

Communiqué

The Education Council convened in Adelaide today to discuss a range of early childhood and education matters. Ministers noted the Australian Capital Territory is observing caretaker conventions ahead of its forthcoming election, with any policy-related or appointment matters to be considered by the ACT's incoming government. As Education Council operates on the basis of consensus decision-making, the Communiqué details the scope of today's discussions and operational decisions taken by the Council.

School Funding

The Education Council discussed Australian Government principles surrounding the distribution of school funding in the context of needs-based funding arrangements to support children throughout Australia.

Whilst a number of concerns were raised by some states and territories, it was agreed Ministers will use their December 2016 meeting to discuss advice to be provided to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) regarding future school funding arrangements.

Online Assessment

Ministers discussed progress in the implementation of NAPLAN online, which is due to commence in some states and territories in 2017. The recent Platform Trial and Readiness Testing (PTRT) was the focus of Ministers' discussion. Over 1000 schools participated over the nine-day period of the PTRT which foreshadowed, as far as practicable, the experience of NAPLAN online. The purpose of the PTRT was to test the online platform and to provide states and territories with an opportunity to assess their readiness, including schools' information technology infrastructure, new test administration processes and classroom logistics.

Ministers discussed tailored test design which will improve accuracy of national assessment and student reporting by delivering a set of test items with items better suited to individual student abilities. Tailored test design provides increased scope to more accurately measure student performance, particularly at either end of the achievement scale, while using the same length of test.

Council received an update on the readiness to transition to NAPLAN online. This update included consideration of the readiness for implementation nationally and work underway to address any risks that were identified in the trial. Further advice will be provided to Education Council in December 2016.

Ministers considered concerns, specifically regarding the Year 3 writing component in the transition to NAPLAN online, and agreed to receive specific analysis and recommendations on that matter at the December 2016 meeting. Council acknowledged the commitment from ACARA to work with jurisdictions in developing a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy regarding the transition to NAPLAN online.

Initial Teacher Education

The Education Council discussed a proposal from the New South Wales Minister for Education regarding the importance of further strengthening standards for initial teacher education to ensure that high quality candidates are entering the teaching profession. Ministers discussed three broad areas of reform including lifting academic standards, transparency of initial teacher education entry standards and a coherent, national approach to improving initial teacher education standards and supply.

Ministers directed officials to undertake further work to explore these broad areas of reform and specific measures to improve standards and report back to Education Council in 2017.

Family Day Care

Education Council received an update on critical issues relating to the provision of Family Day Care (FDC). Ministers discussed initiatives already underway across the country addressing enhanced education for providers regarding awareness of obligations to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, as well as a raft of measures, including legislative change, to address non-compliance and systemic issues amongst some FDC providers.

Ministers have directed senior officials to undertake urgent work to provide Council with advice on further options to address fraud and systemic issues to ensure that quality FDC providers are supported to continue delivering excellent services for the children in their care. Officials will report back to Council in December 2016.

National Quality Agenda Review

Ministers discussed the finalisation and implementation of the review of the National Quality Agenda (NQA). The NQA review provided an opportunity to consider possible improvements to the system for changes to the Education and Care Services National Law, National Regulations and to operational processes to clarify expectations and reinforce policy intent, and streamline and reduce regulatory burden whilst maintaining a focus on improved outcomes for children.

It is anticipated that Ministers will consider a final package of outcomes of the review, including recommendations, proposed amendments to the National Law and the Decision Regulation Impact Statement at their December meeting. Ministers have requested senior officials provide additional advice on options for commencement of proposed changes so the sector, families, and regulators can begin to see the benefits of these changes.

International Education

Council discussed national priorities in international education and in the context of Council's expanded scope, thanked Victorian Minister Steve Herbert for raising this item. The recent release of the Australian Government's *National Strategy for International Education 2025*, along with the international education strategies and discussion papers released by several states and territories, makes the alignment of national activities and approaches timely and appropriate. National collaboration will be crucial in ensuring the continued success of the sector as a vital contributor to Australia's economy – contributing over \$19 billion in 2015. Several Ministers agreed that jurisdictions experience similar opportunities and challenges regarding international education, which would benefit from greater national collaboration.

Ministers discussed shared priorities including enhancement of student experience and employability, quality of educational outcomes, national branding and improved data collection. Ministers agreed to continue to consider international education issues at the December 2016 Education Council meeting.

Media Centre for Education Research Australia

Minister Close provided her colleagues with an update on the Media Centre for Education Research Australia (MCERA), which was recently founded as an independent, not-for profit organisation.

The MCERA will provide a conduit through which educational research and researchers can be made more accessible to the media and therefore to the public, parents, grandparents, educational practitioners and organisations with an interest in education. In doing so it will improve public understanding of key issues for education.

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