# *Many Ways to Learn*:
## *Supporting the needs of all school age students in the ACT.*


**A proposal and position paper from the
Australian Education Union – ACT Branch**


*Labor will:*
- *Assess and evaluate each child's educational needs on the basis of that child's particular attributes rather than generic tests*
- *Support a range of educational settings that provide appropriate educational opportunities for each child. These will range from support to assist the inclusion of any child with a special educational need into mainstream classes, to the creation, as necessary, of small specialist settings for the students who will benefit from them.*

[from the Australian Labor Party ACT Branch Platform 2005-2006]


**August 2007**

## Introduction

This paper builds on the work of an earlier AEU Discussion Paper re Classroom Management (June 2007) which was the result of discussions within the AEU of the issues facing members in workplaces. Individual students' behaviours and student disengagement are presenting serious challenges for teachers and teacher assistants, disrupting these students' education and the learning of other students. Urgent action needs to be taken to address these issues.

During research for the earlier paper it became clear that members face significant challenges with two distinct groups of students, with different needs. The most visible group is that cohort of children and young people who exhibit extreme behaviours including physical or verbal violence within the school setting. These students can disrupt the classroom setting in major and dramatic ways, and can present Occupational Health and Safety threats to staff and fellow students.

The second cohort of students can be invisible to teachers much of the time as they may create no disruption in class. Their attendance at school may be spasmodic: they may appear in the remaining Department of Education alternative settings such as the High School Support Centres; they may be known to youth workers or agencies such as Youth Connection. These are the students who are already disengaged from schooling or are on the point of dropping out of school. It is estimated that they are in their hundreds in the secondary schooling years.

In our earlier paper we tracked the history of provision for both of these groups of students in the Territory, with the closure of sites such as the Adolescent Development Program (ADP) at Dairy Flat, the primary school behaviour management units and the School Without Walls. Some of that history is repeated in this paper.

It is the Union's belief that teachers and schools cannot continue to provide for these specific cohorts of students in an environment where funding and staffing are under attack. Traditional punitive methods of student management such as suspension are less than satisfactory in achieving a change of student behaviour and improvements in student outcomes, and exclusion is rarely considered as it undermines the student's right to an education. In a climate of diminishing resources, teachers and principals are struggling to provide for the inclusion of all students on the school site with appropriate levels of pastoral care.

Perhaps in response to the perception of difficulties within the public system, the ACT Labor Party went to an election in 2004 pledging to create a Student Support Program which would deliver on average 2 full time professional staff to each public high school, to assist with student pastoral care, student support and student welfare. (1) In fact the government cut high school staff by the equivalent of 35 positions (2 per high school) at the beginning of the 2007 school year. This cut was exacerbated by a cut to college resources equivalent to 25 positions.

The AEU contends that there is currently a critical need to address issues of resourcing in order to enable improved student management and pastoral care, and therefore improved outcomes for students in our schools. Students have a right to expect that the rhetoric of governments regarding pathways and life choices is capable of realisation through our public education and training systems.

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1    ALP ACT Branch policy launch paper *Education*, 24 September 2004, p7

**This paper will argue for a major reinvestment in public schooling in the Territory. Our focus will be on resourcing public schools in a continuing manner, to support them to meet the needs of an increasingly challenging and demanding clientele. Amongst this clientele are students who have health and other needs which will only be met by agencies collaborating in their interest. We will also argue that, for a very small number of students, mainstream school sites may not be the best location at particular points of their lives, and that they have the right to alternative educational provision under the Education Act 2004 to meet their specific short, medium or long term needs.**

## Historical Background

With the closure of the former alternative high school education site [mainly catering to Years 7,8] at Dairy Flat and the closure of the 11 primary school behaviour management centres in 2002, the ACT system moved to a model of provision of support for teachers and schools via behaviour management consultants, now renamed student services consultants. The Union supported the closure of sites which we had come to believe were unsafe and incapable of attracting staff. We were advised by DET that a variety of replacement, but differently configured and properly supervised, alternative settings would be provided to cater for students who could not sustain regular attendance at a mainstream school at every point in their school life.

The work of the behaviour management consultants has been an important addition to the system's capacity. But they cannot be expected to "solve the problem" all by themselves. There is clearly a need for a range of additional services to be available to schools, teachers and students in addition to the consultancy model, as acknowledged by the continuing existence of a number of alternative sites for referral of students with particular needs.

The ACT has a number of alternative settings currently in place:
- four special schools for students with moderate to severe intellectual or physical disability
- 3 Intensive English Centres for children and young people with non-English speaking backgrounds
- CCCares at Canberra College for mothers and babies
- ECLIPSE and SITE [formerly DCAP] programs for Years 9,10 students on college sites.
- High School Support Centres, the Northside and Southside drop in centres for high school students, co-located in Belconnen and  Stirling.
- System-supported Learning Support Centres and Units located on a large number of school sites, for students with disabilities
- A number of schools provide on site special classes for students who do not have a disability diagnosis.
- Adolescent Day Unit for students with mental health concerns
- CAMHS operates a Cottage for students with more severe mental health issues. Violent or severely behaviourally challenged students, however, are not accepted.
- Hindmarsh Education Centre at Quamby for students in custody.

Children and young people with disability diagnoses, and children from non-English speaking backgrounds are catered for through special schools or centres appropriate to their particular needs. Children and young people who are exhibiting violent behaviours and acute behavioural disturbance, whether due to mental illness or not, do not have any special provision.

In a report in 2001 (2) the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation called for the development of a policy framework for alternative education programs before establishing new alternative programs. Since that time, all alternative settings in primary, and the alternative site for early high school, have been closed. The CCCares program is the only new alternative setting to be provided by the DET since 2001.

The AEU believes that no decision to place a student in an alternative setting should be taken lightly. It should not be left to the discretion of an individual classroom teacher, or to an individual principal or school. Any new alternative settings will need to have proper formal entry processes, involving consultation between the school, the DET, the student and parents, and perhaps with outside parties such as health and justice agencies.

This paper will argue for the provision of additional alternative sites in line with Dr Bob Conway's recommendations in his report to DET on alternate settings in the ACT education system in 2002 (3), with some adaptations for specific student needs which have become clearer since that time.

The Union acknowledges the gains made in improving provision for students in mainstream classes at school sites. DET's behaviour management consultancy, including the Complex Needs Team, professional development available to teachers, and the roll out of the Restorative Justice program have had a significant impact. We argue that more needs to be done and for this additional resources are required.

