



Communiqué

Today's meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education marks the start of a new era of collaboration between Commonwealth, state and territory education and training ministers. All governments are now working together to improve education and training in Australia, building on significant state and territory achievement. Ministers welcomed this new approach which replaces the ad-hoc approach that has marked recent years.

Ministers have affirmed their shared goal of building a world-class education and training system in Australia and have today signed up to an historic agreement on priorities and plan of action for early childhood education, schooling and vocational education and training.

Australian students need to be able to compete with the best and brightest in the world in terms of educational achievement. We need world-class schools, principals and teachers who can deliver the broader social objectives of schooling in overcoming disadvantage, equipping all young people with the skills to participate actively in society and supporting them to achieve their potential. This will also help ensure that Australia maintains a competitive economy and secure our long-term productivity and prosperity.

Key outcomes from the meeting were:

Developing a new declaration on the future of schooling in Australia

MCEETYA agreed to the development of a new Declaration on the National Goals for Schooling in Australia to be released later in 2008. This new Declaration will update the historic Adelaide Declaration made in 1999 and reaffirm the importance of national collaboration to promote high-quality schooling for all Australian students. Ministers also agreed to hold a biennial national forum to showcase best practice, innovation and excellence in schooling, to provide opportunities for educational reform and innovative practice to be shared across the nation. The first forum is planned for later this year.

Implementing the Digital Education Revolution

Ministers strongly supported the Digital Education Revolution as a key strategic tool in achieving a revolutionary improvement in Australia's education and training to world class standards. They noted that widespread access to, and effective use of, ICT in Australia's education and training sectors has the capacity to create opportunities to transform learning and teaching environments that can improve education outcomes and increase social and economic participation across Australia. Ministers agreed to the Communiqué Attachment A setting out their views on the need for flexible approaches to implement the Digital Education Revolution.

Taking forward the COAG Agenda

Ministers confirmed the importance of the aspirations, outcomes and targets agreed to by COAG on 26 March 2008 (see Attachment B). Ministers noted the substantial reform of Commonwealth, state and territory financial arrangements through specific purpose payments and national partnership payments.

The COAG reform agenda will provide every Australian – from birth throughout their working life – with early learning, education and training so they can reach their full potential. Together, all Australians can be part of reducing individual disadvantage and lifting national wealth. The reform agenda aspires for every Australian to have a place in an equitable society and a skilled workforce.

The reforms will make a difference to the lives of students, parents and working families by providing early and better opportunities for all children, better quality teaching and training, higher workforce participation and a higher skilled and more flexible workforce.

National partnership arrangement on low socio-economic school (SES) communities

Ministers noted that increasing investment in low SES school communities is an important step in giving all children the skills needed to participate in an increasingly global society. They welcomed the COAG agreement to develop a national partnership agreement focused on the particular educational needs of low SES school communities, as part of the national education funding agreement to be introduced at the beginning of 2009.

Education Ministers will have a central role in the development of a national partnership on low SES school communities, including working together to identify priority students, schools and communities.

To this end, Ministers today agreed to support the development of some pilot initiatives focusing on literacy and numeracy in low SES school communities by the end of 2008. These trials will help inform the development of a National Partnership payment to address disadvantage in low SES school communities.

To ensure that this partnership reaches all children in greatest need, Ministers affirmed the importance of involving the non-government schools sector.

Ministers noted that disengagement and low achievement at school are strong predictors of lifelong socio-economic disadvantage with students from low SES backgrounds tending to be concentrated in poorer performing schools. This has a cumulative impact on the educational attainment of these students with poor education performance tending to result in them leaving school at an earlier age and with poorer results.

National partnership arrangement for quality teaching

Education ministers noted the crucial difference which quality teaching makes to the educational outcomes of students. It was also noted that the Productivity Agenda Working Group of COAG has identified quality teaching as a key priority area to address to improve the quality of Australian education and contribute to the productive capacity of Australia.

