

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 627#

THE HARPER REPORT, AND PRIVATISATION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION BY STEALTH

‘The application of any public interest test would see a strong case to remove competition as a guiding or organising principle for the provision of education.’ AEU Submission to the Harper Committee

The recently released Harper Report — a ham-fisted attempt to legitimise radical right wing Coalition ‘Competition’ policy — is a merely a recipe for the wholesale privatisation and marketing of educational provision in Australia.

It almost completely ignores recommendations of public education supporters such as the Australian Education Union.

WHAT exactly IS THE HARPER REPORT ABOUT?

In relation to education, health and community services

The Harper Report recommends:

- **the formulation of choice and competition principles** in health, education and community services;
- changes to government policies, **intergovernmental relations, and to the role of government in service delivery, funding and regulation of these sectors;** (and
- the introduction of **change to occur progressively** through pilots and trials.

The above ‘code words’ in bold, In DOGS experience mean the following:

Choice and competition: means preferential taxpayer funding of private schools at the expense of public schools – i.e. public schools being prevented from ‘competing with schools for the wealthy.

Intergovernmental relations....sectors: means the Commonwealth using the power of the purse to force state governments to privatise public education, while diverting billions in public funding to private schools - with minimal regulation or accountability for public money.

Change to occur progressively: gradual takeover of public with private providers through private public partnerships etc. If parents object, then those in power buy off the most articulate, duce them, or withdraw funding gradually and ‘consult’ until those wishing to fight walk away in disgust or exhaustion. This procedure is known as ‘friendly’ as opposed to not-so-friendly fascism. Think Turnbull v Abbott.

The Harper Report also recommends that each Australian government adopt 'choice and competition principles' in the areas of health, education and community services such as aged care and disability care. The principles would aim to:

- ensure that user choice is at the heart of service delivery;
- separate the interests of policy (including funding), regulation and service delivery, with governments to retain a stewardship function;
- exercise care and maintain a clear focus on outcomes where governments commission human services;
- encourage a diversity of providers, while not crowding out community and volunteer services; and
- stimulate innovation in service delivery, while ensuring minimum standards of quality and access.

The Harper Report notes that health, education and community services are currently provided by a range of public, private and not-for-profit providers. While the commissioning of human services through competitive tendering can result in a focus on price rather than fairness and responsiveness to individual needs, the Harper Report notes that innovative approaches have been recently trialled by governments. Examples of innovative approaches include the government retaining the ability to step in to remove poor performers, while otherwise giving service providers room to meet consumer needs.

The Report also recommends that all Australian governments review their competitive neutrality policies. For more information on the recommendations relating to competitive neutrality, see [Competition Regulation of Government Activity](#).

The implementation of such changes is likely to take time and is expected to be carried out progressively through pilots and trials

<https://www.allens.com.au/services/comp/harpmaj-health.htm>

AEU SUBMISSION TO HARPER REVIEW

In November 2014, The Australian Education Union made an excellent submission to the Harper Review. **Their submission was ignored.** The AEU represents approximately 190,000 members employed in government schools and public early childhood work locations, in TAFE and other public institutions of vocational education, in Adult Multicultural or Migrant Education Service centres and in Disability Services centres as teachers, school leaders, and education assistance and support workers. They are also supported by the majority of parents in Australia – who send their children to public schools. **Any government who ignores their point of view does so at their peril.**

The AEU arguments are useful for those who prepared to fight for their children's educational opportunities in future months.

<http://competitionpolicyreview.gov.au/files/2014/12/AEU.pdf>

WHAT DOES THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION SAY?

They point out that the evidence just does not support any need to increase the penetration of competition principles into the education sector of the economy.

A Quick Fact Check

Australia has 6 states and 2 territories. In each there is government, catholic and 'independent' provision of education at pre-school, school and Technical & Further Education levels. In essence, there are at the very least, between 24 and 84 different systems of education. Governments provide substantial funding to them all.

There are just under 18,000 pre-school providers, some 6,661 government schools, 1717 Catholic schools, 1015 independent schools, and some 4700 registered training organisations (including about 62 TAFE colleges or institutes). **Australia suffers not from a lack of choice in the provision of education services but from a bewildering confusion of providers.** With the high profile failure over recent years of providers in early childhood (ABC Learning), schools (Mowbray College) and in vocational education and training. The ASQA reports some 18% of applications to register or register as a training provider are rejected and that there has been a 33% increase in sanctions against providers for non-compliance with quality standards. 20% of providers were non-compliant even after being required to rectify deficiencies. *ASQA, Annual Report, 2013-14, pp 24-26.*

and

The application of any public interest test would see a strong case to remove competition as a guiding or organising principle for the provision of education.

DOGS recommend a comprehensive reading of the AEU Submission at <http://competitionpolicyreview.gov.au/files/2014/12/AEU.pdf>

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