## Provision in mainstream school settings

**A.** **The importance of Early Intervention**
The Standing Committee on students at risk strongly supported the idea of early intervention to prevent future problems. (4)  It refers to a report by the Australian Institute of Criminology "Aggression and the Development of Delinquent Behaviour in Children" revealing that aggression at age five is a very strong predictor of the following at age 14: continuing adolescent aggressive behaviour, delinquent behaviour, contact with agencies known to deal with delinquents and suspension from school.

It hardly needs re-stating that early intervention is of vital importance in addressing the needs of children who present at school with, or quickly develop, disruptive behaviours in the classroom. These behaviours can be a sign of deeper problems, such as learning difficulties or psychological disorder. The child has a right to quick identification, diagnosis and intervention.

1. **The AEU seeks the provision of educational psychologists (School Counsellors) with early childhood experience and STA (Special Teacher Assistant) support to  preschools on the same basis as  other levels of schooling.**

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2 Adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes, a report of the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation, July 2001.
3 Report of a review of the provision of alternate settings in the ACT Government Education System, Dr RNF Conway [June 2003]
4 Adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes, July 200, p 60

**B. Primary school sites**

DET has included a paper in its safe schools folder released in May 2007 entitled "The Teaching Pyramid" (5) as one of the underpinning research papers on which its current approach to behaviour management is based. The paper speaks of the need for a school to take a team case management approach to dealing with behavioural difficulties of children, using functional assessment leading to the formation of a behaviour support plan.

The paper continues "a few children may need a well-planned, focused, and intensive approach to learning emotional literacy, controlling anger and impulse, interpersonal problem solving, and friendship skills. When the three lower levels of the pyramid are in place, only about four percent of the children in a classroom or program will require more intensive support." It is for this 4% that teachers have difficulty delivering a program within the classroom. How do they accomplish that without submitting all the children in their classroom to an intervention which they do not require? Clearly the four percent will not necessarily learn these skills by osmosis or observation, but require direct teaching and reinforcement. But should the regular curriculum be interrupted for 4% of the class?

Another article in the DET folder, seemingly taken from the Journal of Positive Behavioural Support (issue not given), entitled "School-wide PBIS" gives a number of pointers to a proactive approach to school-wide discipline, claiming that when these are in place schools experience a reduction in the proportion of students who engage in disruptive behaviours. However, it notes "The procedures do not, however, replace the need to also build and maintain a comprehensive set of procedures for supporting the smaller number of students who require more intense and durable behaviour support." (6)

These children may need some withdrawal attention where their very narrow and specific needs can be intensively addressed, preferably at the home school site. But for this to occur, schools must have the staffing to allow for this specific provision, in the same way that Learning Assistance or ESL staffing points are available to schools. The withdrawal model for Reading Recovery, ESL and Learning Assistance has been a valid and enduring model because it delivers specialist teaching for a particular student clientele. Improved general teaching practice and adapted curriculum do not obviate the need for these withdrawal situations to continue for particular groups of primary level children with specific needs.

**C. High school sites**

High schools need specific additional resourcing if they are to be able to cater for the needs of their more challenging clientele. Dr Bob Conway (7) estimates that around 80 % of students will comply with a school's discipline and management strategies. A second group "those who have some behaviour problems and are at-risk of more serious behaviour problems and hence need targeted behaviour support" are around 15% and "those with serious behaviour problems who require specific management strategies to maintain their presence in the school" are around 5%.

5    *The Teaching Pyramid* by Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph and Strain in Young Children, July 2003
6    *School-wide PBIS*, authors and journal not cited, DET safe schools folder reference inclusion (May 2007)
7    Report of a review of the provision of alternate settings in the ACT Government Education System, Dr RNF Conway [June 2003], p19.

If 5 % of the ACT's school population in public schools requires specific management strategies to maintain their attendance at the school, that would equate to 500 students in the high school sector, as there are just over 10,000 students in public high schools (8). This 5% cohort will need something specific within their school to assist in their continuing at the mainstream site. In that regard the behaviour management consultants now available to schools do an important job and need to be retained in the system. Their role in advising and encouraging schools in best practice regarding difficult to manage students is a useful support for teachers and schools.

In addition to their intervention, schools may need to establish a special class or program to cater for the needs of the most difficult to manage students.

The evidence is that high schools in the Territory are trying to accommodate the range of students presenting at their sites, but they are struggling. Take the case of Caroline Chisholm High School which established itself with a specific structure designed to address pastoral care in a proactive manner. The school follows a sub school system which fosters the long term connectedness between a specific student cohort and a specific group of teachers within the school's staff. Over the 4 years of a student's education at the school, teachers and their student cohort have a chance to develop better relationships.

However, despite the greatly increased quality of the relationships between staff and students in the school, it was necessary to develop an alternative class within the school, called CAEP or Chisholm Alternative Education Program. Properly staffed and supervised, it succeeded in continuing the education of more difficult students whilst allowing for a level of contact between the student and his/her mainstream home group. Reports from teachers to the union suggested the program was working very well alongside the sub school structure of the school.

This year, however, the principal reluctantly closed the alternate class program due to a drop in student numbers which moved the school from a Category 5 to Category 4 budget. This was exacerbated by the Budget staffing cuts to all secondary schools. The school will operate in deficit this year despite making this and a number of other savings. The program is costly to run, in school terms, as it must maintain small class numbers, a teacher and an STA, along with appropriate supervision. That money was not available to the school in 2007.

This example demonstrates the limits to what a school can do from its existing budget to achieve full retention of all students at the school site. Those limits can be stretched by proper funding and allocation of specific resources to the targeted end. Those limits will be more quickly reached if schools are not provided with what they actually need to provide for *all* students.

Staffing structures must be improved in order to allow for the formation of more team teaching situations, more classes with low numbers of students, more at-call supervisory support in classrooms, more time freed up for experienced teachers to troubleshoot and assist colleagues within classrooms. There are plenty of examples both here and interstate of how this can be achieved in schools, and ACT schools have successfully tried many of them over time. But they are all costly in terms of staff time, and schools have no slack within their staffing points to pursue these measures long term alongside the expectations of maintenance of current curriculum diversity and other demands.

8        Government School Census Bulletin, August 2006 Census.

These special programs and classes appear to come and go depending on funding available within the school at the time. When the principal changes, different decisions may be made as to where to invest the school's available funding and time.

The DET Annual Report for 2006 presents results of surveys of parental and student satisfaction with government schooling (9). According to the Report, 95% of primary parents and 96% of students agreed with the proposition *learning is relevant to student needs*; 90% of both students and parents in high schools felt the same way while 93% of parents and 95% of students in colleges felt this to be true. Whilst there may be room for some improvement in the high school sector, we must acknowledge that these figures are extremely high and would be difficult to improve upon generally.

We must also acknowledge the added difficulties of demonstrating relevance of learning to students during adolescence. It is not just schooling which battles to demonstrate its relevance to young people at this stage of their lives. Schools, including high schools, appear to be doing as much as they can to retain students in schooling through curriculum relevance.