Ministers recommended that the Productivity Agenda Working Group should develop a proposal for a national partnership payment in the area of quality teaching for First Ministers' consideration.

A key objective of the proposed national partnership agreement should be to stimulate reforms which will address issues associated with:

- the quality of pre-service education and related preparatory mechanisms
- incentives to address inadequate supply of teachers in specialised areas
- the quality of entrants to the teaching profession
- the status of the profession

- rewards, incentives and career structures capable of attracting and retaining quality teachers, including in early years of employment
- attracting quality teachers to work in difficult to staff schools.

Ministers noted that to assist in the development of the proposed national partnership agreement the Commonwealth will provide funding of \$400,000 for research to inform a national partnership about effective ways to reward quality teaching.

It was further agreed that as a starting point for addressing the issue of the status of the profession, interested jurisdictions will conduct jointly a campaign to raise the status of teaching, with the Commonwealth to contribute fifty percent of the costs of the campaign. Ministers also agreed to work together to inform students of incentives available for them to undertake maths, science and early childhood teaching courses and to enter the profession.

A new approach to early childhood

Ministers agreed that early childhood education and care is an important strategic priority for Australia and that early childhood reform is essential for Australia's future prosperity. They welcomed the aspiration of the Prime Minister that by 2020 all families will have access to parent and child centres that provide a one-stop-shop for early childhood services.

Ministers affirmed the COAG commitment to provide all Australian children with access to a quality pre-school program for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling. They also recognised that achieving outcomes for children requires a whole of government approach, embracing education, child care and support for parents and families. To this end, they have agreed to hold satellite meetings of MCEETYA bringing together Ministers with responsibility for early childhood to harness the intensive collaboration required at all levels to achieve improved outcomes for children.

Reducing Indigenous education disadvantage

Improving educational outcomes is essential to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. Ministers strongly endorsed the COAG Indigenous education targets, including all remote Indigenous four year olds having access to a quality early childhood education program; halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade; and at least halving the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020.

These COAG targets will require Ministers to fully implement the strategies agreed in *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*. They will require strong and sustained effort by all governments. Ministers agreed that they will develop a new four year action plan to support the delivery of the COAG targets.

Skills reform

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to progressing further reform of the vocational education and training sector to enhance its flexibility and responsiveness, improve access to skills for all Australians and strengthen the performance of the national training system.

Ministers affirmed the importance of the COAG commitment to a participation and productivity agenda, skills and workforce development reforms and targets. They

recognised the importance of increasing the uptake of vocational qualifications for those Australians who do not currently hold formally recognised skills and the need to increase the proportion of the workforce with the capability at higher level skills qualifications.

Ministers also acknowledged the vital importance of vocational education and training in providing the skills needed for Australia's economy. The national training system needs to be positioned to meet the complex demand for skills created by the loss of skills from those retiring or leaving the workforce, and the growth in demand for higher level vocational qualifications.

Ministers noted the importance of Skills Australia and the central role it will play in analysing current and emerging skills needs across industry sectors to inform the Government on current and future demand for skills and training.

Ministers also noted that in providing relevant information on skills issues, to target priority skills needs areas, and to better understand the workforce development needs of Australian industry, Skills Australia will also:

- commission research and consult with stakeholders and inform entrepreneurs, businesses and workers to assist them to pursue training
- recommend future skills needs to inform priorities for government investment in skills and advise on reforms to the training sector
- establish relationships with relevant state bodies to take into account the skill priorities in their jurisdictions.

Skills Australia will contribute to the shaping of priorities across different levels and instruments of government, including COAG and MCVTE, to help build a national response to skills shortages and the productivity issues that flow from them.

Attachment A

Computers in schools

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs agreed at its meeting today that it strongly supports the Digital Education Revolution as a key strategic tool in achieving world class standards in Australia's education and training.

