



THE SENATE
SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
Public Hearing –7 December 2018
Questions Taken on Notice
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

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Senator MOORE: I know ACER's work, but, in terms of the development of that in particular—and this is a good example—they're doing work about an international assessment tool, so they bring the work that you do internationally around that, because it's an area that Australia has worked in as part of their ODA. Does that also bring in their domestic work? That comes back to the department of education's primary responsibility for that goal in Australia. With the work that you're doing with ACER about the tool, is Education, as a department, as the primary department responsible, involved in those discussions as well?

Dr Rogers: I wouldn't be able to tell you with any certainty.

Senator MOORE: Could you take that on notice?

Dr Rogers: Yes, I can take that on notice. The discussions actually happen through global mechanisms, and ACER are on some of those as technical advice. Where it comes into it for us in the aid program is in relation to the Pacific, where they, of course, have their own standardised testing, and they've chosen not to go with PISA and the other international testing regimes. It's very relevant there because we're looking at how you can actually track education progress in the Pacific, and ACER has been doing that work about benchmarking against those international criteria. It's extremely challenging and technically complicated work but very important for the Pacific.

Senator MOORE: Absolutely. I get that clearly from the international perspective, but I'm not sure about something. We are supposed to be looking at education in Australia with just as much scrutiny to see what's happening in our domestic process, and early childhood education, development of process, benchmarking and those things are also areas of great debate within Australian policy. What I'm trying to get clear in my mind is this: if this organisation, which is very well regarded, is working so strongly for our Pacific engagement, is the Australian department of education as involved in trying to ensure that we know exactly what's happening in early childhood education? I know they're doing it, but is it actually feeding back into the SDG process? That's, again, where you have to link in to state governments, and it is those consistent policy linkages, which lead to an awareness of what exactly is going on, that I'm trying to get to the bottom of. I just don't get any certainty that all those things are tied up—that departments, particularly in Australia, when they're looking at policy issues, such as early childhood education, are engaging with the SDG agenda in the work they're doing—and that that's discussed when you come back to the IDC and you're going around the table. We've had so much debate around higher education in Australia; has the

Department of Education actually thought, when they come to the IDC on the SDGs, that this is a topic that they need to report on and that does have relevance for the SDG agenda? I know there are no minutes from the IDCs and, because of the way we operate, everything is segmented. That's part of the ongoing questioning in the employment and education Senate process, not in the PM&C process or—the jargon is killing me!—in the DFAT process. As a nation, how do we get awareness of what each of these responsible departments is doing, because it doesn't appear on their websites?

Dr Rogers: Just so I'm clear, you're asking us to check—

Senator MOORE: I'm trying to find out the process for ensuring that an issue such as you've just defined, early education, is one that the federal and state education departments are feeding back on as part of their responsibility under the SDG framework.

...

Dr Rogers: What I can check in relation to that is the engagement of the department of education in the international body that is talking about these standards, and I can find out, I hope, whether or not the fact that there is, I think, some movement on the indicator has been communicated back. I guess, if they're engaged in the international technical working group on it, they'll know that the indicator has been developed.

Senator MOORE: That would be good. Is there an indicator, statistically, through the education SDG?

Mrs Walter: I'd have to check.

Senator MOORE: On notice is fine. That's the other thing going full cycle, pulling it all together—the statistical data. We know it's an ongoing battle in Australia to get the states all signed up to the same sort of statistical basis for information. Education is a good one. The other one is health, with all the work that is done in our health departments.

Response:

What is the department of Education's involvement with the Australian Council for Educational Research (in relation to domestic application of an internationally developed literacy and numeracy tool)?

Are you able to advise if the Department of Education is engaged with technical bodies (such as the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDG)) to frame the education related SDG indicators? If so, does this engagement influence the measurement of education performance in the domestic setting?

The National Assessment Program (NAP), endorsed by Australian education ministers, includes international assessments. The Department of Education and Training manages the international NAP assessments, including contracting a National Project Manager, on behalf of all states and territories. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) currently acts as the National Project Manager for all three international sample assessments, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The National Project Manager is responsible for implementing the assessments in Australia in accordance with international specifications.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) leads Australia's engagement with the international fora involved in development of the SDG Indicators, such as the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG

Indicators (IAEG-SDG) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UNESCAP). This engagement is outlined in the ABS Submission to this Inquiry [Submission Number 96]. The Australian Department of Education and Training is not directly involved in the development of the SDG indicator framework.

Each year, the Australian Government Department of Education and Training provides Australian data to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including data provided by states and territories. The data informs indicators across all levels of education from early childhood education to higher education, including school class sizes, school learning and teaching time, and teachers' salaries. The data is then used in UNESCO's monitoring of all participating countries performance against Sustainable Development Goal 4.