

Submission Re: National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

IEUA-QNT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the Australian Government's Department of Social Services' plan to establish a *National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse*.

IEUA-QNT represents ~17,000 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions in Queensland and the Northern Territory and consistently engages in industrial and education debate at both state and national levels through its Education and Industrial Committees and through its national counterpart, the Independent Education Union of Australia, which receives input from teachers in all States and Territories.

As education professionals, our members have both a pedagogical role in dealing with abused children, and a legal and professional duty to report suspected child sexual abuse. The work of the National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse has, therefore, substantial relevance and significance for our members, particularly as it relates to Recommendation 9.9b (Increase practitioners' (workers') knowledge and competence in responding to child and adult victims and survivors by translating knowledge about the impacts of child sexual abuse and the evidence on effective responses into practice and policy) and Recommendation 9.9c (Lead the development of better service models and interventions through coordinating a national research agenda and conducting high-quality program evaluation). Our submissions, which relate chiefly to these recommendations, are listed below.

1. Child sexual abuse is a widespread, complex social issue and it is appropriate that teachers and other professional groups take on a key role in reporting and prevention. To that end, the inclusion of mandatory Child Protection Training in pre-service teacher education programs is essential to ensure that teachers enter the profession with detailed understanding of their obligations, and the systems within which those obligations are to be discharged, and our union strongly supports the mandated introduction of Child Protection training into teacher education programs from 2021.
2. In practice however, we understand that at least some universities are implementing Child Protection training as a standalone, on-line module of approximately two hours duration, rather than embedding the material into substantive courses. Given the evidence that practitioners' competence in relation to recognising and reporting child sexual abuse requires: a) positive attitudes to reporting; b) knowledge about the social and educational context of sexual abuse and; c) legal literacy about the legal and policy-based obligations to report [1]; we would question whether a relatively short on-line module is sufficient for teachers to develop the desired level of confidence and competence.
3. At present, the prevailing practice for delivery of mandatory Child Protection training for practising teachers also tends to involve delivery of a short (1-2 hour) presentation by school Principals/Deputy Principals during student free days at the commencement of the school year. Our experience with members is that delivery of training in this manner leaves at least some teachers unsure of proper procedures and reluctant to report if they are unsure of the extent or veracity of a concern.

4. We would, therefore, suggest that in discharging its responsibilities in relation to recommendation 9b, the National Centre for Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse may have a direct role to play in educating principals and teachers about their roles and responsibilities in relation to child sexual abuse and, perhaps, in generation of training packages to ensure consistency of understanding within the profession.
5. We would also draw attention to the fact that, for practising teachers, the mandatory reporting obligation may be met by reporting to the school Principal, rather than reporting to external authorities or agencies (e.g. police and child safety). Under these circumstances, the obligation to thereafter rests with the school Principal. In practice, our advice to members is generally that they should err on the side of caution and report to both the Principal and the police, but we have had cases where members have been disciplined by the Principal for taking the allegation directly to external authorities.
6. We would, therefore, suggest that the direct reporting to external authorities should be explicitly authorised in legislation and policy and that this then is an inherent element in any associated training and professional studies.
7. With respect to Recommendation 9.9c, our union strongly supports the role of the National Centre in leading development of better service models and interventions through coordinating a national research agenda and conducting high-quality program evaluation, but would argue that, given the overlap in applications, this should be undertaken in collaboration with the Australian Centre for Child Protection to avoid unnecessary duplication.
8. We would also suggest that the National Centre should develop effective and efficient means of communicating with those in professions with mandatory reporting obligations regarding best practice in discharging their legal and professional obligations to victims of child sexual abuse.

Concluding Comments

Our union welcomes the establishment of the National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse and its role not only in raising community awareness and reducing stigma, but also improving knowledge and capability of workers who have direct contact with children. In this context, we believe the National Centre has a key role to play in educating teachers and other school workers in relation to their duties and obligations in reporting and preventing abuse and remaining aware of best practice in dealing with victims of abuse.

We thank Australian Government for the opportunity to engage in consultation and would welcome the opportunity to participate in further discussion.



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Branch Secretary

Independent Education Union of Australia -Queensland and Northern Territory Branch
13 March 2020

References

1. Mathews, B., *Teacher Education to Meet the Challenges Posed by Child Sexual Abuse*. Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 2011. **36**(11).