MCEETYA welcomed progress in rolling out the first round of the National Secondary School Computer Fund which will transform students' access to computers in Australia's neediest schools. The Council acknowledged that the Rudd Labor Government's plan to allow savings from the \$1,000 unit cost achieved through bulk purchasing arrangements for computers to be spent on their effective deployment would make a significant contribution to the successful implementation of the National Secondary School Computer Fund.

MCEETYA strongly supported collaboration across sectors and jurisdictions to realise the benefits of collaborative ICT purchasing arrangements and also welcomed the Rudd Government's agreement to build in flexibility in funding agreements to support timely rollout of computers consistent with jurisdictional ICT plans.

MCEETYA agreed to support bilateral negotiations for the further implementation of the Digital Education Revolution and in particular the future roll-out of the National Secondary School Computer Fund, taking into account the need to ensure equitable distribution over the life of the program.

MCEETYA also agreed to work collaboratively with the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group to develop the next steps in implementing the Digital Education Revolution including:

- the development of a Strategic Plan to guide the implementation of the Digital Education Revolution as a whole, ensuring all elements of the Revolution are focussed on improving educational outcomes for Australian students
- development of agreed arrangements for next phase of the National Secondary School Computer Fund
- planning for the provision of fibre-to-the-premises connections in schools and enabling access to on-line curriculum, language services and web portals for parents.

The Council also agreed to a revised charter for its Australian ICT in Education Committee (AICTEC) to allow it to undertake the work to develop a shared vision and strategic plan for the Digital Education Revolution.

MCEETYA also noted that in March this year COAG acknowledged that the Commonwealth election commitments have legitimate and additional financial implications for the states and territories and that consideration of these costs will be included as an addition to the work of Treasurers in the final determination of the new generation Specific Purpose Payments at year's end.

MCEETYA also agreed to explore the opportunities for smaller states to adopt a shared approach to buying computer equipment for schools. This could involve reaching agreement on detailed specifications for equipment tailored to the needs of schools and negotiating price reductions based on higher volumes for agreed types of devices.

Attachment B

Productivity Agenda Working Group—Education, Skills, Training and Early Childhood Development

Outcomes, Progress Measures and Policy Directions

12 March 2008

Introduction

The Productivity Commission has established a clear evidence based link between investment in the human capital of Australians and increased productivity and participation. In February 2007 the Productivity Commission found that early childhood, education, skills and workforce development policies could boost participation by 0.7 percentage points, and productivity by up to 1.2 per cent by 2030. This corresponds to an increase in GDP of around 2.2 per cent, or around \$25 billion in today's dollars.

This report provides an explanation and support for the outcomes, progress measures and policy directions document developed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory members of the Productivity Agenda Working Group (PAWG) and its three sub-groups in Early Childhood Development, Schooling and Skills and Workforce Development.

This work brings together election commitments from the new Commonwealth Government and existing effort from all jurisdictions. The Commonwealth, States and Territories are committed to working together to continue their reform efforts and build on these foundations.

The Policy Framework

Working together, Governments have the opportunity to optimise long term investments in the productivity and participation of Australians. A first step towards the collaborative approach that is required is to agree on a shared policy framework, so that we harness the many contributions that jurisdictions can offer through this and other processes, and draw on the strengths of our federal system of government, including diversity, flexibility and innovation.

The table below sets out the general framework which has guided the work of the PAWG and its sub-groups. This framework draws on the agreement reached at COAG on 20 December 2007 and the policy logic agreed under the National Reform Agenda (NRA).

