

# QUALITY EDUCATION: A BLUEPRINT FOR REFORM

(Policy endorsed by Conference in August 1998)

## Introduction

VIEU has consulted extensively with members to develop a broad professional claim that will take us into the next century with the status of the profession restored and intact. The claim is focussed on the following broad areas:

- the classroom
- specialist and educational support
- professional development and research
- learning technologies

There are many other aspects of the profession that could be canvassed, but these areas are priorities that systems will need to address appropriately over the next five years, and that substantially affect how our members can deliver their best.

The needs of our profession may not be that different in the year 2003 from 1998. The expectations of schools to provide optimal resources, teaching and learning environments that enable students to achieve their best, are community expectations of schools that will not change. There are many factors that affect the provision of education, among them funding, staff/student ratios, class sizes, access and use of technologies, professional development opportunities, wages and conditions.

It is timely that the recent Senate Enquiry into the Status of Teachers, *A Class Act, Inquiry into the Status of Teaching*, has published its recommendations, some of which are reflected in the consultations and recommendations made in this professional claim. The Senate Inquiry asserted that teaching is a much more complex and professionally demanding role than it was twenty years ago, and that “the best teacher in the world cannot perform properly in an inadequately resourced and inadequately staffed school”. Appropriate funding of education, technology funding benchmarks, national registration of teachers, professional development, are some of the recommendations made. This claim also investigates the minimum benchmarks needed to ensure that students in all schools are provided with the resources and professional support to ensure effective learning.

Teachers and their students have had to deal with an increasingly complex educational setting. This includes:

- Language and cultural diversity in student populations
- Integration of students with disabilities into mainstream schooling
- Introduction of standardised testing across most year levels
- Detailed reporting requirements for student achievement
- Extension of vocational education initiatives
- Demand for technologies to support the learning process
- Increased demand on schools to fulfil social functions such as welfare, counselling, inter-community information and services
- Curriculum review and imposed change
- Flexibility of teaching and learning approaches
- Increased competition and marketing of schools

The demands placed on education staff are many and immense, yet the actual resources available have diminished, resulting in no alleviation of the pressures faced by the profession. The following recommendations have been developed to enable all staff in Catholic and Independent schools to meet many of these challenges over the next five years. The driving force for change is to ensure that students learn in the best possible educational environment.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 1

*That the community standard on class size as established by the Commonwealth Schools Commission is reached in all schools*

<i>Prep</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Years 1-2</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Years 3-6</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Secondary</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Practical classes</i>	<i>15</i>

## Recommendation 2

*That where class sizes exceed these numbers, because of team teaching or organisational/educational decisions about learning requirements such as multi age groupings, that there be guaranteed additional support provided to teachers, for example, a teacher aide, literacy support, ESL support.*

## Recommendation 3

*That non-contact time for all staff be substantially increased by the Year 2003. In primary schools, this would equate to 3.5 hours a week as a minimum of release time, and in secondary schools, a face to face maximum of 18 teaching hours per week, inclusive of extras and pastoral responsibilities.*

## Recommendation 4

*That staff who undertake positions of leadership in school attract increased release time proportionate to the scope of duties required and increased financial compensation.*

## Recommendation 5

*That each student with a serious intellectual and/or physical or emotional disability shall have access to an integration aide with appropriate expertise in the area of disability in every learning context.*

## Recommendation 6

*That where there are students with serious developmental, physical or emotional disabilities, class sizes are decreased*

## Recommendation 7

*That time is provided for teachers and teacher aides to work together on curriculum planning, and to liaise with external agencies and parents, when teaching students with intellectual, physical or emotional difficulties.*

## Recommendation 8

*That the nature of funding and resources to students with special needs is reviewed and improved to reflect the range of disabilities and/or students requiring specialised support.*

**Recommendation 9**

*That the number of specialist staff employed be substantially increased to cope with the diverse needs of students. These numbers should be additional to normal staffing schedules.*

