



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: AAAE - Australian Alliance of Associations in Education
Submitting as a: Peak body
State: ACT

Summary

AAAE has responded to selected aspects of the Review. AAAE confirms current directions in the Australian Curriculum prepare students for the future, also acknowledging that monitoring / change is timely in terms of the context of enacted curriculum, measures of student outcomes and the nationally agreed Goals for Schooling. International initiatives can inform this process. Professional associations are pivotal in driving improved teacher practice, establishing and leveraging key partnerships (eg AITSL), fostering the implementation of an evidence culture and building evidence capacity in practitioners. AAAE is able to promote communication and collaboration between member associations and can provide insights from national experts in specialist areas of national education policy related to the improvement of student learning outcomes.

Main submission

AAAE Submission to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian School

The Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE) is an alliance of national professional teacher associations. The AAAE:

- represents member national professional teacher associations, so that the voice of the teachers and educators they represent are heard by the appropriate statutory authorities and governments for the improvement of quality Australian educational policy and practice. AAAE currently has 24 member associations.
- has the mission to explore possible consultative and collaborative structures beyond the current 'ad hoc' status of relationships between teacher associations and education entities.
- considers that strategic and formalised partnerships between teacher associations and education entities are a compelling value-add proposition

for governments to continue to improve the quality of student learning and teaching excellence in Australia.

What should educational success for Australian students and schools look like?

What capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future?

AAAE sees the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) as a framework for 21st century learning that still has currency for schools and schooling in Australia. Goal 2 of the Melbourne Declaration (2008) states the central premise that students should be:

- Successful learners;
- Confident and creative individuals; and
- Active and informed citizens.

AAAE confirms that in broad terms, the Australian Curriculum as it is now stands, with its emphasis on knowledge development in learning areas/subjects, as well as capability and skill development through the General Capabilities and Cross-Curriculum Priorities, can prepare young Australians for the future, if their school's enacted curriculum includes each of these domains. However, at a forum meeting of 45 member associations of the AAAE hosted by ACARA in Sydney, October 21, it was agreed that a review and redevelopment of the nationally agreed Goals for Schooling is needed. Much has changed in the context of Australian education in the last decade, and other countries have made progress that we can learn from. Australia's involvement in the OECD's Future of Education and Skills: Education 2030 initiative is an important means for tapping into international initiatives of promise. This project recognises that

'There are increasing demands on schools to prepare students for more rapid economic and social change, for jobs that have not yet been created, for technologies that have not yet been invented, and to solve social problems that have not been anticipated in the past'. (OECD, November 2017)

At the forum, Fiona Mueller, Director of Curriculum, reported that ACARA is undertaking up to 8 international curriculum comparisons of Australian curriculum with initially the high performing countries – British Columbia, Canada, Finland, and Singapore.

AAAE agrees with ACARA that this will be a valuable exercise that should inform the development of the next Goals for Schooling. This process should involve a national conversation about what capabilities, skills and knowledge should students learn at school to prepare them for the future, based in the findings of this international research.

How should school quality and educational success be measured?

AAAE recognises that international measures of student outcomes, such as PISA are likely to continue as one form of determining 'school quality' and 'educational success' of nation states and that global comparisons will continue.

We know that in Australia, the National Assessment Program (NAP), which includes NAP- Literacy and Numeracy, NAP-Civics and Citizenship, NAP-Science and NAP- ICT, (organised at the direction of the Education Council) is an important measure through which governments, education authorities and schools can determine if young Australians are meeting important educational outcomes.

However, AAAE argues that teachers, schools and education authorities need tools that enable careful and authoritative assessment in the domain of broader 21st century capabilities. These include intercultural learning, critical and creative thinking and ethical understanding - key elements of the General Capabilities. We assert that tools should be available for teachers, so that the emphasis is on valuing teacher judgements, with the corollary that significant effort needs to be invested in informing those judgements to make them as good as they can be.

What can we do to improve and how can we support ongoing improvement over time?

How could schools funding be used more effectively and efficiently (at the classroom, school or system level) to have a significant impact on learning outcomes for all students including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically advanced students?

- What actions can be taken to improve practice and outcomes? What evidence is there to support taking these actions?
- What works best for whom and in what circumstances?

The current government includes "Improving the quality of teaching and school leadership" as one of its five focus areas. AAAE supports this emphasis. Further, we would argue that this focus underpins other foci on student performance, preparing them for a globalised world, and achieving equity, since school leadership (that includes distributed teacher leadership) enables effective change.

International initiatives such as the Academy of Singapore Teachers and others in British Columbia and Ontario provide examples of how other jurisdictions have committed to making their teachers 'the best they can be' by provision of targeted professional learning and networking. It is noteworthy that these are high performing jurisdictions in PISA testing. We argue that organisations, including AAAE, that represent and include national and peak associations (connected to diverse specialisations that are relevant to teachers) can drive and develop teacher

professional learning across all sectors, in urban / rural / remote areas, at grassroots levels.

