

## Background papers

### BACKGROUND PAPER SUPPORTING ITEMS 3 AND 4

#### Preamble

The motions below are broadly in line with the recommendations of the 2008 Dalglish Report, which was commissioned to look at ways to improve the performance of the P&C Federation.

The objective of the following motions is to:

- strengthen the performance of Council and the Federation;
- provide better support to the volunteer Officers and Councillors of Federation; and
- encourage Regional Councils to play a greater role in furthering the objectives of Federation.

Federation's Council has been operating more-or-less in its current mode for decades. To be successful on a continuing basis, organizations must change to meet the changing challenges they face, and to make the best use of the opportunities that arise.

There has been a noticeable drop in interest in the Federation's state-level activities in recent years, and this reflects the general experience of voluntary organisations around the world.

There is more competition for the time of people who might volunteer, and technology changes have changed the way people communicate and make decisions.

In Federation's case, the number of people prepared to become Councillors has dropped to the extent that, at the time of writing, less than 55% of the available 106 Councillor positions are filled (56 positions in total). In common with many other voluntary organisations, the average age of Councillors has been rising, and a considerable majority of Councillors are now Citizen members, with no children still at school. Although the presence of Citizen members is to be valued for the experience and continuity that they bring, a vibrant organisation needs to retain its relevance by continually attracting new members.

Although Federation has a democratic election system, the way Council operates is a disincentive for broader participation, and most Councillors are actually "elected" unopposed because there are not enough people interested in standing. This leads to the perception amongst those we wish to influence (politicians, educational professionals) and lead (current parents), and probably the reality that Federation doesn't really represent parents in this State.

With rapid changes in teaching methods and technology in schools, it is important that current parents are attracted to Council, and that they form a majority of people on Council.

One of the main problems identified in the Dalglish Report is that a group of 106 people is too large for the Governance role that Council has, and this leads to dysfunctionality. Most Councillors are unhappy with the way Council operates because of the lack of substantive education issues discussed, and new entrants are additionally deterred by the prospect of five full weekend meetings per year. People who are current parents don't wish to be away from their children so much, and they would prefer shorter, more focussed meetings aided by communication in-between using technologies which weren't available when the current model for Council was set up.

Whilst some of the Dalglish recommended reforms have been implemented, there remains some unfinished business if P&C Federation is to remain the pre-eminent representative of public school parents in NSW. Constitutional changes are presently only allowed every three years, and the next opportunity is 2011.

However, the size of our Governance bodies, Council and Executive, is covered by the By Laws and may be changed at any Annual Conference.

The motions submitted are designed to reduce the size of both Council and Executive as a first step to make both bodies more efficient and effective and to make participation by parents more desirable. Reduced costs associated with smaller state-level groups would release funds to help build up Regional Councils and to employ more permanent staff to do the work that volunteers no longer have time to do.

The current operation of Federation is overdue for change. The motions set out below for debate at Annual Conference are designed to spark debate and to lead to reform which will allow the Federation to better meet the expectations of its affiliates, parents and stakeholders; the challenges of the future; and also to enable Federation to take full advantage of opportunities as they arise.

### **Size and operations of Council**

Federation's Council allows for a total of 98 Councillors plus eight office bearers, a total of 106 people. Council meets a minimum of four times per year for a full weekend. In addition, most Councillors attend Annual Conference, which meets for three days in July each year. The eighteen members of the Executive also attend a number of Saturday meetings every year between Council Meetings. Office bearers more frequently.

Council has traditionally dealt with policy matters, educational issues and internal machinery and commercial issues.

