

The National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97 is a document for practical use. It has been carefully crafted to enable educators to achieve real improvements in the equality of educational outcomes for girls and boys.

The Action Plan, which grew out of the National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools (Australian Education Council, 1987), adds a new dimension to the four primary objectives of the National Policy. It sets out clearly defined goals and strategies by which those objectives can be achieved:

- *Eight priorities to be addressed by schools and education systems*
- *Key strategies for achieving each priority*
- *Questions to help schools analyse their preset strategies*
- *System-level indicators of progress*

The National Policy provides a framework for growth in awareness of the educational needs of girls in Australian schools; the National Action Plan provides the means by which the policy objectives can be achieved.

This plan is an essential instrument for all systems, schools and educators striving to improve the school experiences and educational outcomes of girls.

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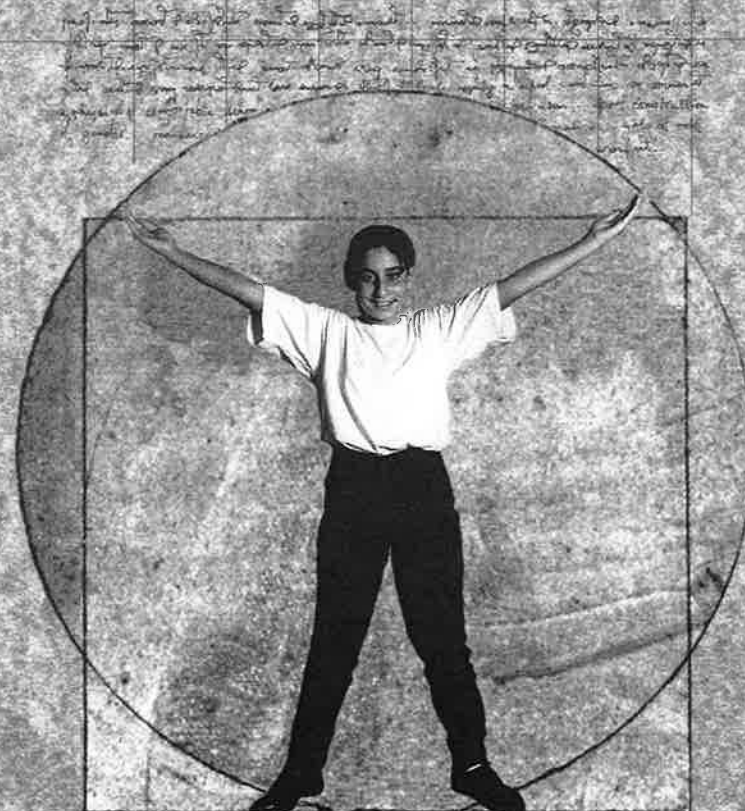
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National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993-97



National Policy for the Education of Girls

In Australia and throughout the world, attention has focused on the status of women generally, on the need to improve the condition of their lives, and on the benefits of a society where women and men participate as equals in all aspects of economic, social and political life. Schools have a role and responsibility in contributing to the achievement of equality between the sexes and in improving the conditions of life for girls and women. All Australian schools should ensure that what is being taught and learned does justice to girls and women, taking account of their cultural, language and socio-economic diversity, and is equally valuable for girls and boys.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

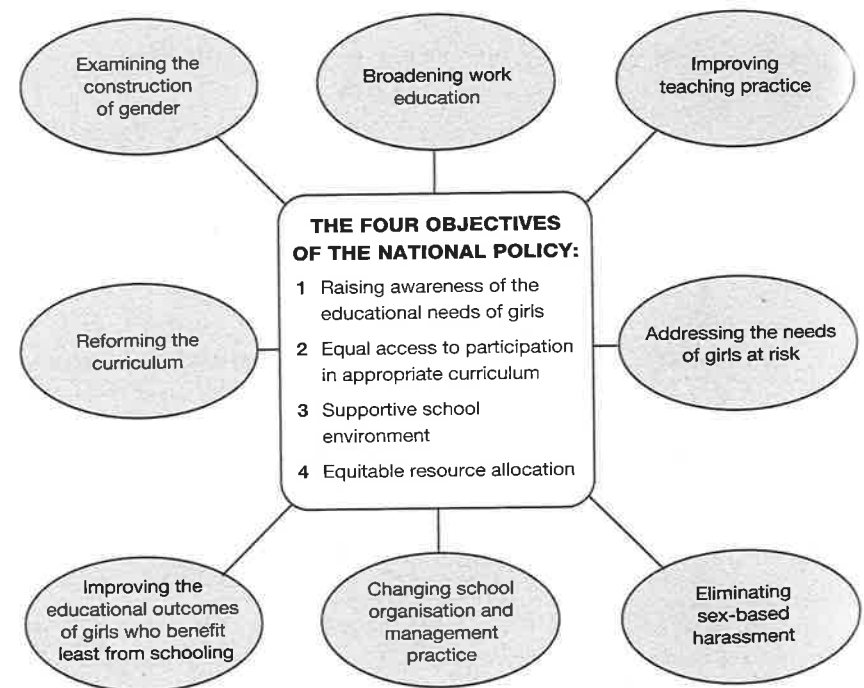
Educational Values and Principles:

- Gender is not a determinant of capacity to learn.
- Girls and boys should be valued equally in all aspects of schooling.
- Equality of opportunity and outcomes in education for girls and boys may require differential provision, at least for a period of time.
- Strategies to improve the quality of education for girls should be based on a recognition that action is required at both the primary and secondary levels.
- Strategies to improve the quality of education for girls should be based on an understanding that girls are not a homogeneous group.
- Priority in improving the quality of education for girls should be given to meeting the specific needs of those groups of girls most requiring support to benefit from schooling.
- To improve schooling for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, school authorities will need to take account of the unique culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- A high quality education for girls is a mainstream professional responsibility for all educators in all primary and secondary schools and school systems.
- Schooling for girls and boys should reflect the entitlement of all women, in their own right, to personal respect, economic security and participation in and influence over decisions which affect their lives.
- Schools should educate girls and boys for satisfying, responsible and productive living, including work inside and outside the home.
- Schools should provide a curriculum which in content, language and methodology

meets the educational needs and entitlements of girls and which recognises the contributions of women to society.

- Schools should provide a challenging learning environment which is socially and culturally supportive and physically comfortable for girls and boys.
- Schools and systems should be organised and resources provided and allocated to ensure that the capacities of girls and boys are fully and equally realised.
- The effective change and lasting improvements needed in schools will require awareness and understanding of the educational needs of girls on the part of students, parents, teachers and administrators, and institutional support for addressing those needs.

EIGHT NEW PRIORITIES FOR 1993-97



***National Action Plan
for the
Education of Girls
1993-97***



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Foreword

As 1993 Chair of the Australian Education Council, I am pleased to introduce the *National Action Plan for the Education of Girls 1993–97*.

The *National Action Plan* represents a key developmental phase in national policy setting processes which commenced in 1986 to improve educational outcomes for girls. This major national initiative has involved all the State, Territory and Commonwealth governments working together to bring about real improvements in equality of educational outcomes for girls and boys.

