

**The National School Reform Agreement: Its Implications for  
State-level Curriculum Reforms**

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## **Abstract**

Release of the report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools in March 2018 led the Australian Government to develop a National School Reform Agreement, including bilateral agreements established with the states and territories. The purpose of this article was to compare emerging state-level curriculum reforms with the actions that states and territories agreed to undertake in bilateral agreements for the reform direction of supporting students, student learning and achievement. Content analysis method was used to summarise actions reported in bilateral agreements and analyse state-level curriculum reforms. Results showed that states and territories prioritised a mixture of actions relating to national policy initiatives, state-specific initiatives and sector-specific initiatives in their bilateral agreements. The scope of curriculum reforms varied at the state level. Implementation of the Australian Curriculum formed an important element of systemic educational reforms undertaken in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland and Victoria. Reform of the state curriculum in New South Wales focused on improving its design and relationship to the Australian Curriculum. Curriculum reform in Tasmania focused on designing a curriculum for years 9 to 12 incorporating the Australian Curriculum. Curriculum reforms in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia focused on specific learning areas or integrating disciplines associated with the Australian Curriculum. The degree of alignment between the actions set out in bilateral agreements and state-level curriculum reforms varied from strong to moderate, suggesting that other actions were seen by policymakers as important for supporting students, student learning and achievement.

## **Keywords**

Educational innovation, Federal state relationship, National curriculum, State programs.

## **Introduction**

The review conducted by a panel chaired by David Gonski to develop a funding model for schools recommended in the report, published by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011), that a needs-based approach to funding should be based on a Schooling Resource Standard. In June 2013, the Australian Parliament enacted the Australian Education Act 2013 setting out the rights and responsibilities of approved authorities for schools, block grant authorities and non-government representative bodies to receive federal funding for schools. In June 2017, the Australian Education Act 2013 was amended to give effect to the Quality Schools package intended to link federal, state and territory funding of education to the improvement of student outcomes. With changes to funding arrangements commencing in January 2018, the amended Australian Education Act 2013 will lead the Australian Government to increase funding for public schools to 20 percent and non-government schools to 80 percent by 2023, all schools will move to consistent shares of the Schooling Resource Standard within ten years, and state and territory governments will increase their share to public schools to at least 95 percent of the Schooling Resource Standard by 2023.

The debate over a funding model for schools was influenced by arguments that school funding should be targeted towards the most effective strategies to raise student achievement. Evidence provided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development that increasing funding for schools does not improve student outcomes was borne out by the finding that total funding for schools provided by Australian governments has doubled since 1988, but students' performances have fallen on international and national studies of educational achievement.

This conclusion was central to the Australian Government's decision to establish the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools. In its report, published by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (2018), the Review Panel identified three priorities of delivering at least one year's growth in learning for every student every year, equipping every student to be a creative, connected and engaged learner in a rapidly changing world, and cultivating an adaptive, innovative and continuously improving education system. Five focus

areas for improvement were discussed to support the three priorities. Laying the foundations for learning can be met by narrowing the gaps between children entering school. Equipping every student to grow and succeed in a changing world can be met by changing education policies and practices to modify the education system. Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators can be met by supporting teachers' professional practices. Empowering and supporting school leaders can be met by maximising the impact of school leaders on educational outcomes. Raising and achieving ambitions through innovation and continuous improvement can be met by creating a cycle of continuous improvement. The report concluded with a call to action outlining 23 recommendations.

In April 2018, the Australian Government accepted these recommendations, and announced that it would work with state and territory governments, Catholic and independent education sectors to determine how the recommendations should be delivered. In May 2018, David Gonski briefed the Education Council on the review to inform development of a new national school reform agreement. In September 2018, the Education Council discussed the draft National School Reform Agreement, agreed to submit it to the Council of Australian Governments and supported work to clarify the costs, scope, milestones and governance for eight national policy initiatives. In November 2018, the Council of Australian Governments released the National School Reform Agreement. In December 2018, the Education Council agreed that the eight national policy initiatives would be developed jointly by the Australian Government and state and territory governments, and that educators would be consulted on implementing the reforms.

The National School Reform Agreement sets out three reform directions, each consisting of several national policy initiatives. The first reform direction, Supporting students, student learning and student achievement, consists of three national policy initiatives: enhancing the Australian Curriculum (AC) to support teacher assessment of student attainment and growth against clear descriptors; assisting teachers monitor individual student progress and identify student learning needs through student learning assessment tools with links to student learning resources, prioritising early years' foundation skills; and reviewing senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training. The second reform direction, Supporting teaching, school

leadership and school improvement, comprises two national policy initiatives: reviewing teacher workforce needs of the future to attract and retain the best and brightest to the teaching profession and attract teachers to areas of need; and strengthening the initial teacher education accreditation system. The third reform direction, Enhancing the national evidence base, consists of three national policy initiatives: implementing a national unique student identifier that meets national privacy requirements in order to support better understanding of student progression and improve the national evidence base; establishing an independent national evidence institute to inform teacher practice, system improvement and policy development; and improving national data quality, consistency and collection to improve the national evidence base and inform policy development.

