



Australian Government
**Department of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations**

THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION

National report of
AUSTRALIA

Prepared by

**The Australian Government Department
of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

for the

International Conference on Education

**Geneva
November 2008**

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AEDI	Australian Early Development Index
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQTF	Australian Quality Training Framework
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HELP	Higher Education Loan Program
HESA	Higher Education Support Act
I-AEDI	Indigenous Australian Early Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IHEAC	Indigenous Education Higher Education Advisory Council
ISC	Industry Skills Council
IYLP	Indigenous Youth Leadership Program
IYMP	Indigenous Youth Mobility Program
JET	Jobs, Education and Training
JIFP	Joint Indigenous Funding Pool
LTPF	Learning and Teaching Performance Fund
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
MCVTE	Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NISC	National Industry Skills Committee
NQC	National Quality Council
NSOC	National Senior Officials Committee
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECECC	Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
QLD	Queensland
RTO	Registered Training Organisations
SA	South Australia
SES	Socioeconomic Status
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Preface

This report describes the recent development of education in Australia. It has been prepared as Australia's contribution to the forty-eighth session of the UNESCO International Conference on Education, held in Geneva in November 2008.

In accordance with the UNESCO guidelines, the first section of the report describes recent reforms, innovations and achievements while the second section of the report presents some priorities for Australian education to foster inclusive education. These sections are preceded by a brief overview of the structure of the Australian education system.

This report has been compiled by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and is written from a national perspective. Further information covered in the report is available at <http://www.deewr.gov.au>. While the report covers issues that relate to each of the States and Territories in Australia, the specific strategies and programs of the States and Territories have not been included. Should conference participants wish to know more about specific State/Territory Government issues and initiatives, the following websites may be of assistance:

- Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Department of Education and Training: <http://www.det.act.gov.au/>
- New South Wales (NSW), Department of Education and Training: <http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/>
- Northern Territory (NT), Department of Education and Training: <http://www.education.nt.gov.au/>
- Queensland, Department of Education, Training and the Arts: <http://education.qld.gov.au/>
- South Australia (SA), Department of Education and Children's Services: <http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/>
- South Australia (SA), Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology: http://www.training.sa.gov.au/ovet_home.asp
- Tasmania, Department of Education: <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/>
- Victoria, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/>
- Western Australia (WA), Department of Education and Training: <http://www.training.wa.gov.au/>

1. Overview

Introduction

This overview provides brief information on the broad structural features of the Australian education system, including information on the various responsibilities of different levels of government.

Australia

Australia is a federation of six States – New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, and includes two internal Territories, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Australia also has a number of small external Territories located in the region. Australia's Government is a parliamentary democracy with three levels: Australian, State/Territory and Local. The Australian Government is based on a popularly elected Parliament with two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

There are approximately 21 million people in Australia and most live in the major coastal cities and regional centres. The capital city Canberra is located in the Australian Capital Territory, situated inland between the two largest cities – Sydney in New South Wales with a population of approximately 4.2 million inhabitants, and Melbourne in Victoria with approximately 3.5 million. Australia's population is diverse, with approximately 30% of the population being born outside Australia.

Australia's education system

Australia has a well developed education system. Responsibility for the policy, administration and finance of education is shared between the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments. States and Territories hold major responsibility for the management and administration of compulsory and post-compulsory education and training, with each State and Territory Government having its own laws and related policies which govern such matters as the organisation of schooling, curriculum, course accreditation, student assessment and awards. In the higher education sector, universities are autonomous, self-accrediting institutions, established in most cases by State or Territory legislation.

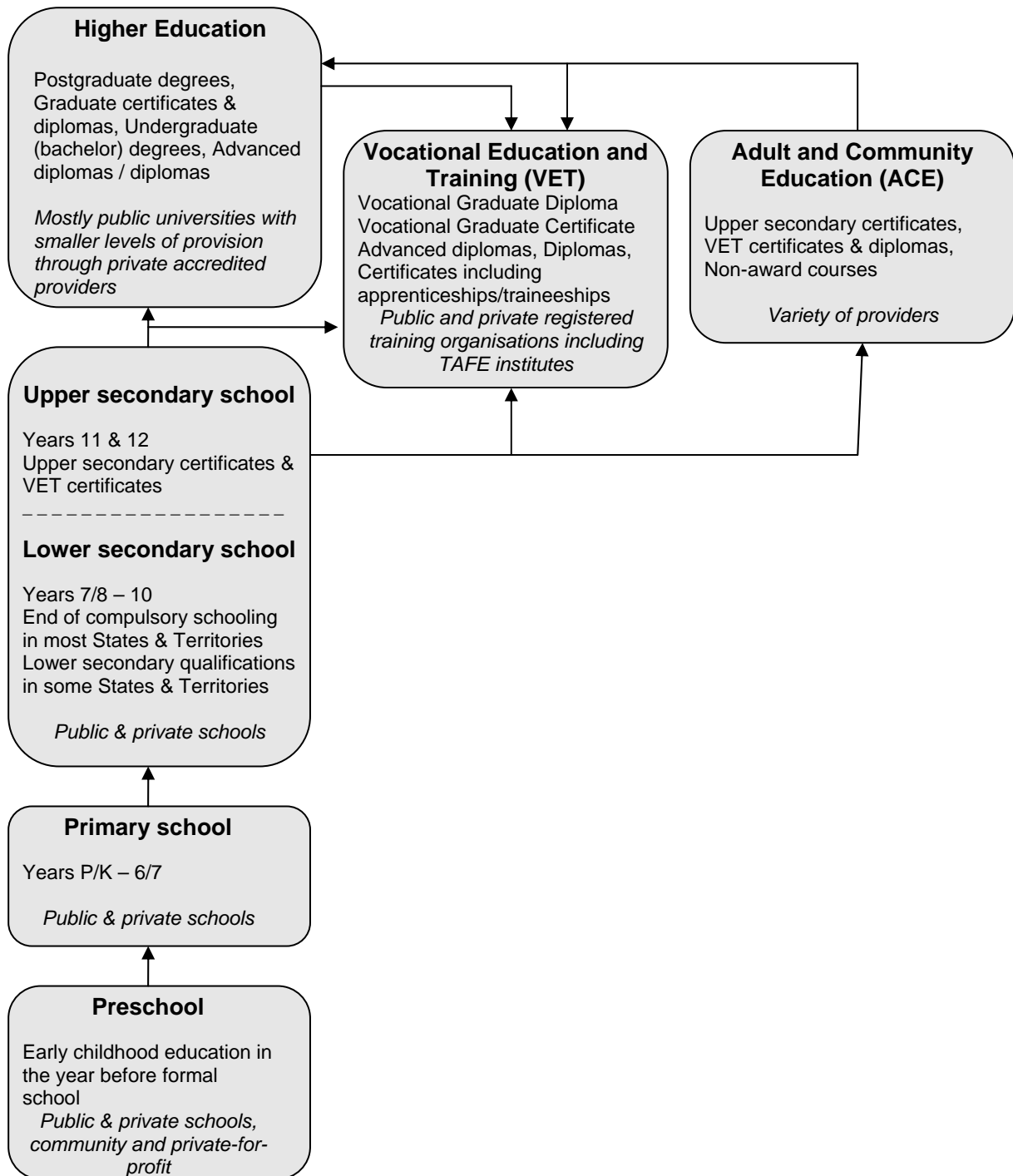
The Australian education and training system broadly comprises four major sectors:

- government and non-government early childhood education (including preschool), primary and secondary schools
- public and private vocational education and training providers
- public and private higher education institutions, and
- adult and community education (ACE) providers.

The Australian Government takes a national leadership role and works with the States and Territories, industry and the community to advance the quality and effectiveness of education and training in all sectors. The main pathways taken by students between these sectors are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of the Australian Education System

Roles of the Australian and State/Territory Governments



At the federal (Australian Government) level, the Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (The Hon Julia Gillard MP) is responsible for the Government's education, employment and workplace relations policies, programs and funding. Ms Gillard is supported by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). The Department administers the Australian Government's policies and programs in education, employment and workplace relations, provides national leadership and works in partnership

with the State and Territory Governments, industry, other agencies and the general community. The Department supports the Australian Government's contribution to:

- early childhood education and child care
- school education
- vocational education and training, including Australian Apprenticeships and training services
- higher education
- improving educational outcomes for Indigenous people
- international education
- social inclusion

Each State and Territory has a minister and department in its own parliamentary system responsible for education policy, programs and funding. Also, in all States and Territories, there are separate statutory authorities with responsibility for the assessment and certification of students at the end of Year 12, and many States and Territories have separate statutory curriculum authorities.

