



ParentACTion

The parent voice on public education

Term 2, 2015

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

Learn anywhere

The use of technology in schools has changed a lot in recent years. In this update, provided by the Education Directorate, we hear about online learning tools which the Directorate has provided to all ACT public schools.

Digital Learning opens up an exciting world of learning opportunities for your child. Students can use a range of technologies to access information, resources, software and tools that can support and enhance their learning activities. Familiarity with these technologies will allow students to develop the skills they will need when they enter the workforce.

Digital technologies also enable you, as parents and carers, to have greater involvement in your child's learning. Your child will be using technology both in the classroom and at home to connect and collaborate with their peers and to share their work with you, their teachers and other learners.

The use of digital technologies also enables your child to learn anywhere and at any time. Teachers will also have greater access to learning resources to develop their own skills and help them plan and provide activities.

The Education and Training Directorate (ETD) provides access to quality digital resources through its learning website: Digital Backpack. Your child can access thousands of educational resources from around the world including websites, videos, images, audio and more - all quality assured by teachers.

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Students can use their own tablet, or school devices, to access a huge range of educational resources on the school's fast, secure, online learning platform.

Photo courtesy Brad Flickinger:

www.flickr.com/photos/56155476@N08/6660076003

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Reflections of a very temporary teacher



From Council President, John Haydon

As the parents or carers of students in ACT government schools we are indirectly the consumers of education services provided by teachers. Normally there are differences in the interests of people who use a service and the people providing of the service. Oil companies, for example, want to sell us petrol so that they make the highest profit possible, whereas we want to buy the petrol at the lowest possible price.

But this sort of simple economic model doesn't always work and especially in education, one of the most complex 'services' available. The Australian Education Union represents the interests of teachers in government schools and while its policies and Council's don't always align, generally we see issues in a similar light. This is not a comment on any current industrial negotiations, but it has for a long time been Council's view that teachers should be better paid, with better working conditions and teaching regarded more highly as a profession in the community. We think this would ultimately result in our students getting a better quality education, and, not incidentally, be of great benefit to the country and future generations.

Since October last year I have been teaching English part-time to classes in a Spanish Government high school, and will finish in early June. It is my first experience of teaching in a school, although I have in the past given training courses for adults. Some things have struck me: first, teaching is not an easy job, especially when there are big differences in the levels of students. While much is made of 'differential learning' in ACT schools, in practice it is difficult to apply unless much of the instruction is course work done in small groups, and while that has its place there is also a place for the more traditional presentation of information by the teacher to the whole class.

The danger of having too rigid a curriculum is another thing that struck me. For example, one lesson I found myself and the class teacher with just two students – occasionally there are student strikes in Spain to protest education cutbacks and on this day all but these two students, in classes that tend to be around 20-25 students, had gone on strike. On the board was grammar from the previous class, describing the use of the 'passive voice' in English. With just two students we decided to just chat rather than have a formal lesson. One of the students was unable to understand or reply to a question about how many brothers and sisters she had. At this point in her studies the curriculum had her learning the passive voice, but a very simple question carefully put by a native English speaker was beyond her capacity.

So teachers need leeway to tailor things around a curriculum and I worry that in Australia the curriculum has become so packed that there is precious little leeway. This could also have the effect of reducing the autonomy of teachers and making the work less satisfying for them so that eventually they leave the profession, the profession becomes unpopular and a downward spiral ensues.

The third thing that has struck me is the difference between teachers. An education guru in Australia was once asked what you needed to be a teacher and his reply was that the first requirement was that you had to like young people. From observation I'd say that becoming a teacher when you do not like young people is a recipe for an unhappy life for the teacher, and in addition the students will soon detect it and detest you for it. A move to education administration is your best bet in this situation. I have no classroom experience in Australia but suspect it might be the same as in Spain.

The Spanish pride themselves on being a noisy lot, associating noise and gregariousness with a warm character, and being in the corridors at break time is probably damaging to hearing. This

can extend to noisy behavior in the classroom and the really excellent teachers, and there are many here, seem to be able to gently chide and shame them into paying attention and not distracting others. Other teachers, including myself at some times, resort to just shouting which means you just end up with a sore throat and it is all a bit counterproductive. I think we have to recognize that in the early years of high school especially it is difficult for many students to sit still and focus on the class work. We are asking them to do something fundamentally against their nature. I've met a researcher in physical education at the local university who is trying to incorporate movement into classroom learning, which sounds very worthwhile.

