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Working Together, Doing Better for Queensland Children

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Response of public education workers by the unions LHMU & QPSU

Queensland Government
Green Paper Review:
*'A Flying Start for
Queensland Children'*



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and Alex Scott, QPSU General Secretary

Introduction

The following combined feedback is being provided to the Queensland Government by two unions with members working in Queensland public education, the LHMU and the QPSU.

The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union, Queensland Branch, Union of Employees is a broad-based trade union representing approximately 28 000 employees across an array of industries and occupations throughout Queensland. The LHMU, Queensland Branch, is a Queensland registered trade union and is transitionally registered in the federal system. In addition, the LHMU, Queensland Branch operates as the state branch of the federal union, the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union. The LHMU represents the Teacher Aide and School Cleaner workforce in Queensland Schools.

The Queensland Public Sector Union is a union of workers in the state public sector. It provides coverage for members working across state government departments, statutory authorities, and other areas, as well as some workers in universities and the private sector. The union is registered both federally and at a state level. The QPSU has 32,000 members across Queensland. Queensland's public education facilities are resourced by QPSU members in a variety of roles including Business Service Managers, Administrative Staff, Schools Officers, and school-based Therapists, to name a few occupations and many other groups within the Department.

This joint submission is made on behalf of both the LHMU and QPSU. It addresses the following terms of reference from the Education Green Paper - *A Flying Start for Queensland Children*:

- Improving children's development, wellbeing and school readiness – Enlisting an army of volunteer Queensland Ready Readers in Primary Schools – the impact on existing school staff and future implications
- Improving transitions from Primary to Secondary School and supporting adolescent development – the impact on existing school staff and staffing allocations across primary and secondary schools
- Improving school discipline and the quality of teaching and setting high performance standards – what demands could be placed on existing support staff

Both unions intend to address this response from an industrial relations perspective.

Collectively, we are addressing the items as they relate to:

1. The impact on Education facilities; and
2. The potential affect for LHMU & QPSU members in their respective capacities as employees within identified industries of coverage.

Worker impact - Public education workers affected by the green paper

LHMU Queensland members affected by the proposals contained within *A Flying Start for Queensland Children* include:

1. Teacher Aides
2. School Cleaners.

QPSU members affected include:

1. Business Services Managers (BSMs)
2. Schools Officers
3. Scientific Operations Officers
4. Administrative Staff
5. School-based Therapists
6. Other groups.

Submission research methodology

Quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used in order to accurately reflect the opinions of school workers who are members of both unions.

Over 30 network meetings of Teacher Aides/ School Cleaners and schools officers were held across the state.

Over a two month period organisers visited most metropolitan schools and many regional schools to talk to staff about a range of matters and particularly issues arising for them out of the Green Paper proposal.

A joint QPSU/LHMU survey was conducted about members' attitudes towards the '*Flying Start for Queensland Children Green Paper*'.

The members surveyed work in schools over a wide variety of areas, including Business Service Managers, Administrative staff, Teacher Aides, School Cleaners, Therapists, Schools Officers, Scientific Operations Officers, IT Officers and other education-based support staff.

Over 60 QPSU and LHMU delegates who are working in Queensland's public education system also met to consider the feedback they had from workers in schools across Queensland.

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The outcomes from this conference are included as part of this submission.

A number of common themes and concerns about the proposal based on existing human resource management frameworks in the Department have been identified by these workers.

Background to Submission

For schools workers, a key priority is making sure that children have a great learning experience and that requires school support staff receiving the funding, resources, training and other support necessary to give this experience.

One of the important points as canvassed in the Flying Start for Queensland Children Green Paper is a recognition that teacher numbers need to be increased to protect and enhance school quality. Unfortunately, recognition for school support staff funding support is lacking by comparison. School support staff are laboring under a funding allocation model that our members believe is fundamentally outdated.