## D.    Secondary colleges

The 2001 Legislative Assembly Standing Committee Report (10) on students at risk made a call for a review of college resourcing levels, saying "The committee recommends that the Government review resource levels for secondary colleges in view of the changing patterns of enrolment". Despite this recommendation, colleges have received cuts to staffing since that time equivalent to 5% of staff.

The current ACT Colleges Business Plan prepared after the recent public Review of Secondary Colleges in the ACT identifies several priorities for development. Among these are issues of transition management; transition from high school to college and from college to further education or training.

Closely connected to these transitions is the need to support students in all matters pertaining to their enrolment. Course selection, time and workload management, accepting responsibility for work and life balance, social networking and dealing with new friendship groups, and responding to the pressures of studying in a vastly different environment, are just some of the challenges faced by students as they enter Year 11. For this to be done successfully for all students, many with particular learning, social and health needs, a significant amount of teacher resource must be directed to the task. All colleges are presently extracting the teacher resource from that allocated to educational programs to do this work. This is particularly problematic following the staff cut of January 2007.

Collectively, colleges are exploring options to build into the curriculum courses that provide targeted transition support and ongoing assistance around monitoring workloads, revisiting goals set in personal pathways plans, problem solving, conflict resolution and the myriad of challenges that young people confront in college years. Of particular interest are those students who are considered 'at-risk' of not successfully transitioning to and from college. These students often lack the essential literacy and numeracy skills, social adaptation skills, basic employment skills, and suitable life skills to succeed in the environment.

9       DET 2006 Annual Report, Table 3, p21
10      *Adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes,* July 2001, p69

In the college context, courses that scaffold these students for success through personalised learning pathways and small group learning options are being considered. Of particular interest are courses that can give students knowledge, skills and understandings that lead them into careers where Australia currently has shortages in skilled workers.

## Resourcing for mainstream provision.

### Primary and High schools

To better provide for students who will need intervention to assist with management of their behaviours in mainstream school settings, the AEU seeks the following provision from government:

2.    **The provision to all primary and high schools of additional staffing of one FTE teacher [or part thereof] per 300 students enrolled in the school.**

3.    **Principals and their staff would be responsible for deciding what form the intervention support is to take. The principal would be responsible for accounting for this provision to their School Board and DET.**

4.    **Schools may wish to consider the following options:**
   - **a separate withdrawal class or pod within the school;**
   - **team teaching arrangements within mainstream classes;**
   - **provision of roving internal teacher support and advice to assist in difficult to manage classes.**

**If a school chose to create a separate withdrawal class, this level of extra staffing would allow for the creation of a class of 12-15 students, with two teachers, for a school with 600 students. High schools should receive no fewer than 2 additional teachers under this initiative, irrespective of their size, and primary schools no fewer than 1. Principals may choose to pool their additional teacher support in cluster-based models of student welfare support.**

5.    **Indexation and supplementation of the Professional Learning Fund to return it to the real value set in 2000. Schools and DET need increased support to engage in whole school professional development of teachers' skills, particularly in the area of pedagogy related to dealing with difficult student behaviour. The AEU recommends the system-wide introduction of the West Australian course *Classroom Management and Instructional Strategies,* for which it has financed a substantial trial this year.**

Primary Principals through the PPA strongly support the notion of additional funding directed to clusters of schools to provide badly needed support and early intervention programs in student welfare and management. This funding could take a variety of forms such as a cluster based student management support teacher, social worker, schools as communities worker or School Leader C or B to work collaboratively with Principals and schools, to provide leadership, programs and support.

Specialised cluster staff could work with principals, counsellors and support agencies to ensure targeted resources are allocated on a needs basis. A cluster based consultant would bring added value as they would get to know individual student,

school and community needs while their work would target early intervention programs to deal with high need issues.

They could track students from P-10 in the cluster ensuring support such as quality transition programs were implemented. They could also provide cluster based professional learning, mentoring of classroom teachers, conduct parent support programs and training for para professionals (special teacher assistants).

High school principals report some additional needs in common with the college sector:
- Transition support between their sectors
- Cluster-based models for improving essential literacy and numeracy levels
- Mental-health workers as part of a team addressing young people's health
- The coordination of vocational education between the sectors.

**Secondary colleges**
All colleges are also diverting classroom teacher resources into their student services programs to ensure some support is provided to all students. However, this subsidy is often insufficient and reduces course offerings for students and increases class sizes. To help colleges address these significant challenges, the AEU supports college principals' recommendation for:

6. **The allocation of two additional teachers per college to enhance the success of students and allow further dedication of teacher resources to the delivery of a curriculum package aimed at supporting students in transition, and assist them with their ongoing studies through better resourced student services programs.**

Further resources could also assist in providing support around the following areas:
- young mothers and 'students as carers' programs (perhaps modelled on the successful CC Cares program at Canberra College)
- additional programs for students with disabilities
- health workers in all colleges to address issues around student wellbeing, especially in the area of mental health
- on-line learning and distance education models suitable for colleges to provide specialist courses across different campuses.

## Provision outside the mainstream school setting

Our reading of the research and consistent reports from principals and teachers suggests that there remains, and may always remain, very small but significant cohorts of children and young people whose particular needs the system will struggle to provide for. This is reported to the AEU as being a very small number, suggesting that possibly 1-2% of students may not be able to be catered for at the school site.

Our observation, based on reports over time from schools, is that students with significant behavioural disturbance, usually including violence, and sometimes accompanied by mental illness, are currently not receiving the support they need in order to access a proper and relevant education. The DET folder on Safe Schools [May 2007] contains five papers offered as the underpinning research upon which DET's approach to behaviour management is based.

In one of these, Dr Bob Conway (11) outlines possible options for the education of students with behaviour management problems. The options given are:

- Within the regular classroom with coordinated specialist support
- Within the regular class plus off-line programs with support
- Within the regular school as a formal alternate program but with the possibility/desire for reintegration
- Within the regular school but as a separate program
- An alternate program located off-site but with reintegration of students
- As an alternate program located off-site with preparation for post-school life.

It is clear that DET's philosophical and research approach to these matters does not exclude the provision of alternative settings.

Conway's practical approach suggests that it will be necessary to provide for students along a continuum, with appropriate placements for all within that continuum. This approach has also been adopted by a number of other jurisdictions. Summing up its approach to students with disabilities or special needs, Ireland's Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993) proposed a continuum of educational provision to meet a continuum of special educational needs, from fulltime placement in a mainstream class, without additional support, through various part time withdrawal/part time integration models, to full time placement in special residential schools.