**Recommendation 10**

*That the ratio of school officers to full-time staff be substantially improved to cope with the diverse needs of students.*

**Recommendation 11**

*That teacher librarians and school officers/assistants be given the same access as teaching staff to professional development opportunities, including replacement.*

**Recommendation 12**

*That by 2001, every teacher is provided with a high speed multimedia computer and an individual email address.*

**Recommendation 13**

*That by 2001, the ratio of computers to students is 1:3.*

**Recommendation 14**

*That all schools have the capacity to network computers, access the Internet, and provide an environment that enhances learning with educationally appropriate hardware and software*

**Recommendation 15**

*That funding from State and Commonwealth governments be made available to ensure that schools continue to maintain appropriate technical infrastructures, and to redress inequities in technology provision between schools. Such funding should also provide for the physical refurbishment and the safety requirements needed in classes involved in technological expansion.*

**Recommendation 16**

*That all staff develop expertise in learning technologies through the establishment of strategic planning, consultative mechanisms and effective professional development*

*opportunities.*

#### **Recommendation 17**

*That research and projects be funded by governments to support the trialing of new technologies in and across schools and to allow sharing of practice and innovative curriculum.*

#### **Recommendation 18**

*That appropriate initial and ongoing training opportunities are available for library staff in the latest information and telecommunications technologies and their use in educational contexts.*

#### **Recommendation 19**

*That time is provided to enable teachers, teacher librarians and library staff to work cooperatively in the development of school programs and the integration of information technologies into the curriculum and into classroom practice*

#### **Recommendation 20**

*That professional development is recognised as an integral part of every school's planning processes, with sufficient time and money allocated to meet system and individual's needs. As a minimum, every school's responsibility should be to provide 10 days of professional development for every member of staff every year.*

*Professional development opportunities should be based on a combination of specific system initiatives, needs of the school development plan and professional needs determined by the individual.*

#### **Recommendation 21**

*That national initiatives, such as the National Schools Network, and the National Professional Development Program, which are premised on collaborative networks, are reinstated and funded accordingly.*

#### **Recommendation 22**

*That educational priorities are established by the profession, and resourced appropriately by governments and systems*

#### **Recommendation 23**

*That state and federal governments increase funding to schools to enable optimal learning and teaching conditions – specialist support, access to quality professional development, ability to lower class sizes and work in team models, trial new technologies and new learning structures, to establish formal links with community and industry organisations.*

## The classroom

National and international research consistently demonstrates that class size does matter. Students need to be able to work in a setting where they are not competing all the time for the attention of the teacher. Many educators believe that some years are even more crucial than others, for example, the first years of schooling. An ideal learning environment would enable small group and individualised instruction to take place regularly, but this is not possible in the more typical classroom setting of one teacher and a large group of students. The quality of learning that could take place if students could receive quality individualised attention is undisputed – the challenge is to redress the increasing trend towards larger classes, with little specialist support.

Also of concern is the pressure to maintain large class sizes in areas of the curriculum that require the use of machinery, close supervision, practical work, hazardous chemicals, technology. One accident in such a context is not a minor concern – students need to be able to work safely, under close professional observation.

As long ago as 1984, the Commonwealth Schools Commission proposed a community standard for class sizes in Australian schools. Fourteen years later that standard has not been achieved. Classes in excess of 30 are common across all sectors of education in Victoria, and Catholic schools fare worst in this regard. In addition, practical and senior classes traditionally were smaller classes, but with increased numbers of students studying in these areas, there has been a slow creep towards higher numbers in specific classes.

Although it is difficult to access precise data about actual class sizes, examination of teacher:student ratios provides important comparisons. From 1985 until 1995, primary and secondary teacher:student ratios have improved only marginally in non-government schools, and there has been a worsening of the situation in Victorian government schools. All statistics indicate less favourable ratios in primary schools than in secondary schools.

