Changing Education Landscape in Victoria

It is with some surprise that we have now reached June 2012 and our organisational arrangements for DEECD Regions and associated delegations are yet to be finalised. For those in schools with the constancy of Term Two commitments this may be a relief or something less to deal with at an already demanding time in schools. Nonetheless for Principal Class Officers in regions and central office this is a difficult time, as they try to second guess what might change for them and the nature of their interface with Principal Class Officers and schools. The natural corollary of such uncertainty can be supposition and belief about likely outcomes.

It would seem that until such organisational structures and delegations are established it will be difficult to establish how other policy areas, notably those surrounding ‘autonomous schools’ will be implemented.

Needless to say we look forward to announcements being made sooner than later in order that our school system can continue with articulated purpose, clarity and shared understanding. The challenge in creating an organisational structure that is now consistent with changed Government education policy priorities seems formidable. In essence, whilst we may hanker for less red tape, less compliance, less regulation and less conformity for system goals and associated action plans we are also expectant that support when required is available, that there is a regard for our entitlement to a duty of care and that intervention and advice occurs to provide needed protections. We suspect this may be a challenge for our system, given that in a period of over thirty years there has been the ‘system intermediary’, granted with slightly different roles, but of titles such as District Inspectors, Senior Education Officers, Support Centre Managers, District Liaison Principals, Regional Principal Consultants, Senior Education Officers (again) and subsequently Regional Network Leaders.

At the APF we have a view that with all change management there needs to be a reasonable period of transition.
Of course at the core of this rethink are some policy givens that determine a very different relationship between the bureaucracy and schools. We have known about these for some time, perhaps first through the *Liberal National Party Election Commitments 2010* and later through the philosophy and direction suggested by the document *Victoria as a Learning Community*, launched by Minister Dixon in November 2011. It is a space that will be of particular relevance and interest to Principal Class Officers. It is clear that direction, levels of organisation, collaboration, initiative and choice will come from Principal Class Officers – and not be provided through system led directions. Essentially we can expect that the concepts of choice, local decision making and school community integration will characterise our actions and deliberations into the future. There are at least two broad avenues for this to occur.

**Victoria as a Learning Community – towards a discussion paper**

Firstly, during the last few months we have been aware that the DEECD has been preparing a discussion paper for consultation regarding *Victoria as a Learning Community*. We would expect that this document, scheduled to be available for consultation with stakeholders in Term Three will address areas around the ‘compact’ previously reflected in the November 2011 document. This document whilst of interest in relation to educational philosophy and provision will be of greater interest to the APF in terms of how this will impact the conditions, entitlements and working lives of Principal Class Officers and therein the quality and form of relationships between schools and their communities, regions, and central office. We would expect that the document should shed some light on how the following matters will be addressed into the future:

- The way in which schools will be the centre of our system and how infrastructure surrounding schools will interface in a climate of professional trust and support.
- What is meant by ‘autonomous schools’ if indeed that language is to be used at all. How will any models developed or presented be different to those previously experienced, or from perhaps the model of independent schools in WA or the State Federal partnership provide by the ‘Empowering Local Schools Program.’
- What will be the Human Resources, Facilities and Financial arrangements in such proposals.
- Intervention in schools – How will this occur and by whom, and under what circumstances?
- Governance – School Councils – What will be different in terms of their role and function. This area is perhaps less likely to change in the shorter term given the need for legislative reform, and if plausible and agreed, would take at least twelve to eighteen months to enact.
- Training and ongoing support for PCOs in such arrangements – how would this occur and how would PCOs be made aware of their compliance obligations.

