

Chapter 3

Education and Training portfolio

1.1 This chapter summarises certain key areas of interest raised during the committee's consideration of the budget estimates for the 2015-16 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.

1.2 On 3 and 4 June 2015, the committee heard evidence from Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, and Senator the Honourable Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, representing 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:

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
- 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.

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

1.3 The committee heard evidence for approximately 16 minutes.

Digitisation of cultural records

1.4 The Principal of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Mr Russell Taylor, informed the committee that an additional \$5 million appropriation to AIATSIS would be used to digitise and preserve its collection of cultural material, especially items sensitive to physical or chemical breakdown such as film, photographs and audiotapes.¹ In addition to ensuring the preservation of these culturally significant items, digitisation will improve the ease and speed of research in relation to native title claims.²

AIATSIS Foundation

1.5 The committee also discussed the establishment of the AIATSIS Foundation, which will provide financial assistance to support the work of AIATSIS and may also

1 Mr Russell Taylor, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 4.

2 Mr Russell Taylor, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 4.

promote related projects and activities in its own right.³ Donations to the foundation will be tax deductible.⁴

Australian Research Council

1.6 The committee heard evidence for approximately one hour and 24 minutes.

Future Fellowships

1.7 The Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Research Council, Professor Aidan Byrne, advised the committee that approval had been granted for a further 50 Future Fellowships.⁵ Asked about the benefits a Fellowship provides to mid-career researchers, Professor Byrne said:

It allows them, I think, to establish themselves as independent researchers and to be the future research leaders of the organisations they are in. It gives them the freedom to pursue their individual research career. ... These grants allow a degree of independence. It allows them to establish their own research connections. It enables them to build important research connections internationally, which is actually very important.⁶

1.8 The committee heard evidence that the Australian Research Council would have to find the resources to fund these scholarships – at \$11 million per annum – from existing resources, ‘until such time as the parliament resolves the matter through the legislation’.⁷

Industrial Transformation Research Program

1.9 The committee heard evidence in relation to the Industrial Transformation Research Program (IRTP), which connects researchers and universities with industry in priority areas such as advanced manufacturing, medical devices, mining and agribusiness.⁸ These priority areas are aligned with the priority areas of the Industry Growth Centres Initiative administered by the Department of Industry and Science.⁹

3 Mr Russell Taylor, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 5.

4 Mr Russell Taylor, Principal, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 5.

5 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 7.

6 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 21.

7 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 8.

8 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 15.

9 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, pp 17 and 18–19.

Research Metrics

1.10 The committee heard evidence in relation to the Australian Research Council's assessment of proposals for research impact metrics, including work that has been done with the Academy for Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE). In evidence Professor Byrne advised the committee that:

In a sense, ATSE has done a third of the exercise. The third of the exercise that they have done is to start to coming up with, perhaps, a suitable indicator. The next part of the conversation is to test that in specific institutions to see if it actually is meaningful. It is very important to do that. The next stage of the exercise is to say, 'Well, this is what we can get with existing; what might we actually want to consider to do it better?'¹⁰

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

1.11 The committee heard evidence for approximately one hour and eight minutes.

Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group report

1.12 The committee sought information about how the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) would implement the recommendations of the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group's report 'Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers'. The Chief Commissioner, Professor Nicholas Saunders, advised that TEQSA met with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in March 2015 and discussed the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

Professor Saunders described TEQSA's role in the implementation process:

I think our role at the moment is to diligently do the education course accreditation of the non-university providers and to work with AITSL to support them in their activities with regard to the vast majority of teacher education programs in the country.¹¹

Academic integrity

1.13 The committee asked about reports of student cheating using online services. Professor Saunders advised the committee that he was waiting to hear back from universities about the actions they had taken, but stated that he was satisfied that there had been appropriate responses.¹² He noted that while the issue of academic dishonesty is not new, technology has changed the nature and extent of the problem:

What has changed the game, I think, in recent years is the pervasive use of information technology, social media and the like. People have always been able to purchase essays and seek assistance with assessments from people who are not enrolled students. In the old days it used to be much more

10 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 12.

11 Professor Nicholas Saunders, Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 25.

12 Professor Nicholas Saunders, Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 27.

difficult to gain access to that. Nowadays, as you know, with the internet and the like, it is a much more pervasive issue.¹³

Establishment, registration and accreditation of universities

1.14 The committee heard evidence in relation to the processes and standards for establishing, registering and accrediting a new Australian university.