- Rather than address the defects in the existing allocative model, the proposals in the Green Paper have the potential to stretch it even further. School support staff firmly believe that this should change.
- School support staff report that job security, reasonable workloads and consequently reasonable hours are of continuing concern and can adversely affect productivity. These concerns arise from the existing inadequate 'Allocative Model' for many officers.

Physical and mental strain and increasing threats to job security can affect productivity and motivation.

Surveys of school support staff completed during 2008 and 2009 showed that staff are already under significant stress:

- Wellness Survey – quoted greater than 40 per cent had taken some sort of medication to handle stress; and
- Joint Survey DET/QPSU– revealed that many workers are writing off between 1 and 300 hours because of extreme workloads.

The Allocative Model for staffing and funding does not reflect new duties and demands that apply to BSMs, Teacher Aides, AOs and SOOs particularly. Not to mention the ludicrous scenario regarding Schools Officer time allocation being based on student numbers rather than an assessment of the facilities and grounds that they are employed to care for. All of these issues have been documented in Workload Management Tools and surveys over the last five years.

Another example of increased workload is in the area of science operations officers. SOOs are now undertaking EEs (extended experimental investigations). In the senior sciences, to ensure individual student ownership of the assessment task, schools often require that EEs are conducted largely in school time and in school laboratories. This decision places a significant burden on schools science departments as group experiments over the last few years have been supplemented with these student individual experiments. Whilst the commonwealth government may increase the capacity of laboratories to cater for this increased use there has been no corresponding increase in support staff to cater for this workload.

These effects upon workers flow on to organisations, families and the community.

The existing allocation of school support staff is insufficient and nonsensical in application. Further, a movement of student numbers from one school campus to another will result, under the existing Allocative model, in job losses or dropping of classification levels for some staff. While this may not be the intention of the government this critical industrial issue must be addressed and the nonsensical Allocative Model changed.

LHMU & QPSU Response to Submission Objectives:

Objective 1:

Improving children's development, wellbeing and school readiness – Enlisting an army of volunteer Queensland Ready Readers in Primary Schools – the impact on existing school staff and future implications

First and foremost, LHMU & QPSU members absolutely support investment in early childhood. Many of the important investments that can be made include:

- Introducing children to books at an early age to enhance vital pre-literacy skills
- Universal access to a kindy year provided by qualified teachers in community based kindergartens at schools and long day care centres
- Encouraging parents to read to their children at home
- Campaigning to promote the importance and enjoyment of reading
- Providing support to parents on how to help children acquire early crucial reading skills

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As previously mentioned, key delegates from both unions participated in a forum as part of the information-gathering endeavours to address the submission.

The forum provided the following valuable information regarding concerns by staff of the impact on existing school staff.

Union delegates draw to the government's attention:

- That using volunteers could potentially devalue the role of Teacher Aides in the school system and reduce hours and funding available for Teacher Aide allocation
- That potentially, the volunteer program could be expanded into other areas of school support staff work including grounds and schools offices again devaluing the role played by those staff
- That volunteers may be used to hide failures in the "Allocative Model".
- The management, training and quality assurance for student outcomes based on the work of volunteers as an extra role for paid workers in the school is an additional duty that poses several risks.
- That the use of volunteers is problematic when it comes to protecting confidential information;
- That the use of volunteers raises questions about what checks could be done to ensure that people were appropriate to work with children, given in particular that the Blue Card does not involve a criminal history check.

Union members believe that using existing skilled and trained Teacher Aides as a primary resource for effective literacy support should be the first priority.

Survey snapshot - statistics

Some illustrative statistics relating to QPSU and LHMU members in schools:

- 90% of members surveyed believed the State Government should allocate more funding to teacher aide hours in schools
- 72% of members surveyed believed the volunteer program had the potential to expand into other areas of support staff work allocation
- Overall, when asked about each area of work school support staff perform across the board over 90% of respondents believed the state government should allocate more funding for all public education workers
- 98% of members felt their job security could be threatened if volunteer programs were introduced without strict guidelines that ensured volunteers could not be offered work in the

school settings.

