



Education Ministers Meeting

23 February 2024

Communiqué

Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education

Ministers agreed to the *Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education*, including the establishment of a National Student Ombudsman.

The Action Plan was developed in response to the Australian Universities Accord Interim Report.

The National Student Ombudsman will allow all higher education students to escalate complaints about the administrative actions of their higher education provider, including complaints about sexual harassment, assault and violence.

The final Action Plan has been informed by consultation with students, staff, victim-survivor advocates, higher education sector and subject matter experts, including the CEO of Our Watch, Patty Kinnersly, and across governments.

The Australian Government will begin immediate implementation of the Action Plan, working collaboratively with state and territory governments and stakeholders, including on the design and implementation of the National Student Ombudsman and the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.

Ministers thanked survivor-advocates for their efforts in bringing about this change.

Ministers agreed to receive updates on implementation of the Action Plan at future Education Ministers Meetings.

Actions to strengthen university governance and improve workplace relations compliance will be considered by Ministers at the next Education Ministers Meeting.

Safety in Early Childhood Education and Care settings

Education Ministers accepted in-principle key recommendations from the [Final Report](#) of the Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework, and agreed that they would work with other Ministers where recommendations went beyond Education.

Implementation advice provided to Ministers was informed by initial consultation with the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector, with further consultation to come. The plan will also be informed by an expert panel who will provide robust advice to senior officials and governments.

Recommendations from the Review for priority action include reducing notification reporting timeframes for allegations of physical or sexual abuse, making services free from e-cigarettes / vaping and options to restrict the use of personal devices that take images or videos of children.

Actions agreed will improve existing safeguards and enhance safety arrangements for children across ECEC services throughout Australia.

Education Ministers agree the National Quality Framework remains robust and continues to offer strong protection for children nationwide.

Early University Offers

Ministers agreed that offers to school students for university commencement in 2025 and 2026 should not be issued before September in the preceding year and that a national approach to early offers, including how to improve transparency in early offers and admissions, should be developed in time for 2027 commencements.

Education Ministers will write to universities and relevant funding agreements will be updated to reflect this agreement.

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement

Ministers agreed to establish a sub-group of the Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC), which will meet fortnightly to progress the development of the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement.

Ministers also agreed that representatives of the non-government school sector, the Coalition of Peaks and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Conference will be invited to attend meetings of the sub-group to provide input on national reforms.

AESOC will also meet monthly to consider the development of the Agreement.

Ministers will next meet in April to consider progress on negotiations.

National Teacher Workforce Action Plan

Ministers received a progress update on key initiatives under the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan (NTWAP), including Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships, Workload Reduction Fund and the response to the *Be That Teacher* campaign.

The Australian Government has received 3,183 Commonwealth Teaching Scholarship applications, which are currently being assessed. Conditional offers will be made in late March and offers are expected to be finalised in April.

The Australian Government is working productively with all states and territories to finalise pilot proposals for Phase 2 of the Workload Reduction Fund.

Ministers were briefed on the *Be That Teacher* campaign. As of 23 February 2024, more than 640,000 visits had been made to the campaign website and the campaign videos have been viewed more than 50 million times.

Ministers noted that as the Tasmanian Government is in caretaker mode, departmental officials attended and adopted observer status for the meeting.

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