Australian Skills and Quality Authority

1.15 The committee heard evidence for approximately two hours and 55 minutes.

VET FEE-HELP investigations

1.16 The committee was advised that the Australian Skills and Quality Authority (ASQA) is conducting 23 audits in relation to the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme. Chief Commissioner Mr Christopher Robinson stated:

At the moment, those audits have been completed in terms of the initial audit phase. But we are interviewing students as well, because the nature of the VET FEE-HELP concerns that were raised were very much to do with how students were recruited into courses and the use of brokers and the like.¹⁴

Registered training organisation (RTO) audits

1.17 Mr Robinson told the committee that ASQA had undertaken approximately 2 500 audits of RTOs in the last four years.¹⁵ In total, ASQA has cancelled or refused the registration of 260 RTOs and has also taken outside regulatory action.¹⁶ Asked why qualifications from certain de-registered RTOs had not been withdrawn, Mr Robinson explained:

... we are very loathe to do that without clear evidence that the people who got those qualifications were not competent. The legal issue is that if we do an audit at a certain point in time, you cannot presume that the qualifications that people gained earlier were not valid or that the people who hold them are not competent. We have not tested that retrospectively.¹⁷

13 Professor Nicholas Saunders, Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 27.

14 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills and Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 39.

15 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills and Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 39.

16 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills and Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 45.

17 Mr Christopher Robinson, Chief Commissioner, Australian Skills and Quality Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 41.

Outcome 2

1.18 The committee heard evidence for approximately three hours and 30 minutes.

Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) debt

1.19 The committee asked the Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Mr Robert Griew, about proposals to write off HECS debt of up to \$100 000 for undergraduate students in science, technology, engineering and maths. Mr Griew estimated the cost of the proposal to be more than \$2 billion dollars, but noted that the calculation was not straightforward due to the variety of repayment rates and timeframes across any given student cohort.¹⁸

Australian Apprenticeship Services Support Network (ASSN)

1.20 The committee was informed that apprenticeship services would be delivered through the new AASSN, replacing the former Australian Apprenticeship Centres. Deputy Secretary, Skills and Training, Dr Subho Banerjee, explained that individual support would continue to be offered in addition to new gateway and mentoring services.¹⁹ The Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, added that the change was designed to address a recent reduction in the number of apprentices:

... the AASSN tender in particular is focussed on providing at least greater mentoring within the apprenticeships and greater assistance in the early stages of selection to better match apprentices and employers. This will at least ensure that, where we are still getting apprentices through the system, we boost the completion rate, which is currently hovering around 50 per cent.²⁰

Australian Consensus Centre (ACC)

1.21 In response to questions about the ACC, Mr Griew told the committee that following a government decision in 2014 to bring the 'Copenhagen consensus model methodology' to Australia, the Department held discussions with Dr Bjorn Lomborg and then with the University of Western Australia (UWA). The discussions led to a contract between the Department and UWA with \$4 million to be provided by the Department, a \$4 million in-kind contribution from UWA and \$5 million from private

18 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, pp 57–8.

19 Dr Subho Banerjee, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Training, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 66.

20 Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 67.

fund raising.²¹ UWA subsequently informed the Department that it could not complete the contract.²²

National Partnerships

1.22 The committee asked questions about the process for determining payments under the National Partnership on Skills Reform. Dr Banerjee and the Group Manager, Skills Policy, Mr Craig Robertson told the committee:

Dr Banerjee : There is an annual review of performance against the national partnership. I will go back into the historical record of 2012 and 2013. I will check with Mr Robertson about what the process has been for those assessments.

Mr Robertson : The normal process at the end of a calendar year is for states and territories to report against an implementation plan that they would have crafted at the time the national partnership in particular was agreed. We then go through a process of assessing their progress against those implementation plans. So there have been two lots of payments to all states and territories in respect of 2012 and 2013. We are in the process of receiving responses to the implementation plan in respect of 2014, and that is a process we are going through at the moment.²³

International agents

1.23 In response to questions about the powers to regulate international providers and the behaviour of their agents in recruiting students the committee was told that there was no direct regulation of international agents, but their behaviour was indirectly regulated by TEQSA and the Department through higher education providers.