The provision of a separate Principal Class Agreement will have a significant bearing on how such a ‘compact’ or an alternative document or this government’s ‘blueprint’ is operationalised. Given the obvious connections with a Principal Class Agreement the timelines and phases of implementation could be problematic if this is not resolved sooner than later.
**School Networks - models into the future**

The second obvious vehicle for this renewed ‘vision and realisation’ is the construction of School Networks. This is not a new phenomenon and represents surely collaboration practice ‘101’ for Principal Class Officers. Essentially no school can ever function totally as an island state as we seek to collaborate, cooperate, share, exchange and are drawn to forever improve our practices and achievements. At the APF we are aware that there is a need for some transitional arrangements in order to adapt to what has been current practice. This is a message received as we move around the State and in particular in rural and regional areas. The notion of using the existing Network structure until at least the end of the 2012 seems to make sense. In the coming week we look forward to continuing discussion with senior DEECD personnel regarding not only the way in which Networks will function, but also how Principal Class Officers and schools will be resourced to cope with the additional demands. Importantly, whilst some of our members may be keen to explore other arrangements it is the connectivity and support we provide to each other which will be even more significant in the immediate months ahead.

**Enterprise Bargaining Agreement – Separate Principal Class Agreement**

At this stage we continue to meet with senior personnel from the DEECD and the Department of Treasury and Finance on a regular basis to seek a separate Principal Class Agreement. Importantly, we continue to pursue our comprehensive log of claims served on the DEECD in May 2011.

Additionally, we are also aware of matters that invariably will change the character of the management position, that were not readily apparent for them or us in early 2011.

Given that we are still involved in regular negotiations we are not in a position to report in writing the specifics of EBA discussions or developments.

So far we have conducted some thirty member forums throughout the State in metropolitan, regional and rural areas. I thank our members for the informative and timely feedback in such arrangements and look forward to conducting more of these into the future. At these forums we have provided members with a ‘positional package’ around given percentage increases, performance payments based on yet to be clarified data sets; a remuneration review and some considerations regarding Principal Class Performance and Development Plans. **Importantly, we have been clear – this is not an agreed position.**

*There are however some challenges which the APF acknowledge in the broader context as they continue to approach negotiations.*

- Our members broadly have the expectation that some portion of Principal Class salaries will be subject to Performance Management accountabilities. This is hardly new, given that individual Principal Class Officers are highly accountable for the performance of data sets included in the School Level Report and elsewhere. There is a reality that this does have a relationship to successful reviews and contract renewal processes – unlike arrangements for other members of the Teaching Service.
  - The focus on performance in Schools has considerable State and Federal policy impetus and is actively supported by views expressed by think tanks currently influencing public policy on education.
There is increasing evidence of broad community expectations and belief as witnessed by the print and electronic media in more recent times that high performance – however it is established and determined should be recognised and rewarded and conversely professionals – Principal Class Officers included – have to expect to be held accountable for their levels of performance. The debate is surely around what constitutes those areas for review, assessment and reward and how and by whom will it occur.

Also understood is that emotive terms like ‘payment by results’ and suggestions of behaviours and practices akin to league tables is widely viewed by Principal Class Officers as out of touch with the reality of schools, and at best is simplistic and counterproductive if crudely applied.

There has been considerable discussion in the media regarding performance pay arrangements for teachers. APF members recognise the complexities and challenges such a system would impose on them. At the APF we are mindful of the additional support, protections, resources and understandings that would need to be provided to Principal Class Officers in any such arrangements, if indeed they are to occur.

The actual model applied to teachers or vicariously reported is not of industrial relevance to us; however we are continuing to monitor how developments in this area will impact the Principal Class.

The third wave of reform, as reflected initially through the document *Victoria as a Learning Community* will impose considerably increased demands on Principal Class Officers into the future. We will look with interest how further discussion or consultation papers will impact Principal Class Officers.

It needs to be understood that we have not reached any level of agreement at this stage.

Again our focus entirely is on the industrial conditions and entitlements for Principal Class Officers through the development of a separate Principal Class Agreement. We believe we are operating in an improved climate of mutual trust and professional respect for Principal Class Officers.

We look forward to continuing to positively engage with DEECD negotiators and Government in a climate of ongoing good faith bargaining, as our positions change and evolve or as the political and or industrial context enable greater outcomes.

**New Directions for School Leadership and the Teaching Profession – Consultation Paper**

This document which arrived on 21st June 2012 was initially alluded to on page two of the open letter sent to parents by Ministers Hall and Dixon on 6th June, in reference to ‘improving school outcomes’. We consider that this document has significant relevance to the APF and look forward to engaging our members in relation to its proposals prior to submissions being provided to DEECD by 1st September 2012.

