



HON WILL HODGMAN MP
LIBERAL LEADER

Mr Terry Polglase
Branch President
Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch
Level 1, 32 Patrick Street
Hobart TAS 7000

Dear Mr Polglase

Thank you for your letter of 21 January requesting responses to a survey by the Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch.

I have pleasure in responding on behalf of all Liberal Members and Candidates.

Because of your deadlines, I cannot include all Liberal policy announcements that relate to education, and I would point your members to our website – www.tas.liberal.org.au where these will be posted, as released.

We are happy to answer any supplementary questions, and would appreciate if our responses could be published in full, as written.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Will Hodgman'.

Will Hodgman MP
Liberal Leader

Questions for Political Parties 2014 from the AEU

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Liberals' vision for education in this State.

Tasmania's education system has been largely characterised by failed reforms over the period of the Labor Government, and more recently, the Labor-Green Government, including Essential Learnings, Tasmania Tomorrow and more recently the school viability review.

Tens of millions of dollars have been wasted and Tasmanian students and our professional education workforce have been the guinea pigs of a rushed and ill-considered education agenda.

Added to this, the Labor-Green Government cut the education budget by \$190 million, and there are now over 122 fewer teachers in the public education system¹.

As a result of Labor-Green Government's cuts to education, results in Tasmania have gone backwards, retention rates have plummeted for post year 10, we have the lowest year 12 (or VET equivalent) completion rate of any State in Australia, and Tasmania is below the national average in every one of the 20 literacy and numeracy measures under NAPLAN.

The Liberals understand our educators are reform-weary, and just want to get on with the job of improving educational outcomes for Tasmanian students.

The Liberal commitment to teachers is strategic investment into careful, evidence-based policies to get better outcomes, extending high schools to year 12 – a secondary school provision which is successful and normal interstate - and an investment in literacy and numeracy specialists.

Question 1 - How would you ensure a competitive teacher salary with appropriate relativity to the salaries of mainland teachers?

Wage restraint has been a necessary outcome of the Budget mess created by the State Labor-Green Government. The Government implemented a 2 per cent wage cap in 2011 as an attempt to rein in budget spending. However, since then and despite reducing the size of the public sector, the Budget mess is worse, with Tasmania recording the biggest budget deficit in the State's history of \$316 million.

We understand that capping wages has meant the salaries of many professionals, including teachers, are slipping behind their interstate counterparts.

However, there are only two ways for any government to be able to fund salary growth beyond the current 2 per cent wage cap at this time – increased revenue or increased

¹ Department of Education Annual Reports 2010-11 and 2012-13.

savings. Increased revenue will flow from a growing economy, and responsible financial management should be an enduring principle of good government.

Today, we could not commit to wage growth outside the current cap. However, with a growing economy and fiscal discipline, we can commit to negotiating in good faith with the AEU when wage agreements fall due into the future and, in doing so, recognising the need to maintain some level of relativity to ensure we can retain our professional teaching workforce in Tasmania.

I further note that both Labor and the Greens promised relativity at the 2010 State election and did not deliver.

Question 2 - In relation to school and TasTAFE support staff annual unpaid stand down, what steps, if any, would you take to address this issue?

The Liberals have already announced we will address the current inequity faced by Tasmanian Teacher Assistants and school support staff by making available up to one week of extra paid hours which we would favour to be worked during the school term when it can be of most direct support to teachers and students. If elected, we would favourably consider extending this to similar TasTAFE positions and await further information from the AEU.

Question 3 - What class size limits, if any, do you see as appropriate for the school sector – (a) for regular classes and (b) where the use of equipment means there is an element of danger?

Under the period of the Labor-Green Government, according to the Department of Education's own annual reports, class sizes have increased in kindergarten, primary schools and secondary schools. They have increased from 18.6 to 19.5 in kindergarten classes, from 23.1 to 23.4 in primary schools, and from 23.0 to 23.4 in secondary schools. In fact, in 2011 the Labor-Green Government rescinded funding which was specifically directed to schools to have smaller class sizes, claiming that "*class sizes run a long way behind teacher quality in driving educational outcomes*".²

The Liberals will not seek to set class sizes or limits. We trust and support our schools to *manage class sizes effectively and have flexibility in this area, depending on the school and depending on the number of high and additional needs children within the class.*

Instead, the Liberals will have a single-minded focus on improving student outcomes.

Tasmania's current education standards are simply unacceptable and, as Saul Eslake rightly notes, Tasmania's most persistent economic problems is the fact that the State's productivity is around 10 per cent below the national average, resulting in low skills, lower wages and lower living standards.

² Nick McKim, Budget Estimates, 27/6/2011.

Unlike the former Minister, we do not believe our education standards are a reflection on our schools or teachers. They are a combination of entrenched disadvantage in this State, years of poorly-considered government policy in education and the inadequate focus we – collectively – place on the value and importance of education.