Each state and territory established a bilateral agreement with the Australian Government setting out state-specific reform plans. The Australian Government Department of Education and Training engaged with state and territory education agencies, Catholic and independent education sectors in defining the subject matter of the reform plans and reaching funding arrangements. In most cases, negotiations were completed between September and December of 2018. New South Wales and South Australia signed bilateral agreements in November 2018, and the Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia signed bilateral agreements in December 2018. In December 2018, Victoria signed an interim bilateral agreement with the Australian Government requiring both parties to finalise a full bilateral agreement as soon as practicable in the first half of 2019. The failure of Victoria to sign a bilateral agreement was due to the Victorian Government's position that the federal government was entrenching funding inequality between education sectors by refusing to commit to increasing its contribution for Victoria's public schools to 25 percent of the Schooling Resource Standard. In June 2019, Victoria signed a bilateral agreement.

The purpose of this article is to compare emerging curriculum reforms with the actions that states and territories agreed to undertake for the reform direction of supporting students, student learning and achievement. Based on this rationale, the study focuses on two research questions. What actions are governments taking to advance the reform direction for supporting students, student learning and

achievement? Are the actions that governments are taking to advance this reform direction closely aligned to emerging curriculum reforms at the state level?

## **Method**

The research design comprised a review of reports, position papers and regulatory publications with the intention of uncovering information to answer the research questions. This design allowed the researcher to cover each of the two research questions comprehensively through a policy review.

Documents referring to the Australian Government's initiatives relating to the National School Reform Agreement were identified by searching the Department of Education and Training's website. Documents, identified on the websites of state and territory education agencies, provided a valuable source of information for state-level curriculum reforms.

The procedure for analysing information, collected during the study, used content analysis method to summarise the subject matter focusing on interpretation of the relevant documents. Initially, the reform actions for supporting students, student learning and student achievement set out in the bilateral agreements were reported in tabular format. In-depth analysis of specific state-level curriculum reforms focused on analysing the subject matter of relevant documents and summarising the findings. Finally, judgments were reached concerning the alignment of specific actions with emerging curriculum reforms occurring at the state level.

## **State and territory reform plans**

Table 1 summarises the reform actions that each state and territory government, together with the Catholic and independent sectors, agreed to undertake for the reform direction of supporting students, student learning and achievement.

**Table 1 Summary of actions set out in state and territory bilateral reform plans (Source: National School Reform Agreement, appendices 1-8) Copyright, Commonwealth of Australia**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Timing</b>
ACT	Develop a cross-sectoral implementation plan for the Future of Education Strategy.	All	2019
	Implement the first phase of the Future of Education Strategy.	All	2020
	Establish a cross-sectoral reform forum.	All	2019
	Deliver professional learning on the AC general capabilities.	All	2019
	Develop and implement assessment and reporting strategies aligned to the AC achievement standards.	ED	2019 onwards
	Extend the assessment reform effort to play a lead role in refining the learning progressions for literacy and numeracy.	All	2019
	Extend the assessment reform effort to play a lead role in the national effort to develop the digital formative assessment proof of concept.	All	2019
	Extend the assessment reform effort to play a lead role in developing national learning progressions for the general capabilities.	All	2020 onwards
	Play a lead role in refining the digital formative assessment tool, and implement relevant aspects as they become available.	All	2020 onwards
	Conduct a cross-sectoral STEM educators' forum.	All	2019
	Implement the Cultural Integrity Continuum and Toolkit in all public schools.	ED	2018 onwards
	Implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures elaborations for Science.	All	2019 onwards
	Expand the number of schools to meet students' learning needs.	ED	2019 onwards
NSW	Deliver the curriculum review to prepare students for the future.	All	2019
	Implement revised curriculum and formative assessments ensuring teachers are supported to implement them.	All	2020 onwards
	Embed evidence-based practices, including the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2017 to 2020.	All	2020
	Meet the needs of students-at-risk of educational disadvantage through evidence-based pedagogy, instruction and innovation.	All	Ongoing
NT	Implement NAPLAN Online.	All	May 2020

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<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Timing</b>
NT	Invest in pathways for students in remote and very remote schools by providing opportunities and delivering workplace skills.	DoE	2018-2022
QLD	Review and extend the Early Start screening tool or similar measures in schools.	All	2019-2021
	Implement the new senior assessment system.	All	2019-2023
	Expand the transition support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering and leaving boarding schools.	All	2019-2023
SA	Provide tailored guides in all public schools to support improvements in literacy and numeracy.	DoE	2019
	Employ 500 teachers with expertise in STEM in primary schools.	DoE	By 2020
	Screen all year 1 students with a phonics-based literacy and numeracy assessment, and launch the Literacy Guarantee Unit.	DoE	2019
	Revitalise infrastructure and increase capacity.	DoE	Ongoing
	Transfer year 7 to high school.	DoE	2019-2023
	Implement the Living Learning Leading Framework.	Catholic	2019-2023
	Build system capacity, and dynamic and sustainable partnerships in STEM education.	Catholic	2019-2023
	Implement the Catholic Education South Australia literacy and numeracy strategies.	Catholic	2021
	Transfer year 7 to high school.	Catholic	2022
	Use the High Impact School Improvement Tool to provide evidence-informed improvement practices.	Independent	2019-2023
	Explore the learning progressions for literacy and numeracy.	Independent	2019-2021
	Implement an audit tool, develop a research bank, establish partnerships, and implement school-based strategies in STEM education.	Independent	2019-2020
	Implement a phonics-based literacy screening assessment.	Independent	2019
	Implement the Resolve Mathematical Inquiry Project.	Independent	2019-2020
	Investigate and scale best practice in middle schooling.	Independent	2019-2022
	Provide Aboriginal students in secondary schools with mentoring support.	Independent	2018-2019

