

Chapter 3

Education portfolio

3.1 This chapter summarises key areas of interest raised during the committee's consideration of budget estimates for the 2014–15 financial year for the Education Portfolio. It follows the order of proceedings and is an indicative, but not exhaustive, account of issues examined.

3.2 The committee heard evidence on 4 and 5 June 2014 from Senator the Hon. Marise Payne and Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan, as the Ministers representing the Minister for Education, along with officers from the Department of Education and agencies responsible for administering education policy, including:

- Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority;
- Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership;
- Australian Research Council; and
- Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Cross portfolio

Shared services centre

3.3 The committee discussed the shared services centre with the Department of Education. The committee asked why there was no announcement of the initiative to employ 650 people in the centre and why there is no budget line. Ms Lisa Paul, Secretary, said that as staff are still employed either by the Department of Education or Department of Employment, it is not listed as a separate agency in the PBS.¹

3.4 The committee heard the CEO is attached to the Department of Education and the Secretary of the Department of Employment is the chair of the advisory board. In terms of administrative accountability, the CEO is responsible to Ms Paul and that formally and technically, staff are mapped to either department for administrative accountability. Ms Paul agreed that a public announcement would have been a good idea.²

Department of Education Outcome 1

National Quality Framework

3.5 The committee asked representatives from the Department of Education about issues surrounding the National Quality Framework (NQF). The committee heard that supervisor certificates have been one of the administrative processes that have caused

1 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 14.

2 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 15.

the most concern in the sector. Feedback from the ACECQA regulatory burden report released in December last year, indicated the process involved quite a high administrative burden with 78,649 persons being issued with a supervisor's certificate from 31 March 2014.³ Mr David De Silva, Group Manager, Early Childhood and Care, Early Childhood Initiatives, explained that:

The reason for a supervisor certificate is that under the national quality framework there is a requirement for, whenever a service is open and has a child in it there must be a person who is either the approved provider, the nominated supervisor, or a person who has been approved to hold a supervisor certificate.⁴

3.6 He explained that long day care centres have been very cautious and obtaining supervisor certificates for all staff on the off chance they might be put in charge on a short basis.⁵ Mr De Silva also outlined for the committee that one of the changes agreed to by the standing council in April was to create a new class of staff that does no longer need to apply for a supervisor's certificate. He said 'if you are, for example, a director or a leader in a room you will automatically be deemed to have a supervisor certificate because you are actually in a class.'⁶

Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

NAPLAN

3.7 The committee sought information from the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) about the proposal for NAPLAN testing to move online. Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, said that education ministers in the states and territories see a movement to online assessment as a way of improving on what is currently available.⁷ Mr Randall explained that as part of the movement for NAPLAN to go online, there will be a better alignment with the Australian curriculum, with the Australian curriculum aligning with NAPLAN as of 2016.⁸

3.8 The committee raised concerns about resource implications, including some schools not having enough computers, internet connectivity difficulties and computer breakdowns. Mr Randall said that ACARA has done work with the department, state

3 Mr David De Silva, Group Manager, Early Childhood and Care, Early Childhood Initiatives, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 33.

4 Mr David De Silva, Group Manager, Early Childhood and Care, Early Childhood Initiatives, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 32.

5 Mr David De Silva, Group Manager, Early Childhood and Care, Early Childhood Initiatives, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 33.

6 Mr David De Silva, Group Manager, Early Childhood and Care, Early Childhood Initiatives, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 32.

7 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 67.

8 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 59.

and territories and Education Services Australia for NAPLAN to move online. He said ACARA is doing work to design and be ready to run NAPLAN online, build capability to be able to deliver it and have it in schools and work with state and territories to ultimately put it in the classroom.⁹

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

Teacher quality

3.9 The committee discussed with the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) the issue of teacher quality. Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer, said that it is necessary that graduates coming into teaching have strong literacy and numeracy capacity and that they are in the top 30 per cent of the population with their personal literacy and numeracy skills.¹⁰ She outlined that a test is 'an elegant, simple way of assuring ourselves and assuring the public that that is so.'¹¹ The test is an online test that is ready to trial and will test personal literacy and numeracy as opposed to capacity to teach literacy and numeracy.

Department of Education Outcome 2

National School Chaplaincy program

3.10 The committee discussed the National School Chaplaincy Program with the Department of Education. Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan, Minister representing the Minister at the table, and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, indicated the reintroduction of the chaplaincy program can support a range of pastoral care activities including to:

...enhance academic achievement, encourage positive attitudes and behaviours by students towards themselves, their school community and others; reduce behavioural and mental health issues such as truancy, aggression, criminal behaviour, drug and alcohol use, anxiety and depression; and, in more general terms, enhance a student's social and emotional competence.¹²

3.11 The committee asked representatives of the department about what the definition of a chaplain will be and whether there will be new guidelines. Mr Tony Cook, Associate Secretary, Early Childhood, Schools and Youth, said that the details around the operation of the new National School Chaplaincy Program, including guidelines have yet to be finalised and have not been released. Ms Paul explained that

9 Mr Robert Randall, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 67.

10 Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 71.

