



GLBT Policy

Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People

This policy was endorsed by AEU Branch Council in November 2003. A newly established GLBT Consultative Committee of AEU members has been established to implement key aspects of the Policy. If you would like to be part of the Consultative Committee, or would like further information on GLBT issues, please contact Roz Madsen, AEU Women's Officer at rozm@aeutas.org.au or phone 6234 9500 or 1800 001 313 outside of the Hobart area. A copy of this Policy is also available on the AEU's website at www.aeutas.org.au



A u s t r a l i a n E d u c a t i o n U n i o n

Australian Education Union

**Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and
Transgender People**

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Australian Education Union

Policy on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender People

1 INTRODUCTION

The Australian Education Union is committed to protecting the industrial, professional and civil rights of its members. Discriminatory practices such as homophobia and heterosexism are infringements of members rights and as such are to be challenged and eliminated.

2 HOMOPHOBIA AND HETEROSEXISM

2.1 The main focus of discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (GLBT) are two related phenomena - **homophobia** and **heterosexism**.

2.1.1 **Homophobia** refers to the fear and hatred prevalent in Australian society, of homosexuality, which in turn motivates the bullying of young GLBT people (or even those only suspected of being GLBT) in schools, colleges, on the streets and even in their own homes.

It is also argued that homophobia is also perpetrated by the anti-homosexual attitudes expressed by some leaders of the major churches.

2.1.2 **Heterosexism** describes the pervasive assumption of heterosexuality which is common to language, the law and other institutions in Australian society e.g.: the education system and the family.

Heterosexist assumptions may be fueled by homophobia or by a lack of knowledge.

The assumption that heterosexual sex and relationships are “natural” or “normal” and practiced by all members of the community leads to legal and social invisibility for many GLBT people.

Whether ignorance of GLBT issues is intentional or not, the resulting homophobia and heterosexism with its legal and social ramifications can not be allowed to continue.

2.2 **Homophobic attacks on some teachers and students have led to:**

- **loss of self esteem;**
- **loss of job or position at school or college;**
- **malicious allegations of child abuse;**
- **suicide;**
- **murder.**

2.3 The AEU will develop strategies to counter the effects of homophobia and heterosexism at three levels:

2.3.1 Institutional

Government

As a matter of urgency we call on the Federal and State Governments to ensure their discrimination laws cover all aspects of law relating to GLBT people. These must include laws on marriage, IVF, adoption, and age of consent. Because most states and territories have laws on age of consent which are different for gay men, the message being delivered to young GLBT people is that they are not equal.

The state government should ensure that it has Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers (GLLO) who can be used as positive resources for schools and colleges.

Department of Education

The Department of Education must ensure that its policies relating to GLBT are up-to-date and implemented. Under no circumstances should they be left only to be used when addressing occasional incidents or when a teacher shows an interest.

All staff must be inserviced on homophobia and heterosexism.

The unacceptability of homophobia and heterosexism must be included in the codes of conduct of the department, schools and colleges.

All students must have the opportunity to maximise their learning potential, regardless of sexual orientation.

Homophobia and Heterosexism must be included in the content of pre-service training of all teachers.

Parents

As most parents will agree that they don't want their children to be the persecutor or the persecuted by homophobia, schools need to raise the issue of homophobia with the local parent organisation and PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays).

Churches

While some churches and church people are to be commended for their positive common sense and humanist approach to GLBT issues others are to be condemned for their un-Christian approach. The AEU calls on all churches to take a positive humanist approach to GLBT issues.

2.3.2 **Workplace**

Education workplaces at a classroom and playground level must implement strategies to counter homophobia and heterosexism. The use of language is important when teaching, e.g partner instead of boyfriend or girlfriend.

Workplaces should educate for diversity. As with sexism and racism, homophobic remarks or actions should never pass without comment. Schools have an obligation to maximise learning potential, regardless of sexual orientation.

Computers

Teachers must be aware that with the increased use of personal computers they can also be used to vilify other students.

2.3.3 **Curriculum**

All curriculum should be written in non-heterosexist language. Sexuality should be included in all curriculum relating to health and personal development. Homosexuality and bisexuality need to be normalised and materials need to be developed which will help to combat homophobia. Such material must be inclusive and educate all students to value diversity. This is consistent with the Essential Learnings Curriculum which aims to prepare students to participate actively in a democratic community, value diversity and act for a just and equitable society.

3 EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

3.1 Elimination of Discrimination in Employment

3.1.1 The AEU asserts that the employment rights and conditions of its members should in no way be jeopardised on account of their sexual orientation and/or gender preferred identity. In particular employment rights in relation to:

- leave
- recruitment
- appointment
- promotion
- transfer
- superannuation
- health and welfare
- ongoing employment

must be inclusive and free of discrimination. The AEU stresses the need to ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members are supported professionally and personally at the school level to the same extent as any other member.

3.1.2 The AEU recognises that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members have family responsibilities and as such should have access to all leave and conditions applicable to workers with family responsibilities including:

- IVF
- paid maternity or paternity leave in relation to the birth or adoption of a child;
- extended unpaid leave for the purpose of child rearing; and
- family leave for the purpose of care and support of a partner.