The framework has six components:

Component	Purpose	Example
1. Aspirations	Describe our overarching aspirations	"That children are born healthy and have access to the support, care and education throughout early childhood that equips them for life and learning, delivered in a way that actively engages parents, and meets the workforce participation needs of parents."
2. Outcomes	Describe more specific aspirations for change	"All children have access to affordable, quality early childhood education in the year before formal schooling"
3. Indicative Progress measures	Provide the ability to measure our performance against the agreed outcomes	"Proportion of four year olds accessing early childhood education"
4. Targets	Set specific targets agreed by COAG	"Universal access to early learning for all four year olds by 2013"

Component	Purpose	Example
5. Commonwealth election commitments	Implementation of the Commonwealth's announced election commitments	"Universal access to early learning for all four year olds for at least 15 hours per week, 40 weeks per year"
6. Policy directions	Describe a broad area of policy effort which evidence suggests will have a significant impact on the attainment of specified outcomes	"Enhancing and integrating the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care services"

The PAWG has met on three occasions, with detailed work being undertaken through the early childhood development (ECD), schooling and skills and workforce development sub-groups. The PAWG has agreed on the six components listed above and outlined in more detail later in this report. More detailed discussion is required on some of the technical issues raised by the progress measures.

The function of the policy directions is to set challenging new goals for collaborative national reform and directions and to ensure that flexibility at the jurisdictional level is coupled with a logical and evidence-based approach that clearly links up to the agreed outcomes.

In the next phase of its work, the PAWG (with the assistance of its three sub-groups) will need to develop priority reform areas and actions which translate the framework set out in this document into more concrete reforms and may need to refine the progress measures.

This agenda should take into account gaps and shortfalls in existing Commonwealth and State/Territory initiatives, recognising that jurisdictions are already doing a great deal in some areas.

Specific reform strategies should then be developed for each identified reform area, including plans for use of National Partnership (NP) Payments and other mechanisms.

Over time the impact of the reform initiatives to boost productivity and participation will need to be reviewed and, potentially, the Policy and Reform Framework will need to be modified to take this into account.

Early Childhood Development

Introduction

The Case for Change

Early childhood is the foundation for the development of the skills necessary for future workplace productivity. Ensuring that all children enjoy their childhood and grow up prepared for adult life is also critical to social inclusion. A focus on early childhood development, education and care will facilitate future workforce participation, combat intergenerational disadvantage and help reconcile work and family responsibilities.

The OECD and UNESCO stress the importance of access to quality early childhood education. Compelling evidence from a range of disciplines emphasises the critical importance of the early years to human capital development. In particular:

- The developing brain—the early years have the most critical impact on cognitive, social, emotional and physical development.

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- Family environment and child development—a stimulating, responsive and positive family environment is necessary for a child’s social, emotional and intellectual development.
 - Effects of disadvantage on child development—quality early years experiences will reduce the effects of disadvantage before they become entrenched.
 - Economics of human capital formation—interventions to support development in early childhood can reduce the effects of disadvantage by increasing educational attainment, reducing crime and promoting later workforce productivity.

UNESCO’s work also highlights the importance of antenatal care in supporting early childhood development. Healthier outcomes at birth provide a stronger foundation for later cognitive development as well as life-long health, generating real productivity impacts over time.

Providing children with the best start in life requires a partnership between parents, carers and government. Parents and carers need support from a comprehensive service system that responds effectively to their needs. It is also critical that the experiences of children in formal care settings make a positive contribution to learning and development, in particular for the most vulnerable. Access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services is also essential to enable parents and carers to participate in work or training.

Aspirations

A focus on reform of early childhood health and development, both in formal education and care settings and elsewhere, offers significant scope to increase productivity, participation and social inclusion. Critical facets of the required change include:

That children are born healthy and have access to the support, care and education throughout early childhood that equips them for life and learning, delivered in a way that actively engages parents, and meets the workforce participation needs of parents.

