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STILL AT THE CENTRE

How New Zealand teacher unions have not been sidelined by radical reforms

The social and economic reforms started by the Labour government in 1984 have been developed further by the National government on taking office in 1990. However, the new government's view of the proper place and role of teacher organisations was seen to be significantly different.

This paper examines how teacher unions have responded to the change of stance by the government and to the changes in the mode of reform processes in ways that enabled them to remain effective participants in shaping outcomes for education in New Zealand.

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MIHI

Karanga mai mihi mai
Aku rangatira tena koutou

Te whare e tu nei
Te papa e takato ki waho
Tena Korua

E nga mana

E nga reo
E nga tangata o te wa

Tena koutou katoa

Nga mate, nga aitua

Haere haere haere

Te hunga ora
Tena koutou katoa
Thank you for the welcome
To my elders, greetings

To the house standing here
To mother earth outside
Greetings to you both.

To the honoured
To the speakers
To the people of this time and place

greetings

To our dead and those being mourned

Farewell, farewell, farewell

To the living
Greetings to you all.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years New Zealand has seen a Labour and a National government provoking significant changes in the administration of education and teachers' employment conditions. Key documents driving these changes in schools have been Tomorrow's Schools 1989, Today's Schools 1990, Tomorrow's Standards 1991, the State Sector Amendment Act 1989, and the Employment Contracts Act 1991. These statements of education or labour relations policies have emerged during a period of economic and political crisis in New Zealand. At a time of financial restraint, devolution of responsibility has been accompanied by increased state control.

The role prescribed for teaching unions by the Labour government and carried through by the National government¹ on taking office in 1990, was seen to be significantly different to the traditional 'partnership' approach of the years prior to the early eighties. What then had been

uneasy co-operation and formal involvement became labelled 'provider capture'. Teachers were accused of subverting the original intention of policies when they were implemented. Despite government's attempts to isolate and fracture the influence of teacher unions, teachers' considerable involvement in their union, their ability to respond at the school level, along with participation in a series of public protests suggests teachers are organised and have the potential to act in decisive ways.

The rate and extent of educational change first signalled in England received a great deal of attention from commentators and writers. The debate was taken up and 'resung' on both sides of the Tasman in written critiques, lectures and by the popular press. The debate generally focused on the changed nature of process and government action forcing through changes with: little or no consultation with those affected by the changes; no supporting research; no opportunity for trialling aspects of the changes. Within the massive volume of literature little attention has been given to show how individuals, organisations, and institutions can still play an effective role. Or how teacher unions have attempted to assert and reassert their right to take part in any decision-making.

In New Zealand what we have is a government with a rigid agenda. It is determined along a path quite destructive to maintaining and improving quality teaching and learning. This paper examines the responses of teacher unions, in particular the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) 2, to the government's economic and social initiative, and increasing pressure to impose bulk funding of teachers salaries. This paper argues that although teacher unions have not been successful in changing the basic thrust of government policy in a major way NZEI and other unions have had an impact. This impact is despite exclusion from policy making, practices and procedures.

THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INITIATIVE

Any hope that teachers and other education workers would at last, in 1991, be allowed to concentrate on children's teaching and learning, was completely dispelled by the government's 19 December 1990 Economic and Social Initiative. The key elements of that initiative were benefit, health and housing cuts, the Employment Contracts Bill and some 17 education reviews. The reviews dominated the work of teacher unions³ in early 1991.

The new National government's savage determination to reduce public expenditure had already hit the primary service hard:

- school operational grants for 1991 were cut;
- the extension of 1:20 teacher:pupil staffing ratios in junior classes was stopped;
- there was to be no pay increase for most NZEI members from 1 July

1991 to 30 June 1992.

Further cuts were expected in the July 1991 Budget.

Under the guise of reducing the fiscal deficit, policies and programmes designed to extend private schooling and to undermine public education were to be introduced⁴.

EDUCATION REVIEWS

As stated previously the government announced a series of education reviews to be completed between 1 February and 15 March 1991 and implemented in its July budget.