A summary of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Australian and State/Territory Governments is shown in Figure 2. The differing roles and responsibilities are discussed further below.

Figure 2: Roles and Responsibilities in the Australian Education System

Sector	Policy	Government funding	Administration & Delivery
Early Childhood	Shared	Mainly States/Territories	States/Territories, non-government school authorities, community preschools, community and for-profit child care
Schools	Shared	Mainly States/Territories (85-90%)	States/Territories
Government		Mainly Australian Government (70-75%)	Non-government school authorities
Vocational Education & Training	Shared	Mainly States/Territories	Mainly States/Territories
Higher Education	Shared	Mainly Australian Government (56%)	Autonomous universities (within agreed policy framework)

Source: Higher Education at the Crossroads: Ministerial Discussion Paper, DEEWR 2008

Early Childhood

Structural features

Early childhood education in Australia (generally called preschool), is part-time during the year before children start school and is not compulsory.

In Australia, the provision of early childhood education (primarily preschool) and child care is becoming less clear cut as some child care services offer preschool programs with qualified teachers.

Preschool

In Australia, ensuring delivery of preschool services is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments. Preschool programs are offered in a range of settings, e.g. government, non-government schools, community-based preschools, community-based child care centres and private-for-profit child care centres. Government preschools are often integrated with or associated with the school system. Programs generally comprise a structured, play-based educational program, designed and delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher.

Fees and participation rates in preschool vary across the country. In South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory, preschool education is delivered as part of the formal education system with a nominal contribution only. In New South Wales, costs range from \$25 to \$45 per day. Rates of participation in preschool vary dramatically between jurisdictions, however at least 13%, and possibly up to 20%, of all Australian four-year olds and over half of Indigenous four-year olds do not participate in preschool.

A priority of the current Australian Government is the integration of early childhood education and childcare, where possible and appropriate.

Starting age

School starting ages vary from state to state, but children usually participate in preschool from the age of three and a half or four.

Schools

Structural features

In 2007, there were 9,581 schools in Australia of which 6,853 were government schools and 2,728 were non-government schools. Primary schools comprised 68% of schools while 16% were secondary schools. A further 13% were combined primary and secondary schools and 4% were special schools¹. In 2007, there were 3,416,523 full-time students attending school, 66% of whom attended government schools. Of the 1,969,303 Australian primary school students, 70% attended government schools, while 61% of Australia's 1,447,220 secondary students attended government schools.

State and Territory Governments have regulatory and funding responsibility for government schools and provide supplementary funding to non-government schools. The Australian Government is the primary source of funding for non-government schools and provides supplementary funding to government schools. State and Territory Governments provide about 89% of their schools' running costs while the Australian Government contributes around 11%. Private school education exists in parallel with the State and Territory systems. The Australian Government provides about 42% of private school funding with the State and

¹ For instance, schools for students with disabilities.

Territory Governments contributing about 15% of private schools' running costs². The remaining 43% is met from fees and other charges.

Governments consult and collaborate through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.

Federal, State and Territory Ministers as well as New Zealand Ministers responsible for the portfolios of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs consult and collaborate through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). MCEETYA coordinates strategic policy at the national level, negotiates and develops national agreements on shared objectives and interests in the areas of pre-primary education, primary and secondary education, higher education and employment. MCEETYA brings together employment/labour market programs and education and training, adult and community education, youth policy programs and cross-sectoral matters.

Policy coordination for schooling at the national level centres on the 'National Goals for Schooling' agreed by the Federal and State and Territory Ministers in 1999 (the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century*). Progress in achieving the goals is monitored and reported. A new set of national goals for schooling is being developed and will be declared in December 2008.

Starting age and school year

School education has a similar structure across Australia but with variations in the starting age and the number of years after which students move from primary to secondary education.

² These are proportions of total expenditure and contrast with those in Figure 2, which are proportions of government expenditure only.

Figure 3: Primary and Secondary School Structures by State

School Year Level	State		
	NSW/VIC/TAS/ACT	SA/NT	QLD/WA
12*	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
11*			
10			
9			
8			
7			
6	Primary	Primary	Primary
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			
Preschool – Year 1 minus 2	Preschool (NSW/ACT) Kindergarten (VIC/TAS)	Preschool (SA/NT)	Kindergarten (WA) Preparatory (QLD)

* - not compulsory (excluding Tasmania for pre-year 1)
Source: MCEETYA (2003b), DEEWR 2008

Children usually start school in the preparatory year between the ages of four and five. Primary schooling is usually seven years and secondary schooling is five or six years. Currently, school education is compulsory until the age of 15 in 3 of the 8 states, with the remaining states having compulsory schooling until the ages of 16 or 17 years. The final two years of secondary schooling, Years 11 and 12, are necessary for those wishing to proceed to higher education (mainly university) and in some States and Territories, this is undertaken in separate senior secondary colleges. The Year 12 qualification is recognised by all Australian tertiary institutions, regardless of the State or Territory in which the qualification was obtained. Private school education exists in parallel with the State and Territory systems at all levels of schooling: preschool, primary and secondary. Many private schools have been established in association with religious groups, ethnic communities or a particular pedagogical orientation.

Higher Education

Structural features

The higher education sector in Australia comprises 37 public and 2 private universities and 1 branch of an overseas university, which are autonomous and self-accrediting. There are also 3 other self-accrediting higher education institutions and around 150 other non self-accrediting institutions such as theological colleges and providers specialising in vocational or artistic studies. Universities offer undergraduate diplomas, advanced diplomas and bachelor degrees and postgraduate awards including graduate certificates and diplomas, master's degrees and doctoral degrees.

Almost all Australian universities were established by State or Territory law and hence they remain under State or Territory jurisdiction, with members of their governing councils

appointed by the State or Territory Governments. The State and Territory Governments are responsible for the monitoring and accreditation of universities and their awards.

Consultation between the levels of government occurs at the Ministerial level through MCEETYA and at the official level through a range of cross-government planning committees. These committees provide advice to MCEETYA on a range of issues and further consultation between governments occurs with Universities Australia, which consists of the Vice-Chancellors or Chief Executives of Australian universities. In addition, the Australian Research Council provides national expertise and independent advice on the allocation of targeted research funds.

Vocational Education and Training

Structural features

For more than 15 years, Australian, State and Territory Governments have worked with industry to develop a national training system that provides the basis for high quality, industry developed and nationally recognised training to about one in eight working-age Australians.

Australia has established a broad network of training providers. In 2006, there were more than 4300 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). These are organisations endorsed to deliver and award VET qualifications defined within their scope of registration.

Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes are publicly owned and receive a majority of the public funding in Australia for training delivery. There are more than 60 TAFEs across Australia. In 2006, TAFE and other government providers catered for around 80% of publicly funded VET students.³ TAFEs are large providers which offer a full range of training programs. As part of their community service obligation, they deliver programs to special student groups and provide training in regional areas.

Of the other providers, around 600 are schools which also deliver VET courses to their students and approximately 100 are government bodies which conduct in-house training. Private registered training providers number around 2,400, with many of these associated with particular industry sectors. There are also around 1,130 community training providers which are community governed not-for-profit providers and deliver a range of training services including adult education courses, language courses and formal accredited training.

Training may take place in classrooms, in the workplace, off-the-job, online and through other flexible delivery methods. There were 1.68 million students (11% of the population aged between 15–64 years) enrolled in the VET system in 2006. Of these students, 89% were studying part-time.⁴

The VET system provides training for Australians of all ages and backgrounds, for small and large businesses, across all industries and in many communities.

³ NCVER 2007, *Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics 2006*, Adelaide.

⁴ NCVER, 2006, *Australian Vocational Education and Training Statistics 2006*, Adelaide.

Quality

In the VET sector, achieving a nationally consistent VET system, particularly in relation to improving the quality of VET products, delivery of services and outcomes, has been a focus of governments and industry. The Australian Government has played a leadership role in ensuring robust national quality assurance arrangements are in place to achieve this objective. These include:

- the development, review and implementation of integrated national training resources known as training packages, which describe the skills and knowledge that individuals need to perform effectively in the workplace, and
- the revision of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) to streamline and standardise processes to achieve national consistency in the registration and auditing of training providers, with a stronger focus on quality skills outcomes

a) The National Quality Council

The National Quality Council (NQC) was established in 2005 and is a committee of the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE). The NQC oversees quality assurance and ensures national consistency in the application of the Australian Quality Training Framework. The Council has specific decision-making powers in relation to the endorsement of training packages and other aspects of quality assurance under the National Skills Framework.