Because I'm in the North of Spain in a provincial city, the classes are entirely ethnic Spanish students, with the exception of one student from Columbia. Spain has had for 500 years, however, its own cultural minority, namely the 'Gitanos', sometimes translated as gypsy but also known as the Romani people. There are about one million Romani in a population of 46 million for the whole country. Since 1983, the government has operated a special program of 'Compensatory Education' to promote educational rights for the disadvantaged, including those in Romani communities. It is quite a sore point with some of the teachers that the Romani are paid to attend school but nonetheless rarely appear and in my limited experience are quite disruptive when they do. Despite the obvious problems Spain, according to Wikipedia, is still considered a model for integration of Romani communities when compared to other countries with significant populations in Eastern Europe. There are many issues in the world of course that are not given to easy resolution.

It seems to me as if the teaching staff feel less fully supported by management at the school than they would like to be. An example is that they seem to have events their classes must attend thrust on them at the last moment, disrupting their lesson plans. In other words,

internal communication at the school seems poor despite monthly meetings. This is just one school in another country half way around the world but it does point to how key the role of the principal is to the proper functioning of a school, and highlights that teachers are dealing with a complex environment of not only students but also parents, colleagues, school and departmental management.

English is compulsory for all at the school, as it is for all Spanish primary and high school students, in deference to the role of English as the world language, despite arguably more people in the world speaking Spanish than English. There are two streams, one where they are taught English as a foreign language and the other stream where they do science and physical education in English and get separate classes in English. The second stream has remarkably better knowledge of English indicating to me that having other subjects taught in another language (such as in Telopea Park School's French program) is a far better strategy for learning a language than standard language classes.

There are many similarities of course. Spain is a developed first world country and the school displays a 'rights and respect' framework similar to those I have seen in place in Australian schools. The teachers complain of the bugbear of marking papers and writing reports (especially arduous if for a disciplinary matter), work that they usually complete after hours. I think Council has to be mindful of the cost to teachers' time if reporting structures become overly complex.

So in summary, as we would expect, students are all different from each other, as are teachers, and trying to make us all fit a particular mould is a seriously challenging task.

Next term I hope to be writing about something happening in the Great Southern Land.

Until then, *adios*. ●

Learn anywhere

Continued from front page

Your child can discover, engage with and learn about subjects and ideas supporting their classroom activities and use the Digital Backpack to expand their learning by exploring new areas of interest.

Some of the terminology may be new to you. So here is a quick overview.

SchoolsNET – ETD’s secure computer network

All ACT public schools benefit from one of the highest speed education networks in Australia called SchoolsNET. Students are provided with a secure personal login that enables them to log into any public school computer. Students can also access the secure wireless network in any of our ACT public schools with the same username and password. They can also do this on their own device.

Digital Backpack

Our online learning platforms are provided in a portal called the Digital Backpack. The Backpack allows students to access their learning at school, at home, and through publicly available Wi-Fi on their own device.

The Backpack is only accessible by school users. Your child’s account is managed by ACT government identity systems providing enhanced security and a safe and supported online environment.

The Digital Backpack provides students with safe and secure access to a range of first-class, online learning platforms including the following.

Google Apps for Education

This is a cloud-based education platform offering online productivity tools for learning and classroom collaboration. The platform provides unlimited cloud storage for teachers and students. Student email is also provided.

Microsoft Office 365

The full Microsoft Office software suite is available online including online storage. Students can download the latest version of Office Pro Plus on five different personal devices.

eBooks in Oliver Library

There are currently 2499 eBooks and 225 Audio books available for students and teachers. Your child can borrow eBooks at school, home or anywhere on any device with an internet connection. Students can borrow up to five items at a time with a loan period of two weeks.

MyLearning (LIFE)

This online learning environment has a range of digital collaborative tools such as blogs, wikis and forums that are suitable for students. It is hosted internally under the supervision of teachers.

Cyber-safety help button

This provides students with cyber-safety information and resources on cyberbullying, unwanted contact, scams, fraud and offensive or inappropriate material.

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

ETD have achieved the appropriate balance of providing students with the technology and learning platforms they want to use, including tablets and phones, set up in a way that is safe and secure.

