

TO: QTU MEMBERS

More election announcements

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) announced five additional education policies at its campaign launch on Sunday. These are in addition to its responses to the 12 priority areas that were included in the special election edition of the Journal emailed to members on Friday.

The five announcements are:

1. teacher and teacher-aide numbers
2. a \$100m student wellbeing package, including health professionals and a trial of general practitioners in 20 secondary schools
3. a \$20m paid internship program
4. 120 after-school homework centres at a cost of \$8m
5. \$21m to extend free TAFE and apprenticeships to under 25s.

Teacher and teacher-aide numbers

The ALP's announcement includes the employment of 6,190 new teachers and 1,139 teacher-aides over the next four years, "to meet student enrolment growth and maintain nation-leading teacher to student ratios and low class sizes".

QTU comment

The figures quoted are estimates covering both replacement of retiring/resigning teachers and enrolment growth of approximately 8,000 students per year.

The important part is the commitment "to meet student enrolment growth and maintain... low class sizes".

The Liberal National Party (LNP), which earlier promised 3,350 teachers, has complained it is not an "apples with apples" comparison.

The Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) is writing to the LNP seeking a commitment from the LNP that it will employ sufficient teachers to maintain class sizes, given the LNP opposed the inclusion of class size targets in the EB6 agreement and then legislated to invalidate them.

Student wellbeing package

This package is directed at student mental health. Every Queensland primary and secondary state school student will have "access to a psychologist or similar health and wellbeing professional" at a cost of \$100m.

This will involve the employment of 464 health professionals to provide "expert advice and support across all phases of student wellbeing, including mental health promotion, early intervention for mental health issues and complex case management".

Also included is a pilot placing general practitioners in 20 state secondary schools "in areas of greatest need, providing access to medical care and advice free of charge in a familiar environment".

QTU comment

The importance of student mental health has previously been recognised, but until now has seemed too big to address in any meaningful way.

Student mental health has been identified as one of the fastest growing areas of workload and stress by Dr Phil Riley in annual principal health and wellbeing surveys.

COVID-19 and associated lockdowns have exacerbated and drawn attention to issues of mental health.

This announcement is a MAJOR commitment in a very important area of need.

The relationship of these new positions with existing guidance officers and their respective roles will have to be addressed if the ALP is elected. The QTU definitely does not support the introduction of the new positions as a replacement for existing guidance services (which should also be increased), but as an addition to the resources addressing student mental health.

Paid internship program

As part of the announcement of teacher numbers, the ALP also announced a \$20 million internship program to “provide 300 aspiring teachers with financial support, mentoring and paid internship employment to complete their teaching qualification and take up a guaranteed permanent teaching position in a Queensland state school”.

QTU comment

The QTU understands from previous discussions (and will confirm) that this proposal is very different to the Teach for Australia program to which the Union remains implacably opposed.

The introduction of the two-year graduate teaching qualification has posed a barrier to graduates in other fields seeking to become teachers. An internship is a constructive way of continuing to attract graduates in other fields and career changers to teaching as a profession.

The internship program will provide financial support during the first year of the graduate teaching program and a paid internship (at a rate set in the current EB9 agreement) while completing the second year of the teaching qualification (N.B. the course program, while still the equivalent of a two-year program, may be compressed in time).

The QTU has, for at least the last decade, negotiated unpaid internship agreements for students in the final year of their four-year teaching qualification. A similar arrangement will be negotiated for participants in this internship program. This is in marked contrast to the Teach for Australia program, under which students were given full responsibility for classes after 14 weeks of teacher education.

After-school home centres

The ALP will establish after-school homework centres in 120 state schools. The centres (or sessions) will “be for a maximum of three hours per week, for 30 weeks per year, supervised by up to three on-site teacher-aides”. The cost is \$8m per year.

QTU comment

There is little doubt that this will provide valuable support to students who may not have resources at home to complete homework. The experience of remote learning for some students is part of the motivation for this policy. If the ALP is elected, the QTU will advocate for the distribution of the 120 sessions and access for students to these sessions to be on the basis of need.

Consideration will also have to be given to the relationship with outside school hours care and supervision.

Extension of free TAFE and apprenticeships

The government, if re-elected, “will provide free TAFE and free apprenticeships for Queenslanders under the age of 25 in 165 priority qualifications”.

This is an extension of programs such as Free TAFE for year 12 school leaders and Free Apprenticeships for under 21s. The \$21m investment is supposed to assist 37,000 young Queenslanders.

QTU comment

There has been a sloppiness in terminology in the past that has seen TAFE and VET used interchangeably. The Union understands that this investment will be through TAFE Queensland.

The program is directed towards young people because of the well-documented impact of COVID-19 and the accompanying recession on young workers.

The QTU anticipates further announcements in the TAFE area, which will be publicised when available.

Authorised by:

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