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<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Sectors</b>	<b>Timing</b>
TAS	Contribute to the national effort relating to learning progressions, formative assessment and the review of senior secondary education.	All	Ongoing
	Meet the needs of students at risk of educational disadvantage.	All	Ongoing
	Implement the recommendations from the Years 9 to 12 Review.	All	2019 onwards
	Implement learning progressions for literacy and numeracy.	Independent	2019
	Provide opportunities and access to professional learning and networking for school leaders.	Independent	Ongoing
	Establish uniform feedback and reporting mechanisms to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.	Catholic	2019
	Trial the Staff Learning Management System to enhance professional development.	Catholic	2019
VIC	Design a digital assessment library providing an online resource consisting of student assessments and professional resources.	All	2020
	Provide scholarships for teachers to undertake postgraduate courses in special education.	DoE&T	2019 onwards
	Provide access to Careers-e-Portfolio, and professional career diagnostic assessment.	DoE&T	2019 onwards
	Implement Head Start school-based apprenticeships and traineeships.	DoE&T	Ongoing
	Develop and implement cross-sectoral guidelines for transitioning students expelled from school to new settings.	All	2019 onwards
	Participate in Getting it Right from the Start.	Catholic	2019 onwards
WA	Implement strategies to support positive student behaviour, student health and wellbeing in schools, and reduce bullying.	All	Ongoing
	Deliver professional learning for the Vision for Learning and Five Teacher Practices.	Catholic	2019-2020
	Design the Virtual School Network.	Catholic	2019 onwards
	Investigate university pathways by trialling and implementing portfolio entry.	Independent	2019-2020
	Contribute to the national effort to review senior secondary education.	All	2019 onwards
	Focus on the AC general capabilities and continuing to support the use of formative assessment tools.	All	2018-2020

## **State-level curriculum reforms**

### *Australian Capital Territory*

The bilateral agreement focuses on the systemic reform, the Future of Education Strategy, as the key territory-level element for the reform plan.

In February 2017, Yvette Berry, the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, announced the Future of Education conversation consisting of three phases: conducting a community conversation to discuss and generate ideas; testing key themes with the community; and creating the policy direction. A small group of community partners was formed to provide advice to the Minister and the Education Directorate, and a group of experts was established to facilitate the conversation with school communities. Over 4,500 responses were submitted by school communities, community organisations and the public during the first phase held in April and May of 2017. Analysis of the feedback identified nine themes: learning for the future; transitions; individualised learning; consistency between schools; real life skills; opportunities and pathways for all; what we should be measuring and evaluating; collaboration and support to meet student needs; and valuing educators. A tenth theme, inclusion, was identified during previous consultations with stakeholders. A literature review involved cross-referencing the responses from the consultation, and the publication of a research report. A discussion paper was released in June 2017, and an early childhood strategy discussion paper was released in November 2017. The second phase in March 2018 involved about 150 participants attending a three-hour workshop held at Charles Weston School in Coombs. The participants provided feedback about the four foundations, developed single policy objectives, important policy directions, and short- and long-term actions. A workforce discussion paper released in May 2018 led to more than 700 teachers responding to a workforce survey. The third phase to develop the policy direction involved drafting the Future of Education Strategy between April and June of 2018. The Future of Education Strategy was approved by the Legislative Assembly in August 2018, and distributed to stakeholders for discussion focusing on the development of the first phase implementation plan.

The Future of Education Strategy sets out four foundations, four principles for implementing the Strategy, and an implementation plan consisting of three phases: years 1 to 2; years 3 to 5; and years 5 to 10. For each phase, actions are categorised by four foundations: students at the centre; empowered learning professionals; strong communities for learning; and systems supporting learning. Implementation of the strategy is based on four principles: equity; student agency; access; and inclusion. Released in July 2019, the first phase implementation plan sets out planned activities, outputs, benefits and partnership opportunities for 13 actions: inclusive service delivery; safety and confidence to include; place-based inclusion; connecting young people to their learning; student agency; best start in a career of learning; thriving in a career of learning; supporting leaders in a career of learning; forging innovative partnerships; early childhood strategy; teachers as researchers; systems modelling learning; and future schools for a growing city.

### *New South Wales*

The bilateral agreement focuses on the review of the New South Wales Curriculum and implementation of the revised curriculum, as the key state-level element for the reform plan.