In recent years, many Councillors have observed, to varying degrees, the following issues which the reforms below are aimed at addressing:

- **Wasted Time** Too little time is being spent on substantial policy or educational issues, with time being wasted on micro-managing events such as the Annual Conference, on meeting procedural matters, or on administrative matters that should be dealt with by the office or by the Office Bearers.
- **Size of Council** Council is far too large, with individuals being frustrated or bored by the fact that only one person can talk at once, and the group is too large for any meaningful participation for many Councillors. A smaller Council will still give a broad spectrum of views, but is likely to be more manageable, productive and focussed.
- **Attracting New Councillors** Experience has shown that new Councillors are hard to attract and keep. The result is that Council has a very high percentage of very-long serving Citizen members. There is nothing wrong with Citizen members, as many have a range of valuable talents and the time to attend meetings, etc. But the balance is wrong – for Council to remain vibrant, relevant and effective, it must be attracting new Councillors on an ongoing basis. Some Councillors who have left after just one or two terms have complained of a lack of focus on real issues, and a boring and unnecessarily time consuming format. Council is also unattractive to parents with children at school because giving up full weekends away from their children is quite a sacrifice, and they are not interested in wasting time at unfocussed and unproductive Council meetings. The bar for participation is just too high.

A measure of the attractiveness of the current Council format is that there are many vacant positions, with 56 ordinary Councillor positions filled out of a total of 98. In the Metropolitan regions, there are only 20 out of a total 40 positions

- **Succession Planning.** The number of Councillors with the time and the skills to take on leadership roles in Federation is seen by some to be diminishing to the point where the current mode of operation will be unsustainable in any case. Less time spent on unproductive activities is a pre-requisite to attracting the continuing fresh inflow of talent needed to sustain the organization at the high level of effectiveness expected from a peak body such as ours.
- **Councillor Elections** Council, although elected through a democratic process, has become unrepresentative. Elections are carried out at Annual Conference by those present. At recent Annual Conferences, only about 3% of the possible 6,000 plus delegates have been in attendance. There was little

or no competition for Councillor positions. Councillors are not elected by the full conference – only by delegates from their own Region. The number of delegates from some Regions was particularly low. If Councillors were elected at Regional Council meetings, it would help generate more interest in the Federation, as well as encouraging a broader pool of people to participate.

- **Technology** Council is technology shy, perhaps because of the lack of younger parents who are more comfortable with technology. As a result, Federation does not take proper advantage of web, email and mobile telephone technology to energise affiliates and parents on issues, or on lobbying decision makers such as MP's. This is at a time when students, the Department of Education and Training, the Board of Studies, Teachers Federation and politicians are using technology extensively to communicate their issues – the P&C Federation has been left a long way behind.
- **Representation** is one of the valuable functions of the Federation. With a smaller Council, representation duties should be extended to members of Regional Councils where appropriate – thus strengthening the links between Council and the Regions. Committees of Council do have the power to co-opt (Clause 7 of the Constitution), and Regional Council representatives could be utilised this way. However, it would be clearer if Clause 7 of the Constitution were changed, and this will have to wait until 2008 to be addressed.

## Motions

To make the management of Federation less unwieldy, more productive, more focused, and more representative, the Motions below will:

- **Reduce the size of Council to a more manageable 40 plus eight Office Bearers.**

There is a separate motion at Conference, put forward by Council, that allows for the election of Councillors from their Regional Councils, rather than at Annual Conference.

These reforms will encourage more people at Regional level to put their hand up at state level, and will make Council easier to manage and more productive. They will also give the Regional Council more buy-in to Council and its activities, and more relevance to the operation of Federation.

The reduction in the size of Council will save thousands of dollars every year in the cost of running Council – money which can be used to improve Federation's communications and ability to argue issues. It will also take some of the load off the President and the paid staff if the size of Council is smaller.

- **Reduce the size of the Executive Committee to ten (from 18).**

This will allow the Executive to be more effective and focused. It will be able to be run like the Management Committee (or Board) that many volunteer organisations have now adopted. The Management Committee, if run well, can make better commercial decisions, and reduce the need for the whole Council to be involved in the amount of unnecessary detail that now comes to Council.

## BACKGROUND PAPER SUPPORTING ITEM 8

We put forward that for each moderate student placed in a mainstream class, that student be weighted as two mainstream student equivalents and for every severe student in a mainstream class, that student be counted as three mainstream student place equivalents. For students with a diagnosed behaviour problem that do not attract funding support, these students are reviewed by local placement panels on the severity of their problem and be given the weighting of either moderate or severe.

Discussion around the issue included awareness of:

- Insufficient disability support in NSW public schools to genuinely meet the needs of the individual student.

