

National School Reform Agreement: 2020 Annual Report on progress in implementing the national policy initiatives

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National School Reform Agreement: 2020 Annual Report on progress in implementing the national policy initiatives

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the national policy initiatives in 2020 against agreed milestones contained in the *National School Reform Agreement*. It is the second annual public report, as required by clause 53.a. of the Agreement and follows the publication of the 2019 progress report in September 2020.

The Agreement features three reform directions that focus on supporting students, student learning and achievement; supporting teaching, school leadership and school improvement; and enhancing the national evidence base.

The reform directions are being progressed nationally through the eight national policy initiatives, together with a suite of state-specific activities outlined in bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and states or territories.

The national policy initiatives are being developed in close consultation and collaboration with government and non-government education authorities and broader education stakeholders including, but not limited to, teachers, school leaders and parents.

The 2019-2020 bushfire season and the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for the implementation of the national policy initiatives in 2020 and changed the way we consult and collaborate. Despite these challenges, governments progressed the national policy initiatives with minor delays.

In June 2020 Education Council agreed minor adjustments to the Agreement's Schedule B milestones. These were formalised by Education Council on 4 September 2020 and a revised Agreement published on 2 October 2020. This report notes progress against the revised milestones.

The 2020 report shows that there has been good progress across all of the eight national policy initiatives, with two notable achievements:

- The review of senior secondary pathways was completed as scheduled in June 2020 and the report, *Looking to the Future: Report of the Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*, was published in July 2020. In December 2020, Education Council agreed to focus on areas that could be actioned immediately and address potential gaps in current activity, including literacy, numeracy and digital literacy; developing a sample Learner Profile; and agreeing a common language for skills and capabilities. In 2021, education and skills ministers will work together to progress this reform agenda, including improved career guidance through the National Careers Institute and development of a national strategy on VET delivery to secondary school students.
- In December 2020, the national evidence institute was launched as the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). AERO has been established to drive improvements in student outcomes through improving teachers' access to evidence about what works in the classroom. AERO delivers against a key recommendation of the *Through Growth to Achievement Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools* (2018).

On 26 June 2020, National Cabinet agreed that former Director-General of the Western Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet and former Commonwealth Cabinet Secretary Mr Peter Conran AM would lead a review of the former COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums with a view to rationalise and reset their work.

On 23 October 2020, National Cabinet accepted the Review's recommendations that include reducing the number of ministerial forums and ensuring that those that remain are more agile and responsive, with direct responsibility for decision making resting with Ministers. Consistent with the direction set by National Cabinet, ministers' meetings will not report to National Cabinet (or the National Federation Reform Council) unless tasked.

This represents a significant reform to Commonwealth-State relations and will significantly reduce bureaucracy and red tape. National Cabinet also noted that the range of significant reforms agreed have come about directly through the collaboration of National Cabinet, as the country comes together to continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of these reforms, National Cabinet agreed to maintain and reset Education Council as the Education Ministers Meeting.

From 2021, all Australian governments will continue to collaborate on strategies to address the long-term challenges facing Australia's education systems through the new Education Ministers. The reset forum for Ministers provides the opportunity for a renewed focus on key strategic priorities and an emphasis on delivering effective outcomes under the Agreement.

Under clauses 51-55 of the *National School Reform Agreement*, all parties have committed to reporting on progress in implementing agreed national policy initiatives outlined in Schedule B to give the community confidence that Education Ministers are making efforts to improve the quality and equity of Australia's schooling system. Table 1 of this report reflects progress as at 31 December 2020 against revised *National School Reform Agreement* Schedule B milestones approved by Education Ministers on 4 September 2020.

Table 1: Progress in the implementation of the national policy initiatives against milestones in Schedule B of the *National School Reform Agreement*

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
A (i) Enhancing the Australian Curriculum to support teacher assessment of student attainment and growth against clear descriptors	a) Education Council consider proposal(s) for the development of learning progressions across the Australian Curriculum learning areas and general capabilities, including consideration of existing progressions and development stages, timelines and estimated costs.	Early 2019	Yes. More information is available from the Online Formative Assessment Initiative website .	
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement at a), develop and trial learning progressions and formative assessment capability for learning areas and general capabilities, with priority on literacy and numeracy in the early years of schooling.	Early 2021	Not yet applicable.	
	c) Subject to Education Council agreement to a) and b) above, existing and new learning progressions and formative assessment capability for agreed Australian Curriculum learning areas and general capabilities are progressively made available.	From 2022	Not yet applicable.	
A (ii) Assisting teachers monitor individual student progress and identify student learning needs through opt-in online and on demand student learning assessment tools with links to student learning resources, prioritising early years foundation skills	a) Education Council consider a proposal for the enhancement of formative assessment capabilities, including consideration of existing IT solutions, online assessment resources and digital learning resources and potential benefits to students, teachers and school leaders. It is expected the proposal will include development stages, timelines, governance arrangements and estimated costs.	Early 2019	Yes. More information is available from the Online Formative Assessment Initiative website .	
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement at a), Education Council commission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the design, build and piloting of an opt-in formative assessment facility with priority on early years literacy and numeracy. 	Early 2021	Not yet applicable.	