Protecting Privacy

The protection of your child’s personal information is a high priority. As a parent you are provided with information from your child’s school so you can make an informed choice prior to the service being enabled for your child.

Some services are only made available once the school has received your consent. Any online service that requires any personally identifiable information to be collected, disclosed or stored externally, must follow this process.

To find out more about how your child’s learning will be enhanced, visit the Learn Anywhere section of ETD’s website: www.det.act.gov.au. •

Zoe McMahon, Education & Training Directorate

Editor’s Note: If you have questions about how these technologies are being used in your school, contact your school, raise it at a P&C meeting or contact Council.

Get productive with ‘Doodle’

There are a variety of websites and online applications that P&Cs can use to help with their everyday operations and management.

Doodle

‘Doodle’ is first and foremost a timetabling and scheduling website (go to doodle.com). An event creator sends a link to participants asking them to add their availability in a pre-determined timesheet/calendar. It’s great for finding the most optimal committee meeting time or scheduling shifts for the sausage sizzle fundraiser.

Survey Monkey

If your P&C is looking to survey members of your community, then Survey Monkey is the website for you. Signing up (at www.surveymonkey.com) is free, after which you can fully customise a survey specific to your needs. Whether it’s about parental engagement and communication or finding out what foods could be included on your Canteen’s menu, Survey Monkey is up to the job.

Some P&Cs have even used it to get parents to nominate what times they can help at events in order to compile a roster (find an example on our web under ‘recruiting volunteers’). The collected data is provided in a highly accessible way so it’s simple and quick to compile and understand.

Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive

The popularity of cloud-based storage services has increased significantly in the past couple of years. Each of these act in much the same way in that a user signs up, for free, to access a virtual drive. This drive is password protected but can also be privately shared with other users. It’s an easy way to make sure all committee members have quick and easy access to your constitution, meeting agendas, minutes and so on. You can upload any file type, meaning photos and videos can be included as well. Drive users can be easily removed and added so it’s an easy way to ensure that documents and information do not fall through the cracks as your committee changes. ●

Collecting your views

Council’s role includes responding to a variety of government and non-government reports, lobbying government on behalf of public school communities and making statements to the media. To do this, it is necessary to have an agreed position on a wide range of topics so that Council can reflect, as accurately as possible, the collective views of parents. These agreed views are stated in Council’s Policy Document.

Lately Council has provided valuable input into a variety of education policies including: reporting student achievement, review of decisions, ‘bring your own device’ in schools and the supervision of students on school sites.

How is Council policy formulated?

Council policy is largely determined at the annual Policy Conference in August. In the months leading up to this, P&Cs are asked to consider Council’s policies and propose amendments or additions for discussion at the conference.

Where can I find Council’s policies?

Council’s policies are published annually in our Policy Document. All P&Cs should have a copy of this publication and it is available on our website. Should you require a hard copy, do not hesitate to contact Council’s office.

How can my P&C get involved?

It’s easy. Details regarding the 2015 Policy Conference have already been emailed to all P&C presidents, secretaries and delegates. Ask your P&C to consider the policies and discuss any appropriate amendments as soon as possible. There may be some issues which are not appropriately covered in Council policy or it may be appropriate to amend one or more of the current policies.

For more information or guidance, contact Maclaren Wall (Council’s Policy Officer) at mwall@actparents.org.au. ●

Equity in education: boosting economic growth and health

Trevor Cobbold, of Save Our Schools Australia, shows why business leaders and politicians alike must support Gonski school funding for our future prosperity and wellbeing.

The Gonski funding plan aims to improve equity in education by lifting school results for disadvantaged students. Several studies published in the last few months show that there are significant benefits associated with greater equity in education, making the need for Gonski funding more compelling than ever.

Economic growth

Two recently-published studies show that inequality in education is a significant factor affecting economic growth. They find that income inequality limits economic growth because low income families tend to under-invest in education, and that improving school outcomes of children of these families would increase workforce skills, productivity, incomes and economic output.

An OECD study published last December titled *Trends in Income Inequality and its Impact on Economic Growth* shows that the gap between rich and poor in OECD countries is now at its highest level in 30 years and it has significantly restricted economic growth. It says that the evidence strongly points to education as a central factor in how income inequality affects growth. Income inequality undermines education opportunities for disadvantaged individuals, lowering social mobility and hampering skills development.