The *National Action Plan* was developed through an entire year of extensive consultation with girls themselves, with their teachers and their parents, and with a wide range of interested groups and individuals. Based upon this detailed advice, the Plan sets out what needs to be done and how to do it. Eight priorities for action which emerged from the consultations have been clearly defined and supported by a range of suggested strategies which may be used by systems, schools, teachers and parents.

I commend this *National Action Plan* to all who are interested in bringing about equality of educational outcomes and improving the school experiences of Australian girls.

Norman Moore MLA
Minister for Education, Employment and Training
Western Australia
Chair, Australian Education Council
March 1993

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Introduction

Education which leads to equality of outcomes for girls and boys has not yet been achieved in Australia. That this should be true, in a culture priding itself on a fair go for all, remains one of the disturbing contradictions of the Australian social condition. Equal outcomes from education are still not available for most girls. More disturbingly, for many girls, education and employment prospects have been restricted by the gender constructs of Australian society — constructs which have been assimilated in early childhood and which are often reinforced during the years of schooling. The Australian Education Council's 1987 *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* was a welcome initiative to improve the education of girls, and during the past five years has helped raise the awareness of the needs of girls in Australian schools.

It is obvious that the shift required in Australian culture to establish the outcomes of the National Policy may take many years and will require continuing commitment from the education community in all parts of Australia. Yet it remains a reasonable expectation that a properly implemented policy for the education of girls in schools will assist in establishing an Australia in which both women and men have equal rights to responsibility and power.

The National Policy prepared in 1987 remains the basis of policies designed to support the education of girls. When establishing the National Policy, the Council also proposed that it be reviewed in 1991, after five years of implementation. This publication is the outcome of that review. In preparing for the next five years, from 1993–97, the Review Committee considers that the educational and social needs of girls in our schools can be greatly assisted through the provision of some sort of practical addition to the National Policy. For this reason the review is presented in the form of a *National Action Plan*, which will make it possible for schools and systems to improve the education of girls, and at the same time to assess the progress they are making towards real gender equity. It is not the purpose of this plan to replace the National Policy, but rather to add a new dimension to its usefulness in Australian schools.

This *National Action Plan* is directed towards schools, systems and authorities, and is published with the same commitment that produced the National Policy in 1987. The Australian Education Council, the National Catholic Education Commission and the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations remain convinced that every effort must be made to create and refine processes which ensure equal educational outcomes for girls and boys.

The review of the National Policy

The Common and Agreed National Goals of Schooling in Australia have been an essential foundation for the plan. In addition, and to the extent that it is possible at this time, the plan takes into account the reforms which will follow from the reports to the Australian Education Council from the committees chaired by Finn, Mayer and Carmichael.

In preparing the plan a deliberate effort has been made to make it as practical as possible. The plan aims to do more than raise awareness; it encourages direct action in such areas as curriculum, girls' classroom experience, the behaviour and attitudes of males towards females, and changes to the social, physical and cultural environments in which girls learn. The plan is informed by current research and practice in girls' education. It is deliberately prepared for the use of people in the work places of girls' education, and is additional to the existing National Policy, not a replacement. The Committee has chosen to concentrate its efforts into providing a document of hands-on assistance to schools, systems and their communities.

While schools can achieve a great deal, they cannot by themselves achieve equitable educational outcomes for girls. Without modification to the attitudes and values of the wider community and the media, girls will continue to be educationally, socially and economically disadvantaged. Education authorities and schools have a firm responsibility in this regard. Indeed, the extent to which school-based policies can become effective strategies will depend upon the extent to which educational leadership can influence the wider community — including many of the families of the girls in schools.

The task is great but it is achievable, and the ensuing benefits to the nation have moral, social and economic significance for the Australia of the twenty-first century.

An integral part of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* is the notion of accountability, reflected in the requirement of a review in 1991, the fifth year of the policy's implementation. The Australian Education Council appointed a committee to review the policy and to develop appropriate strategies for the next five years. The Committee included representatives from each State and Territory education system, a representative of the Department of Employment, Education and Training, a representative of the National Catholic Education Commission, and a representative of the National Council of Independent Schools' Associations. The aims of the review were:

- to consult upon and develop a revised set of priorities;
- to propose key strategies to underpin the new range of priorities; and
- to advise on an appropriate structure for annual reporting, based on indicators of progress towards the policy objectives.

As it reviewed the National Policy during 1991, the Committee noted significant changes taking place in Australian education.

- The general economic and administrative frameworks in which schools and school systems operate have changed significantly since 1987. These changes include policies of devolution which have led to greater self-management in schools, an associated strengthening of centralist policy-making, significantly increased community participation in education, and increased requirements for accountability.
- Significant improvements have been achieved in retaining both girls and boys into post-compulsory education, although the consequential outcomes for girls remain inequitable. At the same time there has been markedly less success amongst particular groups of girls, including those with disabilities, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, those who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, and those who live in poverty.
- In most school systems there have been real reductions in resources. In some schools and systems this has meant a reduction in the resources available to implement the National Policy.
- There has been a national focus on post-compulsory education and training, leading to the reports of Finn and Mayer on key employment-related competencies in curriculum, and the report of Carmichael on entry-level training.
- There has been increased recognition of the importance of early childhood experiences in shaping girls' and boys' educational outcomes.

Purpose

The review of the National Policy has shown that it has been easier to achieve some policy objectives than others. For example, while there has been a significant rise in the awareness of the needs of girls, there has been less progress in those objectives which are concerned with curriculum reform and the equitable allocation of resources to girls. In some schools significant change has been achieved; in other schools there is still minimal awareness of the issues involved. In many places, to have been the equal opportunity coordinator in a school or system has been a difficult and frustrating task. The experience of these educators highlights a continuing sex discrimination which actively operates to exclude women and girls. Changes in attitudes to gender require the commitment of educators in partnership with parents and the wider community.

The National Policy remains the essential statement through which equity in the education of girls can be achieved. The review has confirmed the need for the original policy, and has shown it to be as relevant and necessary now as it was in 1987. Indeed, the framework and objectives which form the substance of the National Policy remain the most appropriate for the next five years, and provide a fundamental underpinning for the National Action Plan.

In the creation of an action plan for girls, the opinions and experiences of the girls themselves have been of fundamental importance. In many instances they are the foundations on which the details of the plan have been prepared. The girls' contributions were collected through two initiatives commissioned by the Review Committee and the Department of Employment, Education and Training respectively:

- *Listening To Girls*, a report containing discussions with girls at school to discover their educational and social experiences as they understood them in 1991; and
- *Where Do I Go From Here?*, a quantitative and qualitative review of the way in which girls view their educational options for subjects taken in the post-compulsory years of schooling.

Summaries of *Listening To Girls* and *Where Do I Go From Here?* are presented on pages 43–45.