Indicative of comments from members:

- "If the government intends to use these volunteers to perform teacher aide roles within schools then I have grave concerns for what this is saying about our roles. In my opinion, this is reinforcing the idea that Teacher Aides are 'just mums who want to do a bit of work while their kids are at school' and 'you don't need any skills to listen to kids reading'".
- "Most Teacher Aides are qualified, highly motivated, dedicated and conversant with code of conduct practices and confidentiality. They follow through on students from year to year, class to class and interact professionally with teaching and other specialist support staff to work in the best way possible with the students in their care."
- "I would not like my child in a system which relies on volunteers. Volunteers do not share the same work ethic or commitment to allow consistent skill building.

I cannot express my opinions more fiercely and hope all Teacher Aides share this view."

- On the subject of voluntary labour we already have in primary schools across Queensland support staff volunteering their time because they cannot complete their duties in the time allowed because of this allocative model."

Some questions posed by union members in relation to the use of volunteers:

- "What training will volunteers receive to ensure that they are able to properly deal with children? What checks and balances will be in place?"
- "Will the management of volunteers require extra duties for BSMs, Teacher Aides or other staff?" (This question seeks an answer to who will call in the volunteers, supervise them and ensure they abide by the code of conduct?)
- "What incentives will be offered to attract volunteers?" (If there is money available to attract volunteers why aren't staff currently paid for the hours they work?)
- "Who is the organising or governing body when it comes to arranging for volunteers in schools?"
- "Why couldn't the money that would be used to train volunteers, pay for blue cards, etc. be used to fund additional hours for qualified Teacher Aides or other support staff?"

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- “How will the use of volunteers affect educational outcomes? How will this be monitored?” (Currently the department carries out workplace reforms with no monitoring of their outcomes despite the provision to do so in the certified agreement so members are not confident outcomes will be monitored).
- “What strategies will be in place to support students in interacting with volunteers?”
- “Can Education Queensland guarantee that the role of volunteers will not be extended over time until it encroaches on paid staff work? What monitoring mechanisms will be put in place?” (Concern here relates to some administrative, and information technology work could be done spasmodically by volunteer parents who see the need for work to be completed.)
- “What happens to an injured volunteer?” (Who is responsible for the volunteer’s safety? How would workers compensation take effect?)
- “What code of conduct will volunteers be subject to?” (If volunteers are not employees how can they be disciplined?)

Objective 2:

Improving children’s development, wellbeing and school readiness – Improving transition from primary to secondary school and supporting adolescent development

LHMU and QPSU members support providing high quality, challenging and age appropriate learning experiences for Year 7 students and equipping schools with well-prepared teachers and support staff and the provision of well maintained facilities as well as ongoing training and development for these workers.

Union members are seeking:

- Guarantees that current staff will not lose their classification, position or rostered hours. Under the current allocative model a reduction in student numbers could lead to this occurring.
- Guarantees that rural and remote community primary schools will not close and disadvantage local children as well as staff who are members of those communities
- Vitality, an immediate joint review of the Allocative Model of staffing and funding take place. This is especially important given the staffing changes that may result from the current proposed model
- Guarantees from the Department that consultation occurs with all School Cleaners via consultative forum arrangements, as is detailed in the relevant collective agreement, and supplemented by the agreed process

outcomes from the “transitional arrangements working party” prior to the implementation of the transition arrangements with regards to classrooms that may be closed or underutilised classrooms

- The introduction of workable Local Consultative Committee (LCC) structures at every school in Queensland, to ensure that consultation with staff in relation to this change, or indeed any change, is genuine and ongoing as well as joint union/DET training for LCC delegates being rolled out as soon as possible.

Union members wish to draw to the government’s attention that we have many concerns related to the proposed move of Year 7 from primary to secondary school.

Most of these concerns relate to the potential effects on the Allocative Model for staffing in schools.

The Allocative Model sets out how many positions will be funded at a given school, and at what level, based on the number of students enrolled.