- Lack of acknowledgement by the Department of Education and Training to address the issue of weighting class sizes to allow for and acknowledge the needs which must be addressed in the integration of special needs children and the possible negative effect on all children meeting their potential.
- Students enrolled under funding support may initially succeed in primary schools where the class sizes are smaller (eg kindergarten 20), but by the time they are in Year 3 they can be part of a class where student numbers can exceed 30. This means that a teacher's time is further stretched dealing with the needs of the whole class.
- The Expectation that a classroom teacher may have a number of children with emotional, behavioural, physical or intellectual disabilities included in the r mainstream teaching load where a similar class may have no integrated or special need students, yet both teachers are required to provide quality teaching and be judged against student outcomes.
- Additional work load of integrating children with disabilities into mainstream.
- Successful management lessens the long term impact of a disability and reduces the amount of external assistance required.
- Equitable Education experience for all.
- Allowance needs to be made if a teacher at any level of the education system is required to provide teaching to a wider range of student abilities, and the support provided should reflect that it is going to take more time and create greater demands in the teacher's time, creativity and responsiveness.
- Our teachers require ongoing training, regular practical and theoretical reinforcement, and a support and consultation mechanism.
- We need to acknowledge and create strategies that address the fact that workload is a problem for teachers with integrated students and much of this is related to day-to-day care, assessments, preparation, individual learning programs, in addition to responding to the child's needs in class.
- Early intervention can reduce the impact of a disability and we believe that the system is not supporting as well as it could.
- Parents of neuro-typical children sometimes see inclusion as detrimental to their child's learning as the teacher's time and attention is split among students of differing ability.
- School communities need to see that their child is not being disadvantaged through the integration of students with disabilities and this can only be demonstrated through additional visible support.
- We do acknowledge that there have been a number of significant improvements in support of Special Education in NSW public schools in recent years however, there is still much to be done to provide an inclusive Public Education system to ensure that all students are being given a fair chance at achieving their full learning potential.

## **BACKGROUND STATEMENT SUPPORTING ITEM 10**

While the Regional Council is of the understanding that there is no official literature that at present identifies unflued gas heaters as negatively impacting on children's health it calls upon the immediate changes to heating in New South Wales government schools.

The state government through the portfolio's of Health and Education and Training has not been able to offer assurances that unflued gas heaters do not emit toxins into classroom environments. Current research being undertaken is looking to measure the possible emission levels of nitrox oxide, carbon dioxide, phermaldehyde and carbon monoxide to name a few. The Regional Council asserts that any possibility for children to be exposed to such air pollutants is untenable and hence the fuelling of all heaters should be addressed as a priority of the state government.

Regardless of research results the unflued heaters also require the room to be cross ventilated as a requirement by the Department of Education issued to all schools through Memorandum. The Regional Council finds the situation as proposed redundant where a school is experiencing extreme cold weather and is required to sufficiently ventilate a room. The actions appear to be contradictory and require protocols being correctly followed for successful heating with no discomfort experienced. The solution appears crude and would be alleviated with the fleuing of all gas heaters and enable safe environment standards across the state without being dependant on individual's being responsible for following guidelines.

## BACKGROUND STATEMENT SUPPORTING ITEM 11

It is felt that the Principal in primary schools of the enrolment size listed nowadays need this additional help in the running of the school.

Many parents in our school are unhappy with Assistant Principals frequently being taken off class to fill this role as it often means in reality that the class affected has a fragmented and disruptive teaching pattern, sometimes with a variety of class teachers.

Currently, only schools with an enrolment over 515 qualify for this non-teaching position and it is a Deputy Principal's position.

It is suggested that the following pro-rata schedule might provide this sought after assistance to our schools which could be provided at minimum cost to the Department of Education and Training

<b>Classification</b>	<b>Notional Enrolment</b>	<b>Executive Positions</b>
3A	301-420 PP3	3AP+1AP (0.4pw) NonT.
3B	421-450 PP3	4AP+1AP (0.6pw) NonT.
2A	451-515 PP2	3AP+1AP (0.8pw) NonT