The NQC has a key role in bringing together the major players in the vocational and technical education sector - industry, unions, governments, equity groups and practitioners - to oversee and support the current and future quality of vocational and technical education across Australia. It is also critical to ensuring the successful operation of the National Skills Framework – the system's requirements for quality and national consistency in terms of qualifications and the delivery of training.

b) Australian Quality Training Framework

The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) is a national set of standards which assures nationally consistent, high quality training and assessment services for the clients of Australia's VET system. It was revised in 2007 to improve the quality of training and assessment in the VET sector. The revised framework includes new sets of standards for RTOs and State and Territory registering bodies, a risk-based approach to managing the quality of training and assessment, a stronger focus on quality skills outcomes, and the use of an outcomes-based auditing model to support the new standards.

The new arrangements encourage greater participation of licensing and industry regulatory bodies in ensuring the quality of training, and will also achieve greater national consistency through the new standards for State and Territory registering bodies. Outcomes-focused audits will allow RTOs to concentrate more on the quality of outcomes of their training and assessment, which in turn will give industry greater confidence in the outcomes of training.

The Apprenticeship System – 'Australian Apprenticeships'

Australian Apprenticeships provide a vocational education pathway combining employment and formal training. Australian Apprenticeships last up to four years and generally involve a

training contract between an employer and an apprentice. Australian Apprentices receive structured training usually through off-the-job courses in public or private RTOs, and are subject to monitored practical work with their employer.

Since the introduction of Australian Apprenticeships, major changes include: a broadening of the occupational base to include a much wider range of occupations than the trades traditionally associated with apprenticeships; increased take-up of Australian Apprenticeships by a wide age-group and not only by new entrants to the labour force, but also existing (including mature aged) workers; and a greater use of flexible training/employment arrangements including full-time, part-time and Australian School-based Apprenticeships.

Australian School-based Apprenticeships offer senior secondary students the opportunity to undertake paid training in the Australian Apprenticeship system while still remaining at school. Completion of an Australian School-based Apprenticeship is recorded on the Senior Secondary Certificate.

Adult and Community Education

Structural features

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector covers an extensive range of educational activities undertaken outside the main vocational and academic streams, including:

- vocational programs, which have an employment related focus and are designed to equip students with specific professional skills, and
- non-vocational programs, which contribute to the overall personal, cultural and social development of an individual.

Within ACE, there are two main types of vocational training programs:

- formal programs, which may lead to a qualification recognised under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) or other certificates, and
- informal programs, which do not result in attainment of a recognised qualification.

Vocational programs in the ACE sector are often delivered by community organisations (e.g local churches and other community groups), who also provide a range of non-vocational courses. Some non-vocational education is provided by formal education institutions, but separate from their mainstream academic and vocational courses of study (e.g personal interest courses conducted by universities and TAFE colleges).

Some ACE organisations receive funding from the Australian and State/Territory Governments, including specific-purpose allocations for VET. Others provide training on a fee-for-service basis. Volunteers also deliver some ACE programs.

International education

Australia has a long history of participation in international education, and has experienced significant growth in its international education activities. This participation includes student and teacher exchanges, education provision to international students in Australia, training to develop skills in other countries, and online and offshore delivery of education and training.

The Australian Government aims to ensure the development of a world-class, influential and globally connected education system with world leading curricula, making Australia one of the most highly educated and skilled nations. The Australian Government provides leadership to achieve this through an integrated approach to policy, regulation and international engagement. Emphasis is placed on the provision of high quality education and training, global recognition of qualifications, meeting student needs, and student mobility to generate education competencies for life.

Australia has experienced rapid growth in its international education activities, achieving an average 15% annual increase in international student numbers over the last 10 years. There has been a continuing steady growth across all sectors. During 2007, there were a total of 455,185 onshore enrolments by full-fee overseas students, representing an increase of 19% from 2006. Most onshore enrolment growth in 2007 was in VET (46%), with 121,422 students enrolled. Growth in the schools sector was up by 12%, to 27,426 students in 2007. The higher education sector grew by 4% to 177,760 students enrolled, and the English language sector grew by 31%, with 101,824 overseas students enrolled in 2007.

Australia's international students come from over 190 countries. The top 10 source countries are China, India, Republic of Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Brazil and USA.

2. Major Recent Reforms and Innovations in the Australian Education System

2(a) Major reforms and innovations introduced in curricular policies, educational content and teaching and learning.

The last decade has seen wide ranging changes to the Australian education system across all sectors, in curricular policies, education content and teaching and learning. The sections below provide an overview of these reforms.

Early Childhood

Early childhood education (generally designated as 'preschool') is a key priority of the Australian Government. Since ensuring the delivery of preschool services is largely the responsibility of State and Territory Governments, it has not been a strong focus under previous federal governments at the national level. The Australian Government's early childhood agenda has driven a number of important initiatives since December 2007, including ensuring universal access to preschool for all children in the year before school, development of the Early Years Learning Framework, the national rollout of the Australian Early Development Index, the Home Interaction Program, and the National Quality Framework, among others. These initiatives are discussed in more detail in Chapters 2(c) and 3(b).

Schools

National Goals for Schooling

The *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* developed and agreed by MCEETYA in 1999, provide a common and agreed framework for the development of outcomes-based curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling. While each State and Territory has its own curriculum framework, they all share some common principles. All framework statements show that learning is a lifelong process and provide a structure within which schools and teachers can build educational programs to achieve agreed learning outcomes for all students, within a broad and balanced set of curriculum offerings that can be adapted to respond to local needs and priorities.

Some of the key points from the National Goals relating to curricular policies and teaching and learning strategies are as follows.

When students leave schools they should:

- be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life
- have employment related skills and an understanding of the work environment, career options and pathways as a foundation for, and positive attitudes towards, VET, further education, employment and life-long learning, and
- be confident, creative and productive users of new technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, and understand the impact of those technologies on society.

In terms of curriculum, students should have attained high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding, encompassing eight key learning areas:

- the arts
- English
- health and physical education
- languages other than English
- mathematics
- science
- studies of society and environment, and
- technology

A new set of national goals for schooling is being developed and will be declared in December 2008.

Curricular policies and educational content

Curriculum in Australia is the responsibility of the eight States and Territories. Each jurisdiction has an independent curriculum authority, sets its own standards and designs its own curriculum.

Through MCEETYA, the Australian Government and the States and Territories have also agreed to work together on identifying major curriculum priorities and establishing strategies for their achievement. New priority areas can be proposed by any of the jurisdictions, and become national priorities when all governments agree, and when funding is allocated. The Australian Government plays a major role in identifying priorities and funding agreed areas. The work is often undertaken or assisted by the Curriculum Corporation, a company established by all levels of Governments to support national collaboration on curriculum.

At present, agreed priority curriculum areas include literacy, numeracy, values education, civics and citizenship education, environmental education, science, mathematics, information and communication technologies and the development of online curriculum materials. For a number of these, nationally agreed benchmarks are being developed. In some, collaborative approaches are being developed to assess student achievement while, for others, development projects are under way to assist schools and teachers in improving the quality of teaching and curriculum resources, and in raising levels of student achievement.

Statements of Learning have been agreed for English, mathematics, science, civics and citizenship and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which were implemented by the States and Territories since January 2008. The Statements of Learning outline the essential skills, knowledge, understandings, and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn by the end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

VET in Schools

VET in Schools programs increase access to vocational pathways and hence aid the development of skills and attributes of young Australians, primarily in Years 11 and 12, that will better enable their full and on-going participation in learning and work. VET in Schools

- helps to strengthen partnerships between schools and business to better prepare students to move successfully from school to further education, training or work, and

- enables senior secondary students to undertake subjects or programs as part of a senior secondary certificate that on completion provide credit towards a nationally recognised VET qualification.

The current focus of VET in Schools is to expand both the number of young people undertaking VET programs during their senior secondary years and the breadth and depth of VET in Schools programs offered. VET in Schools is now an established part of mainstream senior secondary education across Australia.

Enterprise Education

Enterprise education is learning which is directed towards developing in young people those skills and competencies which equip them to be innovative and help them to identify, create, initiate and successfully manage personal, community, business and work opportunities, including self-employment. Enterprise education is a priority area within the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century.

The previous Australian Government committed funding to the Enterprise Learning for the 21st Century (EL21) initiative from June 2005 to June 2008. During this period, 47 innovative and creative projects across Australia, involving at least 300 schools, undertook activities to promote the benefits of enterprise learning through partnerships between schools and education authorities, business, industry and local communities.

