

Chapter 2

Education and Training portfolio

2.1 This chapter summarises certain key areas of interest raised during the committee's consideration of additional estimates for the 2014–15 financial year for the Education and Training portfolio. This chapter of the report follows the order of proceedings and is an indicative, not exhaustive, account of issues examined.

2.2 On 25 February and 5 March 2015, the committee heard evidence from Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, and Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, along with officers from the Department of Education and Training (the Department) and agencies responsible for administering Education and Training policy, including:

- Tertiary Employment Quality and Standards Agency;
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority;
- Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership;
- Australian Research Council; and
- Australian Skills and Quality Authority.

Cross-portfolio matters

Machinery of government changes

2.3 In light of machinery of government changes since the consideration of supplementary estimates in late 2014, the committee began by seeking clarification as to which early childhood services remained the responsibility of the Department, and which had become the responsibility of the Department of Social Services. The Secretary, Ms Lisa Paul, advised that childcare responsibilities had moved to the Social Services portfolio, while preschool, research and early languages would remain within Education and Training. Ms Paul suggested 'the way that you could frame it is that anyone under four is with [the Department of Social Services] and preschool remains our responsibility'.¹

2.4 The committee subsequently discussed the impetus for the machinery of government changes. The Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, while noting that questions about overall government and departmental structure would be best directed to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, advised that the changes reflected the most appropriate way to manage certain functions and programs.² In particular, the Minister drew the committee's

1 Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 4.

2 Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 February 2015, p. 30.

attention to the distinction between educational aspects of early childhood services and those to do with childcare and family assistance.³ Ms Paul noted that the Department maintains close connections with other departments on education matters, and will continue to do so in relation to early childhood.⁴

Higher education advertising campaign

2.5 The committee discussed a government advertising campaign about higher education fees and the HECS-HELP scheme. The committee heard that the campaign sought to address misconceptions about the future of the HECS-HELP scheme, raise awareness of higher education support mechanisms and reassure prospective students and their families about potential reforms to the higher education system.⁵

2.6 In response to questions about whether an advertising campaign may be carried out if the related legislation has not been passed by the Parliament, Ms Paul advised the committee that current and past guidelines allow it and she had certified similar campaigns in the past.⁶

2.7 The committee also heard evidence about research, evaluation and monitoring undertaken in conjunction with the campaign. Jacqueline Gleeson, Acting Branch Manager, People, Communication and Legal, described the preliminary results of the first two weeks of the campaign:

They seemed to suggest some decreases in the prevalence of myths and misconceptions about the higher education system and also some slight increases in awareness of the reforms. Further, campaign activity shows to be positively correlated to a correction in audiences misconceptions of the reforms. There was an increased awareness of government support for higher education and the mechanisms that will remain in place into the future and some increases in perceptions that the reforms will be beneficial to Australia.⁷

3 Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 February 2015, p. 30.

4 Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 31.

5 Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 13 and 47; Ms Jacqueline Gleeson, Acting Branch Manager, People, Communication and Legal, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 13; Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 February 2015, p. 13.

6 Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 14 and 20.

7 Ms Jacqueline Gleeson, Acting Branch Manager, People, Communication and Legal, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 12.

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)

National Trade Cadetship

2.8 The committee heard evidence that the National Trade Cadetship (NTC) curriculum, which covers both literacy and numeracy with a particular focus on work readiness, has been delivered for years 9 and 10 and ACARA is working to support its take-up by states and territories.⁸ The committee queried the development of a curriculum for years 11 and 12 and was advised by the Department that work had not commenced on the curriculum and it would not be proceeding.⁹

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing

2.9 The committee discussed preparations for online NAPLAN testing. Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer of ACARA, advised that the work is underway with a transition to online testing scheduled to begin in 2017.¹⁰ Stanley Rabinowitz, General Manager, outlined the two key foci of preparing for online testing:

... making sure that items themselves are computer ready; and that the device, the platform that gets built, can work with our items, is fair to all students and can handle different types of devices.¹¹

2.10 The committee also sought information about withdrawals from NAPLAN testing, which have increased from less than two per cent to slightly over two per cent.¹² Asked what the increase in withdrawals could be attributed to, Mr Randall suggested that there had been increased publicity about NAPLAN participation and greater public awareness of the ability to withdraw students from testing.¹³ The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, indicated that the success of the NAPLAN program should not be judged by the small number of people who have an issue with it.¹⁴

8 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 51.

9 *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 51–53.

10 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 56.

11 Dr Stanley Rabinowitz, General Manager, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 56.

12 Dr Stanley Rabinowitz, General Manager, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 64.

13 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 65.