In September 2018, Robert Stokes, the Minister for Education, announced terms of reference for the review to be conducted by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA). The review would articulate the purpose of the curriculum, identify essential knowledge, skills and attributes, explain how the curriculum could be redesigned, and identify the implications of any new approach to curriculum design. NESA engaged Professor Geoffrey Masters, chief executive officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) as lead reviewer, and formed a taskforce to support the review. NESA commissioned John Hughes, an academic at Western Sydney University, to develop a background paper on the history of the New South Wales Curriculum since 1989, and Learning First, an education research and consulting group based in Melbourne, to conduct case studies on curriculum reforms in Louisiana and British Columbia to highlight innovation and best practice.

Feedback was collected from 14 public meetings held at metropolitan and regional centres across New South Wales in October 2018, more than 50 meetings held with stakeholder groups in November 2018, and 2,200 submissions lodged through an online survey. Commissioned by NESAs, ARTD Consultants (2019) produced a report summarising the analysis of the feedback in relation to four key themes.

In October 2019, NESAs released the interim report for public review. In the interim report, Masters (2019) discussed factors affecting the context, conclusions derived from community aspirations and concerns, and the findings from learning research and reform initiatives to inform 12 design principles for the curriculum. The design principles provide guidance for refining the content and structure of the curriculum, and the senior secondary curriculum. Reform of the content should be based on four reform directions. First, syllabuses should be reviewed to reduce the amount of mandated content, determine clarity, identify duplication in earlier stages, requests to address extra-curricular topics, and time required for compliance activities. Second, key knowledge, skills and understandings should be identified and prioritised as part of the syllabus review. Third, transfer and application of knowledge to meaningful contexts should be included in learning outcomes. Fourth, a common entitlement should prioritise literacy and numeracy and social and emotional development, specify a range of subjects, develop knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories, include a language other than English, involve learning in areas of personal interest, and develop understanding through personal applications and projects in the senior secondary curriculum. Reform of the structure should be based on six reform directions. First, a more flexible curriculum should provide a framework for teachers to establish the points students have reached and identify next steps. Second, the curriculum for each key learning area should be reorganised into a sequence of syllabuses with each syllabus corresponding to a particular level of attainment. Third, a standard should be established in each key learning area that every student should meet by completion of schooling. Fourth, attainment levels should be used as a frame of reference for monitoring and communicating students' learning trajectories and progress toward achievement of the expected standard. Fifth, an objective in the curriculum should provide structures that recognise students' varying levels of attainment and remove structures that impose ceilings on progress in learning. Sixth, information about the highest

attainment level a student has achieved and progress the student is making toward attainment of the next level should replace grades against specified outcomes. Reform of the senior secondary curriculum should be based on five reform directions. First, a set of advanced courses should be developed that incorporate theory and application to encourage a more integrated approach to learning. Second, advanced courses should be structured as a sequence of attainment levels. Third, a single major project should be introduced for every student in a learning area of choice. Fourth, a new set of learning areas should be defined to reflect a more integrated approach to the curriculum. Fifth, the school system should work with the Universities Admissions Centre to replace the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank with multiple course selection ranks.

NESA collected feedback about the reform directions in the interim report at 18 meetings held with stakeholder groups and an online survey. Feedback from the public review will provide the basis for the final report to be presented to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood in 2020.

### ***Northern Territory***

Although the bilateral agreement emphasises the five focus areas of the *Education NT Strategy 2018 to 2022* as the key territory-level element for the reform plan, it outlines strategies to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal children.

In 2016, the Northern Territory Board of Studies reconvened the Indigenous Languages and Cultures Reference Group to develop a policy for teaching Indigenous languages and cultures. This group defined five principles for programs in Aboriginal languages and cultures. The Board of Studies released a discussion paper outlining implications of each principle, presenting sets of recommendations and proposing a framework for Indigenous languages and cultures based on the five principles. The discussion paper provided a foundation for the Board of Studies to create a plan for Indigenous languages and cultures in collaboration with stakeholders. Following approval by the Board of Studies, the plan was launched in April 2017.

Based on the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework and the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages, the plan provides a curriculum framework consisting of four learner pathways. The first language pathway, consisting of bilingual and maintenance options, is designed for Indigenous students to maintain communicative competence. The language revival pathway, consisting of revitalisation and renewal options, is designed for Aboriginal students to learn an Indigenous language that may no longer be spoken on a daily basis. The second language pathway provides an opportunity for all students to learn an Indigenous language as a second language. The language and cultural awareness pathway provides an opportunity for all students to increase intercultural capability by learning about an Indigenous language and culture. The cultural knowledge and content component for each of the four pathways is organised into three strands: country - land; people and kinship; and natural environment. In 2017, the Northern Territory Government published guidelines to help schools, local communities, elders and language custodians implement the learner pathways.

The Department of Education collaborated with the Board of Studies to develop the *STEM in the Territory Strategy 2018-2022* that encapsulates the Northern Territory Government's election commitment in relation to digital literacy, coding, and enterprise education and innovation. A complimentary document, *STEM School Matrices: a Tool for guiding the Implementation of STEM Education in Northern Territory Schools* was developed to support schools implement the strategy. Launched in November 2018, *STEM in the Territory Strategy 2018-2022* incorporates the two national goals and five areas of national action expressed as outcomes. Each outcome sets out priority areas and key actions. *STEM School Matrices* outline an implementation plan based on five domains.

