



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

Submitter: Department of Education and Training  
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State: ACT

### Summary

The recommendations of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (the Review) will be a key input to a new national schooling reform agreement in 2018. This agreement is a requirement under the amended Australian Education Act 2013 as a condition of Commonwealth school funding.

The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Education Council provides a vehicle for states and the Commonwealth to work together to deliver major national schooling reform – the Commonwealth cannot implement national reform alone – but it is important to recognise that the collaborative decision-making processes underpinning this approach work best when focussed on key reforms that require national cooperation.

The Review will have the best chance to positively influence a national schooling reform agreement in 2018 if the report focuses on a small number of strategic, enabling national reforms rather than a long list of reforms or local-level actions.

There are several key areas of potential national reform the Australian Government Department of Education and Training recommends the Review directs its attention towards: quality teaching and impact, teaching and assessment of general capabilities, formative assessment, building the evidence base and national reform evaluation.

### Main submission

#### National reform context

1. The Australian Government's school policy reform agenda was outlined in Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes (QSQO) released in May 2016, emphasising that a strong and sustainable education system is a key factor in building Australia's future economic and cultural prosperity. QSQO recommended that any areas for future focus should be underpinned by the following principles:

- focus on what makes the difference
  - support those who need it most
  - ensure students are equipped for a globalised world
  - increase accountability through transparency.
2. Under the amended Australian Education Act 2013, states and territories are required to be party to a national schooling reform agreement and bilateral implementation agreements as a precondition of receiving Commonwealth school funding.
  3. The report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools will be a critical input to the development of a national agreement and provides an opportunity to positively influence national reform direction.
  4. Through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Education Council (Council), the Australian Government and states and territories have joint responsibility for the progression of national reform priorities. The Commonwealth does not have direct responsibility for schools and cannot implement reform alone – national reforms must be a collaboration between all governments.
  5. National collaborative effort should be targeted at key strategic initiatives. Council processes work best when focussed on a smaller number of reforms that require national cooperation.
  6. Significant national schooling reforms are already underway and states all have their own state-specific efforts. A key challenge is how to coordinate and build upon reform efforts to achieve systemic improvement rather than simply adopting additional reform directions or reiterating existing reforms. This involves preparing all young people with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they need to successfully transition from school to further education, training or employment, including through vocational learning and access to quality vocational education and training in secondary schools.
  7. In this context, the Department would like to see the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools report recommend a small number of high level national reforms.
  8. Further, the recommendations should ideally deliver a balance between innovation, ambition and actions that can be collectively implemented in the shorter term. This could be achieved by indicating reforms for immediate progression by Education Council in addition to identifying longer-term strategic challenges in school education for Education Council consideration.

9. There are several key areas of potential national reform that would provide a catalyst for systemic change and a foundation for ongoing schooling reform; the department recommends the Review direct its attention towards:
- Quality teaching and impact
  - Teaching and assessment of general capabilities
  - Formative assessment
  - Building the evidence base
  - National reform evaluation.

#### Quality teaching and impact on student learning

10. Teachers and school leaders are a key national workforce, but systemic barriers presented through Federation prevent the kind of national investment and policy responses which would have a large-scale impact to lift quality and improve teaching practice. A growing body of literature suggests effective education systems use policy levers to increase the effectiveness and quality of teaching and its impact on student learning.
11. Consideration should be given to the systemic changes needed to raise the status of the profession, making teaching and school leadership a profession of choice.
12. Some of this has begun through the implementation of the report of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), where there has been considerable national effort around improving initial teacher education in recent years. In addition, the development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Australian Professional Standard for Principals has led to a more nationally consistent approach to enhancing teaching quality, including work to develop and support school leaders.
13. The OECD has indicated Australian teachers spend less time working as professional teams within their school and in supporting each other to improve their practice than in other high-performing OECD countries. We should consider how to better encourage teachers to work collaboratively to improve the skills and knowledge of the teaching workforce, as is demonstrated in many Asian countries.
14. Consideration should also be given to how to further develop and enhance the skills and knowledge of the existing teaching and school leadership workforce so that the teaching profession is known for its highly skilled and knowledgeable practitioners.