That's why we have set a goal that by the end of the first six years of a majority Liberal Government, Tasmania will be at or above the national standard in every single NAPLAN measurement, and meet national benchmarks in reading, writing, maths and science.

If elected on 15 March, a majority Liberal Government will be a government that has, at its core, a fundamental commitment to raise educational standards in Tasmania, and work with and support our education professionals to do so.

As part of that plan, a majority Liberal Government will employ up to 25 new specialist literacy and numeracy teachers. These new specialists will focus on working with our year 7 to 9 students who are consistently performing below the national average, and where according to NAPLAN figures, our students are falling behind the most.

We are prepared to be judged on our success in achieving our goals of improving education outcomes.

Question 4 - Do you acknowledge workload problems in schools and TasTAFE?

Yes. And we have raised this matter consistently in the last Parliament.

Workload problems were exposed in a 2012 AEU survey where 68% of participating principals and 58% of your members said their current workload levels were unmanageable as a result of the impacts of State Labor-Green Government budget cuts.

In 2010, at the beginning of the Labor-Green Government, there were 5840 teachers (including principals). According to the latest Department of Education Annual Report, there are now 5718 – a reduction of 122.

As the AEU noted at the time, you cannot slash education budgets, reduce teacher numbers and expect there to be no impact.

Other workload problems identified by teachers themselves relate to the need for proper educational support for high and additional needs students.

Question 5 - If so, what steps will you take to see workload managed more effectively in schools?

The best way to manage workload is to rebuild resources and that's why the Liberals have committed to rebuilding education.

We did not give our support to the Labor-Green cuts to frontline services in 2011, and we have said consistently that a majority Liberal Government will focus unashamedly on the essentials - jobs, economic development, education, health and public safety.

To underscore that, the Liberals have already committed to an additional 105 new teachers to implement our \$45.5 million four-year plan to extend 21 high schools in rural and regional communities to year 12, by 2018.

As previously referred, we will employ up to 25 new specialist literacy and numeracy teachers which will be of enormous value in supporting classroom teachers with the great challenge of assisting their students who are falling behind.

We will have more announcements to make on rebuilding education during the election campaign – you can read all Liberal policy at www.tas.liberal.org.au

In addition, we have committed to an independent review of education for students with high and additional needs, to look at the limitations for families in being able to exercise choice in the education of their child, and barriers faced relative to in-school support for their child and access to the Severe Disability Register. The impact on the workload of teachers from the lack of adequate support for students with a disability or high and additional needs will be part of the review.

Question 6 - If so, what steps will you take to see workload managed more effectively in TasTAFE?

We understand that in the transition back from the Polytechnic back to TasTAFE, there has been massive unrest and difficulties for many administrative and teaching staff, resulting in significant additional pressure on employees. In addition, there have been cuts to available courses, and increases in fees. Our consistent feedback from staff is that there remain structural deficits in the organisation that the Labor-Green government have created as a result of a lazy amalgamation of the two former entities. We will work with TasTAFE in a proactive way to tackle these problems.

We have seen that a cost-recovery model for adult education has led to a 78% drop in adult education, and we do not want to see this occur for TasTAFE and our vocational education and training sector.

The Tasmanian Liberals led the push for the re-establishment of the well-known TAFE brand. Despite the procrastination by the Labor-Green Government in dealing with this, and the fact that post-amalgamation the organisation has more non-teaching staff today than

before, we want TasTAFE to be a success and will strongly support the organisation in order to meet the training needs of the Tasmanian workforce

Question 7 - Will your government commit to the Better Schools (Gonski) Agreement over six years, as signed by State and Federal Governments?

The Liberals strongly support Gonski and we will continue to do so.

If elected in March we will work constructively with the Federal Government to ensure Tasmania's promised share is delivered in full.

All our funding commitments are for the term of government, as is common practice. It would be inappropriate and misleading to make funding commitments beyond the next election cycle.

The Liberals have been the biggest supporters of education in Tasmania. We were the only party to stand up for Tasmanian schools while Labor and the Greens tried to forcibly close them. And we argued on behalf of schools when Labor and the Greens ripped \$190 million out of the education budget two years ago – cuts which have still not been restored.

The Liberals want to see every available Commonwealth dollar for Tasmania in education, because we deserve that and because we believe in education and the importance that Tasmania must begin to place on students getting the best educational outcomes to fix the Tasmanian economy. Our policies announced to date underscore this.

I personally travelled to Canberra in early December to discuss measures needed to reboot Tasmania's economy. I was able to confirm the Tasmania's Gonski funding was secure. The Australian Government has also publicly stated that the funding for Tasmania will be the same across four years. That money is now flowing to Tasmania.

If fortunate enough to be elected to Government, we will always negotiate with the Federal government on the basis of getting the best possible deal for Tasmania.

Question 8 - Will your government commit to a schools funding model using principles outlined in the Gonski review beyond 6 years?

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All our funding commitments are for the term of government, as is common practice. It would be inappropriate and misleading to make funding commitments beyond the next election cycle.