Higher Education

In the higher education sector in Australia, universities are responsible for developing educational content and teaching and learning strategies for the courses they offer. The Australian Government is not involved in developing curricula or course content for these institutions in Australia. However, the Australian Government promotes the quality of university teaching and learning through two key initiatives:

Australian Learning and Teaching Council

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council provides a national focus for the enhancement of learning and teaching in Australian higher education providers. The Council's responsibilities include:

- managing a major competitive grants scheme for innovation in learning and teaching
- liaising with the sector about options for articulating and monitoring academic standards
- improving assessment practices throughout the sector, including investigation of the feasibility of a national portfolio assessment scheme
- facilitating benchmarking of effective learning and teaching processes at national and international levels
- developing mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching
- managing a program for international experts in learning and teaching to visit Australian higher education providers
- developing reciprocal relationships with international jurisdictions, and
- coordinating the Australian Awards for University Teaching, including an Awards presentation event.

Learning and Teaching Performance Fund

The Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) rewards universities for demonstrating excellence and improvement in learning and teaching. The LTPF uses statistics to compare participating universities' learning and teaching performance in four broad discipline areas:

- science, computing, engineering, architecture and agriculture
- business, law and economics
- humanities, education and arts, and
- health.

The statistics include nationally comparable measures of student satisfaction and success, and graduate outcomes. The analysis provides the basis for allocating funding.

Vocational Education and Training

A key issue for the VET sector in Australia is to continue to meet the demands of industry. Growth in the demand for skills, business cycle fluctuations, the emergence of new industries and technological change all require a VET system that can adapt its training programs and teaching strategies to meet the needs of the Australian labour force.

Quality and Standards

The Australian VET sector aims to provide consistent quality and standards across VET courses and maintaining relevance to industry needs. A key element of VET is competency-based training packages. Training packages are an integrated set of national AQF qualifications, units of competency, and assessment guidelines for a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. They describe the skills and knowledge that individuals need to perform effectively in the workplace.

Training in the Workplace

The National Skills Shortages Strategy (NSSS) commenced in 2004. The purpose of NSSS is to work in partnership with industry to address skills shortages by funding projects that pilot strategies to increase the pool of skilled labour available to industry, by either reskilling or increasing skills. The program enables flexible responses to emerging issues related to the provision of skills training and has a particular focus on supporting Australian Apprenticeships. Projects have been conducted in a wide range of industries including automotive, civil construction, electro technology, hospitality, marine, mining, manufacturing, retail baking and transport industries. Projects have also been conducted to assist regions address skills needs.

The project activity differs depending on the skills needs identified by the industry and allows industry to test new approaches. For example, some projects have piloted strategies to attract alternative entrants to the skilled workforce, including mature age workers, Indigenous people and women. Others have focused on piloting strategies to increase the skills of the existing workforce to meet new and emerging skills needs.

2(b) The legal framework of education

Under the Australian Constitution, the State and Territory Governments have responsibility for education and training and are therefore responsible for the regulation and administration of schools and the post-school education and training system. State and Territory Governments also have responsibility for the major funding of primary and secondary education and VET, with the Australian Government providing supplementary funding to these sectors. In contrast, most higher education institutions are funded by the Australian Government under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, though the States and Territories are responsible for the management and administration of universities, which are autonomous institutions.

The Australian Government has special responsibilities under the Constitution in relation to education and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, migrants, international relations in education and assistance for students. The Australian Government also provides special grants to the States and Territories for areas of particular need. Apart from its significant financial role, the Australian Government is also involved in promoting national consistency and coherence in the provision of education and training across Australia.

Strategic policy development and delivery of programs and services at the national level are coordinated through MCEETYA. For VET this role is undertaken by MCVTE. The Australian Government works cooperatively with the States and Territories and non-government authorities to achieve common goals and to set strategic priorities.

Early Childhood

Preschool is not compulsory in Australia. State and Territory Governments are responsible for regulation, financing, policy setting, and service delivery of early childhood education. Jurisdictions undertake this role in a variety of ways, including direct provision through the schools system, operating subsidies to community preschools and regulating or subsidising the presence of preschool teachers in centre-based child care settings. Similarly, the registration and regulation of preschool teachers varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

In 2008, the Australian Government committed to ensure that by 2013 all children in the year before formal school will have access to quality early childhood education programs delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year. It is anticipated that related legislation will be introduced to the Parliament in 2009, but that this goal will be achieved through financial agreements with the State and Territory Governments.

Schools

In recent years, the Commonwealth legislation has appropriated funding for government and non-government schools in four year cycles. The funding for non-government schools has been calculated with reference to a measure of the socioeconomic status (SES) of the school community. The key principles that underpin the Australian Government's policy for funding non-government schools are that:

- the funding approach should be transparent and simple

- private investment in education should not be discouraged and schools should be able to raise private income without penalty
- schools should have the flexibility to adjust their operations to cater for their communities
- all non-government school students are entitled to a base level of public funding, and
- the existing link between non-government school funding and *Average Government School Recurrent Costs* should be maintained as a benchmark (this is a nationally agreed measure of the national average recurrent cost of educating a child in a government school)

All non-government schools in Australia are funded according to the same set of principles.

Under current arrangements, government and non-government schools are funded via funding agreements entered into under Commonwealth legislation. The funding is conditional upon compliance with the terms of the agreements which include implementation of certain school reporting and performance information, student assessment requirements as well as other requirements relating to the delivery of school education. A number of these requirements are aimed at creating a more uniform schooling system across all States and Territories.

Commencing in 2009 the funding for government schools will be appropriated by the Department of Treasury and will be paid to States and Territories under a National Education Agreement that will be negotiated between the Australian and the relevant States and Territory Governments. This Agreement will link funding to agreed outcomes to be achieved by the States and Territories in the area of school education.

Funding for non-government schools will continue to be appropriated under legislation providing for similar arrangements to those that have existed in the funding cycle (2005-2008). In the next four year funding cycle commencing in 2009, the non-government school funding will continue to be calculated using the SES-based funding approach that has been used for the past two funding cycles with the funding being tied to conditions that are consistent with those imposed on the States and Territories in return for the government schools funding. Funding for non-government schools from 1 January 2009 will be provided under new legislation which was presented to the parliament in September 2008 as the *Schools Assistance Bill 2008*.

The Government has announced a review of funding for all schools, government and non-government, which will commence in 2010. An aim of the review is to identify a single measure of SES status that applies to all schools, regardless of sector.

Higher Education

Although established as separate statutory bodies, universities are authorised by legislation to be self-governing institutions. They are responsible for such matters as developing and implementing strategies for the future; appropriate management and governance structures; management of operations including budgets and internal allocation of resources; staff remuneration and conditions; student enrolment decisions; accreditation of their own awards; quality assurance; and development and evaluation of their curricula.

The Australian Government, through the provision of funding under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) and other supporting legislation, has established eligibility

requirements for funding, and the policy and allocation arrangements for the provision of higher education places and research.

Quality assurance in higher education

The quality assurance framework for higher education in Australia encompasses the AQF and the varied roles of universities, State and Territory Governments, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the Australian Government.

Most Australian universities are established under legislation with the authority to accredit their own programs. They have primary responsibility for their own academic standards and quality assurance processes. The capacity to responsibly exercise this authority is among the criteria for recognition as a university in Australia.

Australian Governments have a number of responsibilities in respect of quality assurance in higher education, including the recognition of new universities, the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia, the accreditation of higher education courses offered by non self-accrediting providers and the monitoring of delivery arrangements of higher education institutions where they involve other organisations.

In Australia, responsibility for the quality assurance framework is shared between the Australian and the States and Territory Governments. The Australian Government has the primary responsibility for public funding of higher education, but constitutional responsibility for decision-making, regulation and governance is shared among the Australian Government and the State and Territory Governments, with decision-making through MCEETYA.

Private higher education providers

Approved private higher education providers are eligible to access FEE-HELP, an income contingent loan scheme which assists eligible students to pay their tuition fees, and/or National Priority Places which involve the payment of Commonwealth grants to higher education providers for places in areas of national priority, currently in nursing and teaching. To be eligible for this assistance, an institution must become an approved higher education provider and meet a range of conditions, including proving that it is willing and able to meet the quality and accountability requirements as set out in the HESA. These include requirements relating to:

- financial viability
- quality assurance (including a periodic quality audit after approval)
- fairness, including tuition assurance, student grievance and review procedures
- compliance, including provision of statistical data
- provision of information on the student contribution amount per place and tuition fee for each unit of study, and
- other requirements as specified by the HESA.

Amongst these approved providers are six state government-supported TAFE institutions and two providers supported by the Australian Government. Accreditation of the non self-accrediting institutions is done by the State and Territory Governments, who are also responsible for maintaining registers of accredited higher education courses and the providers

that deliver them, under nationally agreed protocols. Private higher education providers tend to be smaller than universities and offer more specialised courses to meet market demands.