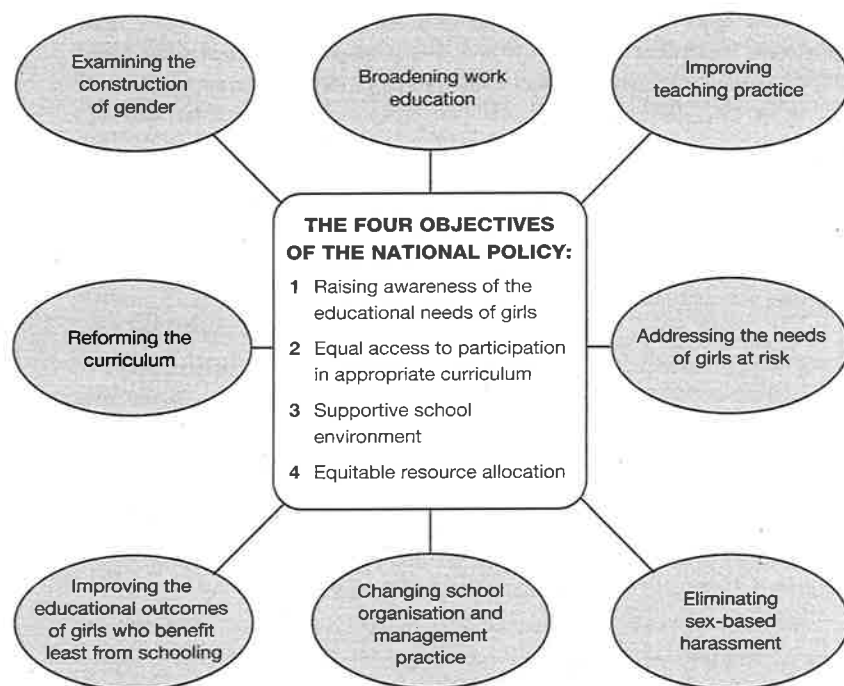
The review of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* established that much has been achieved.

Over the past five years since the launch of the policy, understandings about the educational discrimination and disadvantage experienced by girls have changed. Also during the past five years, the complexities of teaching and learning, of curriculum development and delivery, and of school organisation and management have been re-examined, and the directions for future action have been identified. These directions apply to all levels of schooling from early childhood to post-compulsory, and need to be interpreted in the shifting contexts which follow the 1991 and 1992 reviews into post-compulsory education and training.

The four objectives of the National Policy continue to provide the framework for action at national, system, authority and school levels for the education of girls. This National Action Plan has been developed to build on work that has already occurred, and to provide direction for the education of girls from 1993–97 through eight new priorities.

From the findings of the Review Committee and subsequent national consultation, eight agreed national priorities have been identified. The plan is based upon the expectation that the four objectives of the National Policy will be achieved by attention to each of the eight priorities.

EIGHT NEW PRIORITIES FOR 1993-97



Each priority has the following components:

- a description of issues relevant to each of the priorities;
- key strategies for action at national, system, authority and school levels;
- questions which provide schools with useful starting points for taking action; and
- system-level indicators of achievement.

The key implementation strategies and reporting processes for the eight priorities of the National Policy for the next five years are:

RESPONSIBILITY

Meeting the educational needs of girls is a mainstream professional responsibility of all educators; it is not some sort of additional program among the many already required of educators in our schools. Gender issues are an integral part of all that is done in education.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

This plan is intended for use by systems as a framework for developing policies which enhance girls' educational experiences and outcomes. It provides guidance for monitoring the achievement of these goals. For schools, it is intended for use as a guide for action in both the school and its community.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To meet the educational needs of girls as a mainstream professional responsibility of schools, systems and authorities, gender-instructive pre-service and in-service professional development is essential. Teacher education institutions have a particular responsibility to integrate a critical approach to gender issues into their courses.

Examining the construction of gender

While sex differences are understood as biological, gender differences refer to those behaviours and attitudes which are constructed through social practice. The construction of ways of being female or male is a dynamic process in which all play a part.

Through their everyday behaviour, girls and boys begin to learn their 'place' in an unequal society where 'masculine' characteristics, including the exercise of power and dominance, are valued for men, and 'feminine' characteristics, such as service, nurturing and intuitive reasoning are devalued. In our society these gender constructions form the basis of unequal relations between females and males. Relations between men and women may have different characteristics, according to socio-economic status, ethnicity, ability and disability. For example, Aboriginal girls, or girls with disabilities, are likely to encounter more offensive forms of sexual harassment than other girls. Gender differences may vary over time, making certain behaviour acceptable in one generation which is not acceptable in another.

In their lives in family and community, and before they come to school, children learn socially approved ways of interacting as female or male. As a consequence, many girls and boys develop narrow and limited concepts of masculinity and femininity — concepts which impoverish their existence. To address issues about construction of gender successfully, teachers, parents, students and other members of the community need to participate in school activities which critically reflect on the impact of gender on their own lives and relationships. This particularly includes analysing the roles the media play in constructing images of appropriate femininity and masculinity. School activities of this nature need to begin in early childhood, and continue through all levels of schooling.

The place of language in creating, legitimising and sustaining relationships of equality or inequality is fundamental to the social practices which make up the construction of gender. Schools also need to be aware of the way constructions of gender are likely to dictate limitations on students' choices and their subsequent success at school. The current hierarchy of subjects with Mathematics and Science at the top has devalued the traditional 'female' subjects. Schools need to reconsider practices which allocate greater or lesser importance to subjects, depending on whether they are seen as girls' subjects or boys' subjects. It is important to foster opportunities which expand options for girls, and at the same time avoid practices which endorse unequal relations between the sexes. This will always entail providing opportunities for boys to challenge their attitudes and roles.

Through prevailing belief about femininity and masculinity, teachers can

contribute to girls and boys developing very limited concepts of their capabilities. As a result, girls' understanding of their own futures becomes restricted and unadventurous. A common expectation of primary and secondary school girls for example, is almost the antithesis of the accomplished learner. Too frequently girls are constrained to being neat, quiet, and well-behaved, unlike boys who, while often described as naughty, demanding and difficult to ignore, are also seen as more interesting, and more able to operate as risk-takers.

Schools therefore need to be aware of the key role they play in constructing gender through language, beliefs and practices. Schools should also be careful to avoid distributing adult roles along gender lines (for example, women always having responsibility for pastoral care, and men organising the sports festivals). The predominance of men in senior positions in schools, and of women in back-up positions of lesser responsibility and decision-making, reinforces the construction that men are naturally suited to positions of authority.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR EXAMINING THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

In schools and systems:

- develop policy and implement professional development programs which provide school staff with an understanding of construction of gender;
- develop, for all year levels, curriculum which increase students' awareness of how gender is constructed, with particular reference to:
 - the role of language;
 - the abuse of power in relationships;
 - the part that violence plays in the establishment of power;
 - an examination of body images for girls and boys as presented in the media, and the relationship between body image and disorders such as bulimia and anorexia;
 - the role of popular cultural texts including videos, computer games, toys, films, music, magazines;
 - the influence of family, peers, community, media in the construction of gender;

- develop processes which teach that aggression and violence are unacceptable behaviours;
- engage parents and the community in the development of programs and materials which develop awareness of the impacts of gender construction.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What opportunities and support are provided by schools and systems for teachers and students to explore the limitations which have been placed upon them because of their gender?

