

The Year in Review



2002–2003



Independent Schools
Council of Australia

Our new name

The Independent Schools Council of Australia was formerly known as the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA). Our change of name, which came into effect on 1 July 2003, has not changed the role or powers of the organisation when it was known as NCISA. The new name was introduced to enhance the communication and advocacy role of the council. Those readers who are in communication with the council are encouraged to note its new contact details, listed on the back page of **Year in Review 2002-03**.

Visit our website

To find out more about the council and national issues affecting the independent schools sector, visit our website at: www.isca.edu.au

The site provides links to the council's member associations and other national groups.

Chairman's overview

Education in Australia is the subject of ongoing review and reform. As a result, these first years of the new millennium have proved particularly intense for the independent schools sector.

The Commonwealth's Socio-Economic Status (SES) recurrent funding model for non-government schools, which is the principal source of government funding for this sector, was introduced in 2001. Full phase-in of the model is to be completed during 2004. This funding system marks a radical shift in emphasis for determining funding allocations – from schools to the students who attend them.

The Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, has proved to be passionate and committed to improving educational outcomes for all young Australians. This has been manifested in a review of teacher quality, teaching and teacher education, and renewed interest in values in education and a national education framework.

In addition to more than 25 committees established by the Commonwealth to manage or review policy, there have been national inquiries into the education of students with disabilities and vocational education and training in schools, as well as broader issues affecting schools such as broadband technology and public liability insurance. School funding reviews at the state and territory level have also had national implications.

The independent schools sector is the smallest in terms of student enrolment numbers, yet we are as fully engaged as the Catholic systemic and government schools sectors in responding to the national education agenda. This means we have to work hard to ensure our place is recognised in Australian education and our students are equitably supported. Our full participation in the national consultative process confirms our willingness to be accountable partners in the process of education delivery.

The communications and advocacy role of this organisation has become increasingly important. This factor initiated a change of our name in July this year. Formerly known as the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations (NCISA), we are now meeting the demands of the new millennium as the **Independent Schools Council of Australia**.

The council's strong performance this year as the peak body representing the interests of the independent schools sector nationally provides encouragement that the diversity in our sector can thrive and be of benefit to all our members, as well as to the Australian education sector as a whole.

Chris Tudor
Chairman

The current political dynamic

The influence of state and territory governments on the development and direction of the national education agenda has increased substantially in the past year. This is creating a new political dynamic to which our sector must effectively respond.

With Labor governments in all states and territories, state and territory premiers and ministers of education have grasped the opportunity to form a bloc alliance and present common policy approaches to the Commonwealth Government.

This new dynamic in Commonwealth-state relations can be seen in the workings of the Ministerial Council on Education, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), the most influential forum for the development of national education policy in Australia.

Of concern to the independent schools sector is the effect the dominance of ideologies averse to non-government schooling has on the work of MCEETYA taskforces, particularly the Schools Resourcing Taskforce and its development of schools funding policy (see **Taskforce's funding principles not a solid base**).

Responses to recent state and territory reviews of schooling and the move by some state governments to cut indexation to their recurrent grants for some independent schools are further evidence of the difficult policy environment that independent schools are facing. Added pressure has come from media interest in the continued steady enrolment growth in the sector with its attendant increases in government funding.

The council has advocated strongly on behalf of the sector for enhancement of current federal funding arrangements for independent schools.

In particular, the council has worked to achieve greater equity in government support for students with disabilities and to enable the uptake of information and communications technology in independent schools. It is apparent that gains in both these areas will be incremental.

We have also been concerned to both respond to the national education agenda and demonstrate an important aspect of the sector's accountability as education providers through our participation in the national education consultative process. The council now provides representation on 94 national committees, including eight MCEETYA taskforces and their related sub-groups. This has only been possible with the contribution of state and territory Associations of Independent Schools, as well as individual schools that have made available their staff to represent the sector.

Looking ahead, the Government has announced that it is moving to codify the definition of charities for the purposes of Commonwealth law, including taxation, from 1 July 2004. The council plans to continue its active involvement on this issue by making a submission on the workability of the definitions contained in the proposed Bill.

Meanwhile, as the political environment for independent schools continues to be affected by divisive ideologies, sector representation on policy forming bodies remains vital. It is also clear that as the current funding quadrennium enters its final phase in 2004 the test of the sector's strength will be in its unity.