Vocational Education and Training

The national governance and accountability framework of the *2005 – 08 Commonwealth State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce*⁵ established new decision-making processes and bodies for the national training system.

The key bodies are:

- the Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education (MCVTE) which comprises of the Australian, State and Territory ministers responsible for VET. The MCVTE has overall responsibility for the national training system, including strategic policy, priority setting, planning and performance. It is also responsible for key cross-sectoral issues impacting on the training system such as skills forecasting, workforce planning (including skills needs) and articulation between higher education and VET courses
- the National Industry Skills Committee (NISC) which provides the MCVTE with high level advice from industry's perspective on workforce planning, future training priorities and other critical issues facing the training sector. The Australian Government Minister responsible approves the appointments to the NISC ensuring a good cross-section of membership and the NISC is required to bring broad-based advice to the MCVTE. Membership of the NISC includes employer representatives nominated by industry peak bodies, industry representatives nominated by the Australian Government, and employee representation nominated by the Australian Council of Trade Unions
- the National Senior Officials Committee (NSOC) which is the administrative arm of the MCVTE. Consisting of the Chief Executive Officers of the Australian, State and Territory Government agencies responsible for training, the NSOC is responsible for supporting the MCVTE, implementing its decisions, driving national collaboration on training matters and monitoring the effectiveness of the national training system
- a ministerial company, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Australia Ltd. It has been established to provide secretariat support for the National Quality Council (NQC) and the NISC, and provide access to training resources and other services in support of the national training system. The company is jointly owned by the Australian, State and Territory Governments, and was launched in 2006.
- the National Centre for National Education and Research (NCVER)⁶ which is a not-for-profit company owned by the Federal, State and Territory ministers responsible for training. It is unique in Australia's education system. It is responsible for collecting, managing, analysing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about VET. A board of eight directors, who represent State, Territory, and the Australian Government, industry, unions, and training authorities, manage NCVER.

⁵ http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/agreement

⁶ <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

Anti-Discrimination legislation

Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) Education Standards

The objective of the DDA Education Standards is to eliminate disability discrimination in education. In particular, (a) to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the area of education and training; (b) to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law in the area of education and training as the rest of the community; and (c) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

These Standards apply to all education providers. They recognise that exceptions to compliance with the Standards may be invoked under certain circumstances, principally where compliance would impose unjustifiable hardship on the provider. Responsibility to demonstrate that an exception operates lies with the provider.

Australia's Attorney General introduced the *Disability Discrimination Amendment (Education Standards) Act 2005*⁷ to amend the DDA to ensure that the Standards are fully supported.

⁷ [http://www.comlaw.gov.au/ComLaw/Legislation/Act1.nsf/0/1EB17F72CBD5F905CA25705A000E44E4/\\$file/019-2005.pdf](http://www.comlaw.gov.au/ComLaw/Legislation/Act1.nsf/0/1EB17F72CBD5F905CA25705A000E44E4/$file/019-2005.pdf)

2(c) Objectives and principal characteristics of current and forthcoming reforms

The main objectives of current and forthcoming reforms across all educational sectors are to promote quality (especially in terms of consistency and relevance), accessibility, choice, flexibility and sustainability.

Early Childhood

The Australian Government is pursuing a comprehensive early childhood reform agenda that focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and child care.

The Australian Government is committed to developing a world-class system of integrated early childhood education and child care where:

- services are affordable and meet the needs of working parents
- early childhood educators and child care workers receive appropriate training, remuneration and recognition
- rigorous standards drive continuous improvement in the quality of service provision
- children are socially and cognitively ready for their first year of formal schooling
- children with additional needs receive the support they need to participate in early learning and care, and
- early learning is an effective tool for addressing endemic disadvantage, particularly in relation to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage within a generation.

Key initiatives to support this agenda include:

- Universal access to early childhood education;
- Strong quality standards in child care;
- Early Years Learning Framework;
- 260 New Early Learning and Care Centres;
- Improving the Child Care Tax Rebate;
- Building an early childhood education workforce;
- Home Interaction Program; and
- Australian Early Development Index.

For more detail on specific measures, see chapter 3(b).

Schools

The Australian Government's *Education Revolution* agenda supports the COAG reform agenda through a sharper focus on improving student participation and educational outcomes. Reforms will involve collaboration across the government and non-government school sectors and a genuine partnership involving parents, children, students, employers and all levels of government.

Key initiatives of the Australian Government's strategy for implementing its *Education Revolution* include:

- National Secondary School Computer Fund
- Fibre Connections to Schools

- Trade Training Centres in Schools
- Local Schools Working Together – a pilot program to encourage shared facilities
- Development of a national curriculum through the National Curriculum Board
- National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools, and
- Education Tax Refund.

The Australian Government has also established the National Curriculum Board to ensure that all children have access to the highest quality learning programs. The government will also implement the new National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program, with effect from 1 January 2009, to increase the numbers of students proficient in Japanese, Indonesian, Chinese and Korean and promote cultural understanding of Australia's main trading partners. The National Curriculum Board will oversee the teaching of languages in schools and will work with the States and Territories to increase the number of qualified teachers.

The Government is committed to reduce the gap in educational achievement between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians. Collaboration and partnerships with the States and Territories will provide a strong structure to DEEWR's work in Indigenous education. The agreement made through the COAG to establish high level targets to be used to measure the achievement of reform in Indigenous educational attainment adds strength to the commitment made through the high priority already accorded to Indigenous education by all Australian governments.

Transition through and from School

The objectives and principles of recent initiatives are built upon the Career and Transitions Services Framework developed by the MCEETYA Taskforce on Transition from School. The Framework consists of 10 elements that jurisdictions agreed to use as a tool to provide services to support young people to make successful transitions through and from school to further education, training and employment.

Overall the objectives are to provide a national system to improve the quality, accessibility, choice, and flexibility in transition and career support. This includes, for example, ensuring that career and learning plans are in place for students in Year 8 to Year 12, that the quality and range of vocational pathways in schools is increased, access to quality work placements is improved, and that students are encouraged and supported to attain Year 12 or equivalent. All of the strategies are based on the principle that young people will achieve greater success where there is shared responsibility across a range of stakeholders, such as the student, school, and community.

Where young people are at risk of disconnecting from education, more individualised support approaches have been introduced. Intensive assistance, for example for young people with a mental illness, is used to assist young people to stay at school. Where this is not possible there is increased flexibility with alternate education providers supporting young people to gain skills and qualifications.

Higher Education

On 13 March 2008, the Australian Government launched its Review of Higher Education and announced the establishment of an independent, expert panel to lead the Review to be chaired by Emeritus Professor Denise Bradley AC (a former university Vice-Chancellor). The

Bradley Review will report to the Minister for Education, Employment, Workplace Relations and Social Inclusion, on the future direction of the sector, its capacity to meet the needs of the Australian community and economy, and the options available for ongoing reform.

Underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity is a key term of reference for the Bradley Review. The Government has signalled that supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds will be a key objective of further reform.

The Terms of reference for this Review can be found in Chapter 5(c).

Vocational Education and Training

Skilling Australia for the Future

Specific national training policy and initiatives of the Australian Government are grouped under the banner, *Skilling Australia for the Future*, and include a range of national strategies to tackle skills shortages. These include:

- Funding an additional 645,000 new training places
- Establishing Skills Australia to provide the Government with independent, high quality advice to assist better targeting of support for the workforce development needs of businesses and workers across the country. Skills Australia advises the Government on current and future needs for skills and training
- Moving to higher level skills – a large portion of the 630,000 places will lead to a higher level qualification – Certificate III and above
- Better aligning skills policies and training delivery with industry priorities – new training places will be allocated according to industry demand. It is a demand driven model for purchasing and delivery of training places to meet industry needs;
- Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) will expand their roles and more directly connect employers to new training places (ISCs will work with employers to identify skills needs and match with nationally accredited training)
- Equipping people with skills to gain employment – more than one third of the additional 645,000 training places will be allocated to people currently outside or marginally attached to the workforce
- Strengthening vocational education in schools by establishing trades training centres to increase the proportion of students achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification through increasing opportunities for young people to participate in high quality, relevant vocational education and training, and
- Cooperatively progressing the national skills agenda through COAG.

Indigenous Education

The commitment to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students has received priority by all Australian Governments. In May 2005, all Australian ministers for education agreed, through the MCEETYA process, to put Indigenous education at the top of their agendas. This was followed in July 2006 by agreement to a set of recommendations to support

this commitment called *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*⁸. The paper sets the priorities for jurisdictions in five key domains:

- Early childhood education
- School and community educational partnerships
- School leadership
- Quality teaching
- Pathways to training, employment and higher education.