11 Ms Margery Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 71.

12 Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 122.

'[t]he government's intent is clear, and that is to return the program to a focus on chaplains.'¹³

3.12 The committee also discussed that welfare workers not affiliated with religious denominations and who are not chaplains, will no longer be employed under the program.¹⁴

Australian Research Council

Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine

3.13 The Australian Research Council (ARC) responded to questions regarding special research initiatives (SRI). The committee heard that \$42 million is contained in the budget for SRI funding for the Australian Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine. For this initiative there was one eligible organisation nominated by the government, James Cook University (JCU).¹⁵ The committee asked the ARC to identify any outstanding research performance in the relevant fields at JCU that would warrant \$42 million being allocated to them and if the location of JCU was a factor in the allocation.¹⁶ Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, replied that institutional focus is a factor and that JCU:

...is an institution that has a focus on the tropics. It is, as I said, about building capacity in an area that is probably of very significant importance to Australia. So it is not inappropriate to lay the foundations for an activity that is going to be critically important to Australia.¹⁷

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

3.14 The committee asked the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) if funding cuts would have an impact on their ability to evaluate the applications of education providers, public and private, as well as specific courses for institutions that are not self-accrediting.¹⁸ Ms Dorte Kristoffersen, Acting Chief Commissioner, told the committee that TEQSA:

...has already revised our processes to allow us to focus more on those providers where we have concerns of non-compliance with the threshold

13 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 103.

14 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2014, p. 127.

15 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 7.

16 Senator the Hon. Kim Carr, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 8.

17 Professor Aidan Byrne, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Research Council, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 8.

18 Senator Lee Rhiannon, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 24.

standards and less with those providers that have a low risk profile and a positive track record.¹⁹

3.15 She commented that the revision of the regulatory process will enable TEQSA to effectively undertake their responsibilities and the assessment of providers.²⁰

Department of Education Outcome 3

Higher education funding reforms

3.16 The committee discussed changes to Commonwealth government supported funding for students, specifically the deregulation of fees and 20 per cent reduction in Commonwealth government contribution per place. The department described how funding reforms need to be looked at in the context of the broader suite of reforms which constitute incentives which, in time, are expected to put downward pressure on fees in a number of ways. For example, while liberalisation of fee setting will allow universities to set their own prices, Commonwealth funding will be extended to accredited private education providers, allowing them to enter the system and provide competition for universities.²¹

3.17 Similarly, Commonwealth funding will extend to the higher education diploma, advanced diploma and associate degree—known as sub-bachelor higher education diplomas—in order to broaden the market further and place competitive pressure on universities.²²

3.18 Senators asked the department about individual institutions' intentions to raise student fees as a consequence of Commonwealth funding reforms. The department explained that while universities have complete flexibility in deciding how to charge for their courses, they are not required to pass changes in funding through to students:²³

It is going to be up to the university. So for the first time ever, a university or, indeed, a higher education provider which is approved to operate in these circumstances will be able to set its own course and to compete on the basis of price. Meanwhile, because, as I like to emphasise, the package is a package of balanced incentives, the universities in particular will need to be cognisant of the increased competition, which will put downward pressure on prices from the extension of Commonwealth funding to the private higher education sector and the extension of Commonwealth funding to

19 Ms Dorte Kristoffersen, Acting Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 25.

20 Ms Dorte Kristoffersen, Acting Chief Commissioner, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 25.

21 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 38.

22 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 48.

23 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, pp 39–42.

Commonwealth grants and, of course, to sub-bachelor. Of course, if a university, say, chooses to put its prices up from the current baseline, then one dollar out of every five will have to go to its own equity fund to support scholarships and bursaries for disadvantaged students.²⁴

3.19 The department added that reductions in Commonwealth funding are also combined with a simplification of the funding model, which has been streamlined from eight to five funding clusters.²⁵ It is expected that fees will rise in some areas and decrease in others, but actual figures cannot be known until the Senate considers the package of measures as a whole and the resulting reforms are implemented.²⁶

3.20 The committee heard that as well as increasing competition between metropolitan institutions, the funding reforms will likely have the added benefit of enabling regional higher education institutions to attract students from urban areas.²⁷

Scholarship funds

3.21 Representatives of the department informed the committee that, under the proposed reforms, universities receiving additional Commonwealth funding will be required to put 20 per cent of that money into a scholarship fund targeted at students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The committee heard that this would allow students from low socio-economic status backgrounds in regional universities to access scholarships to a high prestige university and course.²⁸

Senator Chris Back Chair

24 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 42.

25 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, pp 39–40.

26 See discussion, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 41.

27 Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, Secretary, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 50.

28 Mr Robert Griew, Associate Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International, Department of Education, *Estimates Hansard*, 5 June 2014, p. 50.