Professional associations in Australia have been established and thrived as champions of specialist areas of education for many decades in Australia. They include associations whose mission and goals are based on concern for equity (eg rural and remote education; special education etc.), subject based learning (English, the Arts, history, citizenship, geography, economics, business, science, music, health and physical education, mathematics, languages etc.) or other education agenda concerns (early childhood, curriculum, leadership etc.). Refer AAAE website <http://aaae.edu.au/about-us/member-associations/> Each of these organisations can play a vital role in improving practice and learning outcomes and supporting excellence in teaching and learning in our schools. Hence they are pivotal in any moves to support ongoing professional learning.

There is substantial evidence that professional associations can be a cost effective means for providing teacher professional learning and improving outcomes.. The National Professional Development Programme was a Commonwealth funded initiative in the mid-1990s. The evaluation of that project found that every dollar of funding provided to professional associations for professional development of teachers created between two and four times as much in terms of actual value. Hence governments (state and national) and other agencies benefit from a significant 'multiplier effect' if they engage and fund professional associations to provide teacher professional development.

What institutional or governance arrangements could be put in place to ensure ongoing identification, sharing and implementation of evidence based good practice to grow and sustain improved student outcomes over time?

AAAE agrees that ongoing efforts are required to build Australia's evidence base of good practice and capacity to capture impact of professional learning through research. There has been a substantial increase in the sharing of good practice through national professional associations' websites, conferences, publications and resources; but these efforts require government support through targeted programs. There has been widespread adoption of the rhetoric that 'evidence based' approaches are needed to advance Australian education and our students' outcomes, but to further build this work, two key developments are needed.

Evidence culture

Whilst the term 'evidence based' is used, and the idea of basing action on some previous findings are seen by many to have merit, there are differing views about what constitutes 'evidence'. These matters need to be worked through to establish a consensus position between governments and the profession about the principles and practices of an 'evidence culture' in Australian education.

Evidence capacity

Education researchers need opportunities to continue to work in an evidence culture to build the evidence base through their research. This will require more attention in research design to generating defensible measures of impact on student learning.

But it will also require greater levels of government funding available to education researchers for this work than is currently available in the highly competitive funding environment. Only 17.7% of ARC Discovery Project grant applications were funded in 2017, and of these only a small percent were in education.

Smaller grass roots projects such as those in the the NPDP projects discussed above, and projects funded through the now disbanded Australian Learning and Teaching Council and the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) – disbanded and funding withdrawn in 2016 – are required. These organisations have helped to enhance learning and teaching in universities and were found to have strong impact on learning; for teachers and students in schools. Both the ALTC and the OLT’s projects frequently involved collaboration and partnerships between higher education and schools; that contributed substantially to evidence based good practice in teaching and learning.

How can system enablers such as targets and standards, qualifications and accreditation, regulation and registration, quality assurance measures and transparency and accountability provisions be improved to help drive educational achievement and success and support effective monitoring, reporting and application of investment?

AAAE asserts that the current approach to support for, and accountability of, teachers through their careers consists of disconnected parts that lack coherence and purpose. We envisage a solution in which, as in other professions, teachers’ progress through a connected system that marries provision of support and purposeful, relevant continuing professional development with accountability against profession-driven standards and credentialing processes. Such a system could be integrated with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL) as teachers’ progress from Graduate, to Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers. Once again, we see the importance of teacher professional associations collaborating more closely with AITSL than is current practice, in the development of professional learning that is appropriate for progression through the standards.

Are there any new or emerging areas for action which could lead to large gains in student improvement that need further development or testing?

- What are they and how could they be further developed?

Representing and advocating for its member national professional teacher associations having a role in developing excellence in Australian education, AAAE has

a central mission to ensure the voice of teachers and educators are heard by the appropriate statutory authorities and governments, for the improvement of Australian educational policy and practice. Listening to the voice of, and utilising the expertise of, teacher associations needs to be renewed in Australia. AAAE is able to promote communication and collaboration between member associations and can provide insights from national experts in specialist areas of national education policy related to the improvement of student learning outcomes.

Are there barriers to implementing these improvements?

If yes, what are they and how could these be overcome?

There is a generally narrow view of what constitutes assessment and legitimate evidence of students' learning. The move to empowering teachers and building all educators' capacities to assessing all elements seen as important for 21st century skills, including the General Capabilities and cross curriculum priorities, will broaden and deepen our evidence base for building excellence.

'Collaboration' and 'partnerships' are among the current catch cries in society, and this sort of orientation is a driver in the move for school education to focus on a broader set of capabilities and skills. It is therefore ironic that school education in this country in many ways reflects 20th (or maybe 19th) century structures and thinking. We have eight separate jurisdictions that could work with each other – and other agencies including professional associations – much more closely and collaboratively. However they still hold onto their independence and autonomy to create difference when unity would be much more productive. The differential uptake of the Australian Curriculum is a good case in point.

There needs to be a further national conversation about future directions in education and building excellence in education outcomes, and AAAE would welcome the opportunity to be part of these debates.

Cathy Crook

AAAE Secretary

(on behalf of the Board of Directors)