Facing the Facts on the world stage

The International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) 2026 was held in Tallinn, Estonia in March, bringing together education ministers, teacher union leaders and experts from nearly 20 high-performing education systems to discuss the future of teaching and learning under the theme *Shifting Gears: Teachers and Learners in the Future Learning Environment*

Through enabling dialogue and creating coalitions, the ISTP seeks the common ground necessary for real progress, based on unions and government working together. This year Australia was represented by Victorian Deputy Premier and Education Minister Ben Carroll, AEU Federal President Correna Haythorpe and Matt Jarman, in his additional role as AEU Deputy Federal President.

Each nation is required to develop three commitments which must be reported on within 12 months. From the three session themes (The evolving teaching profession, Autonomy of educators and school leadership and Artificial intelligence (AI) and educational technology) the new Australian commitments emerged. All three commitments are strongly aligned to the recommendations of Facing the Facts:

Commitment 1: *Continue tripartite efforts to highlight the primacy of the teacher-student relationship and the importance of teacher autonomy. Continue efforts that support, develop and enhance the workforce and prepare educators to respond to an evolving professional landscape via ongoing evidence-based reforms to initial teacher education, and strategies to support the existing workforce to further refine and develop their skills and knowledge through access to professional learning, teacher resources and refinements to the curriculum when required.*

It is arguable that all 46 recommendations of Facing the Facts support Recommendation 1 - they aim to strengthen core teaching work, reduce workloads, improve support, enhance curriculum and professional learning. Improving teacher working conditions, reducing administrative burden, increasing school support, improving professional learning, providing curriculum clarity and resources and delivering systemic workforce planning are all foundational to strengthening the profession and preserving the teacher student relationship.

Facing the Facts: The attraction and retention of teaching staff “will be greatly facilitated by the Department’s public support for a reduction of workloads and the championing of teachers’ professionalism”.

Commitment 2: *Advance an evolving and diverse teaching profession by supporting First Nations teachers and school leaders, and by providing targeted, culturally appropriate support to ensure all educators are confident and equipped to address complex learning environments and navigate a rapidly changing world.*

Facing the Facts recommendations 7, 8, 26, 27, 28, 33, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45 address Aboriginal education, targeted support, equity, special needs, and cultural capability. Building a more diverse, culturally capable and effective workforce requires improving services for students with special needs, reducing educational disadvantage, establishing a dedicated Aboriginal Education Unit, creating expert First Nations educator teams and supporting schools serving Aboriginal communities.

Facing the Facts: “The Aboriginal Education Teaching and Learning Directorate has a limited role in the selection and training of staff and the development of Aboriginal education.”

Commitment 3: *Recognising the need to preserve the meaningful relationship between teacher and student in a changing digital learning environment, we will continue to support the safe, ethical and effective adoption of digital technologies in classrooms, including Generative Artificial Intelligence, (GenAI).*

It’s hard to believe that AI has progressed so radically that many of our present concerns were not prominent when the research and consultation behind Facing the Facts were undertaken, but recommendations 12, 13, 14 and 32 are relevant to strengthening the foundation of digital readiness necessary for safe and effective AI adoption through curriculum improvement, clarity and targeted teacher development.

Recommendations 12 to 14 relate to curriculum resourcing and teacher professional learning, essential prerequisites for the effective integration of digital technologies and AI. Recommendation 32 addresses reducing administration time and increasing time for core teaching, which – somewhat paradoxically - could occur with the support of AI and becomes even

more critical when integrating new digital tools.

Facing the Facts: It's the relationships - "Considering a one unit increase in school engagement has been associated with a 13-point increase in academic attainment in some domains, we cannot afford to ignore this fall in school wellbeing for Australian students. Beyond academic implications, there are many psychological, social and physical health costs."

This is an opportunity to face the facts that restoring the professional status of teaching is at the heart of maintaining a strong and effective educator workforce, that supporting Aboriginal school leaders and teachers, as well as building cultural competence, is key to addressing Aboriginal educational disadvantage, and that failing to preserve human relationships is just as great a risk as not moving forward with technology.



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