Bill Daniels
Executive Director

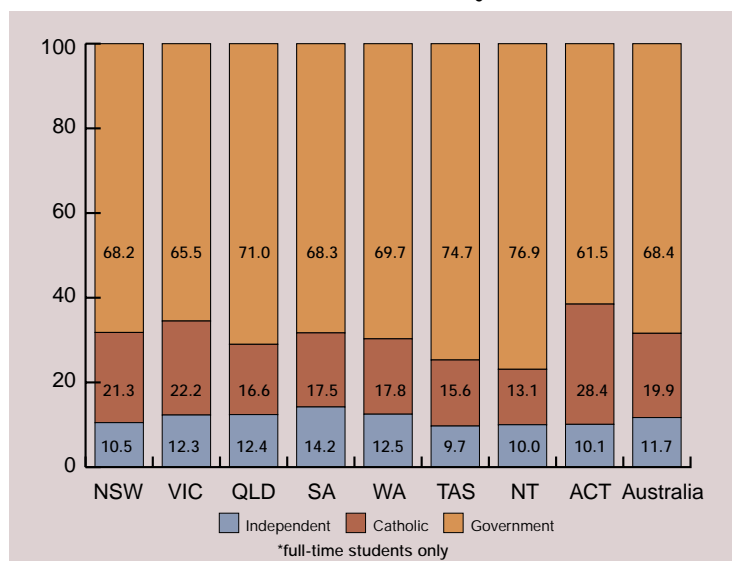
Steady growth continues

By 2002 steady growth in the independent schools sector resulted in nearly 442,500 students being educated within a total of 1,047 independent schools. These figures include independent Catholic schools.

This growth brought the sector's enrolment share in 2002 to 11.7 per cent of total full-time students compared to 11.4 per cent in 2001. Nineteen new independent schools were established in 2002. This growth continues a gradual increase in enrolment numbers in the sector since 1970, when the sector share was four per cent.

The sector's enrolment share of secondary students is now 16 per cent, with a total of 213,798 full-time students. The government schools sector educates 63 per cent of secondary students and the Catholic schools sector, 21 per cent.

Share of school enrolments* by sector, 2002



Source: ABS Schools 2002



Council submissions for the sector

Some eleven submissions have been produced on behalf of the independent schools sector by the council over the past year. Of particular importance have been its submissions on students with disabilities, vocational education and training in schools, affordable access for independent schools to broadband facilities, and teacher quality. The council's submissions can be read in full on our website at www.icsa.edu.au

Students with disabilities

Some 6,500 students with disabilities were enrolled in the independent schools sector in 2002 – a rapid increase in the past ten years. Yet independent schools face significant barriers in making adequate provision for their students with disabilities.

There are severe inequities in the level of access to government funding and services for students with disabilities. These are a result of inconsistencies in funding between school sectors, between states and territories, and because of differences in the definitions of disability and procedures for assessing such students in each state and territory. The situation is exacerbated by lack of clarity in regard to the obligations of schools for students with disabilities under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.

It is the council's view that students with disabilities should receive the same government expenditure for their school education irrespective of the school sector in which they are educated.

In its submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities, the council demonstrated the various forms of inequity in funding and support for students with disabilities, particularly across school sectors.

The findings of the Senate inquiry were released in December 2002. While there was recognition of the need for a nationally consistent definition of students with disabilities and the need to further improve the skill base of teachers, there was no recommendation for increased government funding for students with disabilities in non-government schools.

The government's response in July 2003 to the Senate report acknowledged the revenue shortfall and flagged the prospect of continued dialogue on the needs of the independent schools sector.

In its May 2003 submission to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into the *Disability Discrimination Act*, the council argued that full government funding for students with disabilities is essential if the rights-based model contained within the *Act* is to be fully realised in an equitable way.

The submission also demonstrated that the lack of certainty as to the precise legal obligations of independent schools under the *Act* is unlikely to be resolved by the proposed *Disability Standards for Education*. The sector's preference is to introduce guidelines rather than standards.



Vocational education in schools

Vocational education and training (VET) in schools continues to expand within the independent schools sector. The number of schools with recognised VET programmes increased from 361 in 2001 to 388 in 2002, with the number of participating students growing from 15,721 to 17,752 over the same period.