3.1.3 Full job security and the right to return to work after such periods of leave must be a condition of the leave provisions outlined above. All members returning after longer periods of leave should have access to refresher courses and in-service education.

4 GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER PEOPLE IN EDUCATION

4.1 Elimination of Discrimination in Education

The AEU supports the allocation of adequate levels of resources by the Federal Government and State Government to eliminate all discrimination in education. In particular, it seeks to ensure that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender preferred identity is eradicated. In order to achieve positive change, the AEU will cooperate in and facilitate where appropriate, research of parent, teacher, student, community and employer attitudes on sex-role stereotyping in the context of the development and implementation of policy and curricula.

- 4.1.1 Resources should be allocated by State Government for the establishment of and/or the maintenance of non discriminatory resources which would provide appropriate and relevant material for in-service programs and/or for the development of, and inclusion in, curriculum.

5 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

- 5.1 The AEU supports the provision of non sexist, gender inclusive and non stereotypical vocational education guidance for all students. Vocational guidance and education should be carried out in the context of a total life composed of work and leisure and information on sexual orientation and gender preferred identity as an integral part of such guidance and education. In particular it stresses the need for vocational to:

- 5.1.1 Counteract the traditional channelling of girls and boys into stereotypical learning areas so that their vocational education choices are not prejudiced by earlier school experiences.
- 5.1.2 Ensure that students are educated as to the rights and support group mechanisms available to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers who might face discrimination (either in seeking employment or in the workplace itself) on the grounds of sexual orientation and/or gender preferred identity.
- 5.1.3 Provide students with an understanding of the responsibilities of employers and the legal limitations on employers' actions in regard to matters of sexual orientation and/or gender preferred identity and sexual harassment.

The AEU stresses the need for vocational education teachers and others involved in advisory roles to be fully familiar with the rights and support mechanisms for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students and workers.

6 SEX EDUCATION

- 6.1 The AEU believes that comprehensive sex education should be available on an on-going basis to all primary, secondary and tertiary students and considers that:
- 6.1.1 Comprehensive sex education programs must be part of a broad health education curricula (which includes areas such as safety, environmental, consumer and mental health);
 - 6.1.2 Sex education programs must be non-sexist and non-racist;
 - 6.1.3 Any teacher-directed presentation or discussion of GLBT issues in a class situation should aim to be positive in approach;
 - 6.1.4 Sex education should be developed in a manner that encourages critical thinking and considered decision-making by students;
 - 6.1.5 Sex education programs and related developmental areas should be coordinated between and within schools;
 - 6.1.6 Training, both pre and in-service, must be provided so that teachers of sex education have an understanding of sexism, sexual politics and the politics of health in order to deal with any prejudices, myths and superstitions which may exist or arise in class situations;
 - 6.1.7 Sex education programs should reflect the interests and concerns of students and other members of the school and local community;
 - 6.1.8 The sexual orientation and/or gender preferred identity of individual teachers must not be a factor in determining which teachers are able to teach sex, health or human biology education.
- 6.2 The AEU endorses the development of curriculum on sex education.
- 6.2.1 The AEU shall seek adequate yearly allocations of in-service education dealing with health education, including sex education (which would include sexuality);
 - 6.2.2 The AEU shall be encouraged to propose, develop and conduct such in-services;
 - 6.2.3 The AEU shall, wherever possible, promote sex education within the teaching service and among school communities.
- 6.3 The AEU believes that where GLBT issues are relevant to programs that fall

outside the health education area that such relevance be acknowledged in a positive manner.

7 TEACHER HEALTH AND WELFARE

7.1 The AEU asserts that the employer is responsible for:

- taking preventative measures to avoid health or welfare problems; and
- developing a range of options for dealing with matters of health and welfare.

7.2 In considering teacher health and welfare, the AEU demands that the employer recognise the stresses placed upon non-heterosexual teachers in a society that is considered to be heterosexist.

8 THE ROLE OF THE AEU

8.1 The AEU is committed to ensuring that the concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members are addressed. Every endeavour shall be made:

- 8.1.1 To promote the general welfare, personal, civil, and industrial rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as members.
- 8.1.2 To liaise with the various networks of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people to maximise unionisation of teachers within all groups and foster a more positive and active role for them within the teacher unions.
- 8.1.3 To initiate and coordinate a staff development program so that all AEU Officers are better able to further the welfare and the rights of its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members.

- 8.1.4 To establish committees expressly for the purpose of supporting the personal, civil, industrial, and workplace rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members, and encouraging their closer relationships with the union. These committees should also pursue the rights of all teachers to influence curricula in ways that will enhance understanding and acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.
- 8.1.5 To jointly sponsor and encourage the development of a nation wide support network amongst its members, for the purpose of further policy development on sexual orientation and gender preferred identity, and for development of strategies for implementation of such policies.
- 8.1.6 To organise workshops and discussion groups specifically for their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members to identify and clarify their needs, concerns and conditions.
- 8.1.7 To initiate research which attempts to document the number of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members of the union and their positions within the education industry.
- 8.1.8 To ensure that all industrial agreements contain as positive clause on the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members.