It concludes:
*Current government policy is to encourage the maximum possible level of integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools and to put into place the necessary special supports to facilitate this development. It is envisaged that this support would take the form of learning support teachers, resources teachers, visiting teachers and special needs assistants.* **The pace and extent of the implementation of total integration is viewed as being largely governed by the capacities of individual children and the availability of resources**. (AEU emphasis) (12)

Similarly the Ontario Ministry of Education's Identification, Placement and Review Committee indicates that for students whose needs cannot be met entirely in the regular classroom, a range of placement options is available. These options include options ranging from "a regular class with indirect support where the student is placed in a regular class for the entire day, and the teacher receives specialized consultative services"; through models of regular classes with resource assistance either in the classroom  or through withdrawal services; special classes with partial integration; to placement in full time special classes for the entire school day. (13)

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled on the meaning of "appropriate accommodation" of students with particular needs in the case of *Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education* where Emily Eaton's school placed her in a specialized classroom after 3 years in an integrated setting. The Court ruled that the failure to place Emily in an integrated setting did not create a burden or disadvantage for her, because such a placement was in her best interests.

11      Conway, Bob. Supporting students in secondary schools with significant behaviour challenges. Final slide: *Where to educate students with EBD.*
12      http://european-agency.org/national_pages/ireland/national_overview/no11
13      Ontario Ministry of Education website at: http://www.edu.gov.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/identifi

According to the Court, while integration should be recognized as the norm of general application because of the benefits it generally provides, a presumption in favour of integrated schooling would work to the disadvantage of pupils who require special education in order to achieve equality. **Integration can be either a benefit or a burden depending on whether the individual can profit from the advantages that integration provides.** (AEU emphasis)  The Canadian Human Rights Commission has noted  in its Disability Policy "in some circumstances, the best way to ensure the dignity of persons with disabilities may be to provide separate or specialized services." (14)

It also notes that human rights law has clearly established that equality may sometimes require different treatment that does not offend an individual's dignity. The AEU believes that the key point is that the decision to place a student in an alternate setting must only be taken after full consideration of the *needs* of the student, not in relation to the *identity* of the student.

## A.     Behavioural disturbance including violence

There are children in primary schools and high schools whose acute behavioural disturbance suggests the presence of more than ordinary difficulty in learning the skills needed to survive comfortably in the environment of the school. At primary level their behaviours may suggest trauma, neglect or abuse, or the development of a psychological condition. At high school level some of these students will develop and receive a diagnosis of mental illness.

In the secondary years some from this group may ultimately have contact with Quamby Youth Detention, Hindmarsh Education Centre, post release or various care programs.  These young people can benefit from education programs but it is important to identify that their mental and behavioural disorders would eventually fall under the responsibility of the Department of Health.  NSW research into inmates of Reiby House detention centre found that 87% of the young males experiencing detention had been notified to DOCS as child abuse victims, indicating high levels of Post Traumatic Stress disorder amongst this population. (15)

Education may be a component of the treatment for these young people but it is not the sole solution.  Treatment for Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) may include residential programs aimed specifically to treat PTS conditions.  Upon completion of residential programs, and during long term recovery for PTS, students may engage in experiential education programs. The treatment for these disorders cannot happen as an aside within a classroom and/or a detention facility, but must be dealt with directly.

In order to be in a position to access education in the mainstream setting, these children may need a period of withdrawal from the class, and the corresponding intensive attention to their needs available within a separated setting. Whether this withdrawal occurs at the home school site or at a regional centre housed within a host school needs to be considered. Either way the link with the home school should be retained for each child, and support must be provided long term [up to 2 years] following full reintegration of the student.

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14     Queen's Human Rights Bulletin, Disabilities and the Duty to Accommodate, Vol 1, Issue 1, September 2004, p 1.
15     ASCA (Advocates for the Survivors of Child Abuse) Submission to the  Disability Discrimination Act Inquiry.

Superior models seem to be those that allow for some time in the withdrawal setting and some time integrated with the mainstream class every week, with support from the withdrawal setting attending the school to assist with the transition. Where violent behaviour is present, the withdrawal may need to be full time until the child's behaviour is such that the home school can accommodate him/her.

These children and young people are suffering, and are not receiving the health services or education they have a right to, through lack of specific facilities for them. Older teenagers may access the psychiatric ward at Canberra Hospital, but it is not an appropriate setting as the environment is an adult one. There is nothing within the public health system for children and adolescents. The lack of a mental health facility suitable for children and young people in the ACT is a matter of shame to the Territory community.

Where mental illness includes violent behaviour these young people cannot be housed by either the Adolescent Development Unit or the "Cottage" run by CAMHS.
The DET has no choice but to send these students back to mainstream school settings. This is the cohort, perhaps because of their visibility in schools, which principals most commonly say they have no facilities for. Principals are deeply concerned about the plight of these children and young people. Some of these students will already have a mental health diagnosis, other teenagers will be undiagnosed, and those under 12 years will not carry a formal diagnosis.

These students are available for education in only a limited fashion during periods of their lives. At those times, they need a separate facility where the concentration can be on getting well. They should be supported in the same manner in which the Hospital School at Canberra Hospital caters for children who are physically ill. Teachers located in such a mental health facility would need to be handpicked and specially trained.

The impact of struggling to continue in a mainstream school setting is profound on both the young person concerned, and the school community. There is a cost to the school in coping with a student who is violent, even if the violence is intermittent. Teachers should not be required to be constantly vigilant against erratic and unpredictable outbursts of violent or acutely disturbed behaviour.

**Provision for these students**
The AEU believes the following alternate settings are required to assist these students. The first two and the fourth recommendation are directly in line with recommendations made for the ACT system by Dr Bob Conway in 2002. (16)

7.  **An early intervention/primary level withdrawal site/s with intense behaviour modification/psychological services provided for those with acute behavioural disorders, particularly including violence. Programs would be based on expert psychological advice and intervention. This setting/s would be housed within a host primary school if possible.**

8.  **An alternative setting/s for Years 7,8 students with extreme behavioural disturbance including violence. Programs would be based on expert psychological advice and intervention. The site/s to combine VET, literacy and numeracy, personal development skills/life skills training, possibly the Arts.**

16      Report of a review of the provision of alternate settings in the ACT Government Education System, Dr RNF Conway [June 2003], p 47 and 49.