How does the curriculum allow all students to engage in critical exploration of gender issues including the implications for themselves and society of culturally constructed femininity and masculinity — such as issues of life choice, health and violence?

What steps does the school community take to encourage, support and value the decisions of those girls and boys who choose to participate in subjects and activities which are not the traditional occupations associated with their gender?

What resources and materials are made available to parents and the wider community to enable them to participate in discussions and activities related to the construction of gender?

What roles are given to adults (parents, teachers, administrators, school counselors, ancillary staff) in the school community? How do these challenge gender stereotypes?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

The availability of professional development courses related to the examination of the construction of gender, along with take-up rates, attitudes of teachers and action being taken by schools and systems.

The numbers of systems and schools with non-discriminatory language policies which address the function of language in the construction of gender.

Eliminating sex-based harassment

Sex-based harassment* is the imposition of behaviour based on sex stereotyping. It is often unrecognised, trivialised or accepted as teasing. It includes sexual harassment but is not always explicitly sexual. It is based on the presumption of power relations which discriminate against girls and women. Sex-based harassment relegates girls and women to an inferior position relative to boys and men in Australian society. It is evident whenever a girl is made to feel embarrassed, frightened, hurt, angry or uncomfortable because she is female.

Until recently, the subject of sex-based harassment of girls at school has received little discussion. However, in parallel with the general community, there is a growing awareness in schools of the unequal power relations between the sexes, in both the home and the work place. Teachers and other educators daily find themselves dealing with the consequences of grossly unacceptable behaviour such as sexual abuse and violence against women in our society. The sex-based harassment of girls in schools must be seen as part of this larger problem. As a basis for improving the outcomes of schooling for Australian girls, it is essential that schools direct their attention to the issues of harassing behaviour.

Sex-based harassment is about male students and teachers exercising power over girls. It must not be accepted as harmless teasing or as natural play. At school, sex-based harassment is commonly used within peer groups to keep girls 'in their place'. The impact on the social and educational experience of girls can be devastating. Those being harassed are likely to withdraw from participation in classroom activity or from their social group. Some girls react angrily, and are often perceived to be trouble makers unless the source of their anger is recognised. In some cases girls escape either by ceasing to attend particular subjects or by leaving the school altogether.

Sex-based harassment is experienced by girls throughout their schooling. A response is warranted whether harassment occurs in secondary or primary schooling, or in kindergarten. Frequently, sex-based harassment from a small boy is seen as playful and harmless. However, boys must be taught from an early age that harassing behaviour is unacceptable.

** Sex-based harassment includes a range of behaviours including sexist harassment, sexual harassment and gender-based harassment. In this plan the term 'sex-based harassment' is used as a broad and generic term which includes all behaviours of this sort.*

Girls describe sex-based harassment as the major disruptive factor in their school life. Proper attention in schools to dealing with the whole issue of sex-based harassment is absolutely essential if equality for all Australian girls and women is to be achieved.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR ELIMINATING SEX-BASED HARASSMENT

In schools and systems:

- develop programs which teach girls and boys effective communication and conflict resolution skills, and to value positive relationships;
- develop curriculum and policies at system and school level which provide opportunities for girls and boys from Kindergarten to Year 12 to understand sex-based harassment and related issues, and learn that sex-based harassment is unacceptable behaviour;
- develop and implement professional development programs to reduce sex-based harassment;
- provide programs and materials which inform school and wider communities about the underlying causes of sex-based harassment and the impact it has on the education of girls.

In schools:

- implement policies and associated procedures for dealing with sex-based harassment, including information to parents on how they can assist the implementation of the strategy.

In systems:

- include the issues of sex-based harassment in the National Collaborative Curriculum Statements and Profiles, particularly in *Studies of Society and Environment and Health*.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

How does the curriculum provide opportunities for students to understand sex-based harassment and learn that it is unacceptable behaviour?

What mechanisms are in place to ensure that all members of the school staff treat sex-based harassment seriously and actively work towards its elimination?

What resources are allocated for professional development in respect of sex-based harassment?

What grievance procedures exist for student-to-student, and student-to-teacher sex-based harassment? How are the procedures regularly monitored?

What steps are taken to ensure that students are supported and not penalised when making complaints about sex-based harassment?

What strategies are in place to facilitate and monitor girls' uninhibited access to resources and facilities such as computers and playground space?

What improvements have been observed in the quality of relationships between girls and boys following the introduction of policy and programs to eliminate sex-based harassment?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

The number of State and Territory systems that have established policies and grievance procedures for dealing with sex-based harassment.

The number of schools that have adopted policies and grievance procedures for dealing with sex-based harassment.

The change in views expressed by girls about the incidence of sex-based harassment in schools.

The extent to which the National Statements and Profiles address the issues of sex-based harassment.

Improving the educational outcomes of girls who benefit least from schooling

Schooling generally fails to meet the specific needs of girls from one or more of the following groups: girls who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, girls from non-English speaking backgrounds, girls who have a disability, who live in rural and remote areas, or who live in poverty.

The schooling experience of girls in these groups results in educational outcomes which are unacceptably less than the outcomes of the total student population. Schools and systems need to respond to the issues of these groups in ways which acknowledge the complexity of the interaction of group and gender. It is therefore important that programs are developed which reflect the diverse socio-cultural contribution available from all groups within Australian society.

Issues of socio-cultural diversity are not easy to deal with. Schools are often reserved about pursuing gender equity initiatives with the communities to which these girls belong. Real or assumed contradictions in values and expectations complicate communication between the family, the community and the school. Schools need to be aware of these complexities and safeguard a whole-school approach to gender equity; one which considers each girl's background to be a valuable source of knowledge and experience.

While some issues are specific to the needs of each group of girls, there are issues of general importance which remain critical to improved participation and achievement. These include:

- sex-based and racial harassment;
- literacy and numeracy;
- home-school communication;
- teacher expectations; and
- mutually exclusive curriculum.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES OF GIRLS WHO BENEFIT LEAST FROM SCHOOLING

In schools and systems:

- monitor the attendance, participation, retention, attainment and post-school pathways of girls by group;
- develop and implement anti-racist harassment policies and procedures;
- provide strategies, including professional development, to assist teachers and support staff to address the needs of girls from these groups. Professional development must include strategies for the implementation of programs which value the socio-cultural contributions of all groups within the school. As well as actively promoting reform, competent programs provide opportunities for school personnel to critically reflect on their own assumptions and beliefs about gender, culture, ethnicity, rurality and socio-economic status;
- provide career counsellors with programs which advise girls from these groups about the full range of post-school options;
- provide forums of girls from these groups, their families and organisations which represent them, to discuss issues relating to their lives;
- improve the literacy/language proficiency of girls from these groups;
- provide multi-media and bilingual information for girls and their families on the education system, subject choice, career selection and the life outcomes implicit in these choices;
- establish communication with community workers and leaders to build understanding between home and school on gender issues.

