

# A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT TEACHING QUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

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THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT influencing teaching quality in Australia over the past decade has, without question, been the establishment of nationally agreed policies for education. The wide-ranging policies, influencing what is taught, how it is taught, and who teaches it, have occurred under the auspices of two national organizations: ACARA (the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority), and AITSL (the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership).

In the first chapter of this volume, we look at each organization, their policies, and how they are intended to frame improvements in the quality of education in Australia. We also look at the issue of educational funding—a third plank of national reforms. In particular, we survey the Gonski reforms, which aims to equalize funding across states and school systems, and which is influencing states' approach to the more equitable resourcing of education.

Preceding this, we discuss the context for education in Australia, including its school system in international comparison. We also highlight some of the challenges, in particular those related to achieving an equitable education for all students.

We begin however by briefly looking firstly at the governmental arrangements for education, and then the Melbourne Declaration—the statement that sets the long-term vision of a high-quality and equitable education for young Australians, and which has provided the impetus for powerful national reforms in a federal education system.

## Australia, Its Constitution, and Federalism in Education

Education policy in Australia is formally the responsibility of the governments of each of its six states and two territories. Originally a series of independent colonies, the states federated to become the country of Australia with the establishment of a federal constitution in 1901. The states and territories retain constitutional independence from the parliament of the federal government over many important policy functions, including responsibility for education.<sup>1</sup> Thus each state in Australia operates its own set of government schools, and trains and registers its own teachers.

Federal influence over state policy is however permitted under the federal constitution's Section 96:

During a period of ten years after the establishment of the Commonwealth and thereafter until the Parliament otherwise provides, the Parliament may grant financial assistance to any State on such terms and conditions as the Parliament thinks fit.

(Section 96, Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1901)

This allows the federal government to provide funding to states, and tie it to specific initiatives, including in education. Successive federal governments have made use of this provision for the past 40 years, such as the assumption of responsibility for the funding of Australian universities in the 1970s. Its use as a legislative tool in school education has also grown, particularly over the past decade. This effectively means that where federal funds are provided, federal policy applies.

The increasing influence of this provision is facilitated by the nature of taxation and funding in Australia. Income and general taxes (such as GST—a value-added tax on goods and services) are collected by the federal government and subsequently dispersed to state governments in order to fund their agendas. Funding may also be directed towards school systems and specific activities. Policy matters in states and territories are thus both directly and indirectly funded by the Australian government.

Despite constitutional independence, this imbalance in funding power (known as a vertical fiscal imbalance) discourages states from declining federal funds, particularly in expensive policy areas such as education, and gives the federal government an influential voice in policy. Agreement between state and federal governments has predominated in education policy in recent years, but at times during 2003–2007, the Australian government used the specter of a reduction of funding to move states

towards national policies, a period described as “coercive federalism” (Harris-Hart, 2010; Reid, 2009).

Although center-right governments have in general tended to favor a states-based approach to education policy, attempts to create national policy in areas such as curriculum over the last 40 years have been led by both Liberal (center-right) and Labor (center-left) parties. The discourses and stated rationales for national-level policies in education have thus shifted over time. These have included equity issues, national identity and cohesion, the inefficiencies of misalignment between states (the so-called railway gauge phenomenon),<sup>2</sup> and human capital and economic growth imperatives (Gable & Lingard, 2013; Harris-Hart, 2010).

More recently, flagging international education competitiveness and the risk of “losing the education race” has been articulated as a primary driver (Franklin, 2012; Reid, 2009). Gable and Lingard (2013) have contended that Australia’s increased participation in international organizations, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have led it to increasingly accept a knowledge economy and productivity growth rationale, and thus to focus on education governance centered on addressing systemic issues through national level policies, rather than local issues of instruction and learning.

The most significant developments in federal education policy occurred following the election of a center-left Labor party to the federal government in 2007. The Rudd-Gillard government sought to enact its reform agenda in three key areas:

1. “Raising the quality of teaching in our schools.
2. Ensuring all students benefit from schooling through strategies based on high expectations of attainment, engagement and transitions for every student, especially in disadvantaged school communities.
3. Improving transparency and accountability of schools and school systems at all levels.” (Rudd & Gillard, 2008)

The success in achieving national-level policies has largely been achieved through a “co-operative federalism” (Harris-Hart, 2010). With the signing of the Melbourne Declaration in 2008 (described below), the Australian government pursued national policies largely through a series of National Partnerships agreements between federal and state governments in areas including numeracy and literacy, and teaching quality. This took place through two main organizations, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (representing both Commonwealth and state governments) and

its related body, the Education Council.<sup>3</sup> The process has relied on consensus, and although now well-entrenched, with subsequent changes of leadership at state and federal levels, its success is still potentially subject to political forces. The challenges in implementing national funding reforms (discussed later in this paper) provide one such example.

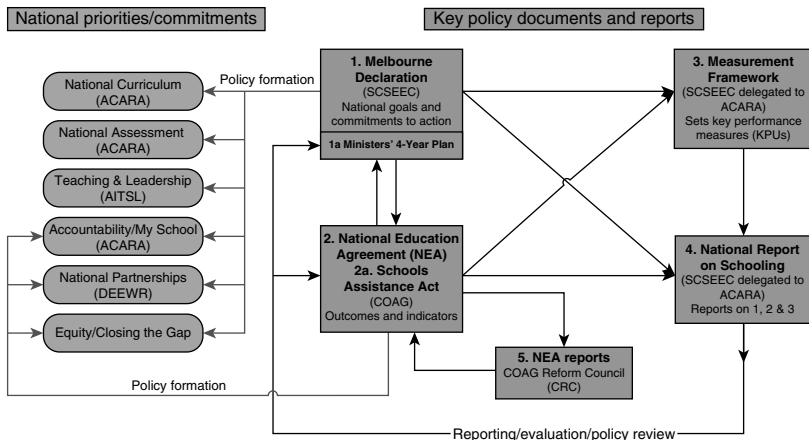
The Australian government has established several national level bodies—most prominently the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)—to develop and promulgate national policies in specific areas, the majority of which are enacted at the state level. The federal government’s role in education takes the form of policy leadership, the establishment of standards, recurrent school funding (including to nongovernment schools), funding specific initiatives for innovation and change, and assessment monitoring and reporting (Gable & Lingard, 2013; Zanderigo, Dowd, & Turner, 2012). A schematic of the key documents and organizational relationships is shown in Figure 1.1.

### *A Pivot Point—The Melbourne Declaration*

A key transition point towards the adoption of national-level policies in education was the signing in 2008 of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Link 1-1). Issued by the then



**Figure 1.1 National School Education Policy and Reporting Framework.**



Reproduced from ACARA, 2014.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), and signed by all eight federal, state, and territory education ministers, it came at a time when both the federal government, and all but one Australian state, were led by center-left Labor governments.

The two broad goals of the Melbourne Declaration are:

- Goal One: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal Two: All young Australians become:
  - successful learners
  - confident and creative individuals
  - active and informed citizens (MCEETYA, 2008)

Endorsed by all Australian education ministers, the MCEETYA plan outlines key strategies and initiatives that Australian governments will commit to in eight interrelated areas in order to support the achievement of the educational goals for young Australians. These eight areas are:

- developing stronger partnerships
- supporting quality teaching and school leadership
- strengthening early childhood education
- enhancing middle years development
- supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
- promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
- improving educational outcomes for indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- strengthening accountability and transparency

Building on the earlier Hobart and Adelaide declarations (1989 and 1999 respectively), which established a framework for national cooperation, the Melbourne Declaration represents an important and symbolic pivot point in increasing the influence of national-level education policy, and its effects are dramatically shaping teaching quality in Australia.

In particular, the Declaration drew important attention to issues of educational equity. This includes disparities in education experienced by indigenous students, by students with disabilities, and by students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It also brought attention to differences in educational provision between states, and between the government and nongovernment school sectors. The document thus provided important context and momentum for developments in teaching standards and curriculum, and highlighted the need for funding reform.

As a consequence, there has been increased federal engagement and cross-state collaboration on educational issues. Key amongst these are: the Schools Assistance Act (2008), providing funding to Catholic and independent schools; the National Education Agreement, with a student performance and assessment measurement framework (Council of Australian Governments, 2010); the Smarter Schools National Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality (Council of Australian Governments, 2013); new initiatives in initial teacher education (ITE) programs; and the Gonski report (Gonski et al., 2012), recommending an increased federal role in education funding; and the Australian Curriculum.