The recommendations are attached to each of the five domains relating to access, community engagement in school decision making, accountability requirements at the local level regarding outcomes for Indigenous students, professional development for school staff and supporting pathways for Indigenous students from school to training, employment and higher education.

In April 2008, all Australian Governments, through COAG, agreed to a set of targets relating to improvements in educational outcomes for Indigenous students. These targets are:

- Within five years all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities will be able to access a quality early childhood centre or opportunity.
- Within a decade the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy benchmark achievement will be halved.
- By 2020 the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the attainment of Year 12, or its vocational equivalent, will be halved.

⁸ http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf

3(a) Major policies, achievements and lessons learned in terms of access to education

Access to school education

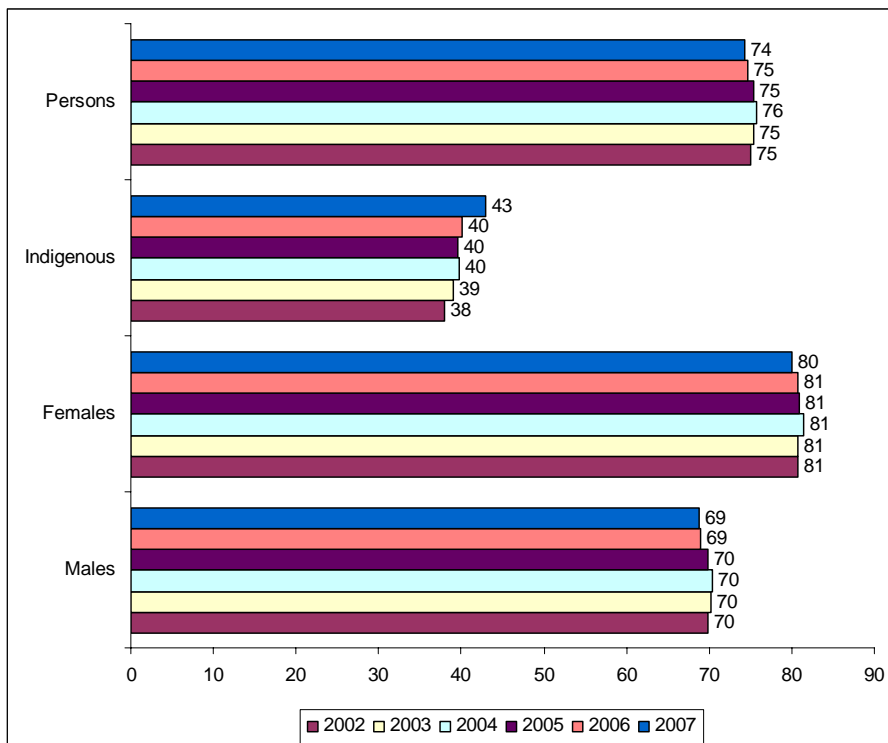
Participation rates and secondary school completion rates in Australia are among the highest in the world. The expansion of educational opportunities over the last decade has resulted in almost universal access to some form of post-secondary education or training. Almost 90% of young people today will undertake post-secondary education at some point in their lifetime.

The most commonly used indicator in Australia of continuation to the end of secondary schooling is the apparent Year 12 retention rate which provides a measure of the proportion of a cohort commencing secondary education which enrolls in the final year of secondary school.

The apparent retention rate measure is based on full-time students and does not include:

- Students undertaking Year 11/12 on a part-time basis or in mixed programs involving both part-time secondary school and part-time secondary school and part-time TAFE/VET options
- Inter-sector, interstate and overseas migration of students
- Structural differences in secondary education across the States and Territories, particularly relevant to Year 7/8 through to Year 12 measures but not for Year 10 through to Year 12 measures
- Repeating students
- Mature age students.

Figure 4: Apparent retention rate of full-time students from Year 7/8 to Year 12: 2002 to 2007



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007, *Schools Australia*, Catalogue No. 4221.0

Apparent Year 7/8 to Year 12 retention rates remained relatively stable between 2002 and 2005 although this was followed by marginal decreases in subsequent years. The exception to this trend has been a continual increase in retention rates for Indigenous students.

Access to higher education

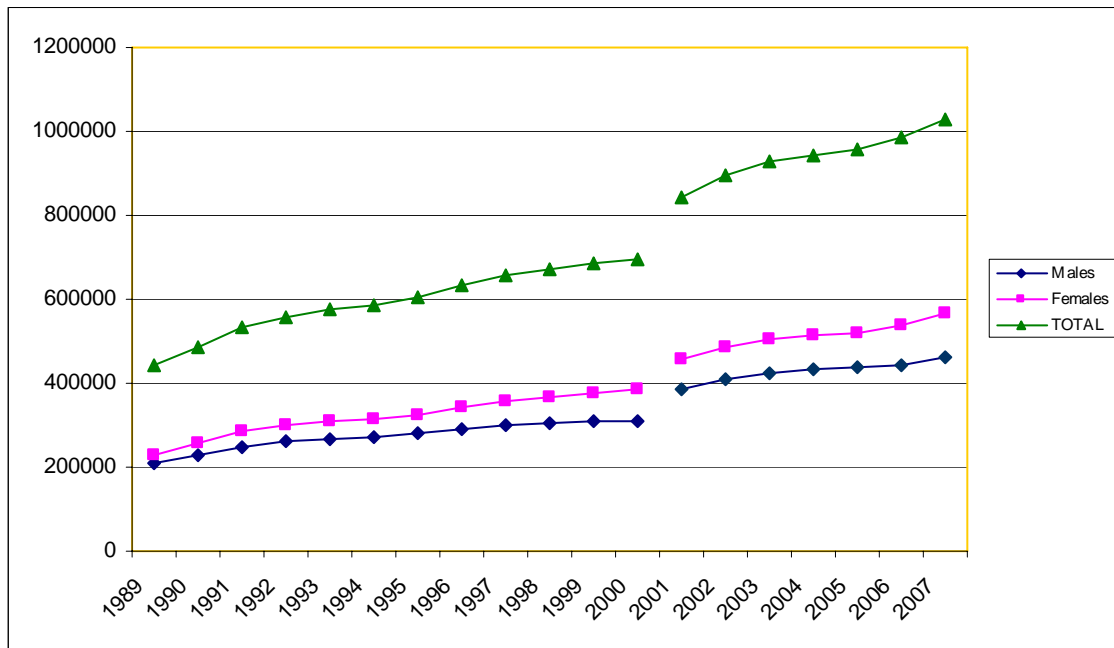
Since 1989, rates of participation in higher education for females have been consistently above those for males and this gender gap in participation appears to be widening. Part of the explanation for this can be found in the higher retention to Year 12 of females, given that successful completion of Year 12 serves as an important pathway into higher education.

The Australian Government believes that access to a university education should be open to all suitably qualified applicants, available on the basis of merit and equity. Entry to university must be sufficiently flexible to allow access for both school leavers and mature aged applicants.

The 2008-09 Budget provided for the number of Commonwealth Scholarships to be doubled to 88,000 by 2012. This aims to give more people from a low SES background the chance to participate in higher education. These Scholarships provide Indigenous students and those from regional and remote areas, with financial assistance to meet education-related costs and costs of accommodation if they have to access higher education away from home.

Access to higher education has increased considerably since the late 1980s. In the period between 1989 and 2007, the total number of students (both domestic and international) participating in higher education more than doubled, increasing from 441,074 to 1,029,846, with the most rapid growth occurring through the mid to late 1980s and early 1990s. While not strictly comparable due to changes in data collection methods, growth in participation has continued into the 2000s with 1,029,846 students enrolled in higher education in 2007 (DEEWR, various years).