Boosting the Commercial Returns to Research

1.24 The committee was informed in response to questions about the Boosting the Commercial Returns to Research Strategy that the Department was looking at evaluating the research grant streams. Mr Griew advised the committee:

There are a number of different programs. We will certainly be evaluating how they can work together—whether some of them might be combined or reformed in some way. But I think the work has to be done first, and then that will be a matter for government.²⁴

21 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, pp 82–6.

22 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 87.

23 Dr Subho Banerjee, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Training, Department of Education and Training, and Mr Craig Robertson., Group Manager, Skills Policy, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 64.

24 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 99.

1.25 The Group Manager, Research and Economic, Mr Dom English also told the committee:

We are going to examine research programs that focus on collaboration between publicly-funded research agencies and industry to see what opportunities there are to align those programs or consolidate those programs to simplify the engagement by third parties with the government's funding streams.²⁵

Curtin Medical School

1.26 The committee discussed the development of a medical school at Curtin University in Western Australia (WA). The medical school will commence with 60 places in 2017, increasing to a full capacity of 110 places by 2022.²⁶

Cross-portfolio matters

1.27 The committee heard evidence for approximately two hours and 45 minutes.

Enterprise bargaining agreement

1.28 The committee received an update on the Department's enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations.

Parental engagement awareness campaign

1.29 The committee heard that the Department will spend \$5 million on a parental engagement awareness campaign to be based on research undertaken by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).²⁷ The Assistant Minister for Education and Training, Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, outlined the link between ARACY's research and the awareness campaign:

ARACY would be looking at what the best practice is, what is actually seen to work in terms of the best and most worthwhile areas for parental engagement. And then you shift the campaign element to: how do you inspire people to undertake more of those areas of parental engagement? How do you lift that level of engagement in those areas that are seen to be most worthwhile?²⁸

1.30 Asked about the source of the campaign funding, Associate Secretary Mr Tony Cook stated:

The cost of this measure will be met by redirecting \$5.0 million in 2014-15 from the information campaign component of the *Higher Education*

25 Mr Dom English, Group Manager, Research and Economic, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 99.

26 Ms Melissa Reardon, Director, Higher Education Reform, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2015, p. 110.

27 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 9.

28 Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 17.

Reforms—amendments measure announced in the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2014-15*.²⁹

Departmental savings

1.31 Asked about \$131 million in savings to be made by the Department, Associate Secretary Mr Tony Cook stated:

Some of those savings are as a result of [a] functional efficiency review; some of those savings are as a result of other aspects of the smaller government agenda, that is, particular boards or committees ceasing their operations. I think some of those savings are also other minor saving activity that the government made a decision on as part of the budget process.³⁰

1.32 In relation to the functional and efficiency review conducted by the Nous Group, the Assistant Minister noted that '[t]he Nous recommendations helped to inform the savings and efficiency measures that the government was able to take in the budget'.³¹ The review has been extended for a second stage.

1.33 The committee was advised that a reduction of 50 staff between 2014–15 and 2015–16 would largely be achieved through voluntary redundancies, machinery-of-government changes and natural attrition.³² The committee also discussed programs and initiatives that may be diminished or discontinued as a result of reduced funding.

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

1.34 The committee heard evidence for approximately two hours and 56 minutes.

Staffing

1.35 The committee heard that there would be 16 forced redundancies and nine new positions within the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), reflecting the changing nature of ACARA's work.

Curriculum development

1.36 Chief Executive Officer Mr Robert Randall confirmed that curricula for health and physical education, digital technologies, design technologies and the arts were completed by ACARA after extensive consultation in November 2013. The curricula were submitted to the Education Council in 2014 and are awaiting the Council's

29 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 11.

30 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 24.

31 Senator the Honourable Simon Birmingham, Assistant Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 29.

32 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, pp 25–26.

approval.³³ It was noted that the Donnelly Wiltshire review delayed the process of approval.