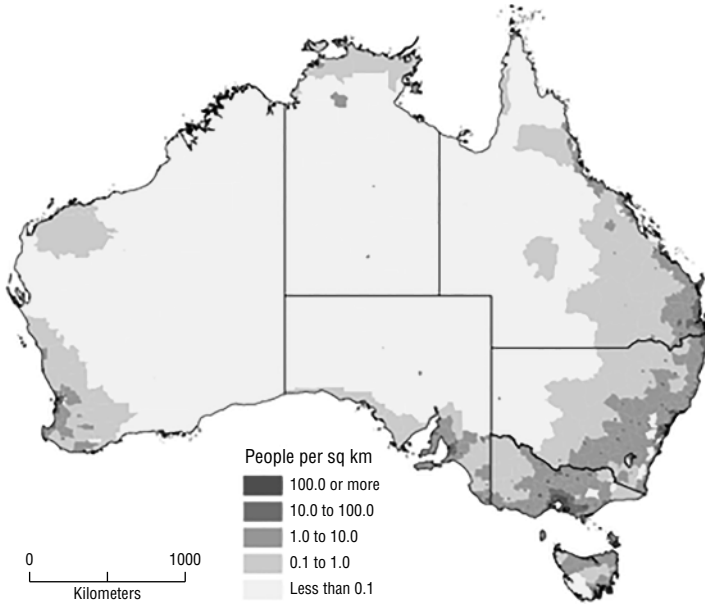
These were further strengthened by the Australian Education Act 2013 that took effect from 1 January 2014. The Act made Commonwealth funding to states and territories contingent upon the implementation of the Australian Curriculum and participation in the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). It is focused on improving teacher quality through the adoption by states and territories of the *Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework* and the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders*, each of which is underpinned by the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)* and the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*.

## About Australia

A look at Australia's geography and demography provides useful insights to key developments in education policy. Australia is a vast country, with a comparatively small population. It has a land mass of around 2.9 million square miles, comparable to that of the United States, yet its total population is around just 23.5 million. Australia's population distribution is heavily skewed towards the south-east of the country. The two most populous states, Victoria and New South Wales, account for over half the national population, and with two-thirds of these people living in the cities of Melbourne and Sydney. As described by one of the authors of this report: "If you considered Australia to be a house, everyone would be sitting on the front verandah."

The country has a very diverse population. Among its 23.5 million residents, around 1 in 4 was born overseas, and nearly 1 in 5 speak a language other than English at home. The most common non-English languages are (in order) Mandarin, Italian, Arabic, Cantonese, Greek, and Vietnamese. A little over half a million Australians, around 3%, identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin, the largest

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**Figure 1.2 Population Density of Australia.**


Reproduced from ABS, 2014b.

proportion of which live in New South Wales (32%) and Queensland (28%). Although just 10% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live in the Northern Territory, they comprise 27% of the territory's population (see Figure 1.2, ABS, 2012b).

This combination of geography and demography gives states and territories different characteristics and contexts for learning, and provides challenges for the development of nationally consistent education. For example, NSW is the most populous state, has around one third of Australia's indigenous population, a large proportion of rural and remote schools, and around 30% of its students speak a language other than English at home. The Northern Territory is sparsely populated, with a median age lower than that of the national median, and the largest indigenous population per capita. Western Australia comprises a third of the land mass of Australia, and has a mix of petroleum, mining, and agricultural interests, and many small remote communities. By contrast, Victoria has an immigrant population much greater than that of the national average, with greater than one-third born abroad, very small remote and indigenous populations, and a diverse economy largely dominated by the services sector.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders tend to face greater challenges and fewer opportunities than their non-indigenous counterparts. For example, unemployment among indigenous Australians is considerably greater than among the non-indigenous population (17.2% versus 5.5%), while labor force participation is 20 percentage points lower (ABS, 2014d). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are also twice as likely to report fair or poor health (23.1% versus 11.8%), and face higher rates of mortality, heart disease, and other serious illnesses.

Remoteness plays a role in this. Around one-third of Australians live in regional and remote areas, which offer less diverse labor markets and access to fewer resources. In regional and remote areas, indigenous people make up a relatively large percentage of the population. Of all people who live in very remote areas, almost half (47%) are indigenous people while of those living in remote areas, 15% are indigenous (AIHW, 2014). However, this is less the case in NSW, where the great majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live in cities or regional towns.

Education is viewed as playing a very important role in increasing opportunities for indigenous Australians. For example, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that closing the education gap would decrease the gap in labor force participation by half (ABS, 2014c). This is particularly important given that Aboriginal people make up a higher proportion of Australia's children and young people with a median age of 21, compared to that of 38 for the non-Aboriginal population.

### *Social Democratic Systems in Australia*

The Melbourne Declaration reflects the importance placed on education in building and sustaining a democratic, equitable, and just society that is well placed to contribute to the global knowledge economy. The focus on developing students who are “successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens” (MCEETYA, 2008), is a key role of education but there is also a strong awareness that the well-being of the whole child is essential and is a fundamental requirement of social policy.

Core national services that are designed to provide a safety net to underpin child well-being in Australia include health and social security support services. The nation has a system of legislation, policies, regulation, and funding to enable all people to access quality health services. Since the 1970s, the Australian government has funded a universal public health insurance scheme to provide free or subsidized health treatment (DHS, 2014). The program is supplemented by social welfare arrangements, such

as smaller out-of-pocket costs and more generous safety nets for those who receive certain income-support payments (AIHW, 2012).

The Australian government also provides a range of social security payments and services, including income support payments, disability support, age pension support, youth allowances and study allowances, and rental assistance. Together, Australian social welfare contribution in 2014 represented 19% of GDP.

## **Australian Education in International Comparison**

### *Schooling in Australia*

Education in Australia is publicly funded, with all students having the right to a free education. Schooling is comprised of both government and nongovernment schools, the latter being further divided into Catholic and independent schools. Unlike many countries, all three systems receive public funding. The majority of students (65.1%) attend government schools, while around 20.6% and 14.3% attend Catholic and independent schools respectively (ABS, 2013). The percentage of students in nongovernment schools is higher at the secondary level.

Education in government schools is administered at the state level, and thus there is policy difference, such as the degree of centralization, that occur between states and territories. Nongovernment schools are also typically affiliated to systems administered at the state level. For example, Catholic schools in NSW are connected to the Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales, and are administered through 11 state level dioceses. Many independent schools in NSW have an affiliation with the Association of Independent Schools of NSW.<sup>4</sup> This organization of schooling facilitates the dissemination and implementation of policy and dispersion of funds across the systems.

### *Teaching and Teachers' Time in Australia*

International data suggest that teachers in Australia work hours that are longer than average when compared to other OECD countries, but that this time favors greater involvement with colleagues in teaching and planning, and school management. The Teaching and Learning International survey (TALIS) found that Australian teachers worked an average of 42.7 hours a week, slightly longer than the TALIS average, but that the number of teaching hours was slightly fewer, at 18.6 a week. Australian teachers spent nearly twice the average number of weekly hours participating in

school management (3.1 hours), and considerably more weekly hours than average working and in dialog with colleagues (3.5 hours) (OECD, 2014c, p. 387). Perhaps as a consequence, the TALIS report found that teachers in Australia were more likely to incorporate active teaching strategies—small group problem-solving, the use of ICT, and projects of longer than a week—into their teaching practices (OECD, 2014c, p. 155).

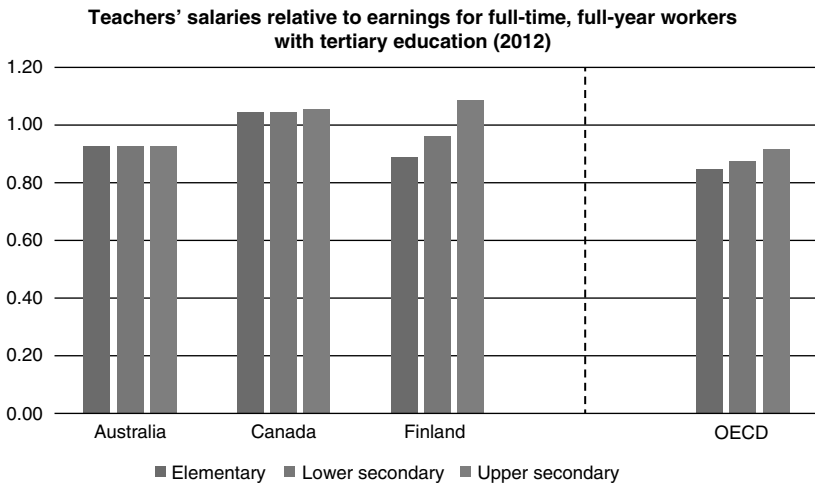
TALIS also surveyed teachers' views of the teaching profession. It found that nationwide, just 38.5% of lower secondary teachers thought that the teaching profession was valued in society (OECD, 2014c, p. 408). While this was greater than the TALIS average (30.9%), it shows that there is much that can be done to raise the attractiveness of teaching in Australia. Many of the national reforms outlined later in this report are intended to contribute to the professionalization and raise the status of teaching.

Teachers in Australia are paid reasonably competitively for their work. When compared with other countries, their salary is above the OECD mean, on a level comparable with teachers in Canada and the United States. However, the range of possible salaries is much narrower than in these countries. It takes as few as eight years to reach the top of the teacher salary scale in Australia, compared with an OECD average of twenty-four, and the ratio of the top-of-scale to starting salaries is just 1.44 in Australia, lower than the 1.68 in Canada, and 1.52–1.61 for teachers in the United States (OECD, 2015).

