

**VIEU POLICY  
STATEMENT  
ON THE QUESTION OF  
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

**Endorsed by the  
Committee of  
Management  
18 October 1996**

# DRAFT POLICY STATEMENT ON THE QUESTION OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

## A. INTRODUCTION

As we move towards the twenty-first century the challenges confronting the education industry are numerous and daunting. Systems and schools face an array of challenges which can only be met if a high quality of educational leadership is achieved and maintained at all times.

At the school level these challenges take a variety of forms: increasing retention rates and their implications for career education; a greater awareness of the political implications of the schooling process; a growing sense of the need for professional control among teachers; a call for industrial and workplace democracy; the increasing pace of educational change; the devolution of responsibility in the areas of curriculum development; deployment of staff and the allocation of resources; new approaches to school development planning; teacher appraisal and the induction of beginning teachers; improved levels of teacher training and professional development; the multicultural nature of student populations; rising levels of community expectations regarding parent involvement and student outcomes; a greater readiness on the part of parents to resort to legal action against the school; and increasing calls for schools to enter into a closer relationship with the world of work and industry.

It is clear that schools will experience difficulty in meeting these challenges if selection procedures do not ensure that appropriate appointments to leadership positions are made in the first place; and if those appointed to such positions are not provided with the network of support required to ensure success in the second.

It is the purpose of this document to set out the views of the union on school leadership in general.

## B. TERMINOLOGY

1. The term “school leadership” as it is used in this policy document refers to the leadership exercised by all teachers in various positions of leadership – Principal, First Assistant to the Principal, those in what are called “positions of responsibility” and Advanced Skills Teachers (AST)/Leading Teachers (LT).
2. “Senior leadership” refers to the position of “Principal” or “First Assistant to the Principal”(or equivalent titles).
3. Middle leadership” refers to what is generally termed “positions of responsibility” (or equivalent classifications) and Advanced Skills Teachers (Leading Teacher Classroom).
4. In this context by a “competency-based standard” is meant the standard of professional performance expected as a result of a combination of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes exercised in a leadership capacity.
5. A “national competency standard” is one which has been developed by the relevant parties involved in the education industry, is subsequently endorsed by the National Training Board and has a national applicability.

6. By “appraisal” is meant a process whereby judgements are made concerning the qualifications and the skills and abilities required of an individual in a position of leadership.
7. By “formative appraisal” is meant a process of review carried out in a context of school/system development planning, the purpose of which is to determine professional development needs and to enhance general leadership performance.
8. By “summative appraisal” is meant a decision making process whereby suitability for and access to leadership positions and promotion are determined.

### **C. WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATIVE PRACTICES**

The union endorses the principles of workplace democracy. Specifically it recognises the following points:

1. The practice of consultation and joint decision making are known to improve the efficiency of organisations.
2. Participative decision making makes work more satisfying, secure and rewarding for employees. People find work more meaningful if they are kept informed about events and have input into decisions which affect their working lives.
3. Consultation gives education leaders access to a wider range of ideas, improves efficiency and facilitates the introduction of change.
4. Everyone in the school including its leaders are able to benefit from an environment in which all staff members are informed and consulted on matters which directly affect them.

### **D. GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

The union believes the following principles are fundamental to sound educational leadership:

1. School leadership is collegial in nature and should be exercised in a collaborative mode. Effective school leadership entails staff consultation and the sharing of leadership functions at appropriate levels.
2. The functions of school leaders may be summarised as follows:
  - a) to signify and promote the unity and identity of the school community
  - b) to exercise the powers of interpretation necessary to formulate an adequate educational vision for the school and to develop the curriculum and programs which give expression to this vision; to promote the professional development of all staff; and to create the supportive environment and the network of assistance which will enable them to carry out their educational roles effectively
  - c) to foster and maintain the cohesion of the school community – students, staff and parents
  - d) to develop the organisational structures, processes and strategies that facilitate the achievement of the school’s educational goals.
3. Every effort should be made to ensure that those with the greatest leadership potential are the ones promoted to leadership positions.