15. In recent years, more emphasis has been put on national consistency between jurisdictions, with standardised testing, a national curriculum and national standards for teachers and principals.
16. All teachers, regardless of location, should be required to demonstrate and maintain the Proficient level of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in a thorough, transparent and comparable way. They should also be required to achieve full registration at the proficient level of the Teacher Standards within a nationally consistent and agreed timeframe.
17. It is vital to extend the capabilities that have the biggest impact on student learning through to the profession more broadly. To do this, we must first develop an understanding of the elements of teaching practice that have the greatest impact on student outcomes and incorporate those within the profession.
18. Implementing a national approach to support improved workforce planning, teacher supply and teacher education could include establishing a national body to undertake national accreditation of initial teacher education, national registration of teachers and the collection of national workforce data.
19. Resources that are currently applied to implementing professional standards, undertaking registration processes and undertaking teacher education course accreditation would be used more efficiently and effectively by reducing duplication of effort within the federated system.
20. A nationally consistent approach to teacher registration would be an efficient way to provide teachers with guidance, help them develop their career paths, provide a consistent approach to collating teacher information, including qualifications and other requirements such as background checks, and ensure teacher training and professional development is aligned with the latest skills required for improving student outcomes.

#### Teaching and assessment of general capabilities

21. Reform priorities should focus on equipping students to function effectively in a constantly changing environment. Developing capabilities such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and communication will be essential.
22. The general capabilities play a significant role in the Australian Curriculum in preparing young Australians to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. However, there is no national approach to ensuring all students leave school with these critical skills.
23. The revised Australian Curriculum Foundation to Year 10 was endorsed by all education ministers in 2015 in order to have greater national consistency in

determining what all students, regardless of where they go to school, should know, understand and be able to do.

24. The Australian Curriculum has been designed to ensure that students are equipped with both discipline-specific knowledge and transferable skills to thrive in the 21st century. It contains seven General Capabilities: Literacy, Numeracy, Information and Communication Technology Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.
25. Among the general capabilities, literacy and numeracy serve as foundational skills that are essential for further learning.
26. Other general capabilities include the broader skills necessary for young people to succeed in both work and life, including employability skills that are needed for Australia's future workforce. With the increasing influence of globalisation and automation, and young people expected to have up to 17 jobs and five careers across their working lives, these skills are increasingly important.
27. While teachers are expected to teach and assess the general capabilities within and across the eight key learning areas, recognition of the importance of the general capabilities and the degree to which they are taught and assessed varies considerably across states and territories.
28. Further work should be undertaken through already established processes such as the Schools Policy Group to translate good practices in the teaching and assessment of general capabilities into a national resource, available to all teachers and part of the online and on-demand formative assessment tool outlined in the next section.
29. Given the importance of these skills for young people and employers, consideration should also be given to expanding the teaching and assessment of general capabilities into Year 11 and 12, given the Australian Curriculum is for Foundation to Year 10 only.

#### Formative Assessment

30. There is an opportunity for national reform to provide online diagnostic classroom-based assessment and reporting to teachers to support targeted data-driven teaching, also known as formative assessment. This could be achieved by leveraging the online platform for the National Assessment Program, which has the capacity to deliver online formative assessments.
31. PISA tells us that Australia has an unusual equity profile: we have high performing students in low SES schools and low performing students in high SES schools. The best way to address slipping performance is to support all

schools to provide personalised and targeted learning to students. Online, formative assessments would help teachers to identify how each of their students is progressing against the curriculum.

32. Real-time analysis of classroom assessment results would give teachers a better understanding of students' progress and enable more targeted teaching and intervention to improve outcomes.
33. This aligns with the Government's proposal for a national Year 1 literacy and numeracy check, which will be a classroom-based assessment to inform teachers on student achievement so that appropriate teaching and intervention strategies can be put in place.
34. Creating an online and on-demand formative assessment tool would deliver:
  - a suite of on-demand classroom assessments aligned to the Australian Curriculum
  - a reporting tool for teachers that provides user friendly diagnostics drawing on assessments and other student information to provide guidance or 'what next' suggestions for activities to address identified gaps in students' knowledge and which can be also used to provide more comprehensive reports and information to parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses, including strategies that parents can use at home to help their child's learning
  - improvements in teachers' use of data to improve student outcomes
  - comparable assessment of student learning and growth against whole cohort outcomes so teachers are better able to target teaching to ensure one year of teaching equals one year of growth.

#### Building the evidence base

35. Student outcomes are affected by their experiences before they start school as well as what happens during their school years, with outcomes often not fully discerned until they have completed schooling and transitioned into further education, work and adulthood.
36. A joined up, national approach to evidence will enhance understanding of the different experiences of students and how these affect outcomes. Better baselines and outcome measures could be built to evaluate the effectiveness of government policy and allow timely responses to lift the outcome trajectories of vulnerable students.
37. There have been important developments in building the national evidence base. The Government's Australian Early Development Census provides invaluable information about school readiness, and identifies vulnerabilities

across five holistic domains among children in their first year of full-time schooling. This information is widely shared and is a core dataset to build enhanced data assets on the experiences of children in the early years.