### Recommendation 1

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<i>Prep</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Years 1-2</i>	<i>20</i>
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## Recommendation 2

*That where class sizes exceed these numbers, because of team teaching or organisational/educational decisions about learning requirements such as multi age groupings, that there be guaranteed additional support provided to teachers, for example, a teacher aide, literacy support, ESL support.*

## Planning and preparation time

Effective teaching involves preparation and detailed planning. Students benefit from the amount of time that a teacher has to plan lessons and to prepare specific learning materials, and to discuss progress or concerns with parents and other colleagues. Teachers must deal not only with the class as a whole learning unit but they must also cater for the individual needs of each student, including gifted students or those with special needs. They work with other staff on the multitude of activities that make up the life of a school. These go beyond the lesson or programmed learning event to a range of other activities that students participate in and learn from – musicals, sporting events, excursions, religious ceremonies, fetes, Open days.

In order to deliver high quality education, the quality and extent of time that staff can devote to planning and preparation is crucial. Over the years however, the amount of time that can be set aside in a day for planning has been gradually eroded. The demands of the curriculum require detailed preparation, marking, and reporting. In primary schools, where teachers spend the bulk of their day with one class, it is uncommon for them to have more than an hour a week within class time set aside for their own professional planning. In secondary schools, where teachers move from class to class, seeing many classes of students in a week, traditionally there has been an allocation of approximately 20 hours contact time with classes (lower in some Independent schools). Specialist teachers in both primary and secondary schools may see hundreds of students a week. Non-contact time is also crowded with the myriad of activities that have become part of the general workload of staff, including:

- Development of curriculum and policy across key learning areas
- Student assessment and reporting
- Parent information and counselling
- School organisation planning
- Extra-curricular activities – eg sport, tuition, fund-raising
- Meetings – generalist, specialist, school planning, community
- Supervision – individual, disciplinary, after school care, safety.
- Participation in school and community based events
- Coordination of subject areas, year levels, departments.

### **Recommendation 3**

*That non-contact time for all staff be substantially increased by the Year 2003. In primary schools, this would equate to 3.5 hours a week as a minimum of release time, and in secondary schools, a face to face maximum of 18 teaching hours per week, inclusive of extras and pastoral responsibilities.*

### **Recommendation 4**

*That staff who undertake positions of leadership in school attract increased release time proportionate to the scope of duties required and increased financial compensation.*

## **The role of integration**

Schools face new and old challenges in providing students with the best learning opportunities. It is important that every student receives highly professional assistance, and that schools meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Integration programs place high demands on education staff, and there can be a tension in balancing the needs of the integration student with the needs of the whole class if appropriate support is not present. Staff are strongly committed to ensuring that every student receives appropriate physical, social, and intellectual support, but the task is overwhelming without the ongoing support of para-professionals.

Balancing the needs of a child with particular difficulties, such as ADD /ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) against the needs of every individual in the class can be a difficult task. The presence of a trained aide who can assist in meeting the special needs of individual students, either in working with students on individually focussed learning strategies, or follow up with parents or other professionals, is vital in ensuring that all students in the class can work in a positive learning environment.

Also of importance is time for the teacher and teacher support personnel to plan individualised programs, and to liaise with appropriate organisations and health/welfare professionals outside the school.

While some students, because of the nature of their disability, receive Special Needs funding, there are many students who do not fit into these prescribed funding categories, but who may be experiencing special problems, such as behavioural, emotional or family problems. These problems can manifest themselves at school, and require expert assistance and frequent individualised attention. It is important that staff dealing with these students have access to expert advice and support in responding professionally. Time and the need to balance the needs of every child in the class is often an issue, but there can be serious consequences if the concerns of such students are

unable to be effectively dealt with.