### ***Queensland***

The bilateral agreement focuses on the key action of senior schooling pathways in the systemic reform, Advancing Education, as a key state-level element for the reform plan.

In October 2015, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk and the Minister for Education, Kate Jones, launched an action plan and a discussion paper on coding and robotics in public schools. Seventeen community forums, held in November 2015, were attended by more than 1,000 educators, parents, community members, education stakeholders and representatives of industry. Members of the public participated in two online surveys, and 11 organisations presented written submissions. Consisting of eight actions, the plan was revised and supporting plans for coding counts and global schools through languages were developed and released in June 2016.

A confident start provides a preparatory year for all children from 2017 by offering age-appropriate learning, engaging more children with disabilities in early learning, and investing in new integrated early year services in areas of need. Schools of the future fast-tracks the implementation of the AC Digital Technologies, coding and robotic programs, establishes science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) virtual academies, and prepares the next generation of information technology entrepreneurs. Global schools through languages expand the study of cultures and languages, and markets Queensland's education system internationally. Senior schooling pathways introduce a new senior assessment and tertiary entrance system, and expand the number of vocational education and training (VET) options in schools. Supporting student learning establishes a state-wide reading centre to provide specialist advice, creates an autism hub in partnership with experts, and provides additional guidance officers and mental health coaches. Investing in schools develops models for resourcing public schools based on need, increases funds, introduces an efficient system for school maintenance, and integrates planning for new schools. Partnering for success provides active partnerships between public schools and universities or industries, places successful partnerships at the centre of the school improvement agenda, and revitalises the Parent and Community Engagement Framework. Valuing our teachers and educators establishes a professional learning centre to strengthen teaching excellence, places an additional 2,500 teachers in public schools, and transforms human resource management to attract and retain the best teachers.

Several initiatives began in 2016 to support schools of the future. The Queensland Government commissioned a review of STEM education in public schools. The findings of the review, reported by the Queensland Department of Education (2019), formed the basis for creating *A Strategy for STEM in Queensland State Schools*. The Centre of Excellence in Automation and Robotics opened at Alexandra Hills State High School and the Queensland Coding Academy was launched to provide online learning for teachers and students to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in coding and computational thinking. An online STEM hub was launched to provide information about resources, STEM careers and pathways. Support was provided for implementing the AC Digital Technologies in schools by 2020. The Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow program was launched to support implementation of innovative projects focused on digital solutions including coding and robotics. Queensland virtual STEM academies used an online platform to enable collaboration between students in different schools. A STEM teacher symposium, held at Brisbane annually in September, uses experts to enhance knowledge about the latest developments, translating research into practice, modelling best practice and facilitating partnerships.

Several initiatives began in 2016 to support global schools through languages. Language immersion programs were implemented in schools and online delivery of languages was trialled in the preparatory year. Curriculum resources were developed for Japanese, French, German and Chinese to assist implementation of the AC Languages. In 2018, languages hubs were provided to school leaders and languages teachers to offer resources and advice, and to parents and students to provide information about the benefits of learning languages.

To support senior schooling pathways, the Queensland Government commissioned ACER to review the systems for senior assessment and tertiary entrance. Matters and Masters (2014) recommended that the systems for senior assessment and tertiary entrance should be redesigned by revitalising school-based assessment, introducing an external assessment, designing a new moderation procedure, and introducing a 60-point scale for reporting students' results. The Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) developed the new senior assessment system for implementation in 2019 by revising and aligning senior syllabuses to the AC and the

new assessment model, trialling external assessments in particular subjects at selected trial schools, and trialling processes for improving the quality and comparability of school-based assessments. The new senior assessment system involves students completing four assessments: three school-based assessments; and an external assessment. Teachers design school-based assessments, which are evaluated and endorsed by a network of more than 1,000 trained assessors before administration to students. The reliability of grades, awarded by teachers, is evaluated by 1,400 trained reviewers. The external assessment, which is designed and administered by QCAA, is assessed by trained markers.

To support student learning, the Department of Education and Training founded an Autism Hub and Reading Centre based at Woolloongabba in February 2016. The Autism Hub and Reading Centre support autism coaches located in the state's seven regions and reading coaches based in the Reading Centre. The autism coaches offer local workshops to support identified needs in their communities, and the Reading Centre holds workshops focusing on curriculum delivery, effective pedagogical practices, analysis and discussion of data, and differentiated instruction, in which the AC is embedded in the context for learning and Curriculum into the Classroom units are used to model planning processes for reading.

### ***South Australia***

The bilateral agreement focuses on strategies for STEM education, and literacy and numeracy as the key state-level elements for the reform plan.