1.37 The committee discussed the take up of classical languages, in particular Classical Greek, and whether the low number of students studying the language was taken into account when a decision was made to roll-out the national curriculum. The committee also discussed strategies to increase participation in science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. Senator the Honourable Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, confirmed that the Education Council had determined to direct ACARA to stop work on senior curriculum development.³⁴

National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing

1.38 General Manager, Assessment and Reporting, Dr Stanley Rabinowitz, outlined ACARA's preparations for electronic NAPLAN testing. The committee raised concerns about the possible limitations of the system, including the difficulty of computer-assisted grading of persuasive and narrative writing tasks and technological barriers to participation for children in remote indigenous communities or from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

1.39 In relation to allegations of misconduct in a South Australian school, Dr Rabinowitz advised that ACARA itself does not have any investigatory functions but confirmed that the incident would be followed up by the appropriate state authority.³⁵

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

1.40 The committee heard evidence for approximately two hours and 16 minutes.

Board composition

1.41 The committee discussed the composition of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) board and the recent selection of new members for the board. Mr Cook noted 'the constitution indicates the membership of the board. The minister has approved the change to the constitution, as previous ministers have in the past'.³⁶

1.42 Asked about the desirable skill and expertise on the board, the Chief Executive Officer, Ms Margery Evans, said:

... there is a range of characteristics. There would be people who have expertise in leadership and teaching; people who have expertise in the management of various sectors of schooling; people who have expertise in

33 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 52.

34 Senator the Honourable Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 66

35 Dr Stanley Rabinowitz, General Manager, Assessment and Reporting, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 56.

governance, including risk audit and finance; and people who have expertise in regulation and accreditation, initial teacher education, public policy and government liaison.³⁷

Outcome 1

1.43 The committee heard evidence for approximately three hours and 23 minutes.

Williams decisions

1.44 The committee discussed changes to Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) funding in light of two decisions of the High Court of Australia that certain operational funding arrangements were unconstitutional.³⁸ Mr Cook advised that ACSSO's contract had been revised in response to legal advice but confirmed that there was no loss of funding. Senator Ryan highlighted the particular effect on the Education and Training portfolio:

[T]here is probably not as great an awareness as there could be of the quite substantial restriction that that now places on Commonwealth involvement. The Commonwealth does not have an open-ended for the purposes of education power. ... [I]n this one education is probably impacted a little bit more than most.³⁹

National Education Reform Agreement funding

1.45 In response to questions about whether the Department has been able to confirm that all Commonwealth funding provided under the National Education Reform Agreement was used for its intended purposes, Mr Cook stated:

We have only just now, as we would normally do, written to all state and territory heads of department asking for an acquittal of their 2014 expenditure. Normally, we would have to wait this long because audited accounts do not happen at the end of a calendar year. They usually happen in the following year. It is a requirement under the act.⁴⁰

1.46 The committee also heard that the difference in reporting requirements between participating and non-participating states is that the non-participating states do not need to break the data down beyond school level.

Federation White Paper

1.47 Mr Cook advised the committee that the Department has provided advice to Prime Minister and Cabinet on the Federation White Paper, as well as participating in state consultation events.

37 Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 91.

38 *Williams v Commonwealth of Australia* (2012) 248 CLR 156; *Williams v Commonwealth of Australia* [2014] HCA 23.

39 Senator the Honourable Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 112.

40 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 96.

Funding of organisations

1.48 The committee asked about the funding of several organisation over the forward estimates, including Australian Council of State School Organisations, Australian Parents Council, Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau, Isolated Children's Parents' Association. The committee heard that funding for all but the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau would continue, with the \$300,000 in funding for the Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau not renewed for the 2015-16 financial year.

Students with disabilities

1.49 In response to questions around whether the Department collects, or is aware of, data relating to students with disability who have been refused enrolment or have been offered part-time enrolment, Mr Cook advised that the Department does not collect the data as enrolment is the responsibility of the states. He confirmed that the information about students' disabilities comes from the state, stating:

That information would only be collected through a medical assessment or a medical diagnosis through the state process, which means a child is attending the school to enable that to happen.⁴¹

1.50 Mr Tony Cook confirmed that the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data is on track for completion in October, and will inform the implementation of a disability loading in time for delayed commencement in 2016. When asked about the implementation of the loading after the collection of the data, and when changes to the act or regulation would need to occur, Associate Secretary Tony Cook noted that:

It is a matter for government as to when government decides the loading will be implemented. In terms of 2016 we might make a payment in June or July. Therefore, the regulations would not have to change until before that point. But it is a matter for government.

1.51 The committee heard that the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies had not had their funding continued, with the annual budget for the program around \$330,000 annually.

Senator Bridget McKenzie

Chair

41 Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Schools and Youth, Department of Education and Training, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2015, p. 146.