When compared with other occupations, overall, the teaching profession in Australia is paid slightly less than other professions with similar levels of education (around 90%) (OECD, 2015), a level similar to teachers in Canada and Finland, but above that of the OECD average. Teachers are well paid at the start of their careers, a factor which has helped maintain high levels of recruitment of teachers into the profession. A government-supported survey of occupations in 2012 found that new graduate teachers ranked 7th among 27 professional occupations in their level of compensation, behind several medical fields and engineering, but ahead of law, sciences, and accounting (Graduate Careers Australia, 2013).

However, the low salary ceiling means that teacher salaries have tended to fall behind those of other professions later in the career, with overall, teaching paid at around 90% of that of similarly qualified professions. This is a rate similar to that in high-performing countries such as Canada and Finland, and above the OECD average (see Figure 1.3). In response, several states have recently revised their salary structures to significantly increase the pay of veteran teachers who meet standards of accomplishment aligned with professional teaching standards.

Figure 1.3 Teacher Salaries Relative to Other Occupations.



Source: OECD. (2014). *Education at a Glance 2014*. OECD Publishing.

### *International Educational Performance and Comparisons*

Australia's relative education performance has had an important bearing on educational policy discussion. As a nation, Australia's performance on international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has been comparatively strong. In PISA 2012, Australia scored well above the OECD average, placing it among the top 20 jurisdictions in each of mathematics, reading, and science. It had an above average share of top performers, with 14.7% scoring in Bands 5 and 6 on PISA mathematics (c.f. OECD mean of 11.9%), and a smaller than average share of low performers, with 19.6% performing below Band 2 (c.f. OECD mean of 26.0%) (OECD, 2014b, p. 298).

However, Australia's performance on PISA has also declined over time. From 2003 to 2012, the mean score in PISA mathematics dropped by 20 points. This included a decrease in the proportion of top performers (Bands 5 and 6), and an increase in low performers (those scoring in below Band 2) (OECD, 2014b; Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014).

Furthermore, within Australia, there are important differences in performance across states and territories. In PISA Reading, five states (the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, and Queensland) scored statistically significantly higher than the

OECD average, while Tasmania and the Northern Territory scored significantly lower. The spread of reading scores was especially large in the Northern Territory. At 413, the difference between those of the 5th and 95th percentiles was nearly 100 points wider than that for Australia as a whole. (See Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1 PISA 2012 Mean Scores and Spread: Mathematics and Reading.**

Country/ state	Mean score	Difference 5th–95th percentile	Ranking within Australia	Country/ state	Mean score	Difference 5th–95th percentile	Ranking within Australia
Shanghai- China	613	331		Shanghai- China	570	259	
Singapore	573	344		Hong Kong- China	545	281	
Hong Kong- China	561	318		Singapore	542	329	
Finland	519	281		<i>Australia Capital Territory</i>	525	339	1
Canada	518	293		Finland	524	309	
<i>Australia Capital Territory</i>	518	319	1	Canada	523	305	
<i>Western Australia</i>	516	303	2	<i>Western Australia</i>	519	307	2
<i>New South Wales</i>	509	336	3	<i>Victoria</i>	517	302	3
<b>Australia</b>	504	315		<i>New South Wales</i>	513	332	4
<i>Queensland</i>	53	305	4	<b>Australia</b>	512	318	
<i>Victoria</i>	501	299	5	<i>Queensland</i>	508	317	5
<b>OECD average</b>	494	301		<i>South Australia</i>	500	301	6
United Kingdom	494	312		United Kingdom	499	320	
<i>South Australia</i>	489	299	6	United States	498	303	
United States	481	295		<b>OECD average</b>	496	310	
<i>Tasmania</i>	478	317	7	<i>Tasmania</i>	485	329	7
<i>Northern Territory</i>	452	368	8	<i>Northern Territory</i>	466	413	8

Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014.

Educational performance over time has also varied by state. Victoria was the only Australian jurisdiction in which scores did not decline from 2000 to 2012. Although PISA mathematics scores from 2003 to 2012 fell for all Australia jurisdictions, these declines were less precipitous in Victoria and NSW than in most other Australian jurisdictions (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014).

Concern regarding flagging international education competitiveness has provided impetus to federal policy initiatives in Australia (Patty, 2013), including a renewed focus on teaching quality and standards (Dinham, Ingvarson, & Kleinhenz, 2008). Raising its performance on international assessments such as PISA have become a national education goal, embedded both in the rationale for, and the wording of, the Australian Education Act 2013 (*see also* Box 1.1.), as noted by then Prime Minister Julia Gillard:

This is why I announce today that before the end of this year, I will introduce a bill to our Parliament: To enshrine our nation's expectations for what we will achieve for our children, our vision of the quality of education to which our children are entitled and our preparedness to put success for every child at the heart of how we deliver and fund education.

By 2025, I want Australian schools to be back in the top five schooling systems in the world.

By 2025, Australia should be ranked as a top 5 country in the world in Reading, Science and Mathematics—and for providing our children with a high-quality and high-equity education system.

(Gillard, 2012)

[T]he Australian schooling system is [defined to be] highly equitable if there is a limited relationship between a student's socioeconomic status and his or her educational performance, as measured by the Programme for International Student Assessment.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2013)

PISA and TIMSS (together with Australia's NAPLAN assessment) were specifically listed as performance and assessment requirements in the National Education Agreement (2010) between the Australian government and the states.

### Box 1.1 Goals of the Australian Education Act 2013

#### 3. Objects of this Act

1. The objects of this Act are the following:
  - a. to ensure that the Australian schooling system provides a high quality and highly equitable education for all students by having regard to the following national targets:
    - i. for Australia to be placed, by 2025, in the top 5 highest performing countries based on the performance of school students in reading, mathematics and science;
    - ii. for the Australian schooling system to be considered a high quality and highly equitable schooling system by international standards by 2025;
    - iii. lift the Year 12 (or equivalent) or Certificate II attainment rate to 90% by 2015;
    - iv. lift the Year 12 (or equivalent) or Certificate III attainment rate to 90% by 2020;
    - v. at least halve the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and other students, in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020 from the baseline in 2006;
    - vi. halve the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and other students, in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018 from the baseline in 2008;
  - b. to acknowledge the matters referred to in the Preamble;
  - c. to provide a needs-based funding model for schools applied consistently across all schools which includes:
    - i. a base amount of funding for every student; and
    - ii. additional loadings for students and schools who need extra support;
  - d. to implement the National Plan for School Improvement.

Source: Australian Education Act, 2013.

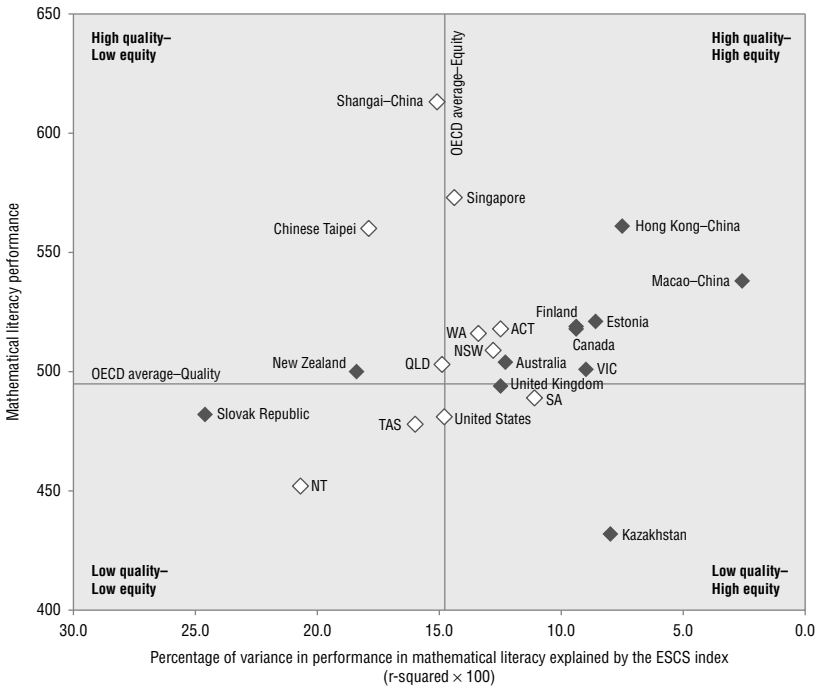
Comparative performance has also influenced policy discussions at the state level. In Victoria, lack of growth in international scores despite investments in capacity building during the same period informed the state's thinking in making the case for increasing school autonomy, identifying central direction inhibiting local decision-making around teaching practice, curriculum, assessment, and reporting as factors hindering growth in student outcomes (DEECD, 2012c). Interestingly, this

movement in Victoria towards further decentralization at the state level occurred simultaneously with a countertrend towards centralization of policies at the national level in key areas of curriculum, assessment, and teacher registration, discussed later in this chapter.

*Education and Equity*

Australia is regarded as a high-equity country by some measures. The country has lower than average between-school variance, and the strength of the relationship between students’ socioeconomic background (SES) and mathematics performance on PISA is relatively low. Nationally, SES explained just 12.3% of the variation in PISA mathematics scores, lower than the 14.6% average for all OECD countries. Among states, the strength of relationship in Victoria was weakest, with SES explaining just 9% of the variation in mathematics scores, placing it line with other high-equity jurisdictions, such as Canada, Finland, and Hong Kong (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014). See Figure 1.4.