In systems:

- increase the number of teachers and support staff from these groups.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What mechanisms are in place to assist communication with the parents of girls from these groups?

What provision is made to improve the access, attendance, participation and outcomes of girls from these groups?

To what extent does the curriculum reflect a whole-school approach to improving educational outcomes for girls from these groups?

To what extent can teachers demonstrate that their expectations of girls from these groups are not less than their expectations of other students?

How do subject areas provide opportunities for cultural study and critical reflection on relevant socio-cultural issues?

How does the school curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 value the knowledge and experience of all girls?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

Retention rates and attainment levels over time of girls by group. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, girls from non-English speaking background, girls who have a disability, who live in rural and remote areas, or who live in poverty.)

The percentages of teaching and support staff, by gender, that come from disadvantaged groups.

Addressing the needs of girls at risk

The term 'at risk' refers to girls at risk of not completing a full secondary education, and who on leaving school are unlikely to be in long-term employment or training programs.

The lives of girls at risk are characterised by a range of out-of-school factors. There are many girls who have significant responsibilities which may include caring for younger children, managing household tasks, working in a family business or at farm duties, and providing financial income to the home. While these responsibilities may establish valuable life skills, it is a disturbing fact that girls are expected to spend far more time than boys at these tasks. Any one of these responsibilities decreases the amount of time these girls have for out-of-school study.

There are other factors also which can jeopardise the full participation of girls in schooling. Some girls experience health and welfare related problems, including:

- domestic violence and being a victim of physical and sexual abuse;
- crucial health problems caused by excessive exercise and dieting, leading to disorders such as anorexia and bulimia;
- teenage pregnancy and motherhood; and
- homelessness and the attendant lack of a secure, independent income.

Girls at risk experience school-related problems because the curriculum, teaching practice and the organisation of schools do not meet their needs. These girls may passively or actively opt out of schooling. Schools have the same responsibilities for the educational development of these girls as they do for all other students.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF GIRLS AT RISK

In schools and systems:

- establish mechanisms for identifying, supporting and monitoring girls at risk;
- provide programs for school counsellors, teachers and parents which enable them to understand those issues which place girls at the risk of not completing their education — issues such as income support, housing and childcare;
- establish collaboration between systems and local agencies which attend to childcare and welfare issues;

Reforming the curriculum

- provide professional development which supports schools in their understanding of the in-school and out-of-school reasons why some girls leave school early.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What mechanisms are in place to identify and track girls who are at risk of not completing their secondary education?

What special opportunities are provided for girls at risk to reflect on their school life and speak out about their concerns?

What programs are in place to provide continuity of education for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage mothers?

What monitoring and support provisions are in place for girls who leave school, who are truant or who are under suspension?

What organisational flexibility exists to support girls' and young women's re-entry into schooling?

To what extent do school organisational procedures such as the school timetable accommodate the out-of-school circumstances of girls (for example, parenting or part-time paid employment)?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

The number of States that have mechanisms for monitoring attendance, retention and participation rates, and attainment levels of girls at risk, by group.

The number of system-level programs for girls at risk funded through the National Equity Program and other special-purpose equity programs.

Data on student participation and educational attainment indicate unequal outcomes for girls and boys. The curriculum in schools is gender-biased, and is a key factor in determining educational access, participation and outcomes for girls. Curriculum documents may seem to be gender-neutral, and may sometimes include statements about gender equity in their application. However, they commonly reflect the fact that almost all areas of study exclude or trivialise women's contributions, experiences or knowledge.

The bias against girls cannot be solved by simply altering selected parts of the curriculum or by writing women and girls into existing content. Neither is it simply a matter of removing stereotypes from resources, or placing appropriate role models in front of classes. Curriculum reform requires a fundamental reworking of what knowledge is valued in the curriculum, how that knowledge is made available (for example, its placement on timetabling lines and competition with other subjects) and how it is taught.

Such curriculum reform should:

- consider where, how and why women's and girls' experiences, achievements and contributions have been excluded from the knowledge that is valued in society;
- provide both females and males with access to a wider range of knowledge, skills and ways of being. It should contain those areas of knowledge and living which are of particular significance to women and girls, to the same extent as it includes those areas which are of significance to men and boys;
- acknowledge the multiple perspectives which women have because of ethnicity, culture and class;
- unravel the ways through which social and institutional structures act to maintain the dominant position of men in society;
- explore system and personal models which fulfil expectations of social justice, and which are based on broad rather than narrow views of what it means to be female or male.

Understanding the role of language is essential to the process of curriculum reform. Language is a powerful tool which is not neutral or free of context. It is fundamental in shaping political and social meaning, including understandings and views of gender. Thus language is not a neutral vehicle through which curriculum is communicated and experienced, but is itself a significant force in creating the curriculum.

Curriculum reform for girls also requires the development of a comprehensive curriculum which empowers girls with a broad range of post-school options. In the context of the post-compulsory curriculum, the reform initiatives for entry-level training, and key employment-related competencies are of crucial importance to the education of girls. At the same time it is important to note that these initiatives primarily address paid work, and that girls remain restricted in their career options as long as the equally important domain of unpaid work remains gender-segregated. Boys maintain a general indifference to acquiring such skills as nurturing relationships, parenting, community work and sustaining the domestic environment. Curriculum which prepares all students for both paid and unpaid work is therefore an essential part of the reform program.

Curriculum reform also needs to reflect girls' diverse geographical, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds, and their differing physical and intellectual abilities.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR REFORMING THE CURRICULUM

In schools and systems:

- develop and implement assessment methods which do not discriminate against girls;
- in reviewing the existing curriculum, ensure that it directs attention to the achievements of girls and women, that it values female knowledge and experience, and that it includes a critical examination of the social practices and structures which are detrimental to women and girls;
- provide access for girls to all areas of the curriculum, and establish the skills and confidence necessary to utilise this access (for example, the sporting skills and confidence necessary to use playing fields);

- implement curriculum programs which provide girls and boys with the skills they need in order to meet the needs of dependants and to maintain a domestic base. Teach these skills within the underlying ethic of shared male and female responsibility for the domestic environment.

In systems:

- provide system guidelines to schools which enable the development of gender-inclusive curriculum in all learning areas;
- include in the development of national and systemic curriculum, processes for evaluating the attainment of gender equity criteria (in relation to formal statements, profiles, evaluation and associated professional development programs);
- in partnership with the school community, provide programs about relationships and human sexuality for all students from Kindergarten to Year 12 (including information on conception, contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing, parenting, and relationships).

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What training and development is provided to increase the staff's understanding of gender-inclusive curriculum?

What programs have been provided for staff to have the opportunity to become familiar with the theory of gender construction and its implications for the education of both girls and boys?

What assistance do teaching staff get to ensure that the range of topics and examples they use in their teaching includes the interests of the whole class?

How is attention given to the achievements and experiences of women as well as men in all areas of the curriculum? In what way does this include women from many cultures? Where women have not been recorded as contributors or achievers in a particular curriculum area, is time given to discussion about why this might be so?

In each curriculum field of study, what are the opportunities provided for students to understand the way gender is constructed?