The reviews detailed by the Minister of Education on 19 December 1990 which had their origins in the Treasury and SSC's briefing papers for the incoming government were of:

- early childhood subsidies
- regulation of building and staffing requirements relating to early childhood centres
- schools' funding as it related to operational grants
- provisions protecting surplus teachers
- the State Services Commission's (SSC) role in wage bargaining
- teacher:pupil ratios
- bulk funding of tertiary education
- the number and size of the nine government education agencies - including a review of the outputs of the Ministry of Education and other agencies
- the corporate status of tertiary institutions.

By February 1991 it emerged that there were a total of 17 reviews including one on the economic and educational viability of small schools which had not been previously announced.

Running parallel with these reviews was the one on bulk funding of the teachers' salary grant and one on Learning Media⁵. NZEI made submissions on both of these and most of the others.

Parent and teacher representatives were completely excluded from the review teams. They were made up of Ministry of Education, Treasury and State Services Commission (SSC) officials. The personnel on the teacher:pupil ratio review, for example, was 5 from the Ministry, 4 from the SSC, 1 from Treasury. On the review of the economic and educational viability of small schools the personnel were 9 from the Ministry (Policy, Managerial and Organisational, Economic and Financial, Institutional Funding, Property, Finance divisions and one district manager) 2 from SSC, 1 from Treasury. An important note, however, is regardless of the size of the Ministry's team there were only three parties involved: the Ministry, the Treasury and the SSC, and each had an equal vote.

Despite strenuous representations to the Minister the best NZEI was able to achieve was an opportunity to make submissions, both to the review teams and to the Minister. No Treasury official was present at any of the presentations made by NZEI to review teams.

NZEI then launched a strong public campaign to get the reviews out in the open and at the very least to get assurances from the Minister that no decisions would be made before public release of the review team reports and a time for public discussion.

In a very restricted timeframe, often only a fortnight after the terms of reference of a review were received, NZEI made submissions to the reviews on early childhood, school funding, provisions protecting surplus teachers, the SSC role in wage bargaining, teacher:pupil ratios and the viability of small schools. Submissions were also made to the review teams dealing with the educational agencies that had a direct impact on primary education, namely, the Special Education Service, the Teacher Registration Board, the Education Review Office, the Parent Advocacy Council and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

Copies of all submissions were distributed to NZEI branches to support members in their lobbying of MPs. Informed members working through their own communities greatly supported the political lobbying and work being done at the national level.

To look more specifically at the effect of NZEI's activity during the education review period it is useful to consider its response to the review of the economic and educational viability of small schools.

At the national level a focused campaign of press releases and publications applied massive union pressure. By providing public information and suggesting likely action, which essentially depended on its members' traditionally sound relationship with their school community, NZEI facilitated a wave of public response which politicians could not avoid hearing. In fact the individual school community's public response was quite unprecedented in New Zealand's educational history. Against the backdrop of political secrecy the community voice expressing concern was able to be heard within the review process.

Both the Treasury and SSC wrote dissenting papers to the report and yet the public pressure was so formidable and intense the Minister was forced to publicly reassure the country that it was not his intention to close small schools. (This was directly attributable to the campaign waged by NZEI.)

The outcome of the reviews was announced in the July 1991 budget. To achieve their ends, without arming further opposition, a new strategy (the Educational Development Initiative)⁶ had to be found as a conduit for the SSC and Treasury's agenda regarding the rationalisation of small schools.

It is also significant that the government's budget, increasingly used as

an instrument of fiscal control, has significant consequences for social and economic policies. The government's decisions on the reviews were announced through the budget. This meant the decisions were not open to public submissions through the normal select committee procedures.

A NEW ROLE

During this period NZEI also compiled and publicised analyses of the Treasury and SSC education briefing papers to the incoming government. Both agencies promoted private schooling and voucher education while attacking public education with spurious figures and in parts, pure fabrications.

Treasury had included in its advice some flagrant fiddling with figures. They gave a table of public spending on education as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product, with the 1990-91 figure for New Zealand, and 1986 figures for eight other countries. To suit its case, Treasury's misleading figure put New Zealand as the third highest spender on education when in fact the position was more accurate as the third lowest.

Treasury also used figures to back accusations of dramatic spending increases in education, without explaining the increased education responsibilities that caused the increased spending. For instance, New Zealand's spending was compared with Sweden which did not count early childhood care and education in its equivalent of the government's education vote. Or a comparison of New Zealand's spending with West Germany's where 80% of the apprenticeship system is subsidised by the private sector.