**Figure 1.4 Quality and Equity of Performance in Mathematical Literacy Internationally.**



Note: Shaded diamonds represent countries in which the strength of the relationship is significantly different to the OECD average.

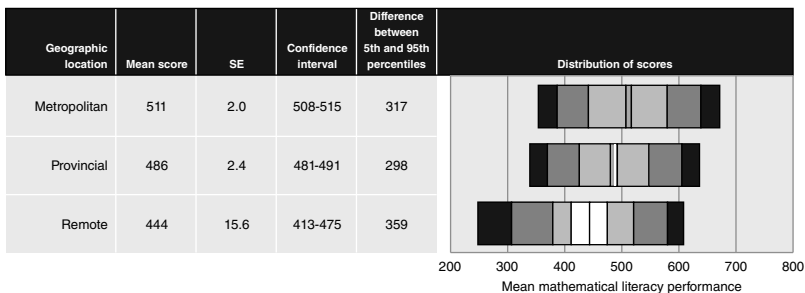
Reproduced from Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014.

However, these data mask important equity challenges that exist across five principal axes: school sector, indigenous status, immigrant status, remoteness, and socioeconomic status. Students in Catholic and Independent schools, for example, tend to perform comparatively better on international assessments than their counterparts in government schools (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014), although analysis of PISA data indicate this is largely attributable to the higher SES of private school students (Mahuteau et al., 2010). While first-generation students, interestingly, tend to perform better than those from nonimmigrant backgrounds, there is also wide variance across subgroups (ACARA, 2013a; Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014).

The greatest disparities in educational outcomes occur across indigenous status. Despite recent improvements in retention and achievement—the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students completing Year 12 or higher qualifications increased from 30% to 37% from 2006 to 2011 (ABS, 2012a, 2013; ACARA, 2013a)—PISA data show a 90-point difference between indigenous and non-indigenous students, estimated to be equivalent to more than two-and-a-half years of schooling (Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014). Remoteness contributes to these gaps. Students in metropolitan areas had significantly higher mean scores than those in provincial or remote areas, and there was a much wider distribution of scores among students living in remote areas. (See Figure 1.5).

Thus addressing educational gaps for indigenous students and those in remote areas is a focal point for national educational policy. Different

**Figure 1.5 Mean Scores and Distribution of Students' Performance on PISA Mathematics by Geographic Location.**



Reproduced from Thomson, De Bortoli, & Buckley, 2014.

emphases may be placed on their implementation at the state level, given the great differences in indigenous populations and remoteness among states and territories. For example, just 2% of students in Victoria identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, compared with over 40% in the Northern Territory (ABS, 2013).

The Melbourne Declaration underscores the need to address both excellence and equity, and emphasis over the past decade has been on nationally agreed policies. Yet within each state the diversity of student needs and educational priorities influences the way these policies become manifest in the state-based education systems across Australia. These national and state policies are addressed in the remainder of this volume.

## Professional Teaching Standards and the Role of AITSL

Much of the emphasis of education policy to achieve the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, and address the above challenges, has been directed at improving teaching quality. The formation of AITSL (the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership), and with it the introduction of the national professional standards for teaching (Link 1-2), is perhaps the most significant development shaping teaching quality and the nature of the teaching profession in Australia.



Progressively phased in from 2010, the standards influence those who graduate as teachers and enter the classroom, how they are trained, the induction they receive upon graduation, and their ongoing professional development. In the coming years, they will also influence those who apply to become teachers, and their ongoing career pathway in teaching. The implementation of standards nationally is also intended to contribute to a more equitable foundation for teaching quality through the development of high quality systems through each state and territory.

### *Development of the Professional Teaching Standards*

The process by which AITSL and the standards were developed has played a role in their influence. Firstly, prior to 2010, teacher registration was solely a state level responsibility, with significant variability. States such as Victoria and NSW already had in place professional teaching standards: Victoria required registration for all teachers; NSW required registration only for those beginning after 1 October 2004 with evidence of their teaching proficiency. Meanwhile, states such as South Australia had teacher registration, but this was not backed by an established set of state teaching standards.

Early foundational work in the development of national teaching standards was carried out by a predecessor body to AITSL—Teaching Australia—originally established as the National Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. Its mandate was to consult nationally with the teaching profession and to build a set of national standards based on those already developed by various teacher professional associations (Thomas & Watson, 2011). However, parallel efforts were also being simultaneously undertaken by other organizations, including state employing authorities, which were seeking to achieve national consensus on teaching standards through the Ministerial Council (MCEETYA) (Thomas & Watson, 2011).

AITSL was established by the Ministerial Council in agreement with the federal government in late 2009 as a government agency, disestablishing Teaching Australia and taking on the role of developing and validating the national teaching standards (Thomas & Watson, 2011). This was done through a process of broad consultation with teacher regulatory authorities, unions and professional associations, and through surveys and focus groups with teachers and principals from around Australia. Thus the standards drew heavily on knowledge from within the teaching profession. As a result, the standards were seen as having strong validity and efficacy by the teaching profession.

Secondly, AITSL itself draws on expertise from educators. Its board at formation represented a broad cross-section of education stakeholders, including universities, schools, departments of education, Catholic and independent education offices, the Australian Education Union, and principal professional associations. More recently it has been streamlined to a smaller group. This unique governance structure connects federal and state education ministers with institutes of teaching and members of the teaching profession, providing the potential for knowledge sharing throughout the system.

Some education commentators have contended that the establishment of AITSL signaled a move from a purely teacher-led set of standards to one that combines these with the interests of government as employing authorities, and therefore represents a fusion of the discourse around teaching quality with that of quality assurance and accountability (Thomas & Watson, 2011), a fact that is noted in the preamble to the standards themselves (AITSL, 2011b). Others, such as former AITSL Chair Tony Mackay, have noted that developing the standards in this way represents an important step in engaging a more comprehensive and representative scope of the profession, and

thereby strengthening the authority and legitimacy of both AITSL and the standards.

The way which [AITSL has] gone about the work has been through really strong collaborative activity, strong cooperation across the states and territories in the sectors, [and] full partnership of the profession... If you ever think that you can (be legitimized) without the profession seeing themselves as being absolutely fundamental to both the development of the policy as well as the implementation,... it's impossible.

### *The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST)*

The standards are informed by evidence describing the key areas of teachers' work. The standards describe action across three teaching domains: professional knowledge, professional practice, and professional engagement. The seven standards and 37 focus areas under the APST outline what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at each of four different career levels: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished, and Lead. The seven standards are:

1. Know students and how they learn
2. Know the content and how to teach it
3. Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning
4. Create and maintain supportive learning environments
5. Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning
6. Engage in professional learning
7. Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/careers and the community

The standards have several declared purposes. Among them is to make explicit the elements that constitute high-quality and effective teaching that will improve student outcomes, and to provide a common discourse to describe the expectations for teachers both within the teaching profession, and among other education stakeholders (AITSL, 2011b). The standards may also contribute to the professionalization of teaching, as the document itself notes:

Developing professional standards for teachers that can guide professional learning, practice and engagement facilitates the improvement of teacher quality and contributes positively to the public standing of the profession.

(AITSL, 2011b)

The Graduate level of the standards plays an important role in the accreditation of initial teacher education (ITE) programs. It establishes the standards that graduates from ITE are expected to achieve by the completion of their course. Similarly, the Proficient level of the standards provides the basis for teacher registration. It sets a pathway for graduate teachers to move from provisional to full registration in their first years of teaching, and in doing so helps establish expectations for the outcomes of teacher induction. Highly Accomplished teachers are those that demonstrate a high level of capability in the standards, while Lead teachers are those that demonstrate these capabilities not just individually, but show leadership across the school. These higher levels of the standards—not yet adopted by all states—inform voluntary certification, but three jurisdictions have now tied them to salary increases.

One of the most important functions of the standards is to provide a common framework to inform teacher conversations around professional learning centered on student learning. It is intended that the standards be used as a basis for teachers to “judge the success of their learning and assist self-reflection and self-assessment” (AITSL, 2011b).

### *Implementation and Impact of the Standards*

All states and territories in Australia are now required to implement the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, although the extent of functional implementation varies across states. The Australian standards were well informed by those in place in NSW and Victoria, and these states were thus better positioned to adapt their systems to national standards.

The standards have had four important impacts upon teaching and teaching quality. Firstly, they have provided a common language to describe teaching quality. As they have been progressively adopted by the profession, it has helped shape the nature of conversations between early career and more experienced teachers to help inform improvement in their teaching practice.

Secondly, it has helped bridge differences between states in the required standards for teachers. Although registration remains a state responsibility, the standards now underpin a nationally consistent approach.

Thirdly, the standards help link initial teacher education with in-service professional development and career development. Establishing the first level as Graduate Teacher, the standards connect expectations in teacher knowledge, practice, and engagement for new graduates with that of the profession. The Proficient Teacher level

lays the foundation for standards-based induction and mentoring for early career teachers, setting up a pattern of ongoing professional learning beyond graduation. The higher levels offer a pathway for teachers to continue developing their expertise and advance their career while remaining in the classroom. As illustrated by former AITSL Chair Tony Mackay, finding coherence among policies that drive each of the phases of the teaching career is important in raising learning outcomes:

If you don't get a system of teacher quality and leadership quality thinking about all of the dimensions of that (initial teacher education, pedagogy, leadership development), it's very hard to be able to drive forward an agenda that really is going to have some leverage over quality learning for all young people.