It says that policy needs to confront the historical legacy of under-investment by low income groups in formal education:

“The evidence strongly suggests that high inequality hinders the ability of individuals from low economic background to invest in their human capital, both in terms of the level of

education but even more importantly in terms of the quality of education. This would imply that education policy should focus on improving access by low-income groups, whose educational outcomes are not only worse on average from those of middle and top income groups, but also more sensitive to increases in inequality.”

The second study, titled *Reducing Inequality in Education and Skills: Implications for Economic Growth*, was published in February by a think tank sponsored by the European Commission. It found that improving equity in education increases economic growth. It says that poorer parents are unable to invest adequately in their children’s education and this leads to lower levels of education in the next generation and therefore lower growth.

The study found evidence of high returns to increased education and skills for low socio-economic families across countries. The main return is the increased productivity and higher earnings:

“The main expected return to higher education and skills is the increased productivity that is made possible. Although socio-economic background is a strong predictor of educational attainment, the evidence reviewed here suggests that if economically disadvantaged individuals did acquire education and skills to equal their more advantaged peers, they would be (at least) similarly rewarded for their productivity – and thus contribute similarly to economic growth.”

It identified two approaches to reducing educational inequality. The first is to pursue redistributive policies and remove institutional mechanisms that discriminate against low income people (such as selective school admissions). The second is to use the most effective educational policies to directly improve the achievements of disadvantaged children, including targeted increases in funding as proposed under the Gonski funding plan.

The study concluded that the important priority is that:

Policies should be developed with the needs of the most disadvantaged students in mind (and not only the average student) because this is the way to both reduce inequality and achieve economic growth.”

Another study published in the *Journal of Economic Surveys* found that more education and higher quality education reduces income inequality. This study analysed the result of 64 statistical studies of the relationship between education and income inequality. It found that that the number of years of schooling and educational attainment at secondary school are significant factors affecting income inequality.

Health and wellbeing

A recent Australian study in the journal *Social Science and Medicine* also shows that extending the years of education improves health outcomes. It shows that more education improves people's diet and their tendency to have more regular exercise but not necessarily to avoid risky health behaviours such as smoking. The results imply that increasing the proportion of students, particularly low SES students, who complete Year 12 will have a positive effect on health outcomes.

These recent studies have important implications for education policy in Australia. The incidence of low education and poor health are strongly associated with socio-economic background.

According to the latest Report on Government Services, 32 per cent of low socio-economic status (SES) students, 32 per cent of remote area students and 59 per cent of very remote area students did not complete Year 12 in 2013 compared to 21 per cent of high SES students. In addition, the latest NAPLAN results show gaps of three to four years in learning between low and high SES students.

According to a report by the National Centre for

Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), the most socio-economically disadvantaged are twice as likely to have a long-term health condition and will die on average three years earlier than the most affluent. The 2011-12 National Health Survey shows that low SES people and those living in remote areas are more likely to engage in risky health behaviours such as smoking, not exercising, and being overweight and/or obese.

Gonski is imperative

Increasing the education outcomes of low SES and other disadvantaged children would not only increase their life chances and their health but would also reduce income inequality and increase economic growth.

The Gonski school funding plan is directed at increasing the school outcomes of disadvantaged students in both public and private schools. The findings of these recent studies suggest that the refusal of the Federal Government and several state governments, including the new Victorian Government, to commit to the plan is likely to see education and health disadvantage continue which, in turn, will restrict future productivity growth and national economic prosperity by denying the opportunity to improve workforce skills. It also denies governments the opportunity to improve the fiscal balance and reduce long-term expenditures associated with low educational and health outcomes.

The findings further suggest that it is in the interests of the business community to support the full implementation of the Gonski plan. It is about time for business organisations to get on board to support Gonski instead of advocating reduced government expenditure and public services. ●

Trevor Cobbold

Trevor is a life member of Council, and the National Convenor of Save Our Schools.
See www.saveourschools.com.au.

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One Prize Package Example- \$5000 value

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| 2 nd | Rydges Deluxe Indulgence | Value \$295 |
| 3 rd | 1/2hr Flight Simulator Experience SYD/MELB | Value \$175 |
| 4 th | Bag World voucher | Value \$150 |
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**Glennaeon School P&F
raised \$5655 in 3 weeks**

**Strathmore Secondary
College raised \$2000**

**Tarremah School P&F
raised \$3200**

(All schools used donated prizes)

Sporting Schools

ACT primary schools are being urged to register for the Federal Government's new Sporting Schools program to help set up before, during and after school sports activities.