### **Recommendation 5**

*That each student with a serious intellectual and/or physical or emotional disability shall have access to an integration aide with appropriate expertise in the area of disability in every learning context.*

### **Recommendation 6**

*That where there are students with serious developmental, physical or emotional disabilities, class sizes are decreased*

### **Recommendation 7**

*That time is provided for teachers and teacher aides to work together on curriculum planning, and to liaise with external agencies and parents, when teaching students with intellectual, physical or emotional difficulties.*

### **Recommendation 8**

*That the nature of funding and resources to students with special needs is reviewed and improved to reflect the range of disabilities and/or students requiring specialised support.*

## **Specialist and educational support staff**

The educational environment is characterised by a need for schools to offer expertise in a number of areas such as technology, literacy, English as a Second Language, vocational education, and to be able to specialise according to student population needs and interests, such as outdoor education, music, the arts, structured work opportunities, languages. The specialist teacher/technician/project officer complements the skills and knowledge of the generalist. The librarian, laboratory technician, administrative officer, careers counsellor, and other school officers/assistants play a crucial role in educational support and delivery of programs.

In secondary schools, students are faced with many choices about their future – New Apprenticeships, Vocational Education and Training courses, the VCE. The advice they receive is crucial, and VET coordinators and careers

counsellors need to be aware of all new developments and their implications in the area of education, training, and employment.

The ESL specialist often works in a team teaching situation or in a one to one role with students who need assistance in learning English. The student who does not learn English will be disadvantaged in every part of their learning, and requires intensive, frequent support.

Students will at different points in their schooling require specialist assistance, whether it be their literacy or numeracy skills, a learning difficulty in a particular curriculum area, a need to speak to an experienced counsellor, or a talent in a particular area that should be encouraged. Schools must service these needs appropriately and specialist staff play an important role in meeting the total needs of students.

Education support staff work in every area of the school – the laboratory, the classroom, the offices, the library/resource centres, reception. These staff provide a high level of professional support to teaching staff – the teacher aide who works with a new student, the laboratory technician demonstrating a safety procedure and setting up an experiment, the administrative officer caring for an injured student. In many small schools, the administrative officer may be solely responsible for budgeting, payroll requirements, parent and student enquiries, publications and yet be the lowest paid member of staff. Even in larger schools, the ratio of school officers to teaching staff could be substantially improved to ensure better student services.

Until recently, the pay levels and career structures of education support staff have been ignored, and the complexity of roles unacknowledged. In Catholic primary schools, the formula used for funding school officers is inadequate, and does not take into account the changing demands on education staff – new technologies, increased autonomy in work roles, high skill level requirements. In all schools, the levels of staffing in respect to school officers and assistants need to be reviewed and substantially increased.

### **Recommendation 9**

*That the number of specialist staff employed be substantially increased to cope with the diverse needs of students. These numbers should be additional to normal staffing schedules*

School Size	Decimal Points per week (FTE)	
	Primary	Secondary
1-100	1.0	
101 – 300	2.5	1.0
301-500	3.5	2.0
501-700	4.5	3.0
701-900	5.5	4.0

901-1100	4.5
1101-1301	5.0
1301 +	6.0

### **Recommendation 10**

*That the ratio of school officers to full-time staff be substantially improved to cope with the diverse needs of students.*

That in schools of less than 100 students, the FTE staffing schedule of school officers/assistants is at least 3.5.

In schools with less than 300 (and > 100) students -	7.5
In schools with less than 500 (and > 300) students -	11.5
In schools of less than 700 (and > 500) students -	17
In schools with less than 900 (and > 700) students -	20.5
In schools with less than 1100 (and > 900) students -	25
In schools with less than 1300 students (and > 1100) -	29
In schools with more than 1300 students -	33

### **Recommendation 11**

*That teacher librarians and school officers/assistants be given the same access as teaching staff to professional development opportunities, including replacement*

## **Learning technologies**

In the 1980s, schools were, relative to the surrounding community, computer rich sites. In the 1990s, this situation is reversed. While some students have access to sophisticated technologies at home, there are still major questions of access and equity across schools and student populations. Access to global information may change the nature of teaching and learning in a more significant way than any other developed tool, and new skills will need to be learned in dealing with limitless information. Students should be able to learn these skills in every school environment, regardless of factors such as family income and the socio-economic/geographical location of the school.