In November 2016, Susan Close, the Minister for Education and Child Development, released the *STEM Learning Strategy for DECD Preschool to Year 12, 2017 to 2020*, encompassing eleven initiatives. Funds would be provided to upgrade STEM facilities in 139 public schools. Additional training would be provided to upgrade 500 primary teachers to become specialist STEM teachers. Preschool teachers would have access to new STEM resources from 2017. Teachers would use a new approach for instruction, assessment and moderation for STEM from 2017. A STEM play program would be implemented in public preschools. The Department of Education and Child Development would design STEM career pathways with stakeholders for

young people to transition to emerging industries. Student engagement would be developed through a STEM student ambassadors program and establishment of an Aboriginal Learners Congress. A Year 7 and 8 STEM Collaborative Inquiry project would design, trial and evaluate innovative STEM projects. The existing network of STEM focus and advanced manufacturing schools and the Australian Science and Mathematics School, based on the campus of Flinders University, would be extended to identify innovative and effective secondary teachers. An annual STEM leaders' symposium would be designed.

In August 2016, the Department of Education and Child Development commenced the Year 7 and 8 STEM Collaborative Inquiry project focusing on ways to develop strong links between feeder primary schools and their local high schools to improve students' transition experiences. STEM learning projects were designed and trialled over two years by five school networks: Morialta; Orion; South East Coast and Vines; Upper Mid North; and Western Shores. The networks conducted six projects: health; humanity, sustainability and environment; engineering; food innovation; smart systems and advanced technologies; and future energy and resources.

Following election in March 2018, the Liberal Government implemented its policy of Literacy Guarantee by introducing literacy coaches, phonics checks for year 1 students, dyslexia workshops for parents, parental engagement resources, proficiency standards for the National Assessment Program literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN) tests, literacy and numeracy testing for preservice teachers, revision of examinations for students with disabilities, and breakfast programs for schools. In June 2018, John Gardner, the Minister for Education, announced that the Department of Education would establish a Literacy Guarantee Unit to provide 500 primary teachers with professional learning, support 500 trained primary teachers to train other teachers, offer conferences to provide professional development opportunities to teachers, and direct coaching to teachers, including support in teaching explicit synthetic phonics.

The Department of Education commissioned the South Australian Aboriginal Education and Consultative Council to consult the Aboriginal community to inform development of a new Aboriginal education strategy. In December 2018, the Department of Education released the *Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019 to 2029*

setting out a vision, five principles to guide implementation and three goals: Aboriginal children develop foundations for success in the early years; Aboriginal children and young people excel at school; and Aboriginal young people are on the pathways to success. The goals are supported by engaging Aboriginal communities to develop the culture and identity of their children and young people, and building a strong, culturally responsive organisation by focusing on six areas: teaching practice and curriculum delivery; languages; engagement and governance; workforce development; funding policy; and Aboriginal governance, service design and delivery. The Strategy includes an implementation and accountability framework that sets out measures and indicators for attaining each goal.

### *Tasmania*

The bilateral agreement focuses on the Review of Years 11 and 12 as the key state-level element for the reform plan.

In June 2016, the Tasmanian Government commissioned ACER to identify opportunities to improve attendance, retention and attainment outcomes in years 9 to 12 by reviewing student and workforce data, curriculum policy and provision, and design and delivery across the three education sectors. The Australian Council for Educational Research (2016) found that there are major policy issues relating to educational provision for years 9 to 12 students that should be addressed by seven recommendations and additional policy options.

In February 2018, a workshop was held for representatives of the three education sectors to determine a way forward to implement the recommendations. Lambert (2018) reported that the participants discussed issues and made nine recommendations associated with developing a pathways approach for years 9 to 12, scoping work to develop a Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework, and clarifying the status and provision of VET and vocational learning.

Following the workshop, a governance structure was formed to coordinate the work of the Years 9 to 12 Project. Appointed in July 2018, the Years 9 to 12 Steering

Committee undertook reviews of relevant educational literature and practices in high-performing education systems focusing on strategies for student engagement through to the completion of Year 12.

In August 2018, groups were reconvened to provide advice for nine learning areas: English; Health and Physical Education; Humanities and Social Sciences; Languages; Mathematics; Mixed Field; Sciences; Technologies; and The Arts. In September 2018, five curriculum forums were held for over 120 principals and teachers to discuss six propositions: teachers as designers; general capabilities; learning as the project; customisation of learning; school and system design; and school and industry collaborations. In October and November of 2018, eight forums were held for 160 participants from schools, registered training organisations, industry and community stakeholders to discuss six propositions: careers advice; qualifications and pathways; skills and capabilities; work-based learning; school and industry collaborations; and systems and models. From these discussions, a series of discussion papers outlining the Tasmanian context, and discussing issues referring to curriculum, assessment and instruction, VET, and vocational learning were released.

In November 2018, the draft Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework was released for review by the education community and responses were collected by two online surveys. Almost 100 members of the learning area groups met to consider the feedback in refining the draft to produce the Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework. In February 2020, Jeremy Rockliff, the Minister for Education and Training, approved the Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework to guide development of new courses and revision of existing courses.

The Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework consists of three components: valued practices and concepts; curriculum organisers; and areas for consideration. The Curriculum Framework is based on six valued practices and concepts: General Capabilities; Cross-curriculum Priorities; Learning Areas; Student Agency; Vocational Learning; and Local and Global Contexts. The Curriculum Framework is structured into five curriculum organisers: Discipline-based Study; Transdisciplinary Projects; Professional Studies; Work-based Learning; and Personal Future. Potential structural improvements to enhance current curriculum provision are defined in six

areas for consideration: Pathways; Vertical Integration; Modularisation; Micro-credentials; Levels of Complexity; and New Course Incubation.

At the same time, the *Vision for Vocational Learning and VET in Tasmanian Schools to 2030*, developed in consultation with project partners, was released to provide direction for vocational learning in Tasmanian schools. A draft *Years 9 to 12 Teaching and Learning Framework* and a draft *Years 9 to 12 Assessment Framework* were released for review by stakeholders.

In February 2020, the Years 9 to 12 Learning Team held teachers' forums and student voice sessions at Burnie, Devonport, Launceston and Hobart. At the teachers' forums, participants were introduced to draft learning area roadmaps and discussed potential course submission proposals for development in 2020. At the student voice sessions, feedback was collected on students' perceptions of the implementation of the Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework and ideas for course development.

## ***Victoria***

The bilateral agreement focuses on key actions in the systemic reform, the Education State as a key state-level element for the reform plan.

In the lead up to the 2014 election, the Australian Labor Party committed to establish Victoria as the 'Education State'. To design a plan for the Education State, the Department of Education and Training released a consultation paper intended to guide discussion in the wider community. Following release of the consultation paper in June 2015, a series of meetings were held across Victoria with stakeholders, discussions were held by groups, and individuals participated in online conversations. The feedback from the consultation was analysed to develop Education State targets in four areas: learning for life; happy, healthy and resilient kids; breaking the link; and pride and confidence in our schools. James Merlino, the Minister for Education, appointed the Minister's Expert Panel for Schools, consisting of education experts from universities and a policy adviser, to develop the Education State initiatives.

In September 2015, the Department of Education and Training released a policy document at the launch of the Education State held at Wellington Secondary College. The policy document set out funding allocations, Education State initiatives, Education State targets, the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes, professional development for principals through programs for local leaders, future leaders and expert leaders, professional development to train school leadership teams implement the Victorian Curriculum, 60 secondary teachers to become STEM catalysts, 200 primary teachers to become mathematics and science specialists, the design of the Insight Assessment Platform, development of an Aboriginal education strategy, establishment of navigator services to re-engage young people in education and training, and the establishment of lookout education support centres.

The implementation strategy underpinning the Education State initiatives employs regional structures, school leaders and teachers in the education system to act as change agents in establishing Learning Places, Communities of Practice and Professional Learning Communities. As well as forming the Learning Places operational model of four regions and 17 areas, tech schools, lookout education support centres, navigator and place-based education plans form key elements for Learning Places. The Communities of Practice approach creates networks for system leaders, aspiring principals, local leaders and emerging leaders to learn and share best practice by participating in professional learning, literacy leadership and data literacy for learning programs offered by the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership and applying the Framework for Improving Student Outcomes that includes the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model. Professional Learning Communities, which provide the structure that teachers need to collaborate and improve professional practice, are supported by the Victorian Curriculum, the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, professional practice elements of the Victorian Government Schools Agreement 2017, differentiated support for school improvement, review and improvement approach, excellence in teachers' education reforms, Amplify for student voice agency and leadership, and the Insight Assessment Platform.

In June 2019, Minister Merlino appointed an Expert Advisory Panel for Rural and Regional Students to examine challenges and barriers that contribute to the gap between students living in metropolitan and rural communities. Seven forums held in

regional cities and a review of previous reports and various data led the panel to reach three main findings. First, each local challenge requires a local approach and a local solution. Second, the majority of students are being provided with a strong education. Third, there are both common and distinct challenges faced by teachers in rural and regional schools. From discussions with stakeholders, the panel developed recommendations for eight themes: planning and strategy; wide aspiration, high expectation and informed choice; school resourcing; student support; inclusive communities; provision and collaboration; attraction and retention of principals, teachers and support staff; and professional development. The Victorian Government supported all of the recommendations, and released an initiative in November 2018 to attract teachers to rural and regional localities, a graduate certificate for out-of-field mathematics and science teachers, employment-based pathways in rural and regional schools for graduates, and support for VET teachers.

### *Western Australia*

While the bilateral agreement emphasises initiatives to improve student engagement and wellbeing, and classroom practice and virtual learning opportunities as the key state-level elements for the reform plan, it outlines strategies for STEM education and languages as the main curriculum reforms.

In June 2014, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) commissioned a review into the provision of languages across pre-primary to year 12. Coghlan and Holcz (2014) found that a high proportion of students studied a language in years 3 to 7 across the three sectors, but there were significant reductions in the number of students studying languages in the transitions from year 8 to year 9, and year 9 to year 10. In March 2015, SCSA convened a languages stakeholders' forum, which was attended by approximately 100 people representing schools, professional associations, universities and community organisations. Feedback from the forum assisted SCSA develop requirements for the implementation of pre-primary to year 10 languages education. Schools, where possible, are required to provide one language in years 3, 4, 5 and 6 commencing in 2018, and in years 7 and 8 commencing in 2022, although the study of languages is optional in years 9 and 10.