**These settings must be resourced to provide:**
- **Very small class sizes**
- **Hand-picked, trained and experienced teaching and support staff**
- **Proper on-site supervisory arrangements through executive staff**
- **Facilities to allow for flexible and relevant curriculum**
- **Expert input from psychologists.**

**Special attention must be paid to the needs of girls in this process. One of the least appropriate aspects of the former Dairy Flat Year 7, 8 setting was the overwhelming numbers of boys referred to the site. Young girls have specific needs, cannot be placed in facilities where they may be under psychological or physical/sexual threat, and may need a separate facility.**

Early evaluation of the NSW suspension schools suggests that they are having some success in helping violent and disruptive students turn their behaviour around. Claiming to report data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, the Daily Telegraph reported [26 April 2007] that 300 out of 343 suspended students sent to one of these schools returned to school.

Centres in some country areas had lower success rates from 78-83%, but those in Sydney, Western and Northern Sydney and New England were reporting 100% success in returning students to school. The NSW Education Minister is claiming that the centres act as circuit breakers: "The data shows the vast majority of students who attend them get the intensive help they need to change their behaviour," he is quoted as saying.

9. **A residential or day mental health care facility with access to education and/or training for school aged students. Models for this facility can be found at Rivendell at Westmead Hospital in Sydney and at the Austin Hospital in Melbourne [see Attachment re Austin Hospital facility]. This must be a site capable of dealing with students exhibiting violence in their behaviour.**

10. **Existing High School Support Centres should be retained and consideration given to the need to duplicate the two settings in other areas such as Tuggeranong and the inner Northside. The movement of the Southside support centre from Tuggeranong has had the unfortunate effect of a decline in numbers, as students from outer suburbs have difficulty travelling to the site.**

11. **Consideration should be given to further supporting the work of programs which introduce middle years students to employment opportunities.**

12. **Consideration should be given to further supporting the work of programs which use creative and performing arts to help young people with mental health issues to adapt to schooling.**

## B.    Students disengaged from schooling

**Retention of students**

Governments around Australia keep a close eye on their Year 12 retention rates. Richard Teese and others researching in this field have pointed out that not all students who leave school early are at risk later in life. Many exit to work/training options such as apprenticeships. Governments, however, will rightly continue to regard Year 12 retention rates as a major barometer of the success or failure of the schooling enterprise, as many studies have established the statistical link between completion of Year 12 and successful transition to full time work or study.

There has, however, been some criticism of the definition of what constitutes a "successful transition" from school to post-school life strictly in terms of the student progressing immediately to either full time work or full time study. Many young people now take a year or more off study to travel, before entering full time study or work. Others successfully combine part time work and study, or come back to study as mature age students. The major determinant of post-school success seems to be not the fact that a student drops out of school, but what they drop into after school. (17) However, despite these qualifying factors, there can be little doubt that for the population as a whole, Year 12 completion points to a student eventually having a superior position in the workforce to a non completer.

The ACT 2007 Budget papers quote census statistics from 2001 which reported as 77% the proportion of 19 year olds in the ACT who have completed Year 12 or equivalent. (18) ABC radio recently reported the results of the 2006 census indicating 89% apparent retention rates to Year 12 for ACT youth. The difficulties of establishing a valid measure of retention in a small, highly mobile jurisdiction are well known.

Many factors influence retention rates in schools. The focus of much of past attention has been on trying to make schools more attractive places for young people to be. Curriculum and quality teaching practice have been targeted by all systems. Different structural models of schooling have been tried, such as separating the final two years of schooling from earlier high school years, creating middle schools for upper primary and lower secondary years of schooling, sub school arrangements etc.

More recently too, attention has shifted the focus of intervention towards pastoral care of the student population, with issues of harassment and violence being identified as triggers for students quitting school. Clearly the current buoyant labour market is having a impact on movement away from schooling, as is the case with declining university enrolment of Year 12 completers. Despite a number of initiatives school retention rates have never met the targets set by governments.

Anecdotally, superior pastoral care is often quoted as a reason for parents choosing a private school over a public school. To what degree this is a significant factor in the shift from public to private schooling in the Territory is subject to conjecture. What is beyond doubt, however, is that a perception of lack of discipline in public schools, allied with a perception of public schools having a more difficult to manage clientele, does not assist retention of students in the public system.

17    *On Track* 2005 Longitudinal Survey – *The destinations of 2003 school leavers in Victoria two years on.*
18    ACT Budget 2007, DET papers, DET Strategic Indicator 2:  Year 12 or equivalent completion rates.

**Students at risk**

Despite the efforts of the system, there remains a cohort of students, usually in secondary school but perhaps beginning to develop in upper primary, who are essentially estranged from the school environment. Who are these young people most at risk of dropping out of secondary school? While warning against the temptation to invent solutions for a typical "at risk" student, stressing that each student is an individual with differing needs, Cole (19) has identified three distinct sub groups in Victoria. We can assume they are fairly similar to the Territory's clientele:

1. a group of basically "normal" kids with a dislike or even antipathy to schooling due to their experiences [perhaps of bullying or academic failure.]
2. a group with low self esteem due to literacy or numeracy problems, perhaps allied with mild intellectual disability
3. a group of significantly damaged or disadvantaged students, likely to be in foster care, to have had contact with the juvenile justice system, with psychological problems and drug or substance abuse problems.

Attempts at early intervention with students considered likely to drop out are claiming success in encouraging students to remain in school. Part time schooling alongside access to VET through TAFE, and/or time out of school at work experience [preferably through an Australian School Based Apprenticeship placement] appear to have some success in making the difference between continued engagement and dropping out.

In the ACT, Youth Connection is an outreach based service which attempts to re-engage marginalised young people into educational pathways and support their families in this process. It targets high school aged students who are still formally engaged in school, on referral from schools, parents or other agencies. It's a short to medium term non-crisis service which addresses educationally based issues and refers complex matters to appropriate services, dealing with around 100 students p.a.

It is difficult to access reliable figures as to the level of disengagement from school of students of compulsory and post-compulsory school age. Movement in and out of the Territory clouds the picture. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling noted in 2001 a pattern of increasing absenteeism over Years 7-12. The Council said: "Information on the numbers and percentage of students with significant absence indicates that this level of absenteeism is an issue for ACT schools." (20)

The Council also said "The Department of Education should also publish summary attendance data and analysis annually." (p22) This appears not to have happened; no data of this kind appears in the DET Annual Report 2006.

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19    Cole, Peter. Learning for Choices Expo, Sydney, June 2004, auspiced by the Dusseldorp skills Forum; Presentation based on findings of Cole P, Griffiths, B Jane, G and Mackay A [November 2003] *Learning in diverse settings, an internal policy paper for the Victorian DET.*
20    Ministerial Advisory Council on Government Schooling, Report to the ACT Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services on Non Attendance in ACT Government schools. [December 2001] p22

This data is somewhat outdated for 2007, and the completion rates in the private school sector are included within the figure. This figure also includes those who completed Year 12 but did not attain a Certificate - 15% of the total in public schools according to the Budget papers. (21) The same section of the Budget papers reports that 85% of Year 10 students in public schools progress to ACT public colleges, but this figure is not terribly useful given that others may move to private schools. No specific data appears to be available publicly regarding students who disengaged with ACT public schooling before completion of Year 12 [with or without a Certificate].