Shifting large numbers of students from primary to secondary schools has a variety of implications for the Allocative Model and for staffing at both primary and secondary schools.

A reduction in enrolments may mean that a worker at the school is no longer funded by the Allocative Model or funded at their current classification level.

To comply with the government’s policy of no forced redundancies, this will require staff transfers, with attendant disruption for the workers involved as well as their families, along with the students, the school community and the wider community (for example on workers’ volunteer activities).

Union members are also concerned that covert pressure could be applied to staff to reduce their working hours in order to comply with the Allocative Model.

In particular, School Cleaners could be affected as the hours they are rostered to work will depend on the amount of classroom space in a given school.

Survey snapshot - statistics

Illustrative statistics gained from surveying of LHMU & QPSU membership include:

- 88% of primary school members surveyed believed that the transition arrangements for Year 7 to Secondary School will impact upon their income

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- 87% of both Primary and Secondary school members believed that the state government had not given adequate consideration to the impact on school support staff and the loss of hours this could potentially have on them
- 36% of members across both Secondary and Primary were concerned about forced transfers and the impact this could have on them as well as their families, along with the students, the school community and the wider community (for example on workers' volunteer activities).

What our members have to say:

- "Working in the Secondary school system, I fear that the resources that are already stretched to the limit now will be taxed even further with the introduction of another year level to our school."
- "What will this mean for the banding of my school – we already struggle for resources in our small community school as it is – if we lose our Year 7s what is going to happen to our school?"

Our members report that the Allocative Model currently does not deliver appropriate outcomes for school support staffing. This is a significant factor in every worker response to this issue and we respectfully draw this to the government's attention for close consideration.

A 2009 survey of Business Service Managers (BSMs) undertaken by the University of Queensland Social Research Centre made the following number of observations in relation to BSM workloads:

- More than 1 in 20 BSMs surveyed worked 50 hours per week or more (more than 13 hours over and above the hours specified in the registered collective agreement)
- Most BSMs accrued an average of between 1 & 10 hours of ADO (accrued extra time) each week, although over half of the respondents had to 'write off' between one and more than 300 hours at the end of the year
- The impact of working these unrecorded hours was seen to have a negative impact on health and social well-being. For example and importantly, the higher the total number of hours per week worked by BSMs the more likely they were to feel that problems associated with their job were directly affecting their health. The longer the period of employment as a BSM/Registrar, the more likely BSMs were to feel that problems associated with their job directly affected their health.

The strains on school support staff due to failure of the Allocative Model have been a problem for years. This is clearly adversely impacting workers' wellbeing as well as productivity. It's not yet known whether or not this is impacting student results and

overarching schools objectives.

Our members have provided some important information about this. In 2007, following another survey of BSMs (registrars at that time) conducted by the University of Queensland Social Research Centre reported:

- "The findings of the survey suggest that long work hours and a heavy workload are the main concern for the registrars. Full-time registrars reported well above the standard working hours set by the award conditions. A typical working week for respondents was around 46 hours. However when asked to identify the hours of work they would prefer, the majority of respondents (59%) reported that they would prefer to work fewer hours than they were currently doing."

As well:

- "Registrars were asked a range of questions to assess their emotional and physical wellbeing including job strain, burnout, and work and family conflict. The majority of the registrars surveyed agreed that work problems directly affected their health and they were often kept awake at night due to problems with their work. Importantly, almost half of the respondents reported taking medication to cope with the pressures of their work. The most common forms of medication reported included sleeping tablets, anti-depressants and pain relief. For these individuals the majority take the medication on a regular basis. Almost half of the respondents had sought professional help to cope with work demands. Within the last 12 months, almost half the respondents had taken some form of leave to cope with work pressures".

There is no indication that the workload problems facing BSMs are confined to that occupational group, or that they have improved significantly since 2007 or 2009. Indeed anecdotally it seems that workload pressures on school support staff are as heavy as ever.