What strategies ensure the diverse experiences, interests and aptitudes that girls and boys bring to school are considered in the planning of the curriculum?

Improving teaching practice

What role does pastoral care play in the promotion of gender equity?

Which students are under-achieving, and in which areas of the curriculum?

How are girls and boys encouraged to consider both the educational and vocational relevance of the subjects they choose?

If there is a minority of female students enrolled in specific subjects, what is done to ensure that those students receive equal attention and support?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

Participation rates and attainment levels over time of girls and boys, by group, across the curriculum.

The number of systems which have implemented guidelines on gender-inclusive curriculum and assessment for curriculum developers at school and system levels.

There is an increasing recognition by teachers of the differential effects of teacher practice on the learning outcomes of girls and boys. In spite of this, teaching practice continues to be the subject of much critical comment by girls. As schools undertake their own surveys, more data are revealing how girls are disadvantaged by specific teaching practices.

The comments of girls from all States and Territories consistently indicate that their learning is best supported when teachers:

- provide for a range of learning styles;
- are explicit about the outcomes they are working towards, and the criteria they will apply for assessment;
- confront dominating, disruptive and harassing behaviour;
- ensure all students can take an active part in class discussions, express feelings and take risks without fear of being considered to be 'wrong';
- encourage students to compete against themselves rather than against others;
- allow students to have some control over the pace and direction of their learning;
- encourage students to support each other in their learning; and
- use on-going assessment processes and a variety of assessment procedures.

In classes which apply these teaching practices, passivity in girls is not allowed to be regarded as normal female behaviour. Girls in these classes are encouraged to exercise their right to equal participation in the learning environment.

Girls' accounts of their own classroom experiences indicate that major changes are still required in classrooms. Because successful change is usually linked with processes which make classrooms more democratic, it is essential that changes to classroom practices are supported by corresponding school policy and by a whole-school approach to change. In order to achieve equitable education outcomes for both girls and boys, it is important that schools and teachers are supported and encouraged to develop appropriate pedagogical practices.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING TEACHING PRACTICE

In schools and systems:

- include, in the curriculum developed, a range of teaching methods and assessment procedures which best promote the active participation of girls in learning;
- identify and use a variety of assessment modes and methods which are equitable to girls and boys;
- establish, for all staff, selection and promotion criteria which include specific expectations in relation to the achievement of gender equity.

In systems:

- provide support for research by classroom teachers which enables them to discover any gender-bias in their teaching, and to assess the effectiveness of their teaching practice in providing equitable learning outcomes for girls;
- develop materials which assist schools with assessment and evaluation procedures, including examples of assessment instruments which consider the different experiences, interests and aptitudes of girls.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What provision allows girls and boys to advise whether they receive teaching relevant to their needs and interests?

How are opportunities provided for all teachers to become informed about and reflect on gender and learning?

By what means do teachers become aware of the gender assumptions which underpin current teaching practices — especially assumptions in relation to girls from different cultural and social backgrounds?

How are students taught to develop cooperative and non-violent behaviours, so that the learning needs of all students are respected and supported?

What variety of assessment instruments are used in each curriculum area? Are all stated course objectives assessed? Are the different experiences, interests and aptitudes that girls and boys bring to school taken into account when developing assessment instruments?

In classrooms, what assessment is made to see if boys listen to girls without interruption or harassment?

What processes are used to consider the use of single-sex classes for those subjects where girls' participation and achievement can be enhanced through this strategy?

What teaching practices are used to emphasise democratic principles, critical thinking and social action to ensure that girls from all groups develop the skills to participate fully within the school and wider community?

What strategies do teachers use to provide a range of teaching styles which allow for gender differences?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

Participation rates and attainment levels over time of girls and boys, by group, across the curriculum.

The number of programs funded by systems to research and document teaching practice which specifically targets the active participation of girls in learning.

Improvements in teaching practice to better suit girls' needs.

Broadening work education

Work education has marginalised much of women's experience by focusing only on paid work. While it is rarely acknowledged, most paid work structures are set up to match the circumstances of workers who either enjoy domestic support or who have few or no family responsibilities.

Work education needs to acknowledge and critically examine the historical forces underlying such things as:

- the evolution of paid and unpaid work;
- the gender-segregated nature of training options and the workforce;
- the influence of work bargaining processes, including trade unionism, on the female and male work forces;
- cultural perceptions of work;
- the relationship between the social institutions of work and family; and
- the implications of domestic and family responsibilities on women's lives and careers.

If girls are to benefit from programs designed to enhance their post-school options, it is imperative that work education programs be extended to include issues related to paid and unpaid work. In particular, they must include the need for all students to develop those skills and attitudes which are necessary for assuming primary responsibility for family and household management. This needs to be done within a context which emphasises that boys as well as girls have a responsibility to participate equally in domestic duties and in the care of young children and family members.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR BROADENING WORK EDUCATION

In schools and systems:

- develop, for all year levels, curriculum which critically examines the gender distribution of work in families, households and paid work, and the relative values attributed to these different kinds of work by society;
- structure vocational programs to ensure that both girls and boys are provided with relevant and challenging work experience in both paid and unpaid work;
- integrate into all curriculum, including national curriculum, from Kindergarten to Year 12, consideration of the range of jobs related to each field of study. Present this information in a non-stereotyped way;
- address gender-differentiated experiences in training, education and employment in all professional development programs related to vocational education.

In schools:

- provide community awareness and professional development programs for parents, staff and business and industry. Include in the programs gender issues related to post-school training and work options, including paid and unpaid work;
- provide advice on subject choices to ensure that girls do not limit their training and employment pathways by the patterns of their study in compulsory and post-compulsory years of schooling;
- provide advice on subject-choice planning to ensure that girls prepare for lifetime economic independence.

In systems:

- monitor the post-school pathways and destinations of girls and boys by group;
- establish career-path planning which includes paid work, unpaid work and leisure.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

What mechanisms are in place to track girls' and boys' post-school destinations? What process is used to record the work life of girls who have recently left school?

How does the curriculum, at all year levels, address the needs of all students to be proficient and caring in parenting and domestic responsibilities?

What steps are taken to ensure that the work education is a positive experience for the girls involved, that it expands their views of what is possible for their career futures, and that it takes place in an environment which genuinely gives relevant experience?

What measures are taken to ensure that boys are provided with work experience in non-paid work, including unpaid community work, parenting, caring and domestic responsibilities?

What strategies are used to avoid sex-stereotyping in the allocation of work experience?

Which curriculum provides learning for decisions in areas of lifetime independence — such as structured career planning, insurance and superannuation?

From Kindergarten to Year 12, how do teachers include information about a range of jobs in their curriculum program? Is this information presented in a way which challenges students views of appropriate jobs for females and males?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

Participation rates of school leavers, over time, in entry-level employment, further education and training, by group.

The attainment levels of girls and boys in relation to key employment-related competencies.

The percentage of schools which allocate resources specifically to work education programs for girls.