Australian Sports Commission CEO, Simon Hollingsworth said the \$100 million Sporting Schools program is about to open up the funding round for *registered* primary schools.

"Sporting Schools is about nurturing the next generation's lifelong love of sport and the benefits this brings, especially for developing social skills, fitness levels and cognitive skills," Mr Hollingsworth said.

"ACT schools are already flagging an interest in a variety of sports, among them cycling, orienteering, soccer, softball and cricket.

"Registering is easy via the Sporting School's website and once completed, schools can access online resources and materials to deliver tailored sport programs," Mr Hollingsworth said.

Upon registering:

- schools need to nominate a coordinator to keep up to date on the program
- the website portal offers a 'find a local coach or coaching provider' service to find approved coaches
- schools can choose sporting programs.

Teachers can also register individually to receive access to coaching plans and tools to help them plan and run activities outside of Sporting Schools practical sessions.

More information on Sporting Schools can be found online at www.sportingschools.gov.au. •

Online support for P&Cs

Continued from back page

Tools for promoting your P&C

We have also created materials for you to promote your P&C to your parents and school community. We have a brochure template, outlining the role of the P&C and benefits of being involved, ready for you to customise and distribute to parents. The Education Directorate have also approved a letter for school enrolment packs which introduces the P&C to new parents and collects email addresses to add to your mailing list, if you have one.

Information on grants

A new page on our website contains hints and tips for writing good grant applications. We have also provided some samples of past successful applications for you to have a look at.

There is also a growing list of grants available to schools or P&Cs (please tell us of more to add).

Meeting templates

If your P&C meetings are well run, it will

encourage people to come. A good place to start is a well-structured agenda, so we have several examples which show how to use timing points and agenda attachments to keep your meeting on track. By putting detail in agenda attachments, you make sure parents coming are informed and ready to all begin a fruitful discussion from a shared starting point. Our agenda and minute templates are ready for you to customise for your own needs. Also we've just added an outline to help P&C presidents create their President's Report for the Annual General Meeting.

To find all these resources, and much more, head to our website and chose 'Resources' from the 'Help for P&Cs' tab.

Our aim is to make life easier for our member P&Cs, so please let us know if there are other resources you need (contact the Communication Officer: jkennard@actparents.org.au) and, as always, our office is available to answer queries not covered by our online resources. •

At our P&C...

There has been a revolution in the canteen at Majura Primary, explains P&C volunteer Stefanie Pidcock.

Hands up if this sounds familiar?

- school canteen needing significant subsidy to stay operating
- struggling to increase the proportion of 'green' food and drinks while maintaining canteen viability
- lack of continuity in canteen oversight leading to administrative inconsistency
- lack of sufficient numbers of volunteers to support canteen operations.

Over the last two years that I have spent on the Majura Primary School P&C Association Executive Committee, these points have been a recurring theme with parents I've spoken to from other schools.

Majura Primary was no exception, with three paid staff, many 'amber' foods and drinks on the menu, a dearth of volunteers and an annual operating deficit that reached between \$15,000 and \$20,000 in 2013! In addition, the governance of the canteen had incrementally deteriorated as committee members changed and people moved on.

Last year, the parents at the school decided things needed to change. But change to what? And how would we make it happen?

To build the case for change, the P&C committee did two things: a forensic analysis of income and costs for the canteen; and an online survey of parents and carers about the use of the canteen and views on quality, price, and what they'd like to see in a canteen service. We had around a quarter of families respond to our survey.

We found that the vast majority of orders were made on Thursdays and Fridays, with a very small number on Mondays and Tuesdays. We also got insight into views around quality and prices of food, and whether there was untapped



Making the canteen financially viable while serving healthy food is a problem faced by many P&Cs. A comprehensive business review can help point the right direction.

capacity for more volunteers in the parent/carer community.

The next step was to enlist the expertise of the Healthy Kids' Association (HKA) to do a full business review and make recommendations to the school community on how we could bring our operations into closer alignment with demand, as well as to a break-even position. HKA is the peak body for school canteens in the ACT, and as part of the membership fees, they offer one comprehensive business review. We would recommend this service to any school looking to improve their canteen operations, as it really helped us see a path to prosperity.