From the perspective of LHMU and QPSU members, to represent a truly comprehensive improvement to children's development, well-being and school readiness, the Flying Start for Queensland's Children program must involve reforms to the Allocative Model and a genuine, truthful reflection of the crucial role that school support staff play to keep our children's schools running.

Further resourcing for these paid school support staff must be provided if this situation is to improve.

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Objective 3:

Establishing an independent education authority to set and monitor common standards for teachers and schools.

With the benefit of reviewing a draft copy of the Queensland College of Teachers' (QCT) submission in response to the Flying Start for Queensland's Children Green Paper, the QPSU and LHMU recommend the submission and support the points made.

- It's our members' considered view that the proposal to amalgamate standards authorities has been put forward in the Green Paper without sufficient information or consideration given to the differing roles and structures of these authorities.

In general, union members believe that the consultation process around the green paper has made insufficient use of open questions, instead relying on yes/no propositions that may not give appropriate contextual information. For example: "Would a single standards authority help raise students' performance by setting clear standards for all schools?"

This question assumes that the work of QCT, QSA and NSSAB could be considered equivalent, without raising the question of whether there are ways to better co-ordinate the work currently performed by the different standards agencies without amalgamating them wholesale.

Based on the evidence, the very real concern and observation of our union members is that in the Flying Start for Queensland's Schools Green Paper, a position has been presented in favour of the view of amalgamating standards authorities without giving proper space to explore alternative views, thus delivering a pre-sought conclusion.

This does not qualify as appropriate consultation around the issue.

Some points made by QCT staff in relation to the proposal:

- "there does not seem to be an understanding of the different standard-setting functions that each organisation performs."
- "the green paper is overly-simplistic. In particular, it fails to recognize each organisation is tasked with setting standards in specific areas – asking whether three standards-setting organisations should be amalgamated is going to be answered in the affirmative by most people who would be unaware of the different functions of each organisation"
- "there is clearly no duplication of work that each organisation performs – there may be an

assumption that bringing these organisations together may improve quality in education."

- "efficiency – the QCT is self-funded through teacher registration and is a successful organisation – is it being used to support a high-cost organisation, namely the QSA."

Key Recommendations

Objective 1:

Recommendation

The LHMU and QPSU recommend:

1. That a Working Party consisting of LHMU & QPSU representatives be established to develop guidelines for the use of volunteers in schools that would encompass the following:
 - Training for volunteers be set within an agreed training agenda that is established in conjunction with the relevant Unions
 - Uniform guidelines for the use of volunteers be agreed to cover at least the following with further guidelines being developed through this working party when required :
 - Roles and responsibilities of volunteers
 - Co-ordination of volunteers
 - Liability issues surrounding volunteers

Objective 2:

Recommendation

The LHMU & QPSU recommend:

That a Year 7 Transitional Arrangements working party be established to develop guidelines for transition for support staff affected by transitioning students to Secondary School settings.

This working party would be separate to the Education Consultative Committee and consist of representatives from the LHMU and the QPSU.

Terms of reference for this working party would include but not be limited to:

1. A full review of the Allocative Model of funding.
2. The establishment of processes to guarantee staffing classifications, hours of work and permanency of roles for all staff at the time of transition.

That a Dispute Resolution Process be developed:

- A central EQ/LHMU/QPSU dispute committee will consider disputes arising from the relevant classification and their union representative affected by the implementation of any change as a result of the programs described in the Green Paper.

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- The joint agreements reached by this committee will be final.
 - Where agreement cannot be reached these matters will be referred to the Queensland Industrial relations Committee for determination.

We would also seek a further guarantee that no staff member employed at the time of transition shall be forced to relocate to another location.

Objective 3:

Recommendation

That further discussions be held with staff from all current standards authorities and their unions to ascertain a clear differentiation of their roles and whether any gains can actually be made through the proposed amalgamation. If it is determined that substantial gains can be made a formal consultation process be commenced including all relevant parties.

We authorise the above report,



Gary Bullock, LHMU State Secretary



Alex Scott, QPSU General Secretary