Figure 5 Participation in higher education by gender, 1989 to 2007⁹

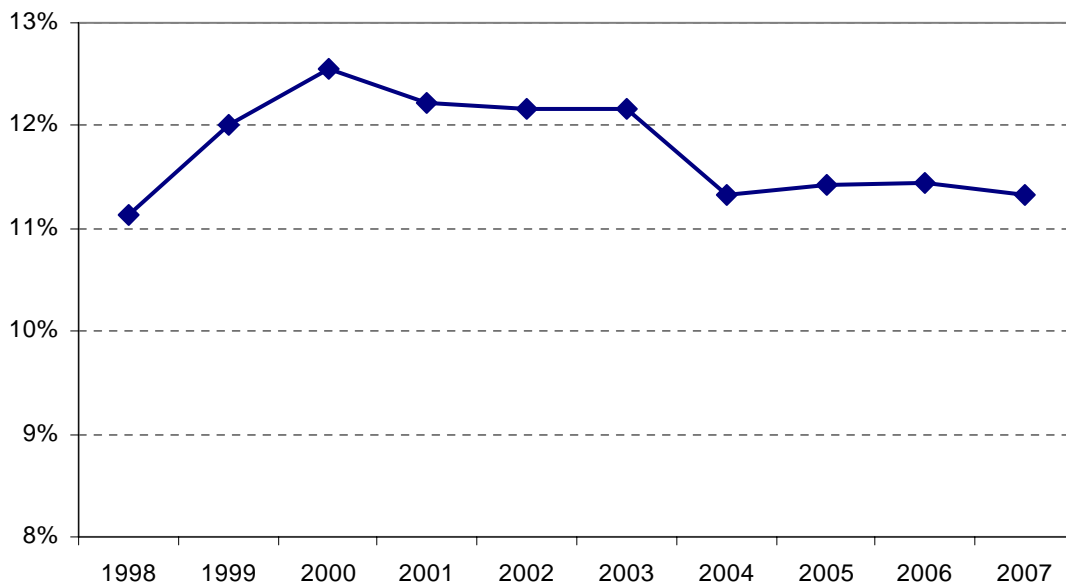


Source: DEEWR: Selected Higher Education Statistics, various years

Access to Vocational Education and Training

The proportion of Australians aged 15–64 years who participated in VET increased steadily over the late 1990s, peaking at 13% in 2000. Since then, participation has slowly declined to 11% in 2007. Between 2006 and 2007, the number of students enrolled in VET declined by 10,900 students to 1.67 million.

Figure 6 Proportion of population aged 15–64 years participating in VET, 1998–2007



⁹ There was a change in methods of data collection between 2001 and 2002 resulting in a break in series. In addition, figures for years from 1985 to 1993 progressively include State-funded basic nursing students who would previously have been trained in hospitals.

Sources: NCVET VET Provider Collection (2007 time series client cube); ABS Estimated resident population, June 1998 to June 2007 (Catalogue. No. 3201.0).

The VET sector provides training for older Australians to both update their skills and enable career changes. People aged 40 years and over have formed about 25% of VET students over the last decade. In the 10 years to 2007, the number of VET students aged 40 years and over increased by 23% to 471,000.

Young people comprise the largest proportion of VET students, with 43% of VET students aged 15–24 years. Participation in VET is highest among young people aged 15–19 years—just over 30% of all 15–19 year-olds participated in VET in 2007. Teenage participation in VET has steadily increased over the last decade, although growth slowed between 2006 and 2007. The growth in participation amongst teenagers can, in part, be attributed to the take up of VET programs by school students.

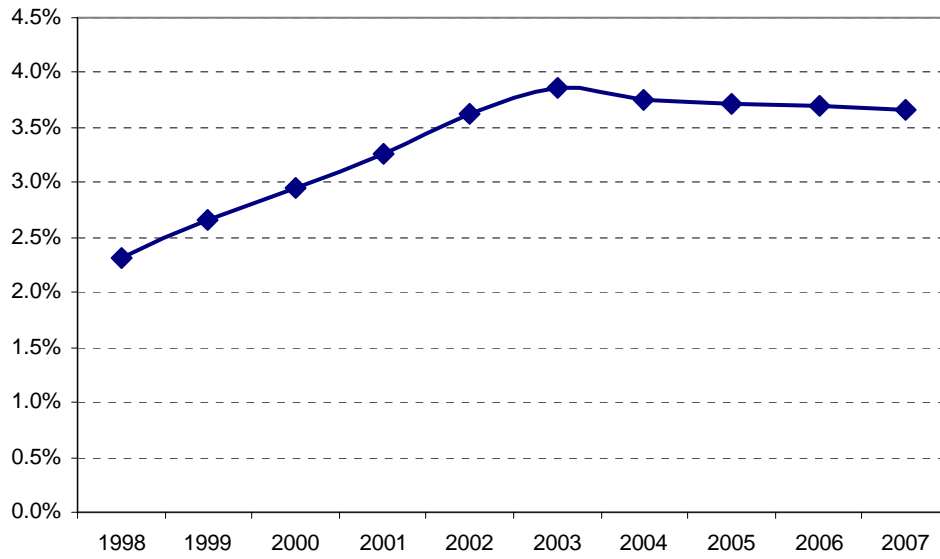
Since 1996, VET programs have been made available to senior secondary students as part of their senior secondary studies. In 2005, the number of school students participating in some form of VET in Schools reached 182,900, which equates to 34% of all school students undertaking a senior secondary certificate. Around 13,000 VET in Schools students were undertaking a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship. Continuous growth of VET in Schools is anticipated as more students recognise that programs such as School-based Australian Apprenticeships increase the range of post-school pathways open to them.

Australian Apprenticeships

Having risen by 87% since 1998, the number of Australian Apprentices in training stood at 405,500 in December 2007. The proportion of Australian Apprentices to the labour force has increased markedly since 1998, although the proportion has declined slightly in recent years, and now accounts for 4% of the labour force.

While around one-third of Apprentices in training as at 31 December 2007 were aged 15–19 years, apprenticeships are now undertaken by all age groups. At the end of December 2007, an estimated 28% of Apprentices in training were aged 20–24 years, 28% were 25–44, and 12% were 45 or older. The strongest growth in the number of Apprentices has been in the 45 and over age group which has increased by 294% over the last decade.

Figure 7 Number of individuals in contracts of training as a proportion of the labour force as at 31 December 1998 – 2007



Sources: NCVET Apprentice and Trainee Collection (NCVER December 2007 cube); ABS, *Labour Force, Australia*, various years (Catalogue No. 6202.0.55.001).

3(b) Main policies, achievements and lessons learned in terms of early childhood intervention

Reform for early childhood education and child care

The Australian Government has announced a major reform agenda for early childhood education and child care. Central to this reform agenda is greater integration of policy, administration, funding and delivery of early childhood education and child care services.

Previously, the Australian Government had relatively little involvement in preschool education, except for Indigenous Australians. The formation of the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care (OECECC)¹⁰ within DEEWR and the appointment of a new Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister with responsibility for early childhood education and child care (the Hon Maxine McKew, MP) has provided the Australian Government with a more integrated and effective administrative structure with which to give effect to its comprehensive early childhood agenda. The OECECC is at the centre of efforts to develop national policy directions for the provision of integrated, accessible, affordable and high quality early childhood education and child care to support optimal child development during the early years, and to help families participate in the social and economic life of the community.

Universal access to preschool

As noted above, the Australian Government is committed to ensuring that all children have access to high quality early learning childhood education. By 2013, every child will have access to a quality, affordable early learning program, delivered by a degree-qualified early childhood teacher, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year in the year before formal schooling commences. The early childhood education programs will be delivered in a range of settings - public, private and community-based preschools and child care services.

New early learning and care centres

As part of this agenda, the Australian Government is establishing up to 260 additional Early Learning and Care Centres across Australia by 2014. Where possible, these centres will be built on school, TAFE, University or other community land to facilitate the seamless transfer of children from early learning and care to school. The first 38, including six Autism specific centres, will be built by the end of 2010. Each centre will be required to provide children with integrated early learning and care in a long day care program, and access to an affordable, age appropriate early learning program, delivered by a university qualified teacher, for children in their year before formal schooling.

Early Years Learning Framework

The development of the Early Years Learning Framework is an integral component of the Australian Government's early childhood reforms. It will ensure the delivery of nationally-consistent and quality early childhood education and underpin universal access to quality early learning in the year before formal schooling.

¹⁰ www.oececc.gov.au

The development of the Framework is being progressed through the Early Years Learning Framework Working Group, which reports to the Early Childhood Development Subgroup to the COAG's Productivity Agenda Working Group. Membership consists of the Australian Government and all States and Territories.

The Early Years Learning Framework will guide early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programs. It will describe the broad parameters, principles and outcomes required to support and enhance children's learning from birth to five years of age as well as their transition to school. The Framework will also recognise the importance of play-based learning, communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) as well as personal, emotional and social development.

The framework is being developed in consultation with State and Territory Governments, early childhood experts and educators to ensure it is a world class, evidenced-based document, accepted by all jurisdictions, early childhood experts and educators.

Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)

The AEDI is a population-based measure of child development, which enables communities to assess how children are developing on school entry and effectively target resources and programs. AEDI will be implemented nationally to provide a census in 2009. AEDI is based on a checklist taken by a teacher in a child's first year of formal schooling. The checklist covers the five key domains: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication and general knowledge. It is discussed further in Chapter 3(c).