14 Senator the Hon Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 67–8.

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Teacher quality and course entry requirements

2.11 The committee asked about proposed literacy and numeracy testing for undergraduate teaching students. The committee heard that a field trial of the test, involving 1 300 teaching students from a range of institutions across Australia, had been completed and the results used to develop a benchmark.¹⁵ Mr Cook explained that satisfactory completion of the test, once implemented, would become a mandatory requirement of teacher registration by way of the national standards accepted by each state and territory.¹⁶

Australian Research Council

Future Fellowships scheme

2.12 The committee discussed the discontinuation of the Future Fellowships scheme. Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Research Council, explained that the scheme was created as a terminating scheme, with funding provided for a fixed five year period (followed by a one year extension).¹⁷ This period had expired without provision being made for further funding, and consequently no Future Fellowships were available for the 2014–15 financial year. However, both Professor Byrne and Ms Paul noted the government's intention to make the Future Fellowships scheme ongoing, subject to the passage of legislation before the Parliament.¹⁸

Tertiary Employment Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

Provider registration assessment

2.13 The committee heard evidence about TEQSA's revised approach to provider registration assessment. Nicholas Saunders, Acting Chief Commissioner, explained that from the existing 42 provider registration standards, seven have been designated as core standards; low-risk providers seeking re-registration are assessed only against those core standards.¹⁹ All 42 standards are applied to higher risk providers and new providers seeking initial registration.²⁰

15 Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 70.

16 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 71.

17 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 82.

18 *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 81–3.

19 Professor Nicholas Saunders, Acting Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Employment Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 96.

20 Professor Nicholas Saunders, Acting Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Employment Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 97.

Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA)

Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)

2.14 The committee discussed ASQA's oversight of RTOs, including Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers. Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, explained that ASQA oversees RTO registration, undertakes audits and investigates RTO compliance in response to complaints or other concerns, using a cost-recovery fee model.²¹

2.15 The committee was advised that in 2013–14 there were a total of 7 600 registration applications of which 180 were rejected: 44 initial applications, 33 renewal applications and 103 change-of-scope applications.²² Mr Robinson provided the committee with examples of serious noncompliance that might lead to rejection, including unqualified teaching staff and poor or invalid assessment processes.²³

2.16 The committee heard that approximately 1 400 complaints are lodged with ASQA each year.²⁴ In relation to complaints, Mr Robinson informed the committee:

The whole VET regulatory reform strategy is about taking the information that comes through from complaints and other intelligence from the industry and using that to address poor-quality RTO provision at a much faster rate than we would if we had continued with the system that we were using before, where the placement of an application to get re-registered or the like would be the main trigger for our regulatory scrutiny. We are now wanting to re-prioritise our work to deal more quickly with the worst-quality providers.²⁵

Outcome 3

Higher education funding reform

2.17 The committee asked the Department about proposed reforms to higher education funding, covering topics such as fee deregulation, projected changes to student enrolment and the effect those changes might have on the cost of higher education to government and the public, and the operation and future of the FEE-

21 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 107–8.

22 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 108.

23 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 108.

24 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 105.

25 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, p. 106.

HELP, VET FEE-HELP and HECS-HELP schemes.²⁶ The committee also heard evidence in relation to the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy.²⁷

Outcome 1

Early childhood education

2.18 The committee heard that all states and territories agreed to the national partnership for universal access preschool funding in 2015.²⁸ Mr Cook confirmed that there is an overarching national partnership agreement, under which each state or territory has its own bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth.²⁹ Universal access funding is contingent upon states achieving agreed benchmarks in areas such as enrolment and attendance.³⁰ The committee and the Department also discussed the Productivity Commission's report on early childhood education and care.³¹

Outcome 2

Independent Public Schools

2.19 The committee discussed independent public schools, which are based on five key 'domains' that provide greater independence and autonomy for the principal and the school.³² The Department explained that the Minister for Education and Training wrote to his state and territory counterparts inviting them to participate in a national IPS scheme, with each state or territory determining their own approach to the five domains in consultation with the Commonwealth.³³ Ms Paul described some of the benefits of the initiative:

I think what you will find parents see is things like their teachers and principals getting professional development in how to be more autonomous. Parents and families will see school councils being more active or set up—if they have not been set up before. They will see some schools taking more accountability for on staffing and hiring decisions and so on.³⁴

26 *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 120–137.

27 *Estimates Hansard*, 25 February 2015, pp 137–9.

28 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 2.

29 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 3.

30 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 4.

31 *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, pp 3–10.

32 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 11; Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 11.

33 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 11.

34 Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 12.

2.20 Mr Cook stated that seven jurisdictions have signed up to the program; negotiations continued with Western Australia, while the change of government in Queensland had caused a delay in that state.³⁵

Students with disabilities

2.21 The committee sought information about additional funding for students with disabilities. Mr Cook advised that students with disabilities identified through state and territory processes receive a disability loading from the Commonwealth.³⁶ The committee heard that this loading has been in place since 2014 but will be subject to refinement based on a national dataset to be released in August 2015.³⁷ Ms Deb Efthymiades, Group Manager, Schooling, explained that classifications of need are based on the amount of adjustment a student requires, from 'extensive' to 'no adjustment required', rather than the nature of their disability.³⁸

35 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 22.

36 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, pp 23–4.

37 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 24.

38 Ms Deb Efthymiades, Group Manager, Schooling, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 March 2015, p. 28.

