



Policy Platform: Education

Youth Coalition of the ACT

For the purposes of this Policy Platform, education relates primarily to compulsory education (schooling) in the ACT, and covers all forms of mainstream and alternative schooling education that occurs for young people up until completion of Year 12.

The Youth Coalition believes that education is an area of great importance for young people. This is demonstrated by being a signatory to the ACT Youth Commitment, an expression of dedication of Territory Directorates, community and private sector groups to ensure the increased educational engagement, attainment and successful post school transitioning of young people in the ACT.

Education should equip young people to make cultural and political contributions to their communities. Education also transmits more abstract qualities such as critical thinking skills, healthy living, resilience, and self-confidence. The Youth Coalition recognises that schools have a responsibility to actively engage with young people, in accordance with the young people's developmental stages and individual learning needs wherever possible, and supports the development of an evidence-based national curriculum which achieves these objectives.

Much has been written regarding risk and protective factors of compulsory education. Low education attainment rates have been linked to many negative outcomes, from mental health issues to cardiovascular disease.¹ Depression among individuals with low educational attainment is, on average, twice as high among adults with low education compared to those of stronger educational background.² More recently, attainment of a Certificate II or lower was attributed to social exclusion in the forms of social interactions, personal safety, community and health.³ The Youth Coalition recognises the complex multi directional relationship between educational attainment and health outcomes. The Youth Coalition therefore believes that these issues need to be dealt with through multi-directional and interdisciplinary ways across government, the community and the private sector.

Under the National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions, the ACT has implemented legislation requiring young people to remain engaged in education, training or employment until the age of 17. Other measures progressed under the Partnership include changes to income support eligibility for some young people. The Youth Coalition supports the decision to implement a national evaluation of these measures to determine their effectiveness and impact on young people. In order to ensure the Earn or Learn policy is effective, young people must be supported to remain in school during the transition periods of primary to high school and high school to college, or from school into other forms of learning such as apprenticeships. If young people are struggling to

succeed in mainstream education, schools have a responsibility to ensure there are more flexible programs available to address this issue.

The Youth Coalition also believes that schools need to be appropriately funded and resourced, and as such supports the ACT Government's commitment to implementing the Gonski report's recommendations, in particular extra funding for students with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, low SES students and students with English as a Second Language.

Young people engaged in education are less likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system.⁴ The Youth Coalition applauds the ACT Government for investing in early intervention identified in the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT 2012-22, which references plans to implement a framework to engage young people in education, training or work. This is an example of different government directorates collaborating and sharing resources should be followed by other organisations in keeping young people engaged in education, training or employment.

Issues such as school bullying continue to be a concern for many young people, particularly for young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex, young people with a disability, multicultural or newly arrived young people, and young people from a low socio-economic background.

Mental health concerns also affect a large proportion of young people who attend educational institutions, and teachers must be supported to have the appropriate knowledge and skills to understand mental health issues. Teachers require extra support to deal with crisis situations in the classroom and in the playground. Additional supporting resources need to be provided through the *Better Schools* agenda. This should include additional non teaching staff such as youth workers, social workers and counselors. *Mental Health and Education is discussed further in the Youth Coalition's Mental Health Policy Platform.*

The Youth Coalition is also concerned about the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous educational achievement and attainment rates. In the general ACT population, the level of Year 12 or equivalent attainment was 91.5% in 2011.⁵ This places the ACT above the national average of 86% in 2011.⁶ In 2011, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT had an attainment level of 71.1%.⁷ The Youth Coalition recognises the positive efforts made by the ACT Government to address this important issues, through the release of policies such as the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Matters – Strategic Plan 2010-2013'.

The Youth Coalition supports the setting of a national agenda on youth attainment and transitions. Further the Youth Coalition supports the:

- Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (December 2008).
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policy.⁸

In light of this critical phase of young people's lives, the Youth Coalition argues that ACT Government agencies, youth and community support services, and the wider community have a shared responsibility to ensure that young people are supported to maximise their engagement in education. Young people need to have a variety of needs met for

them to be able to engage in education. This includes the provision of reliable public transport, comprehensive health services, housing and other resources, services and incentives to allow young people to attend school. We also believe that young people need to be empowered to have a real and genuine engagement in their own educational outcomes, and be offered meaningful involvement in the school environment.

Commitments

1. Advocating for an evidence-based curriculum that reflects the current educational and cultural needs of the diversity of young people.
2. Advocating for more flexible programs for all students within mainstream schools. Alternative education programs should not be seen as a 'dumping ground' for all students who have support needs or behavioural issues.
3. Advocating for increased alternative educational provision for young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging, especially young people involved in the youth justice system, low socio-economic status, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and young people involved in the Care and Protection system.
4. Supporting initiatives that aim to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous education attainment.
5. Advocating for recognition of the role of families in their child's educational engagement, and for supports to be provided to families if required to achieve this objective.
6. Supporting the ACT Youth Commitment to ensure that no young person is lost to education, training or employment.
7. Supporting the ACT Government's commitment to implement the Gonski reforms.
8. Advocating for the provision of additional non-teaching resources such as youth workers, social workers and counsellors in schools.
9. Advocating for additional professional development opportunities for school-based youth workers and providing them with increased resources in order to maintain connections to the youth sector and wider community.
10. Advocating for additional professional development opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff to respond to crisis situations, including mental health issues.
11. Advocating for an evidence-based approach to school suspension, and increasing the support to those young people who are suspended to maintain positive engagement with educational providers.
12. Advocating for the active involvement of young people in designing, planning and evaluating youth education policy and service delivery frameworks.

13. Advocating for the active and supported participation of young people in their individual care planning and case management.

¹ Marilyn A. Winkleby, PhD, Danus E. Jatulis, MS, Erica Frank, MD, MPH, and Stephen P. Fortmann, MD (1992) Socioeconomic Status and Health: How Education, Income, and Occupation Contribute to Risk Factors for Cardiovascular Disease, *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 82, No 26, USA.

² Ladin, K (2008) Risk of Late-Life Depression Across 10 European Union Countries: Deconstructing the Education Effect, *Population and International Health*, Harvard School of Public Health

³ Buddelmeyer, H., Leung, F. and Scutella, R. (2012) Educating oneself out of Social Exclusion, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.

⁴ Attorney General's Department (Accessed November 2010) National Community Crime Prevention Programme, Australian Government, Canberra.

⁵ COAG Reform Council (2013) *Indigenous Reform 2011–12: Comparing performance across Australia*, (COAG Reform Council, Sydney) p. 52 <online> <http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/reports/indigenous-reform/indigenous-reform-2011-12-comparing-performance-across-australia> Accessed 28 June 2013.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2012) *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (Australian Government, Canberra) <online> <http://deewr.gov.au/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-policy> Accessed 2 April 2013.