NZEI's ability to provide analysis and considered critique made it recognised as a key player to be contended with. A series of subsequent meetings involving Treasury and teaching unions, facilitated through the Council of Trade Unions, was held. An agreement was reached that it was beneficial for both groups to meet and discuss macro policies.

Another example of recognition of NZEI's new role was when Dr Maris O'Rourke, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education, told a group of masterate students at Victoria University when discussing policy-making, that the Ministry subjects its draft corporate plan to an 'NZEI test analysis' to determine the plan's ability to stand up to public scrutiny.

Furthermore, the ability of NZEI and other groups to see the hidden implications of policy and critique them publicly in a compelling way that exposed the policy's flaws and thwarted the Ministry's agenda has made its management group paranoid about 'leaks'. Steps taken in the Ministry were direct attacks on the integrity of its own employees. Copies of papers were numbered, a private detective hired and the photocopiers 'dusted' for prints.

BULK FUNDING OF TEACHERS' SALARY GRANT : A CASE STUDY

Since the education reforms started in 1989, NZEI has been fighting new issues on a number of fronts. There have been attacks on: the role of the advisory service, how services for children with special needs are delivered, how pay and conditions are bargained. But one of the dominating issues has been the attempt by the government to bulk fund schools for the payment of teachers' salaries.

Bulk funding of teachers' salaries was advocated under the slogan of 'fully self managing schools'. It is part of a model which devolves administration and managerial functions to local school board of trustees (2700 in total). The overwhelming body of research and experience shows this model would not improve the quality of teaching and learning but in fact work against improvement.

The previous Labour Minister of Education Phil Goff instructed the Ministry of Education to carry out a four-stage investigation into bulk funding of teachers salaries in 1990. The four stages were:

A literature search and research project which examined international examples of bulk funding of salaries.

An investigation of the likely impact of a particular method or methods of bulk funding on New Zealand schools. This would be a paper exercise not involving trialling in schools.

A computer simulation exercise, endeavouring to show the impact of bulk funding on schools.

An actual physical trial implementing, for a limited period of time, direct bulk funding of salaries for a selected number or group of schools or groups of teachers within a school.

The present Minister, Dr Lockwood Smith, in his earlier capacity as Opposition Spokesperson on Education, gave NZEI an unequivocal assurance that there would be no change to the present method of funding salaries without reasoned debate, careful study and NZEI involvement. Lockwood Smith told NZEI Annual Meeting 1990 that before proceeding with bulk funding he needed to be absolutely convinced it would not be damaging to the education of children. Support for bulk funding was never in the National Party's manifesto. The drive, in the first instance came from officials who became increasingly resistant to reasoned debate.

The first phase of the investigation

Despite NZEI's repeated requests for effective constructive involvement, the Ministry's approach to the promised consultation process was disappointing. During the first phase of the investigation the Ministry refused to engage in meaningful discussion or to give NZEI access to the overseas literature it was reviewing. This was in spite of NZEI advising the Ministry that if the government intended to pursue the policy of bulk

funding of salaries then it was essential that all the information the decision was based upon be available to NZEI members. NZEI carried out an independent investigation into the overseas literature and the resulting paper was made available to those school boards of trustees who indicated a concern about bulk funding.

A special NZEI circular, sent to all schools, provided a summary of the situation and of the position of the government, STA8 and NZEI. The research paper on the overseas experience of funding teachers' salaries was attached to this circular.

NZEI and New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association (NZPPTA) attended a presentation of the Ministry Project Team's report in November. Unfortunately the useful research and analysis contained in the report was spoiled by the inclusion of totally subjective, politically-motivated principles⁹ which did not arise from the evidence presented. The conclusion reached by the Ministry's report was that overseas circumstances did not provide a model appropriate for New Zealand. However, the report added "thus the achievement of bulk funding of teachers salaries in New Zealand will require a unique solution developed specifically for New Zealand circumstances".¹⁰

NZEI proposed to the Minister that further work on bulk funding be halted for a period of at least two-three years to enable consolidation and evaluation of the educational impact of the existing devolution of funding and management of schools before proceeding further.