The growth of VET programmes in independent schools has been encouraged through funding from two Commonwealth Government agencies, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation.

In its October 2002 submission to the Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, the council argued that this funding should be maintained to allow students in independent schools to continue VET programmes. This is critical since most independent schools receive little or no financial support for VET programmes from state and territory governments, or access to other government support services.



Broadband technology

While technological change is driving rapid evolution of the learning environment in schools, independent schools face significant barriers to their adoption of broadband technology. The non-systemic nature of the sector has resulted in broadband accessibility and affordability becoming key issues to be addressed.

In its August 2002 submission to the Broadband Advisory Group of the National Office for the Information Economy, the council argued that the structure of the independent schools sector makes it difficult for independent schools to negotiate cost-effective solutions. Other school sectors, due to their systemic natures, have generally been able to secure more affordable access to broadband.

This disparity between school sectors has the potential to disadvantage children enrolled in independent schools. For example, schools that do not have access to a reliable, high-speed internet connection will be unable to access the online curriculum material developed by *The Learning Federation* and other e-learning initiatives for students and teachers.

The council has recommended that a national policy be established to ensure that all schools in Australia, regardless of jurisdiction, sector or location, have a minimum level of access to high quality and reliable telecommunications.

In particular, the sector has argued that access to broadband infrastructure and to national curriculum developments should be available on an equitable cost basis for all schools. Governments could also support initiatives to minimise costs through economies of scale, such as the purchase of licensing for software.



Teaching and teacher education

The council has responded to two discussion papers released through the Commonwealth's Review of Teaching and Teacher Education in the past year. These focused on strategies to attract and retain teachers of science, technology and mathematics, and an action plan regarding young people, schools and innovation.

The independent schools sector defined its key issue as seeking and retaining teachers with leadership capacity who can develop a positive learning environment and instill a passion for their subjects in their students. The council argued for a flexible approach to the delivery of teacher education programmes and professional development, and to provide teachers with greater control over their teaching practices.

School autonomy was highlighted by the council as a means to foster innovation in education. It also argued that teacher registration requirements should be flexible enough to allow those without formal teaching qualifications to be employed, particularly in creative subjects.

The council also identified the importance of leadership that supports risk taking and encourages initiative, and ongoing teacher professional development to allow innovative practices to be examined, applied and reviewed.

Insurance costs

Rising insurance costs throughout the community have resulted in some loss of resources from teaching and learning in independent schools during the past year, as schools have needed to allocate more funds to insurance cover. In particular, cocurricula areas have suffered.

In May 2002 the council made a submission to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into the Impact of Public Liability and Professional Indemnity Insurance Cost Increases suggesting a number of mechanisms to reduce the cost of public liability insurance, and better calculate and pool the risk for independent schools. These include limiting the liability of schools, the granting of exemption from stamp duty, and the use of personal accident insurance as an adjunct to public liability insurance.

School governance kit

Materials aimed at promoting good governance in schools have been published by the council, with the assistance of consultants Hall Chadwick. They provide information on the roles and responsibilities of governing bodies and individual governors.

Topics covered include the nature of unincorporated and incorporated associations, trusts and companies limited by guarantee, legislation, financial responsibilities, and issues such as duty of care and risk management. There are also several case studies and sample documents.

The materials are available on the council's website at www.isca.edu.au and may be downloaded in pdf format.

Council commits priority to taskforces

It is a major strategic priority for the council to play an active role as a member of all the taskforces of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The council's involvement in these taskforces is crucial because of their influence in the development of national education policy. The taskforces are:

- **Indigenous Education, Employment, Training and Youth**
- **Information and Communication Technologies in Schools**
- **Performance Measurement and Reporting**
- **Schools Resourcing**
- **Student Learning and Support Services**
- **Targeted Initiatives of National Significance**
- **Teacher Quality and Educational Leadership**
- **Transition from School**

A report on the work of the Schools Resourcing taskforce can be found above right. In addition, summaries about the work of each taskforce during the past year can be found on the council's website at www.isca.edu.au

National representation a major focus

The council has represented the independent schools sector on more than 90 schools related national policy advisory bodies during the past year with the support of senior staff from the Associations of Independent Schools and staff from individual schools.