4. Appropriate criteria for a competency-based standard for school leadership should be developed on a nationwide basis and these criteria developed and applied at the State, system and school levels.
5. All processes for the selection of school leaders must be, and seen to be, open and fair. Furthermore, they should be such that the most suitable candidates are the ones, in fact, promoted to different leadership positions.
6. As the organisations representative of employees in the industry, unions are the natural partners with school and system authorities in the processes by which selection procedures are developed and appointments to leadership positions made.
7. School leaders at all levels should receive training and support to enable them to carry out their functions effectively. Systems and employers have a clear responsibility to ensure that this training and support is provided.
8. Remuneration should be proportionate to the level of responsibility undertaken.
9. Conditions of employment should be fair and equitable across schools and systems.
10. At the general level appointments to leadership positions should reflect the gender composition of the teaching force in a given education sector.

#### **E. COMPETENCY-BASED STANDARDS**

The union endorses an integrated approach to the development of a national competency-based standard in relation to educational leadership:

1. It supports a holistic approach to competency assessment which takes account of all the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes required for effective leadership.
2. It insists that all education unions have a right to be parties to the process whereby leadership competencies are identified and standards are developed and applied nationally.
3. It believes that a national competency standard applied at State, system and school levels will promote fairness of appointment procedures and facilitate transferability between employment situations within and across schools and systems.
4. The national competency standard concerning the knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes required for school leadership should serve as the benchmark in determining leadership potential when making appointments.

#### **F. COLLEGIAL LEADERSHIP**

The union endorses the view that leadership in schools should be exercised in a collegial mode. It sees the skills and functions of the various components of the leader-team as being complementary to each other and mutually supportive:

1. The classification of the AST/LT has been designed to acknowledge the fundamental importance of classroom teaching. The unique contribution to the leadership function of various levels of the AST/LT classification relates especially to the integration of sound educational theory and effective teaching practice at the classroom/cross -classroom levels; and to the introduction of

new educational ideas and their successful management. It also has to do with a high quality of input into the school's educational vision.

2. At the middle leadership level teachers exercising roles referred to as "positions of responsibility" are to be seen as complementary to the AST/LT role in leadership. At various levels they carry out the coordinating/organisational tasks which create the structures and institute the processes which facilitate the smooth and efficient running of the school and the attainment of its curriculum/ pedagogical goals and objectives.
3. At the senior leadership level the First Assistant may be seen as more immediately and directly assisting the Principal in carrying out the primary leadership role in the school; as acting as delegate of the Principal when requested; and as deputising in the Principal's absence.
4. The role of the Principal is to act at the centre of the configuration of all those appointed to leadership roles in the school to ensure that the leader-team continues to operate collegially and that the complementarity of skills and functions is preserved.

On the Principal especially devolves the ultimate responsibility for all aspects of the school's life as an educational endeavour.

5. It is the task of the leader-team as a whole to combine their knowledge and skills in a way so as to symbolise the unity and identity of the school community; formulate a vision which expresses the values and goals of that community; develop a curriculum and pedagogy which will maximise the realisation of the vision statement; create a sense of community in which interpersonal relations and communications are enhanced; and set in place the structures, practices, procedures and strategies which will enable all these things to happen.

## **G. SELECTION PROCEDURES**

The union endorses the view that promotion to principalships and other leadership positions should involve a three-stage process:

1. That assessment of leadership potential should be conducted by a representative group competent to make the assessment. Appointments should be merit-based. Experience and performance in lower and acting-leadership positions should be taken into account. However, it is also important to define the competencies required for the task more explicitly so as to ensure that, in the first place, suitable criteria are used in the assessment.
2. That for senior leadership positions a period of leadership training should be undertaken as a fundamental prerequisite for eligibility to apply; and that all applicants should be entitled to counselling on career planning for leadership positions.
3. That the appointment to all leadership positions be by a panel arrangement which is representative of the school community and cognisant of the need for gender balance.
4. The union is of the opinion also that as the union representative of employees in the industry, it should be officially represented on all the panels by which applicants are promoted to principalships and other leadership positions in non-government schools.

5. It believes that in order to ensure that the most suitable applicants are appointed to such positions, fairer and more open appointment procedures should be developed. Once negotiated these procedures should be incorporated into the relevant award or industrial agreement to apply on a statewide system/sector basis.
6. To the extent that public expenditure is involved in the matter, the union is of the opinion that greater accountability on leadership criteria and appointment procedures should apply in non-government schools.
7. Furthermore, it is of the view that appeal mechanisms should operate to provide for those instances where there is evidence to indicate that the most suitable applicant to a leadership position has not been appointed.
8. Selection procedures should be free from discrimination on the grounds of an applicant's gender or status and allow for reasonable expectations regarding personal/home responsibilities.