Fourthly and relatedly, it has facilitated increased consistency of teacher training programs. The majority of initial teacher education in Australia takes place in universities, which must now demonstrate that their programs meet certain content requirements consistent with the standards. This is necessary if their graduates are to be permitted to become registered to teach in schools (see below).

### *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*

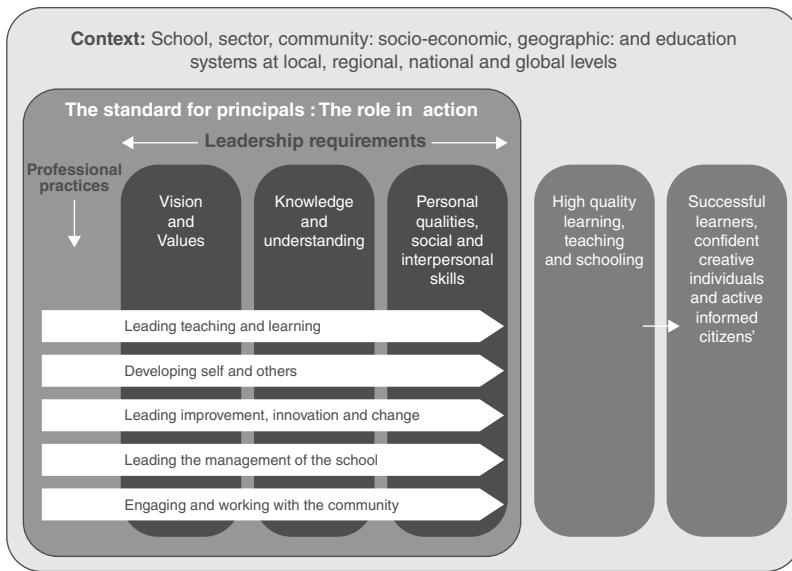
The development of the teaching standards is part of a systemic approach to influencing teaching quality in Australia. Together with these teaching standards has been the development of a national standard for principals (Link 1-3).

In recognition of the critical relationship between effective school leadership and teacher quality, in 2011, AITSL developed the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals*. In developing the standard, AITSL drew upon both research evidence regarding the characteristics of effective school leadership and significant national consultation with school leadership associations and state and jurisdictional employers. As a result the standard has been ratified by each state and territory education minister as well as being widely accepted within the profession.

The standard has provided a professionally agreed-on public statement describing what principals are required to know, understand, and do to succeed in leading improvement within their school. It is represented as an integrated model that recognizes three leadership requirements that a principal draws upon, within five areas of professional practice. (See Figure 1.6.)



**Figure 1.6 Conceptual Framework for the Australian Professional Standard for Principals.**



Reproduced from AITSL, 2011c.

Much like the professional teaching standards, the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* has provided clarity of understanding and a common language to describe and promote effective school leadership. The standard has also enabled the development and sharing of professional learning and resources across Australia.

A set of *Leadership Profiles* has been developed to describe the five professional practices at gradually increasing levels of proficiency. The profiles are intended to provide a framework to support the growth and development of school leaders.

Importantly, the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals* and the *Leadership Profiles* do not describe school leadership as an administrative role. There is a significant focus on the role of the school leader in promoting, developing, and supporting teaching to impact student learning (AITSL, 2014a).

The standard is being widely used by professional associations as a framework for professional learning for current and aspiring school leaders, and is able to be used to support performance and development frameworks for school leaders.

### **Box 1.2 The Australian Professional Standard for Principals and Leadership Profiles**

The standard sets out what principals are expected to know, understand and do to succeed in their work and to ensure their leadership has a positive impact. It takes full account of the crucial contribution made by principals in:

- raising student achievement at all levels and all stages
- promoting equity and excellence
- creating and sustaining the conditions under which quality teaching and learning thrive
- influencing, developing and delivering upon community expectations and government policy
- contributing to the development of a twenty-first century education system at local, national and international levels

Research and a substantial and evolving body of knowledge inform the leadership requirements and the professional practices that are at the core of the standard and show that:

- effective leaders understand their impact
- leadership must be contextualized, learning-centered, and responsive to the diverse nature of Australia's schools
- leadership is distributed and collaborative with teams led by the principal, working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school
- the practices and capabilities of leaders evolve as leaders move through their careers
- almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices and behaviors, with some key personal qualities and capabilities explaining a significant amount of the variation in leadership effectiveness

(Source: Australian Professional Standard for Principals and Leadership Profiles, AITSL, 2014a)

### *Initial Teacher Education*

Although teachers work in state-regulated education systems, initial teacher training (ITE) is predominantly a federal responsibility, a consequence of the Australian government's funding of higher education.

Teacher training is conducted primarily by universities (and a smaller number of other authorized providers). This has been the case for nearly 30 years, since the incorporation of the Advanced Colleges of Education into the university sector in 1987. Australia-wide, there are 406 ITE programs at 48 institutions (37 of which are universities) (AITSL, 2015). AITSL regulates the quality of ITE programs by establishing the national professional standards for teaching and the processes for accreditation of ITE programs.

### *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs*

Nominally, universities have academic autonomy in determining the content of ITE programs. However, graduates are only eligible to register as teachers if they graduate from an accredited program, and this acts as a strong disincentive for providers to offer nonaccredited programs. Thus accreditation processes are contributing to shaping the curricular content of ITE programs.<sup>5</sup>

AITSL itself does not accredit ITE programs. Accreditation is conducted by the eight state and territory organizations, such as the Victorian Institute of Teaching, and NSW's Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards. The main purpose of accreditation is to ensure that ITE programs prepare teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills expected of a graduate teacher as laid out by the national professional standards for teachers. The involves document review and site visits, and is informed by the principles of: continuous improvement; outcomes focus; flexibility, diversity, and innovation; partnerships; building on existing expertise; and evidence (AITSL, 2013).

### *Support for Teacher Education*

The Australian government underwrites the majority of the cost of teacher education. Most universities are federally funded public universities, and private universities also receive some government funds. Some prospective teachers enrolling in ITE are eligible for Commonwealth Supported Places. This means that instead of charging students full tuition fees, the bulk of the full cost of program is funded by the Australian government, and teacher candidates pay a partial cost, known as the student contribution. This varies by university and program, but is typically around one-third of the full cost.

For example, at Deakin University in Victoria, the indicative annual fee for a Bachelor of Education (Primary) qualification is A\$23,680. The student contribution for core curricular units is 31.3%, meaning

that the expected student contribution is of the order of A\$7,400 per annum.<sup>6</sup>

Teacher candidates may also receive grants, loans, and financial support from the Australian government through the combined Higher Education Contribution Scheme and Higher Education Loans Program (HECS-HELP). Under these programs, university students (including teacher candidates) receiving Commonwealth Supported Places may borrow the student contribution portion of the cost of their studies from the government, as a deferred, income-contingent, tax liability. Full-fee paying students may also be eligible for federal government loans to help with tuition fees. In each case, interest pegged to the consumer price index is charged on these loans at an average rate of 3% per annum, and graduates make automatic payments through income tax once they are employed and earning above a threshold amount (around A\$47,000). Repayment rates vary from 4% to 8% depending on the salary level, but typically around 5% per annum for a beginning teacher.

The Australian government has moved to expand equity of access to higher education, including teacher education. It adopted recommendations to “uncap” the number of Commonwealth Supported Places in 2012. This was intended to lower financial barriers to particularly students from indigenous, remote, or lower socioeconomic communities (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008).

However, this also means that universities are able to determine the number of places they can offer in undergraduate courses, incentivized to do so by federal funding. An unanticipated effect is that entry numbers into teacher training programs reflect only weakly the needs of the labor market, and can contribute to shortages in some areas, and excesses in others, as the University of Melbourne’s Professor Dinham articulated in a 2013 article:

Some universities have reacted to this “free for all” by greatly expanding their places and offers for teacher candidates, at a time when there is an oversupply of primary teachers and long waiting lists for employment more generally . . . Put simply, we are training too many primary teachers and these resources would be better spent targeting areas of shortage.

(Dinham, 2013)

### *Selection into Initial Teacher Education Programs*

Teachers in Australia require a minimum of four years of tertiary education, which must include both discipline studies and teacher professional

studies. Teacher candidates can choose to train at the undergraduate or graduate level. There are several different models of study:

- A four-year undergraduate degree in education, such as the Bachelor of Education
- A three- or four-year undergraduate degree followed by a teacher qualification. These may be a one-year Diploma of Teaching (being phased out), or a Master of Teaching (typically two years)
- A combined or double-degree program, such as Bachelor of Teaching/Bachelor of Arts

Candidates may also incorporate specializations, such as indigenous education, into their programs (AITSL, 2014b). Applicants typically apply via state Universities Admissions Centers, organizations that function as intermediaries between applicants and the university sector, allowing potential students to submit applications to multiple universities and programs.