Commonwealth Election Commitments

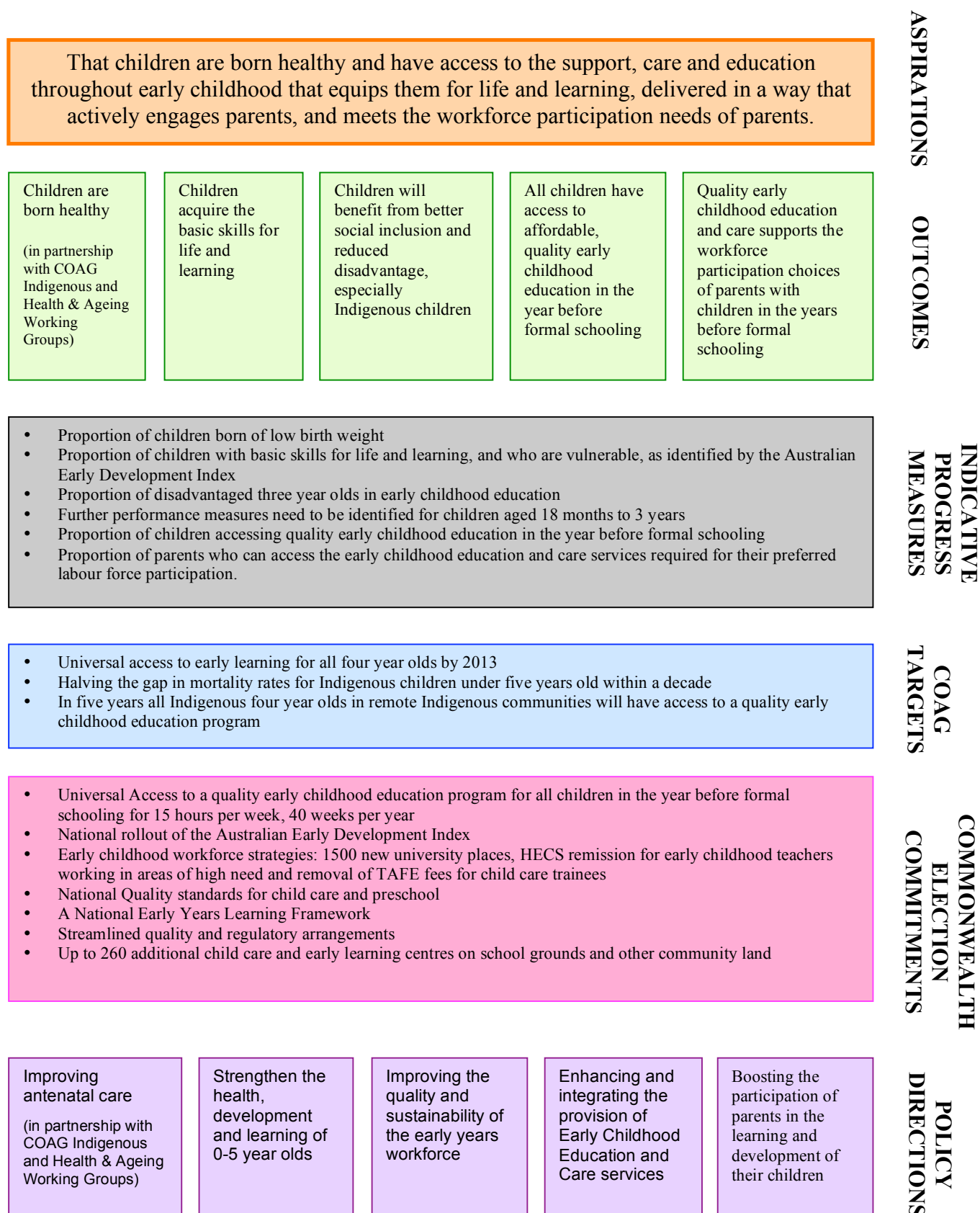
Key Commonwealth policies which support these priority reform areas include:

- universal access to a quality early childhood education program for all children in the year before formal schooling for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks per year, in a diversity of settings, at a cost which is not a barrier to parents and a specific focus on remote Indigenous four year olds
- national rollout of the Australian Early Development Index
- early childhood workforce strategy: 1500 new university places for early childhood teachers; HECS remission for early childhood teachers working in areas of high need; and removal of TAFE fees for child care trainees
- national quality standards for child care and preschool
- a National Early Years Learning Framework
- streamlined quality and regulatory arrangements
- up to 260 new child care and early learning centres on school grounds and other community land.