#### **H. SKILL REVIEW AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The union believes that in order to ensure effective leadership in schools the following conditions relating to appraisal and professional development should operate:

1. Systems and employing authorities have a responsibility to ensure that prior to application, candidates for principalships and other leadership positions should be afforded the opportunity for counselling on career planning. Such planning should include indications of suitability/unsuitability and, if necessary, a consideration of possible alternative career paths.
2. All those appointed to the position of senior leadership should be provided with a formal induction program which includes elements of counselling from experienced leaders and collegial support from others in the relevant neighbouring schools. Such an induction program should involve regular and constructive feedback to the inductee.
3. Those appointed to positions of middle leadership in schools should be provided with orientation sessions to assist them in assuming their new responsibilities.
4. Systems and employing authorities have a responsibility to ensure that employees in leadership positions at all levels are provided with opportunities for suitable and regular inservicing and professional development. The union believes that the most fitting context in which this should occur is within the School Development Plan.
5. The union supports the practice of principals and others in leadership positions working collaboratively in pairs and in groups with colleagues for the purpose of a formative skill review. In such a situation individuals may discuss their strengths and weaknesses with a colleague (or colleagues) with a view to upgrading their leadership skills. The union sees the link between formative skill review and professional development opportunity as the most appropriate context in which this should occur.
6. The record of the outcomes of such a formative review process should remain entirely confidential and be the property of the participants in the program.

7. The data collected in the context of formative appraisal should not be used in situations of summative appraisal.
8. The union believes that unions are the appropriate representative bodies to formally negotiate with employers provisions for leadership induction/ orientation processes and for formative or summative review processes. Furthermore, it believes that these provisions should be incorporated into the appropriate award or industrial agreement.
9. Any allegations of unsatisfactory performance or conduct should be addressed constructively and in accordance with natural justice. The union regards such instances as most appropriately dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Industrial Relations Commission.

## **I. CAREER PATH**

The union endorses the view that those in school leadership positions should be provided with opportunities to pursue a satisfying career path whereby a graduated range of skills is called for and more demanding leadership challenges are presented. In view of this the following principles should normally apply:

1. Experience at a lower level of leadership should be a prerequisite for access to a higher one.
2. Promotion to a principalship in a larger or more complex school situation should be conditional upon experience as leader in smaller and less demanding schools.
3. Experience in a wide variety of educational settings and the acquisition of appropriate formal qualifications and training should enhance career prospects.
4. Appointment procedures and structures at a system level should ensure that only applicants with experience, skills and qualifications which match the requirements at a given level of leadership are promoted to such positions.
5. Remuneration must be commensurate with the level of responsibility involved and the complexity of the leadership role undertaken.
6. Furthermore, it should be comparable to the remuneration available in other industries where the level of responsibility is similar in nature and extent.
7. Appeal mechanisms should operate to ensure that these principles are upheld at all levels.

The union urges that where appropriate “systemic” arrangements be put in place which effectively promote the above principles .

## **J. TENURE**

The union endorses the following:

1. The practice of fixed or limited tenure for those in school leadership positions.
2. All positions of leadership should be subject to performance review.
3. For principals the tenure should be such that a degree of security is provided at the same time as freshness of educational vision and programs is guaranteed for schools and opportunities for leadership are not unduly restricted for others with equal or greater leadership potential. Renewal of contract should be subject to rigorous performance review.

4. For First Assistants to the Principal and those in “positions of responsibility” at the middle leadership level a contract of at least three years with the expectation of biennial renewals is appropriate unless good cause can be shown that the contract should not be renewed.
5. For higher levels of the AST/LT (classroom) classification, the tenure should be for a period of 3-5 years as determined by the school according to its needs. Continuance in the position should be subject to performance review.
6. In instances where good cause for non-renewal of appointment has not been demonstrated, the provisions of the relevant Award/Agreement should come into effect.

## **K. RESOURCES**

The union argues that system and school authorities have a responsibility to provide at both system and school levels the financial, structural and personnel resources necessary to ensure that a high quality of leadership prevails in all schools. Such resources should provide for the following:

1. Arrangements conducive to fair and just selection procedures whereby leadership potential is more accurately assessed.
2. Counselling of candidates prior to application and at appropriate points on the career path.
3. A formal induction process for beginning principals and others in senior leadership positions; and orientation sessions for those in positions of middle leadership.
4. Formative skill review and regular inservicing and professional development.
5. Crisis counselling.
6. The resources which make it possible to achieve the school’s goals without undue stress.