Entry to each ITE program is determined by each university or provider, although national guidelines stipulate the standard expected of teacher candidates by graduation. Previously, academic performance has typically been the main criteria, although some universities have also used written submission and interviews.<sup>7</sup> However, universities' entry ATAR scores (Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank)—a measure of relative rank among a high school cohort, used for entry to most undergraduate programs—showed considerable variation between universities, campuses, and even programs. Despite a recent trend towards graduate-entry courses (AITSL, 2015), analysis of ATAR data also showed that the average ATAR entry of undergraduates had declined (AITSL, 2014b), with concern from some quarters that this could challenge efforts to raise the status of teaching and recruit high-quality individuals into teaching (Dinham, 2013).

A second shift is efforts towards greater inclusion of personal qualities and attributes as part of selection into initial teacher education. (See also new reforms below.) This position was supported by union representatives we interviewed, who suggested that selection should combine both strong academic abilities as well as aptitude for teaching, such as strong communication skills. Some universities already incorporate these elements. For example, the University of Melbourne uses a Teacher Selector Tool to supplement its Master of Teaching admissions criteria for its Master of Teaching program. The tool asks candidates a series of questions that range from literacy and numeracy skills and spatial reasoning,

to communication style, cultural sensitivity, and ethics. It gives a 0–6 rating on each of several dimensions, including conscientiousness, agreeability, openness, and persistence, allowing comparisons between candidates and population averages.

While accreditation processes serve an important quality check on the inputs to teacher education programs, the national government has begun to enact additional reforms to provide greater quality assurance of the outputs, launching the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group in 2014.

### *Ongoing Developments—Initial Teacher Education Reform*

A new and major policy plank of the federal government is the Students First approach to strengthening education, and highlighting the need to lift the quality, professionalization, and status of the teaching profession. A major initiative is in the area of teaching quality via the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG). Comprised of members from the universities and schools sectors, TEMAG was established in February 2014 to provide evidence-informed advice to the federal government on how teacher education courses could be improved. Its report *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (Link 1-4) was released in early 2015, with 38 recommendations aimed at strengthening ITE programs and the accreditation processes, all but one of which was taken up by the federal government.

The key message emerging from the findings of TEMAG is that while Australia has a high quality teaching workforce, there is scope for establishing guidelines and regulatory systems to enhance both the quality and consistency of teacher education courses. Excellent practices exist where providers deliver evidence-backed programs that are constantly reviewed and improved, but reforms were needed to address considerable variation in the quality of the courses.

AITSL has been charged with leading these new reforms, which will have significant implications for ITE from 2016, and are grouped under the following eight areas:

- *Accreditation:* the standards and procedures for guiding the accreditation of ITE programs by state-based authorities. There is an emphasis on providers being able to more clearly demonstrate the impact their ITE programs have on student learning.
- *Selection:* transparent selection criteria will form part of ITE accreditation. Providers should use both academic and non-academic criteria—motivation to teacher, interpersonal and



communication skills, conscientiousness—as part of selection, and evidence how their measures contribute to their effectiveness.

- *Primary specialization*: although primary teachers will continue to be trained and work as generalists, they will take a specialization in mathematics, science, or languages during their ITE. The intent is that deeper disciplinary knowledge will enable teachers to share expertise with colleagues, improve outcomes for students, and in turn increase student take-up of these priority subjects during senior schooling.
- *Professional experience*: AITSL will develop model university-school partnerships to increase communication, and provide greater consistency and transparency of professional experience during training. Partnerships will clarify the skills and activities pre-service teachers should experience during their professional placement, and the methods of assessment.
- *Literacy and numeracy tests*: Graduate teachers are expected to have literacy and numeracy skills equivalent to the top 30% of the population. All graduate teachers will be required to sit a personal literacy and numeracy test. Nationwide implementation will begin from July 2016.
- *Graduate assessment*: in addition to tests of knowledge, AITSL will develop new assessment tools for graduate teachers that reflects the skills in practice that teachers should possess before entering the classroom.
- *Induction*: although together the national professional standards and teacher registration processes shape induction practices, there is still much variability. AITSL will work with states to develop a nationally consistent approach to induction. Early AITSL research indicates longer (up to two-years), individualized but standards-based, peer- and mentor-supported induction is most effective (Deloitte, 2015).

AITSL has the key responsibility for the introduction of these initiatives, but will require the assistance of state-based regulatory bodies for their implementation.

In releasing the findings of the TEMAG report the federal Education Minister noted that he saw considerable scope in the practical nature of the reforms:

Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers is a landmark development in the quest to improve teaching quality in Australia. TEMAG's

recommendations are far reaching, but sensible, practical, and mainstream. They are entirely achievable and this Government is determined to have them implemented. Consequently, our response has avoided creating new institutions, but rather built on existing ones that are respected and have the expertise to implement the recommendations. We understand that improving teaching quality is a national issue needing a coordinated response that must use all the resources and advantages of our federal system. This is why we will work collaboratively with the states and territories and their respective accrediting bodies. It also requires the support from other stakeholders—deans of education, academics, primary and secondary principals, parents and the teaching profession itself. TEMAG may not be the last teacher inquiry in our lifetime, but it will be the one that will lead to real improvements in the quality of teaching in Australia. That is what we all want.

(Pyne, 2015)

### *Nontraditional Certification: Teach for Australia*

A further move by the Commonwealth government has been to provide ongoing funding for the Teach for Australia movement increasing its investment by A\$22 million to A\$57 million by 2018. The program seeks to attract high-caliber individuals into teaching, and offer work-based training while placed in remote or difficult-to-fill teaching positions. Initially, teacher trainees received a six-week initial training course at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE) followed by support from Clinical Specialists and Teaching and Leadership Advisors while on placement in schools, along with an in-school mentor. The program has since moved to Deakin University in Victoria.

Teach for Australia presently operates in Victoria, ACT, and the Northern Territory, but not all states have accepted the program. In NSW for example, senior government officials have firmly resisted the adoption of the program, expressing the view that children in the state, particularly those in high-need areas, should only be taught by teachers that have completed a four-year training program. The president of the NSW Board of Studies, Teaching, and Educational Standards has stated that all teachers should be fully prepared and as such they are yet to endorse the Teach for Australia model, a step that would be required for program participants to register to teach (Dodd, 2014).

The Teach for Australia program has drawn criticism from other universities as well as quarters such as the Australian Education Union (AEU), which argue that the program is more expensive than traditional teacher training pathways and incurs higher dropout rates. These assertions were supported by a government evaluation report into the program, although based on the early experiences of the first three program cohorts. However, the same report also highlighted that as an alternative pilot program, it may contribute to informing teacher education in Australia by highlighting the importance of rigorous selection processes, reduced teaching loads to retain beginning teachers, and the importance of ongoing support during the induction phase (Weldon et al., 2013).

## Role of ACARA

A second prominent national education body is ACARA, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. ACARA was established in 2008 with a mandate to: “develop and administer a national school curriculum,” “develop and administer national assessments,” “collect manage and analyze student assessment data,” and “publish information relating to school education, including information relating to comparative school performance” (Australian Government, 2008). In establishing a federal role for what is taught, and what is tested, ACARA’s influence has already been pivotal in each of its two main responsibility areas.

### *Assessment*

In the area of assessment, ACARA is responsible for the *National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy*, known as NAPLAN. These are annual tests conducted for all Australian students in May of each year,<sup>8</sup> in grades 3, 5, 7, and 9, and in the areas of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. NAPLAN does not test specific content of a state’s curriculum, but is rather intended to assess skills in numeracy and literacy developed over time. Testing began in 2008, with responsibility passed to ACARA from 2010. Australia does not have a history of national testing (Mayer, Pecheone, & Merino, 2012), and thus the introduction of NAPLAN represented a significant shift in posture on this issue.

More controversial than the tests themselves however is how these data are used. ACARA hosts the MySchool website, which posts NAPLAN

data for nearly every school in Australia. It is indicative of a broader trend nationally towards a focus on educational outcomes.

*MySchool*, first posted in 2010, shows annual scores on NAPLAN for each grade and year tested. The website allows for easy analysis of mean scores, of distributions across the six NAPLAN achievement bands, of student growth across a two-year period, and of school funding data. The website's built-in functionality also facilitates comparison either with all schools in Australia, or with 60 statistically similar schools, based on a community's comparative social and educational advantage (Gable & Lingard, 2013).

Early in its implementation, there were concerns that the data could be used to rank schools. For teachers, there was some concern that data could be used to reward or punish teachers based on performance. Mayer, Pecheone, and Merino (2012) noted that recommendations for teacher testing emerged following poor results in the first round of NAPLAN in 2008, although this plan was ultimately dropped in 2011. Vigorous opposition from the Australian Education Union saw an agreement reached with the federal government over the appropriate use of NAPLAN data.

NAPLAN is used nationally as a check on system performance. In states such as Victoria and NSW, growth in NAPLAN scores is also a common goal in school strategic plans. Teachers in Victoria are also appraised at the school level and in part based on their contribution to these strategic goals. Thus NAPLAN seems set to play an important ongoing role in the context of federal and state policy.