NZEI repeatedly requested an additional meeting with the project team in order to fully debate the issues raised in their report. Although this was finally agreed to, the Ministry's insistence that the meeting not be held until the Minister had considered the report and made a decision on whether or not to proceed to the next stage, made nonsense of the agreement.

The second phase

NZEI and NZPPTA attended a presentation of the second Ministry report in February. NZEI and NZPPTA objections to the political base of the report and the speed and method of the process was communicated to the chief executive officer of the Ministry.

A joint NZEI/NZPPTA working party was set up to decide on a joint position on bulk funding and to prepare a plan of action. This resulted in bulk funding information kits being sent to all schools. Principals and staff representatives used the material with school boards of trustees and to lobby local members of parliament. It was as a consequence of this action that letters received in NZEI's national office from boards indicating their opposition to bulk funding, showed an increasing awareness of the problems associated with a devolved salary grant.

In February 1991 the Minister informed NZEI he had decided the investigation should again proceed. In response to pressure from teacher

unions for inclusion in the process, the Minister hinted that a consultative committee would be set up to exchange information and views on bulk funding with the Ministry. He noted "this exchange of views was essential if the Ministry is to be well placed to advise me on all relevant views and concerns." He also stated that it was essential "that the design is right and that we implement it in a sensible and sensitive manner"¹¹. The project team was to continue with an analysis of bulk funding in greater detail and reach conclusions as to which methods would best suit New Zealand schools.

On March 23 a one-day special meeting of NZEI members (only the 3rd in its 108 history) passed the following recommendations about bulk funding of teachers' salaries:

- 1 That NZEI reaffirms its opposition to bulk funding of teachers salary grant. NZEI is totally unconvinced that bulk funding of teachers salaries in any way improves upon the present system.
- 2 That this special general meeting authorises the national executive to discuss the various options with Ministers and their officials.
- 3 That the purpose of any discussion/negotiation is to achieve a system that is:
 - educationally sound
 - provides a fair deal for pupils and teachers
 - is administratively efficient
 - is better than the status quo
- 4 That if the government insists on introducing a teacher salary grant bulk funding system it must contain the following elements:
 - staffing profile to ensure the identified needs of every child and all sectors can be met;
 - an indirect delivery method;
 - a limited ability to transfer between the salary grant and the operations (eg. excluding the equity grant and the Maori language factor funding).
- 5 That NZEI take whatever combined and/or co-ordinated action is necessary to prevent bulk funding or individualised conditions of service.

The second recommendation was significant as it enabled NZEI representatives to participate fully in the consultative group set up by the Minister. Until this time members were totally opposed to participating in any meetings or discussions on the issue.

NZEI, NZPPTA, NZSTA, NZPF, NZIPA, NZEI PAC, NZPPTA PAC, NZPSA, SPANZ12 and Runanga Matua (an advisory group on Maori) were represented on a 'consultative group'. It met three times with the project team in the course of their work to discuss the proposed models of bulk funding. The committee recommended to the Minister: that given the unrealistic research,

modelling and timeframe the feasibility study should be discontinued but a proper consultation debate be initiated. Despite the unanimous response the Ministry's work continued.

The project team was unable to produce models or costings for all the six options presented in their second report, nor were they able to provide one complete model for the primary sector. The question of the educational viability of any model was not debated. As a result the consultative group presented a joint agreed report to the Minister on 11 April 1991. The report recommended:

That given the inadequate research, modelling and timeframe, the feasibility study, as presented to the consultative group, should be discontinued.

That a consultative debate on self-management of schools be initiated and that it have a realistic timeframe.

That the Minister establish a representative, consultative process that will undertake proper research and development of a fair system of adequate and appropriate staffing.

NZEI met with the Minister and the Associate Ministers of Education on 11 April 1991 to more directly state its concerns about the work of the project team and the dangers of continuing with the investigation at such speed without sufficient data and without a proper consideration of primary staffing. The Minister made a press release to the effect that the introduction of bulk funding would be deferred until 1993.

