

Communiqué

The Education Council met via video conference on 11 December for its final meeting of 2015. Ministers discussed a range of key policy issues in the early childhood and school education portfolios.

STEM Education

Council endorsed the *National Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) School Education Strategy 2016-2026*. The strategy supports a long-term change agenda aiming to ensure that students have a stronger foundation in STEM and are inspired to take on more challenging STEM subjects. The Strategy acknowledges that while there is significant effort already underway within all jurisdictions to lift student outcomes in STEM, a renewed national focus on STEM education will provide fresh momentum to improve performance in this area. It identifies national collaborative actions in key areas where joint effort would support improved STEM outcomes, and draws on national and international evidence, recommendations from the Chief Scientist, discussions across jurisdictions and the national STEM Education Summit chaired by NSW and held in Sydney on Thursday 5 November.

The strategy will be published on the Education Council website (www.ec.edu.au) in December 2015.

Initial Teacher Education

Council endorsed the revised national *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures*. The revised standards and procedures will lift the quality of initial teacher education programs and the abilities of program graduates. They include the use of the national literacy and numeracy test as agreed by Ministers in September 2015, introduction of a two stage accreditation process and new requirements relating to primary specialisation.

Council endorsed implementation timelines targeting accreditation decisions by 2017, noting that all jurisdictions are endeavouring to meet the timelines and resolve any outstanding implementation issues. Implementation of the revised standards and procedures will be supported by detailed guidance material to support consistency of assessment and rigour in the accreditation process.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) will work with state and territory regulatory authorities to provide guidance and support to initial teacher education providers and assessment panels.

Online assessment

Ministers were given a detailed update regarding the transition to NAPLAN online, which is due to commence in several states and territories from 2017. All states and territories are continuing to develop local readiness implementation plans and are participating in jurisdictional planning activities across education sectors, test administration authorities and curriculum authorities.

The Council was advised about the significant additional benefits of the transition to NAPLAN online, including improved hardware, ICT and infrastructure in schools, and the ability to use the NAPLAN Online Assessment Platform to support the delivery of other national and state and territory systemic online programs. Research to inform preparation for the move to NAPLAN online continues.

Improving access to the Australian Curriculum for parents

Ministers noted that information sheets have been developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority to improve parental access to the Australian Curriculum. The materials focus on what students learn in each learning area and are concisely written in plain English, using diagrams and images to illustrate the information. They can be customised by state and territory authorities as required.

The information sheets will be published on the Australian Curriculum website by the end of 2015.

Australian Curriculum: Languages

Council endorsed the *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum Languages: Hindi and Turkish*. Development of the Hindi and Turkish curricula commenced in December 2014 and was finalised in October 2015, following an extensive consultation process.

The *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum Languages: Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages* was also endorsed by Council. The Framework provides a way forward for Australian schools to support the teaching and learning of the languages indigenous to this country. Learning to use these unique languages can play an important part in the development of a strong sense of identity, pride and self-esteem for Australian students.

The Framework and Hindi and Turkish curricula will be published on the Australian Curriculum website in December 2015. State and territory school and curriculum authorities will determine implementation timelines for their schools.

English Language Proficiency

Council endorsed the National Framework for Assessing English Language Proficiency and requested that senior officials consider options for the use and application of the framework.

National Quality Agenda

Ministers were advised that recommendations from the Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Agenda (NQA) Review are being considered within the broader context of negotiations around future funding and conditions under a National Partnership. Until these negotiations are completed, any changes to the NQA for 2016 are unable to be finalised.

Appointment of National Education and Care Services Ombudsman, Freedom of Information and Privacy Commissioners

Council appointed Ms Lesley Foster to the roles of Education and Care Services Ombudsman, Freedom of Information Commissioner and Privacy Commissioner pursuant to its powers under the Education and Care Services National Law. Ms Foster is a former senior education executive with extensive experience in all aspects of the regulation of early childhood education and care services and schools. Ministers welcomed Ms Foster to this important role, and acknowledged the contribution of the outgoing Commissioner, Mr Ian Pollerd.

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