## *Curriculum*

### *Process of Establishing the Australian Curriculum*

Through ACARA, a national curriculum framework was developed and finalized in 2010, and is being phased in in each of the states, territories, and school systems. The establishment of the Australian Curriculum represents a significant political achievement, having been a recurring, and at times, contentious debate in Australian education since the early 1980s. The closest previous attempt came in the late 1980s, with education's contribution to economic productivity the driving rationale (Brennan, 2011; Gable & Lingard, 2013). While draft curricula were produced, consensus was not able to be reached among states. Australia is the only country in the OECD with a federal government structure to have a national curriculum (Drabsch, 2013, pp. 2–3).

Renewed impetus for a national curriculum began in 2001 with the election of a new national education minister and the enactment of the Schools Assistance Act, which included agreement for a national assessment plan (later NAPLAN) (Watt, 2009).

The Australian Curriculum drew on existing state curricula. It is an ongoing project, with the curriculum being evaluated, reviewed, and updated (most recently in 2015). Its implementation has been phased, beginning with English, Mathematics, and Science, and followed by other subject areas.

The development of the Australian Curriculum began with parallel efforts, and is connected to the study of history in Australian schools. The council of education ministers (MCEETYA) undertook a study of curricular content in states and territories in 2002, and later developed the Statements of Learning (2004–2006) for states to implement into curricula from 2008. Meanwhile, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was tasked with studying the consistency of states' curricular content. It found many commonalities in mathematics, English, and the sciences, but no such consistency in Australian history (Watt, 2009), with each states' curricula reflecting their own. This led to a national level summit on history education, which in turn opened a wider debate on the Australian Curriculum, ultimately leading to the establishment of ACARA in 2008 and the production of the Australian Curriculum.

The way in which curriculum is implemented is largely determined at the state level. While the Australian Curriculum establishes learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curricular priorities, senior school qualifications is a state-level responsibility. Thus states retain the flexibility to design courses in order to meet content standards, and likewise retain authority over whether and how to report against the general capabilities (ACARA, 2012). States also retain responsibility for assessing and credentialing against the curriculum.

The development of the Australian Curriculum has emphasized a consensus-building approach among state and school systems. Some states have adopted the Australian Curriculum in its full form, while others have incorporated it into their own state curricula. In NSW for example, the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES) has developed syllabus documents from the NSW curriculum that incorporate the Australian Curriculum. In Victoria, the existing Victoria Essential Learning Standards (VELS) were incorporated into the Australian Curriculum framework to create "AusVELS," which has now developed into a new Victorian Curriculum to be taught from 2017. Moreover,

each school in Australia develops its own curriculum programs and resources, to address the learning areas, standards, and priorities of Australian Curriculum.

### *The Australian Curriculum and Its Form*

The Australian Curriculum reflects a combination of 21st-century learning competencies, with traditional subject disciplines and a set of priorities unique to Australia's context. Its aims are reflected in the Melbourne Declaration:

- A solid foundation in knowledge, skills and understandings, and values on which further learning and adult life can be built
- Deep knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications
- General capabilities that underpin flexible and analytical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise.

(MCEETYA, 2008)

The Curriculum identifies three dimensions: “discipline-based learning areas, general capabilities as essential 21st-century skills and contemporary cross-curriculum priorities” (ACARA, 2012).

The general capabilities prioritized are literacy, numeracy, and abilities with information and communication technology (ICT), but also include ethical and intercultural understanding, personal and social abilities, and critical and creative thinking. The three cross-curriculum priorities—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and sustainability—reflect areas regarded as of high importance and contemporary relevance to Australia. The capabilities and priorities are intended to be woven throughout the key learning areas to enrich the curriculum, although teachers have flexibility in how these are integrated.

There are eight discipline-based key learning areas: English, mathematics, science, humanities and social science, the arts, languages, health and physical education, and technologies (ACARA, 2012). Each of the learning areas is comprised of 10 levels, roughly corresponding to a year level. However, the Australian Curriculum encourages teaching to be flexible and move across learning areas and levels.

The learning areas and the disciplines from which they are drawn provide a foundation of learning in schools because they reflect the

way in which knowledge has, and will continue to be, developed and codified. However, 21st century learning does not fit neatly into a curriculum solely organised by learning areas or subjects that reflect the disciplines.

(ACARA, 2012)

Full implementation of the curriculum to Year 10 in all states is anticipated by 2017. The Australian Curriculum has been developed for the senior years (11 and 12) in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography, although the nature of its implementation will depend on each state.

### *Implications for Teaching and Learning, and Teaching Quality*

The Melbourne Declaration intends for the curriculum to be world-class, emphasizing both competency in the learning areas and in the capabilities of flexible thinking and communication skills. Although the Australian Curriculum is becoming firmly established—endorsed in all eight learning areas by the Education Council in 2015—it has nonetheless been the source of contestation. In particular, there remain challenges regarding how the curriculum meets the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, connects to NAPLAN, and segues with the implementation of teaching standards through AITSL.

One challenge relates to professional learning in states and school systems. States such as Victoria take a very decentralized and networked approach to professional development, while in NSW a significant proportion of professional development has been centrally coordinated with school networks, as well as through professional associations. Some education commentators have argued that the structure of the curriculum lends itself more easily to professional learning shaped along traditional disciplinary lines than those oriented to real-world tasks and interdisciplinary strategies (Atweh & Singh, 2011).

A second is the assessment of the Australian Curriculum in the context of NAPLAN. Some commentators contended that NAPLAN may serve as a de facto curriculum for underperforming schools, and influence educators to focus on curricular content at the expense of an emphasis on critical thinking skills (Aubusson, 2011; Brennan, 2011). Although NAPLAN began prior to the development of a national curriculum, it will be shaped by the Australian Curriculum from 2016 and delivered in an adaptive form from 2017. The adaptive form will mean that different students in a class or school would be taking a different form of the test. This is intended to make NAPLAN less predictable, and strengthen the case that the best preparation for NAPLAN is for students to experience a rich curriculum.

A third challenge is the degree to which consensus and accommodations in the formation of the Curriculum have led to an overcrowding of content, as it seeks to meet both national and state standards (BOSTES, 2014). A federal government review found that in some cases there was crowding of content, favoring breadth at the expense of depth. Implications for teaching included difficulties in linking content with cross-curricular priorities, and a curriculum that was unwieldy for teachers (Australian Government, 2014a). The report's recommendations to rebalance curricular content in each learning area, and benchmark pedagogical approaches against other top performing countries, were taken up by ACARA and are informing subsequent editions of the curriculum.

## Education Funding in Australia and Gonski

Australia funds its education system at similar levels to other advanced economies. Total per student education spending was at around US\$7,700 at primary level and US\$10,000 at secondary level (in 2012 dollars at purchasing power parity), comparable with OECD averages (OECD, 2015, p. 211). This amount is a little below the average however, when considered as a proportion of GDP per capita. Nonetheless, education represents an important priority for Australian governments compared with other public services, accounting for 13.5% of all public expenditures (c.f. OECD average of 11.6%). Australia was also just one of a handful of OECD countries to significantly increase its public expenditures on education (by 19%) during the height of the global financial crisis from 2008 to 2012 (OECD, 2015, p. 260).

The federal government funds education in Australia in two important ways. Firstly, it provides funding (via state authorities) to schools, both government and the nongovernment Catholic and independent schools. Secondly, it provides funding to states for specific purposes and initiatives, for example, under national partnership agreements from 2009–2014. The rapid increase of federal funding, and dramatic political changes in 2014—specifically around the Gonski needs-based funding reforms—show both the efficacy and potential challenges of the cooperative federalism approach to national policy formation.

The significance of federal funding in Australian education is of interest in part due to its relative newness. In fact, there was almost no federal funding of education prior to 1964. Annual recurrent funding for schools was first introduced in the 1970s to address perceived deficiencies in school resourcing, with needs-based programmatic funds made available for “disadvantaged schools, special education, teacher professional

development and innovation.” (Harrington, 2013, p. 3) This established the basic funding pattern that existed until 2009, which saw changes to the funding formula, an increase in funding to states for specific initiatives, and the launching of the Gonski report focused on the more equitable distribution of resources.

### *Education Funding in Australia*

Australia differs from many other countries in that it funds three different types of schools: government, Catholic, and independent. It thus provides significant funding to schools that would in many countries be considered private schools. Government schools typically receive around three-quarters of their funds from the state, and around 15–20% from the federal government. Catholic schools receive around three-quarters of their funds from public sources, with federal funds representing the largest proportion of this. Independent schools have greater flexibility to raise funds via private sources such as tuition fees, but on average around 40% of their funds come from public sources.

These funds to nongovernment (Catholic and independent) schools are divided into two major types: A base level of funding determined by the average cost of educating a student in a *government* school; and formula to provide additional funds based on the SES of the students' community.

Government schools are funded by states, but with significant differences between them. Victoria and South Australia have highly decentralized models with funds being distributed directly to government schools, while funding in NSW has until recent years been more centralized. Centralization relieves principals of many of the duties of budgeting and accounting, but also makes it difficult for schools attract needs-specific funding (Dowling, 2007).

