

National School Reform Agreement: 2021 Annual Report on progress in implementing the national policy initiatives

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National School Reform Agreement: 2021 Annual Report on progress in implementing the national policy initiatives

This report outlines the progress towards implementing the national policy initiatives in 2021 against agreed milestones contained in the *National School Reform Agreement* (the Agreement). It is the third annual public report, as required by clause 53.a. of the Agreement, and follows publication of the 2019 and 2020 progress reports in September 2020 and 2021 respectively.

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 COVID-19 pandemic and the exceptional set of circumstances it created continued to impact the way we consulted and collaborated throughout 2021 in the implementation of the national policy initiatives. The progress made during this period demonstrates the durable commitment by Australia's Education Ministers to address long term education challenges. This commitment is more important than ever given education's vital role in supporting Australia's post-pandemic economic recovery. Despite the many challenges of 2021, the report (Table 1) shows good progress:

- On 3 September 2021, Education Ministers agreed that for the purposes of the Agreement, given all initial teacher education providers now have endorsed teaching performance assessments in place, national policy initiative B(ii), Strengthening the initial teacher accreditation system, is now complete.
- Incorporated on 16 April 2021, the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) was established to position the nation's educators at the forefront of education research to improve learning outcomes for all children and young people and has commenced key projects from its inaugural work plan. AERO's scope covers the schooling and early childhood education sectors, focusing on bringing high quality research evidence to education practitioners and policy makers and fostering its effective use, so that children and young people can achieve the best possible outcomes. Education Ministers approved AERO's Strategic Plan and Research Agenda on 3 September 2021, which concludes delivery of NPI C(ii) Establishing an independent national evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development.
- Under national policy initiative C(iii), improving the national evidence base, a new national Post-School Destinations Survey is being established. The first wave of the survey is on track to be implemented in mid-late 2022.

Australia's Education Ministers continue to collaborate on the remaining national policy initiatives, each of which has an implementation timeframe extending across the remainder of the Agreement (to 31 December 2023).

An independent review will be commissioned on behalf of Education Ministers in accordance with clauses 29-32 of the Agreement, which will include an assessment of the effectiveness of the national policy initiatives and the appropriateness of the measurement framework. The review is due to be completed by 31 December 2022 and is being conducted by the Productivity Commission, and will help inform the development of the next national reform agreement.

Under clauses 51-55 of the 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 2021 against revised *National School Reform Agreement* Schedule B milestones approved by Education Ministers on 4 September 2020.

Table 1: Progress in implementing the national policy initiatives against milestones in Schedule B of the *National School Reform Agreement* (up to 31 December 2021)

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	Partially.	Trialling is not scheduled to occur until this initiative enters the Beta phase. Ministers are scheduled to consider progression to the Beta phase in mid 2022.
	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 2021	Partially.	Building and piloting of a formative assessment facility is not scheduled to occur until the Beta phase. Ministers are scheduled to

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>early years literacy and numeracy. 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. 			consider progression to the Beta phase in mid 2022.
	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 from 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.	

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 (i) Reviewing teacher workforce needs of the future to attract and retain the best and brightest to the teaching profession and attract teachers to areas of need	a) Education Council consider an implementation strategy for the recommendations of the National Review of Teacher Registration.	Early 2019	Yes.	
	b) Education Council begin to develop options for a national teacher workforce strategy.	Mid 2019	Yes.	
	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.	
	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.	
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 prior to graduation.	From January 2019	Yes.	
	b) Commence national quality assurance activities in cooperation with all jurisdictional authorities.	From January 2019	Yes.	
C (i) Implementing a national unique student identifier (USI) that meets national privacy requirements in order to	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.	

National Policy Initiative	Milestone	Timing	Has the milestone been met? Y/N, partially, or not yet applicable	If no, or partially, the reason is:
support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base	ii. Governance, privacy protections, national data access protocols and protections and estimates and proposed allocations of costs.	September 2020	Partially.	<p>In November 2021, Australia's Education Ministers noted the approach to pilot an option for the USI with SA, NSW, NT, and the independent and Catholic school sectors within those jurisdictions.</p> <p>Education Ministers also noted that the Australian Government will work with jurisdictions and the non-government sector on next steps after pilot delivery, and develop a framework to identify, develop and implement Schools USI applications.</p>
	b) Subject to Education Council agreement at a), implement the institutional arrangements necessary to support the implementation of a national USI.	March 2021	No	<p>There remains a dependency on a) to be completed to inform the approach to national implementation, including legislative reform at both the Commonwealth and state level. Advice on next steps, including how future applications of the Schools USI will be brought forward, will be provided to Education Ministers after delivery and evaluation of the pilot.</p>
	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.	
C (ii) Establishing an independent national	a) Education Council consider options for an independent national evidence institute, including	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:
evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development	scope of functions, potential for expansion of existing capabilities, interaction with existing national bodies, funding and governance arrangements.			
	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.	
	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. More information is available from the Australian Education Research Organisation website .	
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 National Measurement Framework for Schooling.	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.	Of the 4 projects underway to enhance the national evidence base: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Post-School Destinations Survey (PSDS) and the post-school destinations proof of concept data linkage project have met their milestones to date. The School Readiness and Student Wellbeing projects have experienced delays but are expected to return to schedule in early 2022.