38. As higher education and vocational education data is also becoming more available, there are strong foundations to support further work. All governments have policies in place to support sharing of their data assets as well as significant improvements in methodologies for sharing and linking data, which improves the use of existing administrative data collections.
39. However, while school student-level data exists, it resides with individual states and schools and is not readily available for collective use. This results in an evidence gap at the national level about the pathways, multiple transition points and trajectories of students during the 13 years of schooling.
40. Efforts are ongoing but slow to secure agreed streamlined arrangements in the form of a National Schooling Information Agreement (NSIA) for data sharing across jurisdictions. A NSIA would set out clear protocols for safe and appropriate sharing and use of information for custodians, providers and users of data.
41. To underpin building better data and targeting of funding and policy interventions, a Unique Student Identifier (USI) used through schooling years and across education could be established. A USI would improve the value of longitudinal national assessment outcomes information and contribute to Australia's educational research capacity and capability.
42. A USI would also allow parents, carers and teachers to retrieve a longitudinal record for individual students, and would be particularly advantageous for students who are highly mobile, moving between school sectors and/or between states and territories.
43. Open data strategies are already part of how government data is managed and shared. A national evidence base should be made widely available so that research and analysis can be undertaken by the broader research community and create a more dynamic evaluation culture.

#### National reform evaluation

44. Despite the considerable reform effort underway across the education system, there is no agreed national solution, or national capacity, to analyse the impact of specific policy and program interventions to determine what is effective in improving outcomes.
45. This impacts the ability of governments to determine whether or not reforms are actually working. This is, in part, due to the nature of school education –

students are at school for many years, with reform outcomes coming many years after schooling is over.

46. To better understand whether national and state reform investments have made an impact, an evaluative function that is summative but also formative would be ideal, allowing learnings and changes to be made along the way.
47. The Government's new requirement from 2018 that states enter into a national schooling reform agreement as a condition of funding will go some way to ensuring that Education Council is held accountable for delivery of reforms – but there is no mechanism at a national level for assessing whether specific reforms have worked.
48. Internationally, countries that perform well in standardised school assessment have established mechanisms for harnessing evidence to inform continual improvement in educational practice, including ongoing national institutions to analyse and promote the evidence base – examples are Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Singapore, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK Education Endowment Foundation).
49. A national approach to monitoring, tracking and analysing the progress of reforms and their effect on student and school performance is critical to ensure teachers, schools and governments have access to and use the best evidence available to lift outcomes for all students. It would also help governments and the community assess progress towards national education objectives.
50. The national evidence base is a critical first step to ensuring that the relevant data is being shared and provided to build and assess reforms. By making data widely available as part of a broader informal evaluation process, external scrutiny would make governments accountable to focus on reform measures that are proven to work.
51. To improve our national knowledge base of 'what works', a focus should be established on improving the evidence and measurement of the effectiveness of education policies. This could occur by establishing functions within existing national bodies or by broadening other national data and evidence bodies to include education within their scope. Other options could be to form partnerships between universities and not-for-profit entities that have demonstrated an ability to undertake evaluations that result in evidence based recommendations of effective education reforms. The remit of this national presence could include development and monitoring of an enhanced national performance framework as part of the new national schooling agreement.



52. While the Productivity Commission inquiry proposed a national evaluation function be created within ACARA, it may be preferable for a new body to operate separately to existing national education architecture in order to provide independent assessment of the efficacy of current national approaches.
53. The body would report on best-practice initiatives being implemented by states, territories and non-government school systems and recommend measures to ensure the effective application of identified best practice in the future. A key focus could be to consider the longer-term strategic challenges of education delivery and developing national capabilities in response. The work and findings of the body could be a standing item on the Education Council agenda.
54. To ensure support of education authorities and sharing of data, it is important that any such body have no role in monitoring compliance of jurisdictions with conditions for receipt of Commonwealth funding, including implementation of bilateral agreements.

#### Improving Indigenous student outcomes

55. Improving student outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students remains a national priority and a responsibility of all governments. However, local context matters when addressing disparity in outcomes for Indigenous students and one-size-fits-all national programmatic responses can be problematic.
56. The strategic national reforms outlined in this paper will support and enable improved outcomes for Indigenous students by providing better evidence and a stronger focus on evaluation of the success of reform initiatives. This will provide a solid foundation for action by jurisdictions and help to ensure national, state and local initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are based on evidence of what works.
57. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will also benefit from improved teaching quality and better tools for teachers to deliver targeted support and intervention for their students.
58. It is anticipated that specific measures to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes will be a focus of the bilateral reform agreements between the Government and states, which will include a requirement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are consulted on reforms that significantly impact them.

59. This requirement must ensure that local indigenous communities have a voice in and ownership of specific reforms that are aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students.