

Communiqué

The Education Council met in Brisbane on 29 May 2015 for its second meeting of the year. Ministers discussed a range of policy matters of significance in the early childhood, school education and vocational education and training portfolios.

Universal Access

Ministers welcomed an update from the Australian Government on recent budget announcements regarding a commitment to work with the States and Territories to support access to 600 hours of preschool in 2016 and 2017, for all children in the year before full-time schooling. Programs are delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher, with a particular focus on participation by vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Senior officials will work together to finalise arrangements on the National Partnership.

National Quality Agenda Review

The Education Council took the next step in the review of the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care by agreeing to further work on potential amendments to the Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations. Changes proposed will help to simplify and streamline a number of the processes contained in the National Quality Framework, reducing regulatory burden for early childhood service providers, while maintaining the high quality standards in the sector. Ministers asked officials to work on finalising the Review and bring a final package, including the Decision Regulatory Impact Statement, for future consideration by Education Council later in 2015.

Vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students

The Education Council received an update on key priorities being undertaken by the Council's *Schools Vocational Learning and Training Working Group* to support the new framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students. Government departments, Catholic and independent education agencies, industry and training sector bodies are working together to strengthen collaboration between schools, training providers and employers, raise awareness and encourage best practice, and use evidence and research to inform future policy and actions to improve the quality of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students.

STEM education

Ministers discussed initiatives relating to the participation and performance of Australian school students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

STEM skills are essential in creating and turning new ideas and inventions into lucrative, internationally competitive Australian products, services and exports. STEM studies also develop generic skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and creativity, which are used in a variety of occupations and are important to increasing Australia's productivity.

Ministers agreed to collaborate nationally in developing a STEM school education strategy for increasing STEM participation in schools. Senior officials will report back to Ministers on the strategy later in the year.

Improvements to My School

Council reaffirmed its commitment to the *My School* website, acknowledging its importance in supporting improved educational outcomes through the provision of nationally consistent school level information for the use of parents, school communities and governments.

Ministers considered recommendations relating to the improvement of *My School* resulting from the recent independent review of the website commissioned by the Australian Government, which identified potential improvements to the way information is presented, website design and strategic issues, including possible ways to optimise governance.

Council requested the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), in consultation with education authorities, provide expert advice about the implications and feasibility of options for improving the website, taking account of the review's recommendations and the positions of jurisdictions, for consideration by Ministers at the July meeting.

Online Assessment

The Education Council received an update on progress being made in the transition to NAPLAN online, which will provide better assessment, more precise results and faster turnaround of information. Online assessment is being introduced using a new national platform being built by Education Services Australia, with funds from the Australian Government. The platform will be used to trial online assessment in 2016, commencing with the National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship sample assessment.

Significant planning, development, research and trialing are going on behind the scenes to ensure jurisdictions are ready to move NAPLAN online. To assist in the transition, a project management office has been established by senior officials to manage the development of an integrated national implementation plan, risk assessment and mitigation strategies and the establishment of the systems and processes to report on progress.

Ministers welcomed advice that a longer-term comprehensive communications strategy has been advanced, with a view to engaging the education sector and community at key stages in the transition to NAPLAN online.

Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2015

The Education Council endorsed the *Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2015*. The Measurement Framework specifies the agreed national key performance measures for schooling, and is the basis for reporting of statistical information by Australian education Ministers to the community on progress towards the Melbourne Declaration.

The Measurement Framework will be published on the ACARA website (www.acara.edu.au) in the near future.

Initial Teacher Education

The Education Council received an update on work following the release of the *Action Now: Classroom Ready Report*, including progress on the development of selection guidelines for initial teacher education and 2015 implementation arrangements for the literacy and numeracy test. Ministers signalled a commitment to consider proposals for improving the quality of initial teacher education at a future Council meeting.

Students at risk of radicalisation

The Education Council considered a proposal by the Australian Government regarding students at risk of radicalisation. Ministers noted the role of the Education Council in promoting social cohesion and tolerance in schools and the work being undertaken by the COAG *Law, Crime and Community Safety Council* on countering violent extremism.

Ministers agreed that senior officials will collate current initiatives that support youth at risk of radicalisation and identify gaps in prevention and intervention measures for schools. They further tasked their officials with working with their counterparts from the *Law, Crime and Community Safety Council* and to bring back initial advice to the Education Council later in the year.

Reform of Federation White Paper

Education Council took the opportunity to discuss the Reform of Federation White Paper. Ministers agreed to input into the process ahead of the Council of Australian Governments retreat in July. It was noted that the Green Paper on the Reform of Federation will be released in due course, with Education Council to discuss the options in that paper later in the year.

Future School Funding

Ministers agreed on the importance of needs-based funding for educational equity and ensuring Australian children and young people have access to quality education regardless of their location or economic background. Ministers agreed that the roles that federal, state and territory governments play in ensuring equitable education across Australia are critical to achieving the ambitions of the reform of the federation and that this needs to be considered in any future options for change.

Outgoing Chair of the ACARA Board

The Education Council thanked Professor Barry McGaw AO, who retired from the ACARA Board effective 7 May 2015, for his outstanding service. Professor McGaw had chaired the ACARA Board since the Authority commenced operation in 2009. He has overseen numerous important developments, including the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, the development of the *My School* website, and the successful administration of the National Assessment Program.

--

Media queries: Greg Donaghue, Education Council Secretariat on 0423 748 320 or greg.donaghue@ec.edu.au