The Legislative Assembly Committee on students at risk reported great difficulty in establishing drop out rates in secondary schools. After a lengthy discussion of the difficulty of accessing such data it stated:
*Some 16 per cent of the Year 7 cohort of 1994 did not remain in college until August of their Year 12. It amounted to about 12 per cent of the Year 11 enrolments in 1998. In other years, the proportion has been as high as 15 per cent. Over the last decade it has varied between 10-15 per cent."* (22)

Elsewhere it acknowledges the P&C Council's estimate that up to 5 % drop out before completing Year 10 saying it "does not seem unrealistic and may be an underestimate." (p15)

The Committee report weighed up the arguments for and against the provision of alternative settings thus:
*There is a debate over whether the most effective way to provide an education service for at-risk students is through an inclusive model or through a range of alternative models.*

*Proponents for the inclusive or non-categorisation approach argue that all children can learn given effective instruction and that it is more just and productive to have all children in the school system.*

*Whilst educators agree that labelling is generally destructive to the needs of children there are a number of factors that work against the implementation of the ideal. The costs of lower class sizes, support staff, extra professional development and curriculum redesign inhibit the implementation of educative measures in schools with at-risk students. At-risk students themselves are not likely to succeed in a system that they believe has failed them, they are more likely to re-engage in education in an environment where they believe that they can change their own future. Current school structures and curriculum also work against some students engaging in education.*

*Schools have autonomy to develop a diverse range of programs to meet the needs of all students. There are some excellent examples of schools that have developed alternative approaches to building supportive, challenging and exciting learning environments.*

***However, for some students, often despite the best efforts of the school, mainstream schools are inappropriate and alternative programs are needed.***
[p33] [AEU emphasis]

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21      ACT Budget papers, DET Accountability Indicators/Output Class 1: Government School Education/senior secondary education.
22      Adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes, July 2001, p15.

Elsewhere it notes: *It is clear that some students cannot cope with the structured institutional approach of mainstream schools and do better in a more flexible environment. Others need a more flexible environment because due to individual circumstances they move in and out of school.* [p27] [AEU emphasis]

It concluded: *While it is possible to aim for an inclusive method where no children are segregated in special programs such as alternative settings, alternatives are necessary for young people who have become so alienated from the system. There must be an attempt to give them a new start*. (p44) [AEU emphasis]

It also notes that many of the alternative settings operating within the Territory were operating within serious resource constraints. [p44] It is interesting to note that many of the in-school alternative arrangements referred to in the Assembly report no longer exist. Other local initiatives have in some cases been introduced. However, overall the provision of alternative classes and approaches in schools has decreased, placing more pressure on mainstream classes and the affected students. We have no real idea how many students have left our system rather than stay in a mainstream setting.

Writing of Victoria, Peter Cole (23) says:
*All senior government officials we talked acknowledged the need to programs [sic] in alternative settings. They conceded that despite the best efforts of schools, there would probably always be a small proportion  of school-aged students for whom school was inappropriate…Many young people, for a variety of reasons to do with their family lives, their involvement in substance abuse or in the juvenile justice system or their experiences at school are not able to be catered for in mainstream educational settings. They are often difficult people to deal with and are usually unable to cope with the organizational necessities of school life.*

Victoria appears to have a far broader range of alternative settings to offer its students than is available in the ACT. Attachment A to this paper outlines the provision made for students in the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

In a report commissioned and adopted by ACT DET in 2002, Dr Bob Conway (24) writes of the continuing need for alternative sites for the education of some students:
*Collaborative practices beyond the school are based on regular schools and alternate settings working together to increase learning engagement and learning outcomes for students who are unable or unwilling, to engage with the learning in the regular school…For those students who are more appropriately placed in alternate settings in an on-going basis, collaboration with other education settings such as post-school vocational curriculum options or certificates based on other curricula may be more appropriate.*

23    Cole, Peter. Learning for Choices Expo, Sydney, June 2004, based on *Learning in diverse settings, an internal policy paper for the Victorian DET*
24    Report of a review of the provision of alternate settings in the ACT Government Education System, Dr RNF Conway [June 2003], p 18.

Cole noted when considering the difficulty of obtaining ongoing funding for alternative educational settings:

*It would appear that our most vulnerable young people are often in our most financially fragile programs…The young people in alternative settings tend to present with multiple problems and with significant barriers that seriously impede their social, personal and academic development. Many are difficult to teach and to develop a rapport with, and emotionally unstable and erratic in behaviour. They need significant and intense assistance, and assistance with multiple concerns. Normal resource provision will not suffice to enable program staff to meet these students' needs. Links to other community support agencies and families is not a "nice to have" but an essential survival and support strategy.* (25)

So what did Cole find was necessary for a successful alternative educational setting? His research in Victoria is reflected in our discussions with staff working in such settings in the ACT. One setting may justly look very different from another, and tailoring the setting to a specific profile of student needs is the best option. That will allow for selection of quality staff to exactly match the needs of the students in the particular setting.

The selection and training of empathetic staff is considered the overwhelmingly important factor in any alternative setting. Cole found "The quality of the personnel and of the relationship developed between staff and students are the most critical factors in determining program success." And later, "We also observed that several alternative settings appeared to be reliant upon an exceptional individual who generally was the program leader. This reliance on the "exceptional" makes some programs vulnerable should these persons leave without an adequate replacement being found." (26)

It should be noted that several current alternative settings in the ACT are also dependent for their success on the individual personality of the teacher/youth worker concerned. Future programs must be devised to avoid this as far as possible. This can be done with an appropriate level of resourcing and specific targeting of the cohort for which the program/site is intended. The broader the spectrum of need of the students, the more difficult it will be to find staff who can deal effectively with the situation, and therefore the lower the chances of success.

Also of vital importance is small numbers in classes or groups. Says Cole (27)
*Standard school student-teacher ratios are inadequate in these circumstances. Many of these young people require multiple supports, from teachers, social workers, health professionals, drug and alcohol counselors and so on. That is why the resourcing needs of alternative settings are so complex and not able to be met through "normal" budget and staffing formulae.*

All successful alternative settings include participant involvement in decision-making regarding the learning process, the setting of personal goals, and planning for destinations beyond the setting. For those who successfully re-integrate to mainstream education settings Cole speaks of up to 2 years follow up after their return to school. Other factors impacting positively on the success of the setting are a personalised case management approach, intensive literacy and numeracy remedial attention, and links to health and welfare professionals.

