

Facing the challenges head on

Fran Hinton heads the new National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership.

GUY HEALY | December 8, 2004
Campus Review

Inaugural National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL) chief executive, Fran Hinton, has acknowledged the "series of challenges" involved in moving the latest Howard government reforms forward and in establishing new national teaching standards, winning credibility among teachers and working with the states.

Hinton's appointment has been accompanied by a warning from a key union leader to avoid any "radical departure" on the new teaching standards being negotiated with state and territory registration bodies.

Hinton, a long-established educator is the former president-elect of the Australian College of Educators, who resigned the role to take on the top job of the new overarching body for the country's 400 teacher associations.

Hinton said she brings to the role a "strong commitment to quality of education and the role it plays in promoting social and economic development; enhancing professionalism; developing partnerships with the community and improving outcomes for individuals through better integration of services."

However, the former Federal education bureaucrat has a set of major challenges and balancing act confronting her as she seeks to guide the establishment of the contentious \$10 million new institute over the next eight months.

Hinton told Campus Review that the institute had been set up to advance the effectiveness and standing of the teaching profession in Australia and while "intended be an overarching body for the professional associations, would not to replace them."

"Our modus operandi will be 'for and by' the profession so we will be working with a range of professional associations in the area of school and teacher education," she said.

There were almost 400 different associations concerned with teaching and these – "for the most part" – had done a great job promoting the quality agenda, but they need to be trained, she said.

"The profession has to have influence in national policy issues, so the intention behind the institute is to give greater power to that voice ... in that sense it is really interesting move for the Federal Government to provide \$10 million in first instance," she said.

Recognising the challenge the institute faces in winning the respect of the profession, Hinton said: "Each of the different associations has put their voice

forward, and that has been heard to varying degrees in differing circumstances, but there are 255,000 teachers around the country and that represents a really extraordinary store of expertise and knowledge." She wants to work collaboratively and co-operatively to "communicate the views of the profession much more effectively."

But she has her work cut out for her.

It is believed that even though the teacher unions believe it was shortsighted to deny them seats on the institute's board, they regard its purpose as long overdue. Some senior observers believe that while the Minister supported the institute as giving a voice to teachers in a similar fashion to the Australian Medical Association, that it has effectively "cut unions out, unions who represent 225,000 teachers across the country."

Australian Education Union federal president, Pat Byrne, told Campus Review that the union was happy to have the employers represented on the institute's board, provided they were as well.

At present the representation of the unions - the AEU and the Independent Education Union - have been limited at the institute to the advisory council, although employers have a seat on the board but no vote.

Concerned at union disenfranchisement, Byrne said that for any reforms promoted by the institute to be successful, it was essential "that it have credibility in the eyes of the profession, or in the eyes of teachers. Both unions have a longstanding policy supporting a national professional body to enhance the standing of the profession, Byrne said.

Both unions were actively involved in the establishment of teacher registration authorities around the country and are considered valuable contributors. Byrne warned the profession and the states were already moving toward the establishment of national teaching standards or benchmarks describing the proper standards for an entry level teacher, promotion standards and exemplary teachers.

"There would be much concern if the new institute varied too much, if the new national standards (for teaching) were too radical a departure from what was already being negotiated," Byrne warned.

Australian College of Educators CEO, Cheryl O'Connor, told Campus Review there was "a lot of optimism around the table to co-operate and work hard to get a voice for teaching. Fran is a very clear thinking, determined leader with a very strong strategic focus."

Hinton began her career as a secondary teacher; and then spent considerable time in educational policy and administration with the Federal Government working in the areas of technical and further education, higher education and school education with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission and Department of Education. She was also CEO of ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services for eight years. She is also a Fellow of Australian College of Education, Fellow of Australian Institute of Management, Fellow Australian Council of Educational Leaders

and Member of University of Canberra Council and director of Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Asked what aspect of her career she was most proud of, Hinton said her role in the establishment of the Australian Principals' Association professional development council, which continued for many years.

Among the institute's first priorities are national standards for accomplished teachers, accreditation of those standards, "we have an agenda around professional learning, and we are starting to work linkages between universities and schools relating to student-teachers and practicums.

"Education is an area where there hasn't been enough research and enough integration of research evidence into practicums," she said.