HKA's recommendations were radical: close down the canteen service, revise staffing levels and roles, re-open at a significantly reduced capacity (operating only Thursdays and Fridays) and move completely to online ordering. The analysis showed that these measures would bring us into the black, while fully meeting the demand stated through the canteen survey.

Has it worked? Yes it has, although we're not out of the woods yet.

Our canteen now breaks even, and we have had no decline in order numbers. The menu is almost

About us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations
is the representative body for
Parent & Citizen Associations in the ACT.

We represent over 60,000 parents and carers
in 85 ACT public schools.

About our magazine

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sought. Contributions can be emailed directly to the Editor,
Janelle Kennard, at jkennard@actparents.org.au.*

*Views expressed in this journal are not necessarily those of
the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations.*

Our Executive

President:	John Haydon
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Secretary:	Cecilia Shlegel
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Ian Morgan, Pam Cahir, Graeme Evans, Joan Kellett,
Richard Scherer, Trevor Cobbold, Grant Battersby.

Contact us

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations Inc.

a Maitland House
100 Maitland Street
Hackett ACT 2602

t (02) 6241 5759
f (02) 6241 8839
e contact@actparents.org.au
w www.actparents.org.au

Office staff

Executive Officer: Terry Sanders
Policy Officer: Maclaren Wall
Communications Officer: Janelle Kennard
Executive Assistant: Sulenna Nicholson

Office hours: 9.30am - 2.30pm Monday to Friday.
Closed public holidays and school holidays.

totally 'green', with only two 'amber' menu items. Feedback from parents and carers is overwhelmingly positive. Flexischools allows us to monitor exactly what and how much is being ordered, giving us invaluable data with which to manage the finances.

We are still fiddling at the margins with pricing and some of our systems for managing contingencies, but it's working.

There are two on-going issues we are still striving to solve: the first is getting sufficient volunteers; the second is dedicated canteen oversight by volunteer parents or carers.

This term, we have instigated a roster system, whereby a class is allocated to each operating day of the canteen. That class is required to supply one or more volunteers on that day. We have also called for a canteen coordinator to oversee the canteen operations and provide a contact point for the canteen manager. Up until this point, the P&C Executive Committee has managed the business, which is beyond their on-going capacity.

Success in these two initiatives are necessary to keep the canteen operating.

In conclusion, running a school canteen is exactly the same as running a small business. It is not a simple task, and requires financial management, operational management and staff management. The only reason to do it is when enough parents and carers want it. However, 'wanting it' must be backed up by supporting it through volunteer efforts as well as ordering lunches. ●

Editor's Note: Council pays membership to the Healthy Kids' Association for all ACT P&Cs so that they can take advantage of services such as the business review.

Dates to remember

22-29 May Public Education Week

26 May Council General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

23 June Council Hot Topics/General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

6-17 July Council office closed for term break

25 Aug Policy Conference /Council General Meeting
7.00pm - 9.30pm
Centre for Teaching and Learning
51 Fremantle Drive, Stirling

Online support for P&Cs

Head to Council's website to find loads of resources to make your role on the P&C easier.

As a volunteer on your school P&C, your time is limited and precious. To help out, we have huge range of resources which you can access on the Council website: www.actparents.org.au.

Our hope is to save each of our 85 P&Cs across the ACT from reinventing the wheel, and to share expertise across our members. Below is a quick rundown of some of the resources available – many new or updated. If you have resources you would like to see, or things you could share, please let us know at the Council office.

Better information sheets

We have just finished updating and extending our extensive range of information sheets. These cover many topics and answer many questions which P&Cs have, from licencing requirements for fundraising, to employing staff, or running effective meetings. There are new sheets on growing your P&C, recruiting volunteers, using social media, and the Working With Vulnerable People checks. Many other sheets have been updated with new details and we have improved the indexing and cross-referencing so that you can more easily find the information you are looking for.

The information sheets can be found on our website, but we are also happy to provide P&Cs



Our website has an extensive range of resources for P&Cs which is growing all the time.

with a printed set, or a copy on CD or USB drive. Simply contact us.

Template handover notes

Give your successor on the P&C a head-start and retain P&C corporate knowledge with an informative set of handover notes. We have developed some templates for presidents and secretaries which list the basics of the job and show what information to cover when handing over. They are ready to be tailored to your own needs and passed on to new committee members each year.

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