The School Trustees Association (STA) in the meantime had decided that there should be a debate amongst its members on the issue of 'full self management of schools' rather than 'bulk funding of teachers' salary grants'. In fact the two issues meant the same thing. NZEI proposed to STA that the two organisations work together on background materials and a combined programme that would assist members and boards to have a fully informed debate. This never happened. Despite 94% of boards of trustees indicating, through an NZEI survey responded to by 700 boards, they were opposed to bulk funding of teachers' salaries, STA insisted it must take a neutral stance and continued to treat both voices equally.

As part of a three-year survey on 'The Impact of Tomorrow's Schools in Primary Schools and Intermediates, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) found that 79% of boards participating in the survey were opposed to receiving the bulk grant for teaching staff salaries, with 11% unsure. Only 9% were in favour.

In 1991 a bulk funding model of teachers' salaries on a per pupil basis was set up as a self-selecting voluntary three year trial. To act as a sweetener \$20-\$30 million was set aside by the government. The number of schools able to participate was limited to 200. NZEI and NZPPTA members'

work in schools meant that only 53 schools entered the trial by the cut-off date. Despite an extension to the invitation to July 1992 the total number of participating schools is 71 - out of approximately 2400 schools. Almost all gain a huge amount of bribe money from the \$20-\$30 million fund.

The government's decision to postpone the introduction of total teacher salary bulk funding for another year is evidence of the power of teachers when they are united, determined, well organised and have the support of trustees, parents and their communities. It showed what results can be obtained when NZEI and the Post Primary Teachers Association (NZPPTA) members worked together for a common cause.

These results, however, can hardly be described as a success story. But, the results are considered against the governments' imposition of bulk funding through legislation on the country's largest school, the Correspondence School in 1990¹³ and upon kindergartens in 1992 despite strong opposition - teacher unions can be judged to be effective.

The government has not been prepared to take NZEI and NZPPTA on by legislating for total bulk funding of teachers' salaries in one go. Its tactic has been to whittle away the edges by actions such as the bulk funding of relief teachers' salaries and in July this year (1992) for the 'senior management group'¹⁴.

OTHER PLAYERS

The Business Roundtable maintained the Picot reference did not go far enough. "Consumer demands - through choice and competition in the market" and that bulk funding "distributes funding far more fairly between schools according to pupil enrolments"¹⁵. Fortunately many of the comments made by the Business Roundtable are so out of touch with reality that their chief executive's comments inflicted most damage on themselves.

The Business Roundtable commissioned and published a report on education by Stuart Sexton purported to be an 'objective evaluation' of the recent education reforms in New Zealand. It was, however, a report designed to fit the Business Roundtable thinking.

The Education Forum (a puppet for the Business Roundtable) also espoused strong support for the right wing ideologies of the government. The Forum's membership comprised a number of educators known for their elitist views. Also included as a Forum member was Graye Shattky then the national president of the School Trustees Association.

Treasury and SSC have a single dominating agenda. Cut costs. No consideration of the educational viability or educational outcomes are considered. Both groups base their arguments on assertions and are quite shoddy and sloppy in their arguments and presentation of figures. NZEI was quite willing to challenge both groups and its sound research and analysis left Treasury, in particular, reduced credibility.

CONCLUSION

Although this paper primarily illustrates NZEI's role in two aspects of the education reforms, the teaching unions' role has been to open up a process which has formally and politically been closed to legitimate participants. Where traditional democratic rights, such as the right of participation, have been denied to people by a closed political process, the desire to exercise those rights still exists and given the proper facilitation can still be fulfilled. Education unions¹⁶ have an important role as conduits and facilitators in that process. Their individual members are based in every community and the education of members is filtered through to the community. The union as a professional body has a stake in the educational future of its country and the partnership that is traditionally held with parents can be empowered.

NZEI and other teaching unions have forged new roles. The rigour which is applied to issues by analysis of overseas data and research through contracted original research in New Zealand means the issues can be debated confidently. In many instances NZEI's research has proved sounder than that of the policymakers as is sometimes reluctantly acknowledged as such. A depressing element of the reforms in the education sector has been the lack of reasoned debate with politicians relying on assertions and being dismissive of any research evidence or overseas experience.