Changing school organisation and management practice

The processes which govern school organisation and management are less and less the unique responsibility of educators. The increasing devolution of governance and management involves school communities in more and more educational decision making. It is therefore important that school counsellors and other leaders increase their understanding of the principles, objectives and priorities of the National Policy and this National Action Plan. Effective school governance, organisation, and practices in areas such as behaviour management, can actively improve the quality of girls' schooling and educational outcomes.

School culture transmits strong messages about the value placed on participation of girls and women in the life of the school and the wider society. School celebrations, assemblies and prizes for outstanding achievement; the design of murals, posters and paintings; publications such as school magazines and newsletters; activities such as camps and excursions; and practices of behaviour management can all establish strong, yet hidden, curriculum about gender. So can the staffing of a school. Students in both primary and secondary schools need to see both female and male staff teaching senior classes, acting in promotion positions and taking up leadership responsibility within the school.

The way in which the school manages its resources is also critical. In many schools groups of boys establish and maintain advantageous access to playground space, relegating to girls the use of whatever remains. In some schools girls are forced to retreat to the toilets to establish a 'girls only' space. Schools need to listen to the views of girls about their needs for space both inside and outside the classroom, monitor the use of playground facilities and establish specific areas and activity programs for girls.

When school facilities and resources are monopolised by male-dominated classes or by boys' assumptions of ownership, then schools must intervene by using models of classroom management which redress inequitable interaction (for example, single-sex classes and the use of single-sex groups in mixed classes). In this regard, the secondary school timetable is a powerful factor in educational decisions; particularly in the selection of subjects available to girls and the class configurations in which they are taught. The capacity to provide single-sex groupings is dependent upon a clear acknowledgment of the gender discrimination implicit in the traditional structuring of school timetables.

It is obvious that girls require a school environment which is comfortable, safe and clean. Yet the standard of physical provisions for both young and adolescent girls continues to be of particular concern. Schools urgently need to review the

number and quality of girls' toilet accommodation, sanitary disposal units and the availability and access to emergency supplies of napkins. Inadequate provisions lead to both embarrassment and anxiety, and a lowering of self-esteem likely to cause the withdrawal of girls from school.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR CHANGING SCHOOL ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

In schools and systems:

- ensure that school dress codes enable girls to engage in sport and active play;
- establish staffing procedures which ensure that women are represented in school leadership positions;
- regularly review policies, procedures and resource allocations in order to determine whether they satisfy the requirements of gender equity — particularly the requirements of this National Action Plan;
- provide training for members of the school community — particularly those involved in school management structures — about organisational and management practices which are inclusive of girls.

In schools:

- provide girls with adequate playground space and 'girls only' spaces;
- provide for the physical needs of each girl in relation to privacy, hygiene and clothing;
- ensure that the timetable provides girls with real flexibility in their subject choice;
- provide, in school timetables, opportunities for girls to learn in single-sex groupings or single-sex classes.

In systems:

- develop administrative guidelines specifically directed at girls' needs for playground space, toilet facilities, and 'girls only' space;
- provide training for school managers about organisational and management practices which are inclusive of girls.

QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

By what mechanisms are girls provided with a single-sex forum through which to speak openly and comfortably about problems which they might be having; and what do teachers and the school do with this information?

By what means are provisions for girls reviewed by asking them about their requirements regarding uniform, toilet facilities and 'girls only' spaces (giving attention to include girls from the full range of cultural diversity)? How often does this review take place? How are girls with disabilities fully catered for with regard to these provisions?

How does school policy for uniform or dress ensure the physical comfort of girls and their full participation in the curriculum?

To what extent are resources and facilities used equally for girls and boys?

To what extent do girls have the option of learning in single-sex classes or single-sex groups within a co-educational school or class?

What measures are put in place to prevent timetable structures disadvantaging girls by limiting their subject choices or the groupings in which they are taught?

To what extent do traditional events and activities contribute to making girls invisible?

How are girls provided with a range of opportunities to gain experience in leadership?

What percentage of female staff apply for and obtain promotion positions? How are women encouraged and supported in their applications for promotion or leadership experience?

SYSTEM-LEVEL INDICATORS

The percentage of primary and secondary schools which allocate resources specifically to education of girls programs.

The percentage of primary and secondary schools providing sufficient facilities for girls, especially toilets, sanitary disposal units, change rooms and 'girls only' spaces.

The percentage of women in senior positions, both at school and system levels.

The extent to which school and system disciplinary and behaviour management policies and programs address particular issues related to girls.

Reporting the educational achievements of girls

The 1987 endorsement of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* included an undertaking to report annually over the initial five years of the implementation of the National Policy. Government education systems and non-government school authorities from all States and Territories contributed to the reports, *Girls in Schools 1-4* (AGPS, 1988-91).

The Reports focused on the achievements of various Australian schools and systems. They outlined the attention given to the education of girls, the changes achieved, and the action directed at improving girls' education. The Reports described how available resources were directed at increasing the education community's awareness of the need for changed policies and practices in girls' education. In both schools and systems, committed effort was directed at improving school environments and those classroom practices which provided greater outcomes for girls.

REPORTING PROGRAM FOR 1993-97

While *Girls in Schools* proved useful and informative in its original format, the Review Committee believes that a changed reporting framework is required in this second cycle of the National Policy's implementation. It is appropriate for this to be achieved in two ways:

- through the annual *National Report on Schooling in Australia*, and
- through a new series of annual *Girls in Schools* reports, each of which will specifically focus on one or more of the areas for priority action detailed in this plan.

NATIONAL REPORT ON SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

In 1989, the Australian Education Council produced the first national report on schooling. A second report followed in 1990 and a third in 1991. The annual *National Report on Schooling in Australia* is accompanied by a statistical annex, which comments on aspects of schools' operations, their curriculum, the participation rates of students in schooling, and a range of other student outcomes which are disaggregated by gender. The National Report also includes information from some systems on the implementation of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*.

The National Report will continue to publish information on girls' education by providing a means through which education systems and authorities can provide

summary reports on the areas for priority action identified in this action plan. To complement this reporting, the statistical annex should include the following data:

- literacy and numeracy levels, as assessed through the national profiles;
- achievement in learning areas (as profiles and attainment levels are developed for each area);
- students' records of performance on the key employment-related competencies in the curriculum; and
- information on student pathways.

These data should be disaggregated by gender, target group and by labour force region.

GIRLS IN SCHOOLS REPORTS

Instead of generally reporting on improved education for girls, from 1993 the annual report, *Girls in Schools*, will focus on one or more topics selected from the priorities outlined in this plan. The aim will be to focus attention on each of the priority areas in turn, and thereby encourage the employment of limited available resources toward changes in depth across systems and authorities.

Girls in Schools will be structured to report within the framework of the four objectives of the National Policy, using the performance indicators provided in this plan. The following program is proposed.

- 1993** Broadening work education.
Improving teaching practice.
- 1994** Eliminating sex-based harassment.
Reforming the curriculum.
- 1995** Addressing the needs of girls at risk.
Improving the educational outcomes of girls who benefit least from schooling.
- 1996** Examining the construction of gender.
Changing school organisation and management practice.

Post-1996

In 1997 *Girls in Schools* will be replaced with a second five-year review of the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*.