This significant area of activity for the council includes two important new national initiatives – *The Le@rning Federation* and the Rural Education Forum of Australia (REFA).

The Le@rning Federation is a five-year initiative funded by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and New Zealand to develop online curriculum materials. REFA is an initiative of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and the National Farmers' Federation to highlight education and training needs in rural and remote areas of Australia.



Taskforce's funding principles not a solid base

In July 2002 Australia's key national taskforce associated with resourcing schools endorsed a new framework of principles for funding without the Commonwealth Government's approval.

The Commonwealth's abstention from voting for the framework signalled its protest about the taskforce's lack of consultation with the non-government schools sector and highlights the division forming between the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments acting as a bloc in national education policy (see also **The current political dynamic**).

Central to concerns about the new framework – known as An Agreed Framework of Principles for Funding Schools – is the methodology used by the Schools Resourcing taskforce to identify the cost of schooling. Work to date has concentrated on identifying base costs from a carefully selected sample of government schools. The next major phase of the project, known as Resourcing the National Goals, will attempt to identify marginal cost driver pressures in schools.

Given the limitations of the work on school costs, the council has been concerned to ensure it is not used as the basis for developing funding models for schools.

The foundation principle of the framework commits governments to ensuring that all students are adequately resourced to meet the National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-first Century – agreed by MCEETYA in 1999. But other principles imply certain caveats on the funding of non-government schools and increase the council's concern about its implications for independent schools.

ISCA National Consultative Group

In keeping with its role as peak body for the independent schools sector, the council consults formally with other national non-government school organisations and the Australian Parents' Council through the ISCA National Consultative Group.

Meetings are held twice a year to discuss national issues and to share information. The council also regularly distributes material from taskforces of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and other national bodies on which it represents the sector.

This year the National Independent Special Schools Association and the Montessori Association of Australia joined the group.

The council's chairman, Chris Tudor, also met with the elected heads of national independent schools organisations during the year.

Our board

The council's board of management (pictured below) comprises the chairman and one representative from each state or territory Association of Independent Schools (AIS).

The executive director reports to the board and also draws on advice from the executive directors of the AISs, who together form the ISCA Executive Directors Council (EDCO).

Retiring board members in the past year were Dr Lyndsay Farrall (AIST), Mrs Barbara Godwin (AISWA), Mr Bill Tuckwell (AISV), and Mr Ken Webb (AISSA). The council gratefully acknowledges their contributions to the council and the independent schools sector. The council has also welcomed the following new members: Mr Ken Evans (AISWA), Mr Stephen Kinsella (AISNT), Mr Mark Porter (AISSA), and Mr Tim Waley (AIST).



Booklet informs many about schools

Independent schools in Australia have been described for the first time from a national perspective in a 70-page information booklet, published by the council in July 2003.

The booklet, ***Independent Schooling in Australia 2003***, provides key facts and essential topic-based information for those with a special interest in independent schools. About 18 topics are covered, including an overview, the funding and accountabilities of independent schools, the role of religion in schools, teachers, indigenous students, and cooperation between school sectors. It also includes contact details for the independent schools sector and a national list of registered independent schools.

The full-colour booklet, which captures the diversity and vigour of the sector, was widely distributed to independent schools, the education sector, federal parliamentarians and the media. The council plans to publish the booklet on a biennial basis.

Independent Schooling in Australia 2003 can be viewed on the council's website at www.isca.edu.au. A copy of the booklet can be ordered online, or by contacting the council.



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AISWA

Dr Ken Evans
Board Member
John Septimus Roe
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Biennial conferences

Feedback from participants was very positive about the NCISA Biennial Conference, held in Fremantle in October 2002.

The conference, with its overarching theme, **The Education Jigsaw: Fitting the Pieces Together**, cast a broad net over a number of topics of interest to educators and school governors. These topics were grouped within themes explored by the five keynote addresses: Ethics, Values and the Life of the Spirit, Creating Resilience in Community, The Life of the Mind, Politics and Governance, and Educating in the New Century.

The theme for the next ISCA Biennial Conference is **Learning and Leading in a Culture of Innovation**. This will be held on the Gold Coast, Queensland, 20-22 May 2004.

For further information about the ISCA Biennial Conference 2004 please contact Carole Williamson at:
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