Embedded in almost every aspect of the curriculum from when a student enters school to the time they leave is the need to use technology effectively. The skills involved in researching on the Internet effectively, using diverse applications and processes, go beyond using word processing functions to present work. Students and staff need critical skills in dealing with the array of choices made possible in a networked environment. Students increasingly have to locate many educational resources on the Internet, or have access to CD-ROM to locate information. Schools must be able to provide these resources for students.

If technologies and technology competencies are to become an integral part of schools' curricula, it is critical that all staff develop expertise with the new technologies, and have access to regular and high quality professional development. Equally, students must be able to develop expertise in a range of learning technologies for almost every area in which they learn. The actual number and quality of computers in schools is currently still a stumbling block to achieving this. In Catholic schools, the ratio of students to computers is approximately 1:35 (government 1:8), a statistic that exemplifies the urgent need for actual resources to support the drive towards technology. By the Year 2005, Victorian government teachers are anticipated to have a computer each, with a student computer ratio of 1:5.

In addition to the hardware and software needed in schools, the appropriate infrastructure must be present to support its use. The ability to network, to download information at high speeds, and to participate in on-line learning requires extensive cabling, high speed modems, technical expertise and support. Classrooms need to be designed and refurbished to provide and maintain safe, appropriate sites for extensive technology use. The costs of maintaining and developing appropriate technology infrastructures are not one-off and must be implicit in every strategic plan and annual budget.

As schools begin to develop learning environments that offer technology access to students, new roles need to be created to provide appropriate technical assistance and support. There is an urgent need for teachers and school officers to be competent in the use and application of technology, and for students and staff to receive appropriate technical access and support in the school.

### **Recommendation 12**

*That by 2001, every teacher is provided with a high speed multimedia computer and an individual email address.*

### **Recommendation 13**

*That by 2001, the ratio of computers to students is 1:3.*

### **Recommendation 14**

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### **Recommendation 15**

*That funding from State and Commonwealth governments be made available to ensure that schools continue to maintain appropriate technical infrastructures, and to redress inequities in technology provision between schools. Such funding should also provide for the*

*physical refurbishment and the safety requirements needed in classes involved in technological expansion*

### **Recommendation 16**

*That all staff develop expertise in learning technologies through the establishment of strategic planning, consultative mechanisms and effective professional development opportunities.*

The impact of technology will either be minimal or substantial depending on the opportunity for schools to provide appropriate resources, and for the education profession to be skilled and confident in its uses and forms. As skill levels increase, the focus will need to shift towards critical debate and policy development on the way that schools will need to be structured to deal with a classroom without borders. Substantial work involving teachers was commenced under the auspices of projects such as NPDP and the NSN, and this work will be lost unless there is a recommitment to research and support for schools that are trialling new forms of education delivery.

### **Recommendation 17**

*That research and projects be funded by governments to support the trialing of new technologies in and across schools and to allow sharing of practice and innovative curriculum.*

## **The Library/School Resource Centre**

The 90s have seen dramatically increased expectations of libraries as centres of information technology supporting the changing demands of teachers and learners.

With the increasing emphasis of curriculum and assessment on individual student-centred, technology focussed learning, school libraries are being challenged to meet resource demands well beyond the scope of previous eras. Staff employed in libraries/resource centres are required to provide high quality, relevant technology and information services to students and teachers. They are involved directly in the learning processes of students through collaborative team work with classroom teachers.

The library/resource centre is an integral part of a student's development of information processing skills, as well as one of the foundations for literacy achievement. The resources provided by libraries provide students with the opportunities to analyse, synthesise and organise information and develop as critical thinkers. They do so in a world made more complex by the proliferation of information, where they must learn to challenge the validity of

some information sources. The resources of libraries are a combination of skilled personnel and a range of information modes – for example, Audio/Visual, Multimedia, CD-ROM, and books.