### *Federal Funding and the Melbourne Declaration*

The Melbourne Declaration brought a renewed focus on education funding—in particular issues of equity—and highlighted long-standing deficiencies with the system. Firstly, the SES rating of the community in which the student lives did not necessarily reflect that of the students attending the school. Secondly, the way the funds were indexed disproportionately funded the nongovernment sector relative to government schools. This meant that as costs increased, it had the effect of driving more students into nongovernment schools (Dowling, 2007).

Thirdly, different financial reporting and accounting systems, and even fiscal calendars, existed between state governments, between the Australian government and states, and between the different school sectors—a fiscal example of the rail gauge phenomenon. Even establishing accurate estimates of per-student funding at the school level was a complex and complicated process, with figures on educational spending often unavailable until two years later.

Following the Melbourne Declaration, COAG signed a National Education Agreement (NEA), which established a new framework for federal funding of education. It included Specific Purpose Payments to schools and National Partnerships funding for specific programs (Harrington, 2013).

The Specific Purpose Payments increased federal funding to government schools, but states retained control over how these funds were dispersed. Specific Purpose Payments for nongovernment schools consisted of a series of grants for capital funding. Additional SES were awarded using parental income, education, and occupation data. Each education system received the monies to disperse among schools according to their own method. However, as a result of “grandparenting” arrangements, around 40% of nongovernment schools still received a greater level of funding than they would be entitled to under the new system, a finding that prefigured the Gonski report (see below).

### *National Partnerships: Federal Funding to Improve Teaching Quality*

*National Partnerships (NPs)* funding was provided to school systems for specific programs through federal-state agreements. The two most relevant to teaching quality were the Rewards for Great Teachers and the Smarter Schools National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality.

The Rewards for Great Teachers program was developed to financially reward teachers of high quality, and to support uptake of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and the Teacher Performance and Development framework (COAG, 2012). Participating states were required to establish a system for certifying teachers against the standards, and for all teachers to have undertaken a performance and development cycle against the framework by 2015. Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania, and the Catholic sector in Western Australia have yet to establish processes for certifying teachers at the higher levels.

The Smarter Schools National Partnerships were targeted specifically at raising teaching quality, and comprised agreements in literacy and

numeracy, low SES school communities, and improving teacher quality. A quarter of Australian schools were eligible for the low SES school communities and literacy and numeracy funds, while the improving teacher quality plan was targeted at all teachers and school leaders in Australia.

The agreements focused on “*critical points in the teacher ‘lifecycle’ to attract, train, place, develop and retain quality teachers and leaders in our schools and classrooms*”(COAG, 2013). State governments were able to select reform areas and milestones from among the following six areas:

- Improved pay dispersion to reward quality teaching.
- Improved reward structures for teachers and leaders who work in disadvantaged, indigenous, rural/remote, and hard-to-staff schools.
- Improved in-school support for teachers and school leaders, particularly in disadvantaged, rural/remote, and hard-to-staff schools.
- Increased school-based decision making about recruitment, staffing mix, and budget.
- Continual improvement program for all teachers.
- Indigenous teachers’ and school leaders’ engagement with community members. (COAG, 2013)

The National Partnerships included “reward funding,” paid to states that implemented plans and demonstrated improvements in literacy and numeracy against negotiated targets. The partnerships provided four years of funding to facilitate the implementation and evaluation of evidence-based strategies for improving student outcomes.

### *The Gonski Review*

One of the most important developments in national level policy in Australia was the Review of Funding for Schooling, known as the Gonski report (Link 1-5) after the chair of the review panel. Prior to the release of the report in 2011, there had not been a significant review into educational funding for over 40 years. Established by then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard in 2010, the review’s purpose was to “provide recommendations directed towards achieving a funding system for the period beyond 2013 that would be transparent, fair, financially sustainable and effective in promoting excellent educational outcomes for all Australian students” (Gonski et al., 2012).

The report recommended comprehensive changes in the balance and alignment of funding between the Australian and state governments, and



between government and nongovernment schools. The core principle was a movement to needs-based funding on a per-student basis, rather than on historical spending patterns (Australian Government, 2014b), as outlined in an explanatory report from the Australian Parliament:

The Gonski Review's core recommendation was that the level of recurrent funding for all school students should be determined by a Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) that would include a per student amount (with different amounts for primary and secondary school students) and loadings for various student-based and school-based sources of disadvantage (SES background, disability, English language proficiency, Indigeneity, and school size and location).

(Harrington, 2013, p. 36)

As the terms of the review required that no school receive less money as an outcome, it recommended a significant increase in funding in real terms of around 4.3%, or A\$5 billion, calculated to be less than 0.5% of the gross domestic product of Australia (Gonski et al., 2012; NCOA, 2014).

The Gonski funding model has a very strong equity focus. The six “factor loadings” are intended to provide greater resources to students who may require more support (Australian Department of Education, 2013). As the review panel Chair said in a speech to the Australian College of Educators:

One of the easiest decisions we (the review panel) were able to take is what we as a review team believed “equity” should mean in determining a suitable funding system in Australia. We felt strongly and unanimously that a funding system must ensure that differences in education outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power, or possessions. Flowing from this, a funding system based on need was both obvious and important.

(Gonski, 2014)

The Australian government committed to the review's core recommendations, in which states would increase funding by \$1 for every \$2 of federal funding over six years. State governments signed onto the plan, which was included in the Australian Education Act 2013, and took effect from 1 January 2014.

However, a newly-elected federal government eventually withdrew its commitment in 2014 to the final two years—those in which the majority of funding would have been provided—instead recommending handing responsibility for funding back to the states. “This means that while the Commonwealth has locked in funding increases over the next four

years, there is no obligation for the States to increase, or even maintain, their own funding levels” (NCOA, 2014). This would also mean that the model of aspirational needs-based allocation would again be replaced by a resourcing model that is based on historical figures.

Several states have since implemented their own funding models based on the Gonksi recommendations. The issue remains part of ongoing political debate, and figured prominently in the 2016 federal elections (AEU, 2016).

The ongoing contestation around funding highlights the impetus that exists for addressing equity issues in Australian education under the Melbourne Declaration. It also underscores both that the movement towards national consistency in education is an incomplete and ongoing project, as well as the extent to which national education policies, although becoming more firmly entrenched, are still contingent upon political consensus.

## Summary

States have constitutional responsibility for education, and historically, education policy formation has been conducted at the state level. The federal government manages significant funding including funds from taxation and is a significant provider of funding to the states, which has given it an influential voice in policy (Drabsch, 2013).

State-based education in Australia is being progressively transformed by national level education policies. These policies are aimed both at improving international educational and economic competitiveness, as well as improving educational outcomes for *all* Australians, including addressing equity concerns associated with remote communities, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those of indigenous Australians.

Teaching quality features prominently among these education reforms. Significant policies to date have included the development of nationally consistent standards to underpin teaching. This is being closely followed by efforts to draw processes for each of teacher registration, teacher performance and development, and professional learning into line with these standards.

There are also initiatives requiring accreditation of initial teacher education programs to align teacher training with the teaching standards. This has recently been joined by a suite of federal reforms that aim to significantly strengthen initial teacher education programs. Further initiatives in curriculum and assessment are helping to shape what gets taught, and the work of teachers in the classroom.

The federal government in Australia has played an important role in state-delivered education since the introduction of recurrent funding forty years ago. However, the process of achieving national consistency in education policy has mainly taken place in less than a decade. This has been possible through an approach that has emphasized consensus and harmonization. Thus although the federal role in education is well established, elements of the reforms, such as schools funding, remain contested.

This process has allowed for a degree of independence at the state level for education initiatives, as shown with the national partnerships agreements. Despite the national nature of the reforms, as state-based regulatory authorities maintain the primary role in their on-the-ground implementation, this will contribute to shaping the extent to which the reforms impact on teaching quality, and their effectiveness in achieving the twin goals of excellence and equitable education as set out in the Melbourne Declaration.

In the case studies that follow, we take a closer look at policy impacting teaching and learning in each of Victoria and NSW. We examine the different contexts for education policy, and look at how these influence teaching practices and the work of teachers.

## NOTES

1. The federal government in Australia is known as the Commonwealth, but is now referred to as the Australian government in most contexts.
2. For much of Australia's early history, different states operated railway systems with different widths between tracks (gauges). With the development of interstate commerce, this often entailed the unloading and loading of goods from trains of one gauge to another, causing considerable inefficiency. The rail gauge phenomenon serves as a metaphor in present-day Australia for the parallel and independent development of initiatives in each state.
3. Previously known as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), and the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA).
4. These system organizations serve as sector bodies for negotiation with state and federal governments, but are not directly involved in school management.
5. As with other university programs, initial teacher education is also subject to university internal accreditation processes, as well as external accreditation by the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, the regulatory body for the university and higher education sector.
6. See <http://www.deakin.edu.au/course/bachelor-of-education-primary-education-and-teaching#FEES-CHARGES>

7. Applicants also require completion of a Working with Children Check (WWCC), an ongoing assessment of applicants' suitability for working with children made by each state's Department of Justice. It includes a national police check and determinations made by professional bodies such as VIT.
8. Although NAPLAN testing applies to all students, parents may choose to exclude their children from testing. Additional dispensation may be given for some students with disabilities, new immigrant students, and some students for whom English is not a first language.