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25, 26, 27        Cole, Peter. Learning for Choices Expo, Sydney, June 2004, based on *Learning in diverse settings, an internal policy paper for the Victorian DET*

**Provision for the disengaged**

It is the AEU's view that there exists a need for an alternative site/school which will provide a relevant educational experience for students at risk of dropping out of mainstream schooling before completion of a Year 10 and Year 12 Certificate.

Students may be at risk of incompletion of secondary education due to mild personality disorders, dysfunctional home environments, homelessness, caring responsibilities etc. It is recognized that several hundred young people in the ACT are completely disengaged from the high school system for these or other reasons. These young people would benefit from an educational environment which provided moderate care levels and experiential education delivery.

The Standing Committee (28) report on students at risk in 2001 noted the lack of a purely vocationally oriented alternative program in the ACT. Commenting favourably on an example of such a facility which it had visited in Victoria, the Island in North Fitzroy, the committee noted that there was an interest in establishing a similar program in the ACT. Unfortunately this has never happened.

The Committee referred also to an OECD study on young people's transition from education to work in Australia, recommending for students at risk of leaving school early the establishment of networks of smaller scale alternative secondary schools such as those that operate in Denmark in a satellite arrangement with mainstream schools. [p43]  Many other jurisdictions have faced these issues and arrived at very similar solutions. In a study of students receiving multiple suspensions in Northern Ireland schools, the  authors noted:
*There is a growing acknowledgement that there is a small number of young people… for whom full-time attendance at school might not be appropriate. In the past some of these have been placed in special schools and EGUs (Educational Guidance Unit) but this is unfair both to the young person and to the EGU or special school. For some of these young people, programmes consisting of part-time school attendance, work experience and vocational training need to be developed.* (29)

There is some evidence that, if transition to the workforce is the major objective of vocational education of school aged students, then that VET is best delivered from a TAFE or other non-school site. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 48 (30) explores this question and identifies two outcomes of VETiS: improving school retention rates, and providing skills to facilitate school to work transition.

The latter goal, they note, may be more important than the former, as some students have better outcomes pursuing transition to work rather than continuing in school. The two different goals of VET are related to two different delivery models of VETiS. If the aim is to retain students to Year 12, systems integrate VET into school accreditation regimes and provide VET in-house. If the aim is transition to work, systems tend to provide a stand alone TAFE type model of delivering VET to school students. This approach gives somewhat better post-school outcomes.

28      Adolescents and young people at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes, July 2002, p 41.
29      *Multiply-suspended pupils: their educational career and support projects available to them*, Rosemary Kilpatrick and Alex Barr. A report for the Department of Education, Northern Ireland. In Research Briefing 5/2002, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
30      Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth Research Report 48 [March 2006], *Variations in VETprovision across Australian schools and their effects on student outcomes,* by Lamb, S and Vickers, M.

The implication of this research is that VET can assist in retaining students in school, especially if provided before the student completely disengages with schooling. But if the student is disengaged from school, or if the student wishes to exit school before Year 12 completion and move into work or further VET study, the provision of VET through a non-school [i.e. TAFE] site, may be a more successful option in facilitating the student's goal.

**Proposal for an alternative vocational pathways school at Weston.**

13.    **The AEU proposes that provision be made for an alternative Vocational Pathways School at the Weston site of the Canberra Institute of Technology. We feel that this site is ideally suited to establishing a training facility for both those students at risk of dropping out of school, and those who have already disengaged from schooling. However, if this site is unavailable, an alternative suitable site should be identified.**

**Program Educational Profile**
The proposed educational program will consist of two strands: vocational education and general education. The students' general education could be provided by the CIT's Access Education area through the Access 10 program or by seconding teachers employed by DET.

Students would receive vocational education in Certificate II (and some Cert III competencies) offerings on site at Weston in commercial production enterprises in the discipline areas of:
- Agriculture: including extensive livestock, viticulture, intensive livestock management
- Horticulture: including glasshouse fruit and vegetable production, intensive outdoor market gardening, ornamental seedling production
- Culinary skills: provision of 'seed to plate' meals for program participants and for a future cafeteria / restaurant on site at Weston
- Light industry skills: including metal work, wood work, automotive skills etc
- Construction: including construction of aged care facilities / aged care hostel accommodation
- Aged Care: training in Cert II and Cert III Aged Care in facilities in the Weston and Curtin areas.

The facility would provide vocational education and training in the above disciplines in a traditional VET delivery mode as offered by CIT to apprentices and trainees engaged in outside employment. It is a model similar in type to that of the Victorian "The Island" program, and students would combine general education, vocational training and employment through an Australian School Based Apprenticeship.

**Proposed Enterprise**
The existing facilities and structures at Weston CIT campus would ideally suit the proposal.  It would be desirable for the necessary agricultural / horticultural / construction and vineyard equipment to be retained on site to facilitate commercial production and training at Weston.  The principles of enterprise education would be followed, while education and training costs would be funded by the Department of Education.  Industry and community partnerships would be an important facet of the programs undertaken. It is proposed that students could be engaged with industry in traineeships / apprenticeships in construction.

**Education Delivery Model**
The educational delivery model for the experiential training programs would require the establishment of appropriate production systems on site and the students would be effectively 'employed' by the facility management throughout their training. Students would experience one fortnight in each of 3 of the offered training enterprises before they were required to select the area in which to complete their training in Certificate II (and beyond).

**Student Intake**
The School would cater for students in the age range 14-19 years, with flexibility to admit students outside that age range in exceptional circumstances. Students could attend full time or could attend part time as part of a program organised through their home school.

Students would be referred by Principals through the Department of Education, and selection onto the program would be based on their commitment and eagerness to work cooperatively in a group. They would complete an educational assessment and would commence the training in cohorts of a maximum of 8 per discipline area each intake, with 2 intakes per year. The students would elect 3 areas in which to spend 2 weeks on try-out and, at the end of the 6th week they would elect a discipline area in which to work and train.

**Teachers andTrainers**
The facility would be a Department of Education funded school, in partnership with the Canberra Institute of Technology, accessing secondary teachers and CIT teacher/trainers in a partnership arrangement which would also include industry and community groups. Teachers for the program would be selected for their empathy and experience with the client group, industry experience (including commercial experience), group work experience, leadership skills, teaching / training skills and personal motivation. They would be paid as AST/Leading teachers and would manage the production, training and assessment of the clients throughout their training. They would also oversee the commercial production and marketing of their production etc.
Teachers and trainers would need to be supported by youth workers and other specialist teachers to address individual personal needs and specific remedial educational problems on a daily basis across the program.