Question 9 - Will you commit to reducing primary school instructional load to 20 hours per week by, for example, providing funding for additional specialist teachers who can provide a diverse set of curriculum offerings for all primary school students?

We would welcome a copy of the AEU submission made to Government on this matter and note that this request was not agreed to by Government in the most recent wage agreement.

Question 10 - Would you support provision of school psychologists at a ratio of 1:750 students? If not, what ratio do you commit to providing?

State Labor promised to employ 12 additional school psychologists at the 2010 election but utterly reneged on that commitment. While the budget situation has made consideration of this in the current context difficult, we have been raising the matter throughout the last Parliament together with and on behalf of the Australian Psychological Association with whom we enjoy an excellent relationship.

We will be announcing further policy during the election campaign that will assist students in our schools. All policies can be found at www.tas.liberal.org.au

Question 11 - Will you ensure that no secondary college is closed?

Yes.

The Liberals have already committed to no closure of secondary colleges in our detailed plan to invest \$45.5 million over four years, employ up to 105 new teachers and extend 21 high schools in rural and regional communities to year 12, by 2018.

Specifically, we have stated Colleges and TasTAFE will remain in place and will continue to educate year 11-12 students as they do now.

Under our Plan, there will be up to an additional 2000 students completing year 11 and 12 in the first four years. Our policy has nothing to do with migrating students from one setting to another. Rather it is about providing for and expecting students to actually complete year 12 – admitting that the lowest retention and completion rates of all the states is unacceptable. More students mean more demand for educational provision. Choice will be retained, and students who wish to continue either or both years 11 and 12 at one of our existing colleges will be encouraged to do so.

Importantly, a full Implementation Plan has been publicly available since May 2013.

Question 12 - Will you commit to ensuring instructional load is removed from all Principals?

We would welcome a copy of the AEU submission made to Government on this matter and note this is not a matter raised with us prior to this election.

Question 13 - Will you guarantee that Principals will not be put on contract employment arrangements?

In Tasmania, some schools have endured years of a succession of acting principals. High turnover is far from ideal leadership for our schools, and we acknowledge that it can be difficult to attract experienced principals to some schools in isolated communities.

These problems have existed for years. The Government has been aware of them but has not moved to address them.

The Liberals understand that the issue of the appointment and retention of principals is a critical one for our education system. This requires action, and the Liberals will fully consult with the Principals' Association and AEU to resolve these ongoing problems with a view to giving stable leadership to school communities.

Question 14 - Would you provide full, centralized funding to ensure workplaces have the capacity to meet their requirements regarding Health Safety Reps under the Workplace Health and Safety legislation?

New workplace laws have imposed thousands of new regulations on the community as a whole, business and the public sector.

The Government is not assisting the business community to meet its requirements and we would not be undertaking any special measures in the public sector.

However, what we do want to see is less regulation in our workplaces, not more. It is important to be safe and healthy at work, but on the face of it, it appears these new regulations are excessive.

These new laws will be part of the Australian Government's efforts to cut red tape in all workplaces, and this effort will be supported by the Tasmanian Liberals in our audit of red tape, to achieve a 20 per cent reduction over four years.

Question 15 - Will you guarantee Independent public schools will not be established in Tasmania?

The Liberals believe that partnerships that link students with school, peers, parents, community, training and employers is one of the best ways of ensuring that education and learning is a focus of an individual's life from the earliest point. Such partnerships were showcased as best practice at the AEU's November 2010 Conference.

The independent public school model has been implemented in other states, with some apparent success. However, these have occurred in states which already had a higher level of school autonomy than presently exists in Tasmania. While we appreciate that greater autonomy at the local level broadly has an objective of improving outcomes for students, we would be concerned that implementing this model in Tasmania would distract from our priorities of dealing with our unacceptable literacy and numeracy outcomes and the worst year 12 completion rate of all the states.

The Liberals will look at all options to improving student outcomes, however we have no plans to implement the Independent Public School model.

Question 16 - Will you guarantee, as a minimum, the indexation of TasTAFE and LINC funding to ensure the ongoing viability of this sector?

TasTAFE is the product of the lazy amalgamation of two former entities which were spun out of the former TAFE Tasmania. There are signs that the Labor-Green Government's decision to ignore the structural, duplication and fragmentation issues are causing distress among staff at TasTAFE and we will work to ensure the new organisation is a success and can deliver on Tasmania's workforce training needs. We are not in a position to guarantee any particular increases to funding while the budget is in the process of being fixed. We do guarantee treating TasTAFE staff with respect and professionalism.

Question 17 - Will you ensure that TasTAFE will continue to deliver VET in correctional facilities?

The Liberals believe it is essential that prisoners have access to education and training to maximize their prospects of reintegration and rehabilitation. The feedback we have received indicates that the current delivery is seen as worthwhile.

Question 18 - Will you guarantee continued right of entry for unions?

Yes.

Question 19 - Will you guarantee that education employees, both schools and TAFE, and their union will remain in the State industrial jurisdiction?

Yes.