Importantly the document affirms the crucial and current role played by Principal Class Officers:

We know that school leadership must be at the centre of our reform effort. In our decentralised system where principals have a high degree of autonomy it is they who have the power to improve the quality of teaching. They will determine the quality of teaching in Victoria through the standards they insist on in the teachers they hire, the quality of professional development that occurs in their schools, the extent to which they accelerate the development of great teachers and how they manage underperformers.

Furthermore whilst the document has three broad thrusts of interest the focus of Providing strong direction and support: to elevate the role of leadership at school and system levels will be of greatest interest to the APF. We would encourage you to review the document, particularly page 20 -25 which have significant relationship to the role, function and working lives of Principal Class Officers into the future.

In the coming weeks we will be reviewing the document closely and seeking feedback from our members as we provide a formal response.

Other matters of current interest

Contracts of Employment
We strongly advise our members to know the location of their existing contract and ensure prior to signing any new contract that the details are correct. We are finding members being presented with contracts that have incorrect details, the wrong classification / range, starting salaries and or duration. Importantly it needs to be understood that for those members at the Principal 1-2 classification and range their return position if their contract is not renewed varies according to the date of commencement of the contract. Members at Principal 1-2 who signed a five year contract prior to the implementation of the current VGSA 2008 can expect a contract at Principal 1-1-4. For other after that date the return position under clause 9(3) of their contract will be at the top of leading teacher.

Just as importantly we encourage all Principal Class Officers to aware of the renewal processes both at the Principal and Assistant Principal level. This policy area has remained constant since 18th May 2010 and the 23rd May 2012, respectively.


Superannuation
Please be aware of the $25,000 contributions cap after 1st July 2012 for all contributors. This area is highly taxed if you exceed the limit. Please be aware if you have salary packaging as an adjunct to ESS Super defined benefits schemes (New & Revised) there is a real potential for your cap to be exceeded.

We are already aware of members who because of considerable salary sacrificing have exceeded the $50,000 contribution limit for the period ending 30th June 2012.
In this environment it will be crucial that the reporting of notional taxed contribution and ESS super pre tax contributions are transparent and there is an understanding of what is actually reported to the ATO by ESS Super.

Importantly, given the peculiarities and individual differences in entitlements for those in the ESS Super schemes we strongly encourage our members to continue to obtain professional financial advice.

Importantly in the coming weeks we look forward to liaising closely with senior DEECD personnel with responsibilities in this area, and gaining shared understandings and clarity that we can report to our members. Furthermore, we will also continue to liaise with officers from ESS Super to gain greater clarity and understanding.

For those outside the ESS super schemes, or who are contributors to Vic Super or other complying Superannuation Funds the issue of Salary Packaging is of particular interest. Under the SGC provisions the employer is required to contribute 9% within the total Remuneration Package. Assuming a Principal Class Officer is engaged in no form of salary packing then the 9% contributed to the employee’s complying fund will be such that it is a figure arrived at by applying approximately that percentage to a cash amount to arrive at the quantum of the total TRP. However if the person salary sacrifices other items – car, further superannuation, home office, etc, then the residual amount left will be in effect the new TRP upon which the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution (SGC) will be applied. In effect the person who salary sacrifices reduces the employer’s liability to provide contributions. If they are unfortunate enough to exceed the $25,000 limit in the coming environment they will be disadvantaged both ways. Suffice to say we have much to address in this area for our members into the future.

**Membership matters – Ongoing support, protection and advocacy**

Again we encourage our members to seek support early if an issue is raised in relation to matters affecting you directly or has the potential to do so, whether these be in relation to performance, complaints processes and allegations, duty of care, legal matters and interface with statutory bodies, OH&S investigations ‘random audits’ particularly those relating to compliance matters (known or unknown) or amongst a myriad of matters, contract renewal.

To meet the growing demand for member support the APF will be engaging specialised industrial officers to ensure advocacy and where necessary, intervention for our members, regardless of remoteness and/or location.

Again we hope that in the coming ‘break’ you are able to get away for at least some time to relax and rejuvenated.

Chris Cotching
President
Registered with Fair Work Australia

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