Related commitments include:

- Home Interaction Program for 3-5 year olds in disadvantaged communities
 - increase in the Child Care Tax Rebate to 50%
 - new Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Guidelines
 - the Healthy Kids Check for four year olds
 - improved early years services for Indigenous children.
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Proposed Policy Framework



Schooling

Introduction

The Case for Change

On average, and compared with other OECD countries, Australia's students are going well at school. The OECD's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for 2006 show that the average performance of our 15 year olds continues to be significantly better than the OECD average. However, the period between 2003 and 2006 saw Australia decline in both its absolute and relative performance in reading literacy, and its relative performance in mathematical literacy.

Low levels of literacy and numeracy have a particularly devastating effect on future educational attainment. Lower literacy and numeracy skills in Year 9 have been associated with lower engagement in school, lower retention to Year 12, lower tertiary entrance scores and less successful transitions from school.¹ We are also in the bottom half of OECD countries for the percentage of the post school population attaining upper secondary school level qualifications of Year 12, or its equivalent.

We should also be concerned that we continue to have a "long tail" of struggling students. The PISA results indicate that over the last six years we have not brought down the percentage of students who are less than proficient at reading or maths.

Finally, Australia still needs to reduce the impact of disadvantage on educational outcomes. After many years of inertia², we have recently had some success on this front, with the effect of socioeconomic status declining since 2003.³ Clearly more needs to be done, however. Inequality attributable to socioeconomic factors remains too high, and Indigenous students continue to be more than two and a half years, on average, behind non-Indigenous students.

The work of the Council for the Australian Federation in *The Future of Schooling in Australia* provides a good platform for taking work forward on this agenda.

Aspirations

That all Australian school students acquire the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in society and employment in a globalised economy.

Commonwealth Election Commitments

Key Commonwealth policies which support these priority reform areas include:

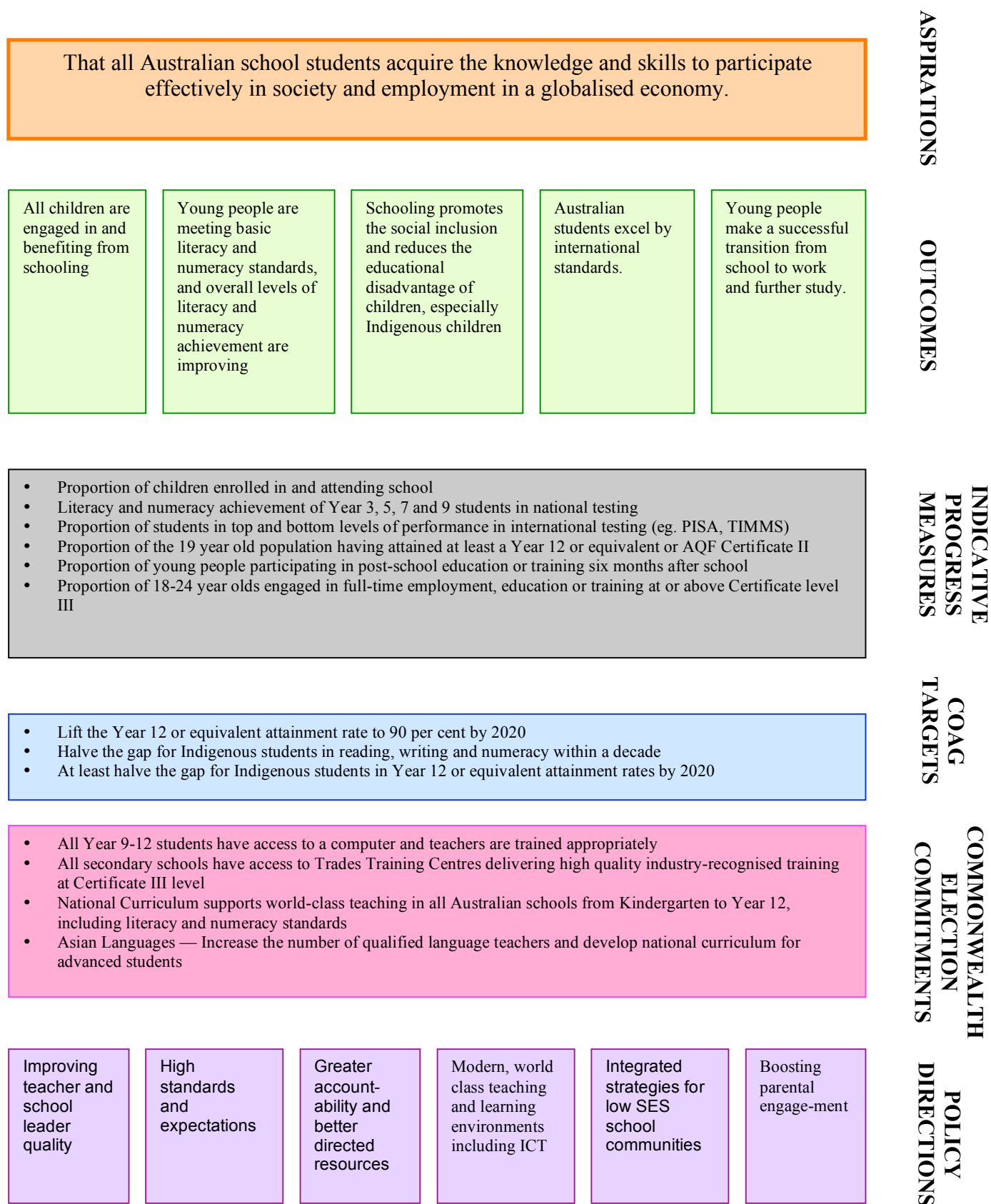
- All Year 9-12 students have access to a computer and teachers are trained appropriately
- All secondary school students have access to Trades Training Centres delivering high quality industry recognised training with a priority for Certificate III training
- National Curriculum supports world-class teaching in all Australian schools from Kindergarten to Year 12, including literacy and numeracy standards
- Asian Languages — Increase the number of qualified language teachers and develop national curriculum for advanced students.

¹ Rothman, S. and G McMillan (2003), *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, ACER.

² Differences in social background had as much impact in 1998 as they did in 1975 (see *The Future of Schooling in Australia*, Revised Edition (September 2007)).

³ OECD PISA results, 2006.

Proposed Policy Framework



Skills and Workforce Development

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Case for Change

The Australian economy is facing significant challenges to its economic growth and prosperity. The economy is operating in a more competitive and changing environment; medium term forecasts predict productivity growth is unlikely to continue; the demographic profile is changing; and businesses are finding it difficult to access skilled workers.

Increased investment in skills training drives workforce participation and productivity. The Productivity Commission in 2007 cited studies which found that an additional year of education may raise the level of productivity by between about 3 and 6 per cent for a country with Australia's current average education level (OECD 2003a). Data from the ABS Survey of Education & Work (2005) shows that labour force participation for people with degrees and skills is about 10 percentage points higher for every age group compared to people with no post school qualifications.

Increasing the skills level of the population will, over time, expand the supply capacity of the economy, strengthen prospects for future growth and help to reduce inflationary pressures like those the economy is currently experiencing.

4.1.2 Aspirations

All working aged Australians have the opportunity to develop the skills and qualifications needed, including through a responsive training system, to enable them to be effective participants in and contributors to the modern labour market.