Students need to have equitable access to relevant, up-to date, accurate resources, which link them to the resources of the wider community – for example, public libraries, State Library, community information and agencies. When they are utilising a resource centre, the teacher and teacher librarian/librarian need to be able to assist them in their academic or personal search for relevant information. Other support staff work cooperatively to ensure that the whole school can access appropriate electronic, technical, and written information.

The librarian, teacher librarian and support personnel, such as A/V technicians and library assistants provide the programs and skills to assist students gain the necessary information skills and knowledge to deal with a complex world.

### **Recommendation 18**

*That appropriate initial and ongoing training opportunities are available for library staff in the latest information and telecommunications technologies and their use in educational contexts.*

### **Recommendation 19**

*That time is provided to enable teachers, teacher librarians and library staff to work cooperatively in the development of school programs and the integration of information technologies into the curriculum and into classroom practice*

## **Professional development and research**

Catering for the educational needs of all students involves change to the ways that schools are structured, yet the organisational structures of schools remain virtually unchanged since the nineteenth century with traditional age groupings, vertical curricula, outdated technologies, and few links to the outside community. Some schools have attempted major reform to the way that they work, yet they do this in a context where there is no formal underpinning support for research and professional development in how to best meet their students' needs. There is an urgent need for the profession to be supported by research and professional development and increased funding enabling such activities to occur without undue stress on limited resources.

As we move towards achieving these recommendations, the pressures on schools are increasing, not diminishing. The imposition of standardised

testing will have an impact on nearly every level of schooling. Literacy benchmarks cannot be attained without considerable impact on the workloads of teachers and education support staff. Vocational education initiatives in Victoria place great demands on the resources and staff in schools, as does the need for staff to be conversant with learning technologies. Apart from increasing resources in schools, effective professional development must accompany any major curriculum change.

The teaching profession has an average age of 46, and for many teachers, there has been little opportunity for new learning since undertaking pre-service education. At the same time, the pace of technological change has been rapid, and many professionals are confronted with the need to learn new skills and explore new methodologies. It is vital that the profession retain its experienced (and its beginning) practitioners, and that a career in education is recognised as a life-long, worthy profession.

### **Recommendation 20**

*That professional development is recognised as an integral part of every school's planning processes, with sufficient time and money allocated to meet system and individual's needs. As a minimum, every school's responsibility should be to provide 10 days of professional development for every member of staff every year.*

*Professional development opportunities should be based on a combination of specific system initiatives, needs of the school development plan and professional needs determined by the individual.*

### **Recommendation 21**

*That national initiatives, such as the National Schools Network, and the National Professional Development Program, which are premised on collaborative networks, are reinstated and funded accordingly.*

## **Conclusion**

No real change or improvement in the quality of teaching and learning will eventuate unless there is a real financial commitment to the importance of education in the shaping of the next generation. Outcomes based funding will only result in the schools that need the most resources being denied them, and equity becoming an obsolete concept. Needs based funding enables schools to offer quality education to all students, and to target specific disadvantage. In an increasingly economic rationalist environment, what is ignored at peril is that one of the best resources a school can offer is its staff. The Victorian government currently funds education at the lowest level per student in both government and non-government schools of any state or territory in Australia. We ignore at our peril the damage this is doing to the ability of our schools to provide a meaningful, accessible education.

VIEU will continue to pursue industrial claims that ensure that staff in Catholic and Independent schools are recognised for the professionals they are, and this claim will serve as the basis for ensuring that our students can be in an environment that enhances, rather than distracts from, learning.

### **Recommendation 22**

*That educational priorities are established by the profession, and resourced appropriately by governments and systems*

### **Recommendation 23**

*That state and federal governments increase funding to schools to enable optimal learning and teaching conditions – specialist support, access to quality professional development, ability to lower class sizes and work in team models, trial new technologies and new learning structures, to establish formal links with community and industry organisations.*

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## KEY CONSULTATIONS

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