**Program Management and Oversight**
The program would be managed by personnel to adequately provide the support and administration functions of an independent Registered Training Organisation. The Principal/Director of the program would answer to a Program Management Committee and be responsible for oversight of training, commercial production, student selection and support. The program would be based on a group work model and the Principal/Director would need to be proficient at managing such a work and training environment.

The Program Management Committee (PMC) would consist of representatives from interested oganisations and community groups and additional representatives with expertise in behaviour management, commercial production (industry representatives) and VET training. A smaller Executive of this PMC would oversee the operations of the program and receive bimonthly reports from the Principal/Director.

## CIT's existing " Alternative School" Setting

CIT offers alternative educational opportunities to the ACT public school system and is the only public provider to do so within the ACT. For many years, CIT has offered an alternative Year 12 Certificate opportunity for many young people and mature aged Canberrans. In recent years CIT has diversified its offerings to include the Certificate II in Access10 program for students at CIT in Southside and Bruce campuses. These offerings have been extended to external bodies that include partnerships with the Hindmarsh Education Centre, the Galilee School and Youth in the City.

Students who demonstrate appropriate self motivation and capacity to manage their own learning are joining the Access10 Program.  In essence, the program offers core units in Maths, English and Computer Skills etc.  A range of electives appropriate to this predominantly 15 -18 year old age group of students includes recognition for relevant prior learning eg Road Ready, First Aid certificate etc and opportunities to gain Certificate II competencies in VET programs offered at CIT.

Many students continue to progress beyond completion of the Access10 program to pursue further VET qualifications at CIT or other appropriate Registered Training Organisations or return to the school system for Years 11 and 12.  The program is appropriate for students capable of managing their own education and for those who can adapt to and learn in an adult learning setting.

The size of the cohort of young, school aged students seeking alternative education provision at CIT has increased markedly in the past few years. This demand seems to be related to the lack of any other appropriate facility that accommodates students who are uncomfortable in and/or disengaged from  the general school environment.

Success of these programs is attributed to a comprehensive selection process and the dedication of the teaching staff who deliver the program. Staff take a personal interest in students who are additionally supported [at Southside campus], by Youth Workers from the YARDS program. The educational environment is important to program success and the ideal accommodation incorporates multi-purpose rooms with adequate computers and furniture that can be arranged flexibly for group and individual needs.

## The future of the Access 10 program at CIT

The AEU considers that CIT has a useful role to play in providing an alternate setting through which students who leave school post-compulsory school age can access a Year 10 Certificate. Whatever arrangements are made regarding use of the CIT Weston site [see above] it is likely that there will be a continuing need for this aspect of alternate provision. The recommendations below would place the CIT in a position to provide outreach facilities to those students unable to access the Weston site, due to transport or other inhibitors. The clientele of the CIT program must necessarily be somewhat self motivated and capable of independent learning.

**The AEU recommends the following strategies to support and guarantee the continued growth and success of the Access10 program facilitated by CIT:**

**14.    The Access 10 program should be available in strategic locations through out the ACT to ensure that, true to its name, it is indeed accessible by students at risk of not achieving a Year 10 certificate. This**

**accessibility would be enhanced by establishing Access 10 programs in suitable facilities in the Northern and Southern suburbs of the ACT [eg Gungahlin and Tuggeranong] as well as a central site at one of the established CIT campuses, eg within the proposed Vocational Pathways School at Weston.**

Each site of delivery should engage youth workers, who are both suitably funded and trained, to support the young people during their education. Staff delivering the education and training of these students are frequently unique in their experience and skill in dealing with troubled and behaviourally challenged youth. The AEU therefore recommends that the program and its teachers be recognised for their efforts to assist the ACT's more socially disadvantaged students.

**15. The ACT government should agree to waive fees for the Access10 and Year 12 program students at CIT as the majority of these students are existing on or below the poverty line. Their school based colleagues receive a free education and the ACT government is obliged to deliver education that is accessible and equitable for all students of school age.**

A suitable learning environment is key to success of these programs. The Access 10 and year 12 programs need:
- Accommodation that contains sufficient rooms containing adequate numbers of computers to meet student needs and flexible furniture
- Students to have ready access to recreational facilities [eg Gym, oval etc] to engage in sport and recreation
- Students to have access to appropriate and comfortable lounge and kitchen facilities to encourage them to relax between classes and to engage in positive social interaction.

# ATTACHMENT

The following summary is included as an example to illustrate the kinds of provision made available in other parts of the country. The Northern Metropolitan Region [NMR] of Victoria offers a comprehensive array of alternative educational facilities. They range from short term placements of one or two terms, to long term placements of 1-2 years. All are located within a host school. One of their rationales is "that a number of students experience difficulty in mainstream schools at sometime in their education which require off-site short term to long term, intensive specialist intervention." (31)

The programs are very specifically tailored to a particular cohort of students, from a specific age range, with specific curriculum emphases. Their entry and referral processes vary – some entry is through self-referral or parental referral, other is strictly through referral by mental health or other professional agencies, or by schools as part of their intervention processes with students with behavioural difficulties.

There is an expectation that when schools refer a child they do so only after many other strategies have been employed at their home schools, including modified curriculum or timetable, peer support or mentoring, referral to student support services, counselling, liaison with appropriate services etc

The region's alternative settings budget funds the settings, which are hosted by a school but accessible to others in the region. Amongst around a dozen such sites, examples are:

- primary site for behaviourally and emotionally disturbed children from K-Year 4; referral from school psychologist via educational psychologist.
- primary site hosted by a special school, for children from 9-15 years in Years 4-7, within the normal intelligence range; referred by school. For children displaying disturbing behaviour for whom a range of interventions have been tried and evaluated in the home school.
- Collingwood Alternative School for secondary students suffering social, emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties; schools refer or referral by parents, hospitals, juvenile justice, Dept of Human Services.
- The Island caters for 15-18 year olds, out of school or in danger of dropping out, and looking for work. Its referrals are from school, welfare agencies, juvenile justice, church groups or self referral. It aims to provide work skills to students and assist them to enter the workforce. Students attend for 6 months.
- Austin Hospital School aims to provide a short term intensive educational program for young people who are patients of Austin Health and who have serious problems of an emotional, physical or psychiatric nature. It caters students from 8-18 years; attendance is free, with re-integration as the aim. Students are referred to the school by the hospital only.

The key element seems to be that each facility does not try to be all things to all students. It defines its scope quite narrowly and adheres to that. Supervision is in place, and reporting lines are clear. The curriculum is tailor-made and has coherence as a program that can deliver what the particular cohort wants. Time of attendance is flexible but aligned to the nature of the student's difficulty with mainstream schooling. Presumably staff are selected for their skills in relation to the particular setting.

31     Northern Metropolitan Region Alternative Programs and Settings: Section 12: Alternative programs and settings.