Individuals are assisted to overcome barriers to education, training and employment, and are motivated to acquire and utilise new skills.

Australian industry and businesses develop, harness and utilise the skills and abilities of the workforce.

4.1.3 Commonwealth Election Commitments

Key Commonwealth policies which support these priority reform areas include:

- Integration of Australian Technical Colleges into broader trade training arrangements.
 - 450,000 additional training places over the next four years:
 - Over 90% at Certificate III or above
 - Establish Skills Australia to advise the Government
 - Greater involvement of Industry Skills Councils.
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4.2 Proposed Policy Framework

<p>All working aged Australians have the opportunity to develop the skills and qualifications needed, including through a responsive training system, to enable them to be effective participants in and contributors to the modern labour market. Individuals are assisted to overcome barriers to education, training and employment, and are motivated to acquire and utilise new skills.</p> <p>Australian industry and businesses develop, harness and utilise the skills and abilities of the workforce.</p>						ASPIRATIONS
<p>The working age population have gaps in foundation skills levels reduced to enable effective educational, labour market and social participation</p>	<p>The working age population has the depth and breadth of skills and capabilities required for the 21st century labour market</p>	<p>The supply of skills provided by the national training system responds to meet changing labour market demand</p>	<p>Skills are used effectively to increase labour market efficiency, productivity, innovation, and ensure increased utilisation of human capital</p>	OUTCOMES		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Literacy and numeracy achievement of working age people in national and international testing• Proportion of 20-64 year old with or working towards the post school qualifications in:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Certificate III and Certificate IV- Diploma and Advanced Diploma• Level and proportion of total investment in structured (including nationally recognised) training by industry, individuals, businesses and governments• Proportion of graduates employed after completing training• Extent of skills shortages, recruitment difficulties and labour market vacancies• Proportion of people employed at or above the level of their qualification						INDICATIVE PROGRESS MEASURES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Halve the proportion of Australians aged 20 -64 without qualifications at Certificate III and above between 2009 and 2020.• Double the number of higher qualification completions (diploma and advanced diploma) between 2009 and 2020.						COAG TARGETS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integration of Australian Technical Colleges into broader trade training arrangements• 450,000 additional training places over the next four years<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Over 90% at Certificate III or above- Establish Skills Australia to advise the Government- Greater involvement of Industry Skills Councils						COMMONWEALTH ELECTION COMMITMENTS
<p>Placing clients (individuals and businesses) at the centre of the system</p>	<p>Reforming training products, services, information systems and regulation to meet a more demand and client driven system</p>	<p>Driving further competition in current training arrangements and strengthening capacity of providers and businesses to build the foundation and deeper and broader skills required by the 21st century labour market</p>	<p>Creating an investment environment and settings that optimises investment from all sources (governments, individuals, businesses and industry) including funding for delivery, tax policy, programs and employment incentives</p>	<p>Renewal of governance framework to reinforce the role of industry and maximise effectiveness and efficiency in intergovernmental relations</p>	<p>Ensuring that skills are fully utilised and wastage of human capital is reduced</p>	POLICY DIRECTIONS

Data Issues

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The Case for Change

The availability of nationally consistent, timely and reliable data for planning, implementation, performance management, monitoring and benchmarking , evaluating and reporting on policy and program interventions is a critical underpinning for progressing the reform agenda across early childhood development, schooling and skills and workforce development.

Good data and analysis is critical to developing evidence-based interventions which are focussed on high priority areas that can make a difference to the lives of Australian citizens. Data needs to be collected, analysed and reported in accordance with recognised Australian and, where appropriate, international standards. At the same time excessive and unnecessary data collection needs to be avoided to minimise the reporting burden on all parties involved.

5.1.2 Further Work

As a key component of its future work program, the PAWG will give priority to the further development of appropriate data collection, analysis and reporting arrangements for both accountability and community information purposes. This work will build on considerable data collections already in place and work underway in a range of forums.