NZEI's status as a professional organisation has been a critical component of the success it has had. The extent to which it has been able to link professional issues with industrial issues has meant that the government or other players have not been able to render it impotent or a mere bargaining agent. NZEI has been able to comment on a range of things from the labour market to corporal punishment. As an organisation NZEI has stamina. Its persistence has contributed considerably to its success. Whilst involved in the complexities of salary and conditions of service negotiations it still maintained its involvement in professional activities.

NZEI's success and strength can be identified in a number of areas. From the centre its leadership and members share a broad vision of what high quality education consists of and how it can be achieved. There is a balance of power between the central leadership and the members ability to participate in decision-making. The broad vision is also set within a much wider view of a just and fair society for all New Zealanders. NZEI also provides effective organisation of members from a national office. At the local level, the commitment and support from members goes beyond what is happening in the classroom, and taps into the very heart of the individual school's community. It is the trust at the school level between parents and teachers that has prevented the government's 'divide and rule' tactic from working despite its considerable will and effort. Added to which teachers and trustees trust NZEI whom they see arguing on a sound basis, and speaking moderately and responsibly.

As a teacher union with a considerable history NZEI has accumulated

resources which it has been willing to use in its efforts to resist destructive government policies in education.

This paper argues that teacher unions have played a significant part in reconstructing scenarios, creating agendas and helping to shape processes and outcomes by their involvement.

This contribution is a personal perspective.

He aha te mea nui

He tangata, he tangata,
he tangata.

What is the most important thing in the world?
It is people, it is people, it is people.

Sandra Aikin.
20 November 1992

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NOTES and REFERENCES

- 1 On the political spectrum, traditionally, a New Zealand Labour government has been seen as 'centre left' and the New Zealand National government 'centre right'.
- 2 The New Zealand Educational Institute is the professional and industrial organisation which represents some 24 000 teachers and support staff in schools, advisers employed by colleges of education, the school of education at Waikato University and employees of the Special Education Service. The main objective of the NZEI is to advance the cause of education.
- 3 Association of University Teachers (AUT), Association of Staff in Tertiary Education (ASTE), New Zealand Post Primary Teachers Association (NZPPTA), NZEI, Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (CECUA).
- 4 It must be noted that whilst in opposition National indicated that they would restore cuts to private school support made by the Labour government.

5 Learning Media is the publications arm of the Ministry of Education.

6 The Education Development Initiative was announced in the 1991 Budget. The government claimed its purpose was to enable local communities to assess and change the provision of education in their area. The three basic tenets were: it should be community driven, it should enhance educational opportunity for children, it should be fiscally neutral. The chief objection has been the level of ministerial interference which has created enormous confusion and resentment in communities. Added to which a number of Ministry officials have visited small rural communities all over the country urging them to look at rationalising their schools. The public outrage at the local level has been enormous.

7 Bulk funding of teachers' salaries was first proposed by Picot committee (paragraphs 5.2.20 - 5.2.26), incorporated in Tomorrow's Schools section 1.3 and Labour's Education Act 1989 with a stated introduction date.

8 The School Trustees Association (STA) is the umbrella organisation of school board of trustees.

9 Bulk funding of teachers salaries should be seen as one element in a policy package of several elements; All elements in the package need to be mutually consistent; Delegation of responsibility for resources for teaching is an essential part of the reform package; Salary bulk funding should be fair in that similar schools are resourced to the same degree; All resources for teaching should be included in bulk funding unless there are good reasons to keep them separate; Simplicity of operation and precision in allocating resources according to need may be in conflict. Trade-offs need to be identified; Clarity and understandability are essential features in scheme design; The historical positions of schools need to be recognised through transitional arrangements.

The principles accompanied by explanatory paragraphs.

10 Ministry of Education. Bulk Funding Report, November 1990.

11 Letter to NZEI President, 11 February 1991.

12 New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA), New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZFP), NZEI Principals Advisory Council (NZEI PAC), NZPPTA Principal's Advisory council (NZPPTA PAC), (NZASA), Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand (SPANZ).

13 The Correspondence School delivers distance education. It covers the compulsory sector and also has a limited preschool role. The Correspondence School includes adult education who are generally working at primary or secondary level. There is a large special education sector. With the education reforms of 1989 the Correspondence was immediately bulk funded for all its activities and at the same time there was a \$2.6 million