OTHER REPORTS

There are other sources of information which help to provide a wider picture of the nation's progress towards equal educational outcomes for girls and boys. These include the Australian Education Council's *National Schools Statistics Collection*, the Commonwealth Government's *Australian Youth Survey*, and the *Youth in Transition Survey*, which is compiled by the Australian Council for Educational Research.

As an expansion of the *National Schools Statistics Collection*, the Australian Education Council is developing a set of national educational indicators. This work is directed at:

- equity and access for recognised groups of the student population;
- pathways to employment and further education; and
- statistical reporting of student competencies, including vocation-related competencies.

Data collections will include:

- transition from secondary education to university, TAFE and paid work;
- literacy and numeracy levels of students by group;
- subject provision in Years 7 - 10; and
- teacher profiles.

The *Australian Youth Survey* began in 1989 and records the activities of a nationally representative sample of 7000 young people aged from 16 to 19 years. The respondents are interviewed annually, and each year a new cohort of 16-year-olds is added to the Survey's data base. The Survey provides information about respondents' schooling and post-school activities — information which can be analysed by a number of criteria, including gender, socio-economic background, family circumstances, disability, parents' educational background and their labour market experience.

The *Youth in Transition Sample* is a longitudinal survey of several thousand young Australians. It provides year-by-year data on participation in education, school achievement, academic aptitude, and participation in the labour force. Information about respondents includes relevant details about family background.

Commissioned reports

LISTENING TO GIRLS

As a first step in the Review of the National Policy the Committee commissioned educational consultants, Ashenden and Associates, to visit as many Australian schools as possible within available time and resources. Their report to the Committee is available from Curriculum Corporation.

The purpose of the consultancy was to describe, anecdotally, the educational experience of girls in 1991. The emphasis was to be on recording what girls have to say, in all its richness and variety, rather than on a scientifically-processed set of recommendations.

More than 800 schoolgirls took part in the consultation. Their ages ranged from 4 to 18 years. The girls attended schools run by governments, churches and independent owners. The girls were consulted alone or in small groups, as informally as possible and in as relaxed a forum as possible. They were consulted in the absence of their teachers. The consultants also talked to educators, teachers and administrators in both schools and systems.

The consultation with girls provided the following key insights into girls' school experience.

Sex-based harassment (which includes sexual harassment) of girls by boys and sometimes teachers, is endemic in most co-educational classrooms and school yards. This harassment contributes to girls' passivity; restricts their access to space, equipment and attention; undermines their feelings of safety and self-worth; and reduces the risk-taking behaviour necessary for their complete development.

The quality of teaching and learning is of paramount concern to girls. They want to learn, are highly critical of bad teaching and are warmly appreciative of teachers who allow for a more participatory, student-controlled approach to learning.

Girls' participation in the curriculum is still very much gender-stereotyped, and they leave school with very different patterns of knowledge, understandings and skills from those of boys.

Girls who have disabilities, who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, who are from non-English speaking backgrounds, from rural backgrounds, or live in poverty, experience the compounding effects of belonging to more than one disadvantaged group.

Some girls experience educational disadvantage because of early pregnancy, teenage motherhood or demanding domestic responsibilities.

Some schools are insufficiently responsive to girls who experience domestic violence or sexual abuse.

There are some practical, day-to-day issues that worry girls; menstruation, fertility and sexuality are the most often mentioned. According to girls, schools need to be better at helping them manage these issues in ways that ensure privacy, comfort and well-being. In this regard, school uniforms are also a significant issue for girls.

Many girls are concerned about the extent to which they are listened to when they raise issues with teachers. The problem would appear to be in the hearing, rather than the telling. When given the chance, the consultants found the girls to be articulate, direct and comprehensive in what they had to say.

Girls' expectations of their post-school options reinforce the existing patterns of gender segregation in the labour market, in training systems, in post-compulsory education and in the home. Schools do little to assist girls to work through confused and contradictory messages about their career futures.

Girls rarely acknowledge their success, talent and worth, and often develop an unrealistic and negative image of their bodies. These images are destructive and damaging to their education.

Opportunities for girls and boys to learn about the role of women in Australian society are limited. Students have little critical awareness of the effects of gender in social, political and economic domains, and the subsequent effect on their lives.

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

The Department of Employment, Education and Training commissioned Dr Susan Johnston to investigate and analyse girls' subject choices in senior secondary schooling. Dr Johnston's report, *Where Do I Go From Here?*, was of assistance to the Review Committee, and is available from Curriculum Corporation.

The consultancy responded to the apparent choice of girls at senior secondary level to opt out of higher level mathematics and the physical sciences. The study referenced existing data bases and collected qualitative data about girls' subject choices and their participation in particular fields of study. The report recommends further research into these issues.

The data collection involved case studies of six schools in two Australian States. The major part of the data was collected from interviews with Year 11 girls and some school personnel. The consultation with Year 11 girls shows both the essential complexity which subject choice presents to girls, and the highly personal response individuals bring to the issue of choice.

The consultation with girls provided the following key insights into girls' experience in choosing their subjects.

Gender has a significant effect on subject choice at senior secondary level. Other variables include State, geographical region, school system, school, social background, ethnic background, parental influence, aspirations, achievement and interests.

Prevailing female choices include home science, creative and performing arts and languages. Prevailing male choices include technical and applied studies. When courses rather than individual subjects are considered, boys dominate courses in mathematics, the physical sciences and technology. The corresponding preferences for girls are in the humanities, the social sciences and the creative and performing arts. In addition, girls are more likely than boys to prefer a general course to a specialised one.

Enrolments by girls in mathematics are high and relatively few students choose no mathematics in Year 11. However, girls are significantly over-represented in lower levels of mathematics, and they are less likely than boys to continue mathematics into Year 12.

Subject choices are particularly important determinants for selection into tertiary education. Increasing numbers of courses in higher education now specify prerequisite subjects. High-level mathematics is a common formal prerequisite, even for courses for which higher-level mathematics is not necessary. The more established traditional universities have more prerequisites (particularly mathematics) than the newer universities.

The wisdom of choosing mathematics and science in order to meet tertiary prerequisites and to keep options open has caused a narrowing of the senior secondary school curriculum. An established hierarchy of subjects has evolved, in which mathematics and the physical sciences hold the more valued positions.

Membership of Review Committee

Chair

Mr Bruce Davis, Secretary, Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts

New South Wales

Ms Sandra Bushell

Victoria

Ms Jane Stewart

Queensland

Ms Lyn Martinez

South Australia

Ms Susan Cameron/Ms Susan Sweetman

Western Australia

Ms Kathy Lymon

Tasmania

Ms Clare Langridge

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Ms Ann Richards

Australian Capital Territory

Ms Carmel Markham

Commonwealth

Ms Helen Allnutt

National Catholic Education Commission

Ms Susan Pascoe

National Council of Independent Schools' Associations

Ms Rosemary Phillips

Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training

Ms Ann Morrow

Women's Employment, Education and Training Advisory Group

Ms Pat Thompson

Executive Support

Ms Joan Dunn

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