In response, SCSA developed Languages syllabuses for Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, French, German and Italian, which were released in July 2016. Furthermore, the study of an Aboriginal language is appropriate, students for whom English is a second language may study English-as-a-second-language, the study of Auslan is appropriate, and schools may offer a language other than those provided by SCSA.

In 2016, the Department of Education began several initiatives to facilitate introduction of the Languages syllabuses in year 3 in 2018. Language Teacher Development Schools offered professional learning opportunities for language teachers. Lead Language Schools provide face-to-face delivery, an online primary languages program and shared teacher expertise. The Department of Education commissioned Education Services Australia to develop the Ketawa Online Indonesian Language Program introduced to Year 3 students in 112 schools in 2018.

In 2016, the Department of Education formed a partnership with Scitech, an organisation that operates an interactive science museum. Scitech created a consortium to develop STEM resources aligned with the Western Australian Curriculum. The consortium formed a Project Control Group to conduct the STEM Learning Project. In May 2017, Suzanne Ellery, the Minister for Education and Training, announced funding for the STEM Learning Project at a showcase event hosted by Scitech. The aim of the project is to develop 40 resource modules for kindergarten to year 12, provide professional learning to support implementation of the modules across Western Australia, and offer online support accessible from the Connect portal. Conduct of the project involves holding workshops for primary and secondary teachers from public schools across the eight education regions, focusing on examining the modules and discussing their use in classrooms, until completion of the project in June 2020.

In May 2019, the Western Australian Government launched the state strategy, *Future jobs, Future skills – Driving STEM skills in Western Australia*, developed by the STEM Advisory Panel. The strategy sets out a vision, three goals, five pillars and 17 themes. Skills for the future have four themes: higher order skills; digital skills; STEM discipline skills; and predicting future skills needs. STEM culture has three

themes: STEM culture in the community; STEM culture in schools; and industry linkages with schools. School leadership and teacher excellence has three themes: school leadership; professional learning for leaders; and teacher qualifications. Diversity in STEM has four themes: women and female students; Aboriginal groups; diverse backgrounds; and career information. Training and reskilling for jobs has three themes: reskilling the current workforce; responsive VET sector; and responsive university sector. The Western Australian Government funded the STEM Enterprise Schools Program to initiate the strategy. In 2019, 60 pioneer schools were selected to define a problem, use discipline-based methods to design and test promising practices to address the problem, collect evidence of impact of the innovation, and design and trial resources to support implementation of the innovation. In 2020, 60 partnership schools were selected to collaborate with the pioneer schools to adapt the innovations that have been tested and refined in the pioneer schools.

### **Alignment of state-level actions to emerging curriculum reforms**

In this section, the results of the study are interpreted for each state and territory in relation to the second research question.

For the Australian Capital Territory, the comparison shows strong alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and the Future of Education Strategy. Six actions support various strategies to implement the Future of Education Strategy, the AC general capabilities, STEM, and assessments aligned to the AC achievement standards. The Future of Education Strategy, which emphasises developing students' interests through personalised learning plans, bases instruction on the AC. For New South Wales, the comparison shows strong alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and the reform directions for the New South Wales Curriculum Review. Each of the four actions supports the intent of the New South Wales Curriculum Review or ongoing reforms of the education system. The reform directions presented in the interim report for reforming the content and structure of the curriculum focus on reducing the content and developing a flexible curriculum, challenges that have preoccupied curriculum reform for three decades. For the

Northern Territory, the comparison shows moderate alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and territory-level curriculum reforms. One action supports development of pathways for Indigenous students in remote and very remote schools. The Indigenous languages and cultures plan adopts the principle of providing pathways. For Queensland, the comparison shows moderate alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and the Advancing Education action plan. One action supports implementation of the new senior assessment system. Advancing Education's actions, which support instruction in particular learning areas of the AC, focus on implementing the AC Digital Technologies, STEM, Languages, and literacy and numeracy. For South Australia, the comparison shows strong alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and state-level curriculum reforms. Two actions support improving literacy and numeracy and one action supports STEM education. State-level initiatives are targeted at STEM, literacy and numeracy, and Aboriginal education. For Tasmania, the comparison shows moderate alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and state-level curriculum reforms. One action supports implementation of the recommendations of the Years 9 to 12 Review. The Years 9 to 12 Project focuses on implementing the Years 9 to 12 Curriculum Framework to guide development of new courses and revision of existing courses, and clarifying the status of VET and vocational learning. For Victoria, the comparison shows strong alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and the Education State initiatives. Five actions support implementation of the Education State initiatives. Implementation of the Victorian Curriculum and the Insight Assessment Platform form key initiatives of the Education State. For Western Australia, the comparison shows moderate alignment between the actions in the bilateral agreement and state-level curriculum reforms. One action supports implementation of the AC general capabilities and use of formative assessments. State-level initiatives are targeted at implementation of the Languages syllabuses and STEM education.

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