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
	<p>Assessments should be matched to agreed learning progressions (such as English, mathematics, science and critical and creative thinking), and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the development of supporting professional learning modules to build teacher and school leader capacity and capability to use effective formative assessment practices. 			
	c) Subject to Education Council agreement at a) and b), progressively develop and release nationally available online on-demand formative assessment resources (linked to the development schedule for learning progressions across Australian Curriculum learning areas and general capabilities), refine the online formative assessment facility based on feedback from the pilot and align digital teaching resources to the learning progressions.	From 2022	Not yet applicable.	
A (iii) Reviewing senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training	a) Education Council agree panel membership and terms of reference for a review of senior secondary education, pathways to work, further education and training and consideration of prerequisites for university entry.	Early 2019	Yes. More information is available on the Department of Education Skills and Employment website	
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement at a), Education Council receive review report and consider recommendations for any national initiatives to strengthen student pathways, with States and Territories to independently consider recommendations for local response.	June 2020	Yes.	
	c) Subject to Education Council agreement at a) and b), Education Council has implemented, or is progressing, agreed recommendations as appropriate.	End of the agreement	Yes.	
B (i) Reviewing teacher workforce needs of the future to attract and retain	a) Education Council consider an implementation strategy for the recommendations of the National Review of Teacher Registration.	Early 2019	Yes.	

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
the best and brightest to the teaching profession and attract teachers to areas of need	b) Education Council begin to develop options for a national teacher workforce strategy.	Mid 2019	Yes. More information is available from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership .	
	c) Subject to b), Education Council agree to an option for a national teacher workforce strategy to support decision making of teacher employers and initial teacher education (ITE) providers. It is anticipated the strategy would identify requirements to address workforce issues of supply, demand, retention, attrition, hard to staff schools, specialisation, teaching out of field, rural and remote workforce and any gaps in data identified by Parties and sectors.	September 2020	Yes, through Education Ministers' 11 December 2020 endorsement of the <i>National Initiatives to Support Teaching and School leadership narrative</i> , available on the Department of Education Skills and Employment website .	
	d) Subject to Education Council agreement at b) and c), Education Council implement a national teacher workforce strategy to respond to teacher workforce needs of the future and support decision making of teacher employers and ITE providers.	From December 2020	Yes. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership reported to Education Ministers in December 2020 with the report <i>Teaching Futures: A National Teacher Workforce Strategy for Australia</i> . This paper has helped shape the future direction of national and collaborative work on teaching. This paper and the <i>National Initiatives to Support Teaching and School Leadership</i> narrative meet the commitment to 'review teacher workforce needs'.	
B (ii) Strengthening the initial teacher accreditation system	a) States and Territories ensure that accredited initial teacher education programs require pre-service teachers to have successfully completed an endorsed final-year teaching performance assessment (TPA) prior to graduation.	From January 2019	Partially.	As at 31 December 2020, nine out of 47 higher education providers in three states and territories were yet to comply with the requirement to include a teaching performance

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
	b) Commence national quality assurance activities in cooperation with all jurisdictional authorities.	From January 2019	Yes.	assessment in their initial teacher education programs.
C (i) Implementing a national unique student identifier (USI) that meets national privacy requirements in order to support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base	a) Education Council consider: i. a proposal for a national USI to enhance school and system self-review and external quality assurance, including proposed approach and compatibility with existing USIs	Late 2019	Yes.	
	ii. Governance, privacy protections, national data access protocols and protections and estimates and proposed allocations of costs.	September 2020	Partially.	The governance, privacy protections, national data access protocols and protections and estimates and proposed allocations of costs have been broadly considered but will be further developed and refined as part of the detailed design and development stage of work for the USI.
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement at a), implement the institutional arrangements necessary to support the implementation of a national USI.	March 2021	Not yet applicable.	
C (ii) Establishing an independent national evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development	c) Subject to Education Council agreement at a) and b), and subject to meeting national privacy requirements, schools and systems to progressively work to create a national USI for each student from 2021.	All students to have a USI by the end of the agreement	Not yet applicable.	
	a) Education Council consider options for an independent national evidence institute, including scope of functions, potential for expansion of existing capabilities, interaction with existing national bodies, funding and governance arrangements.	Late 2019	Yes.	

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement to an option at a), implement the institutional arrangements necessary to support an independent national evidence institute.	Mid 2020	Yes. More information is available from the Australian Education Resource Organisation website .	
	c) Subject to Education Council agreement at a) and b), the national evidence institute commences operations from 2020, and inter alia, develops and implements a national research and evidence plan.	From 2020	Yes.	
C (iii) Improving national data quality, consistency and collection to improve the national evidence base and inform policy development.	a) Education Council agree equity and proficiency standards (for numeracy and literacy assessed by NAPLAN) as part of the scheduled review of the <i>National Measurement Framework for Schooling</i> .	December 2018	Yes.	
	b) Education Council consider strategic opportunities to enhance the national evidence base, including options for measures of child development status at school entry, student learning gain, general capabilities, post-school destination information, attainment, retention, wellbeing, post-school outcomes.	Life of the agreement	Partially.	As at 30 December 2020, there were three projects underway to enhance the national evidence base, including school readiness, student wellbeing, and post-school destinations. Other projects will be considered over the life of the Agreement.