Home Interaction Program

The Australian Government will implement the Home Interaction Program nationally, in partnership with the Brotherhood of Saint Laurence (a non-government, community based charity). The Home Interaction Program assists disadvantaged three to five year olds, and provides for home tutors, books and associated educational resources to help parents improve their children's school readiness. This program is innovative in its holistic emphasis on providing enduring skills to children, parents and the community. Implementation will commence in 2008-09.

National Quality Framework

In December 2007, COAG agreed to a partnership to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development.

Central to this reform will be the adoption of a national quality framework for early childhood education and childcare. A national quality framework will provide parents, communities and operators of early childhood education and care services with a nationally consistent, streamlined and integrated licensing and accreditation system which ensures quality standards are implemented and maintained across all services.

The development of the national quality framework is being progressed through the Early Childhood Development Subgroup of the COAG Productivity Agenda Working Group.

Key elements of the transition towards a national quality framework are:

- strong quality standards
- a quality rating system
- streamlining or integrating licensing, regulation and accreditation arrangements to increase national consistency, and
- developing a workforce for a new quality early childhood education and care system.

Strong quality standards

The Early Childhood Development Subgroup is currently seeking to promote a broad community discussion on key areas of a new quality standards system which might include:

- leadership and management – which would include service governance, commitment to continuous improvement, planning and evaluation, and business management
- relationships between staff and children – this would include the extent to which a service promotes positive and meaningful interactions between staff and children and the engagement of children in the program
- family and community partnerships – how a service promotes the engagement of families in the development and delivery of programs, and the development and maintenance of links to the community more generally
- differentiated play-based curriculum – including the implementation of the new Early Years Learning Framework, and ongoing planning and evaluation of learning programs;
- physical environment – a service's physical space; the way in which the physical environment engages children in learning experiences, and the extent to which the physical environment reflects the context of the community, and
- staffing requirements and arrangements – including professional development, staff qualifications, and staff stability
- health and safety and other licensing requirements relating to the general operation of services and the wellbeing of children in care.

A quality rating system

The Australian Government will provide funding to support the development of a quality rating system, which will provide parents with a simple, clear and independently assessed ratings system that will enable them to assess the quality of child care and make a better informed choice about where they send their children. The rating system will help drive higher quality early childhood education and child care.

Child Care Tax Rebate Changes

The Child Care Tax Rebate (CCTR) is a payment made to families by the Australian Government to assist them with their out-of-pocket expenses for approved child care.¹¹ Most providers of long day care, family day care, before and after school care, occasional care, in home care and vacation care are approved child care providers. The key CCTR changes that took effect from 1 July 2008 are:

- increasing the rate of payment from 30% to 50% of out-of-pocket child care expenses
- increasing the limit from \$4,354 to \$7,500 per child per year, and
- enabling families to receive the payment quarterly rather than annually.

¹¹ Out-of-pocket expenses are the total child care fees less Child Care Benefit entitlement.

3(c) Main policies, achievements and lessons learned in terms of improving learning achievement

Early childhood

The Australian Early Development Index

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is designed to provide a population level measure of young children's development by the time they reach their first year of formal schooling. Data is collected through a questionnaire completed by teachers. The AEDI questionnaire measures physical health and wellbeing; social competence, emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge.

From 2004 to 2007 the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) was completed in 60 communities around Australia. The Government has now made a commitment to nationally implement the AEDI in early 2009. The AEDI national census data collection will take place between March 2009 and May 2009.

Designed to present a population level picture of how children in a community are developing by the time they reach school age, the AEDI is not an individual diagnostic tool. The AEDI results can provide communities with a comprehensive picture of the health and development of children in their area, geographically mapped to illustrate patterns of vulnerabilities and strengths of children in the community. This information can be used to better target and develop services, supports and environments that can influence children in their first five years of life.

Supporting children in the years before school greatly increases their chances of a successful transition to school and achieving better learning outcomes, social and emotional wellbeing. The implementation of the AEDI provides a community the opportunity to strengthen and increase collaboration between schools, early childhood services, and local agencies supporting children and families.

Indigenous Australian Early Development Index

The AEDI is also being adapted for use with Indigenous children, with the development, trialling and evaluation of the Indigenous Australian Early Development Index (I-AEDI) as a culturally-appropriate community-level measure of Indigenous children's early development. During the national census data collection in 2009, the I-AEDI tool will be used to capture information where a child is identified as Indigenous.

Schools

From 2004, the Australian government progressed the *Australian Schools Agenda* which focused on parents and their children and the educational needs of the next generation of Australians. The *Schools Assistance (Learning Together-Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* set out funding arrangements for 2005-08. The arrangements set out the conditions for funding which aimed to improve educational outcomes for all students. The conditions included provision for better reporting to parents on student performance and

statements of achievement against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks. Schools were also required to report against performance measures for civics and citizenship, information and communications technology, and vocational and technical education.

The Australian Government also set in place a number of programs to raise the foundation skills of literacy and numeracy. Over 2005-06, the government extended performance targets to include years 5 and 7 reading, writing, spelling and numeracy and gained the commitment of education authorities and schools to report to parents on each child's performance against the national literacy and numeracy benchmarks for years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Additional assistance was provided to parents of students who were below the Year 3 National Reading Benchmark.

3(d) Main policies, achievements and lessons learned in terms of quality of teachers

Indigenous Education

The Australian Government recognises the importance of teachers in improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students and in making education more inclusive. A number of initiatives have been funded to provide teachers with professional development and assist in addressing Indigenous educational disadvantage.

Indigenous Education Program

As part of Indigenous Education Program, recipient education providers report on the professional development undertaken by their staff. This information is provided by recipients in the preschool, school and VET sectors. Professional development training in these sectors has included cross-cultural training, training in learning styles of Indigenous students as well as training appropriate to the sector, such as in transition to school requirements. At the preschool level, the training received by teachers has impacted on the style of teaching used in the classroom. Recipients of funding under the Indigenous Education Program have shown that teachers in all sectors are undertaking increased cross-cultural and other professional development training.

Dare to Lead

The Dare to Lead project commenced in 2005. It aims to create change in schools through the formation of a coalition of school leaders enlisted to place priority on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The project provides professional learning opportunities to school principals and promotes cultural understanding and intercultural exchange through cultural tours, school visits and access to best practice resources.

What Works

The What Works program, which also commenced in 2005, is a national effort to improve outcomes for Indigenous students and to make this a first priority for all Australian educators and trainers. The program delivers professional development workshops to teachers. The *What Works* website (www.whatworks.edu.au) provides advice and information about how improvement can be achieved and examples of contemporary cases where this has occurred. Over 50 case studies of best practice in Indigenous education are available on the website and schools use these materials to develop teachers' skills in assisting Indigenous students to achieve better educational outcomes.

Early Childhood

In order to meet its early childhood reform agenda, the Australian Government announced measures in the 2008 Budget to build a highly skilled and capable workforce necessary to implement the COAG early childhood reform agenda.

These measures include the provision of more university places for early childhood teachers, the removal of TAFE fees for diploma and advanced diploma students of child care, and the

removal of HECS-HELP (student loan) debts for early childhood teachers working in areas of high disadvantage.

A committee comprising Australian, State and Territory Governments is developing a National Early Years Workforce Strategy. This Strategy builds upon existing workforce programs to provide a long term blueprint to improve recruitment and retention of the early childhood workforce, develop pathways that reward and support the best workers, and raise the level of qualifications.

Schools

In 2004, the Australian Government set up the interim *National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership* which was then established on a permanent basis in 2005. The institute supported and promoted the quality of teaching and school leadership through setting professional standards, accrediting pre-service teacher education and through a national leadership learning program. Funding for the institute was provided under the *Australian Government Quality Teacher Program* which is the government's major initiative for improving the quality of teaching and leadership. The Australian Government will fund the program until the end of 2009.

The Australian Government also initiated the *Australian Schools Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics* project under the *Boosting Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics Teaching* program. The program funded applications from clusters of schools and partner organisations to support innovative projects to improve the teaching and learning of science, technology and mathematics in Australian schools. The program is funded until 2010-11.

During 2007, the government's broad approach to improving and supporting teacher quality included improved professional practice with a focus on ICT, efforts to enhance greater principal autonomy over school staffing and budgetary issues and research to investigate better ways of rewarding quality teaching. The performance pay research provided an overview of the current pay arrangements for teachers in Australian schools, particularly in relation to performance-based pay; attitudes to performance-based pay for teachers; and examples of performance pay in Australia and overseas.¹²

Vocational Education and Training

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework

The Australian Flexible Learning Framework commenced in 2000 to invest, at a national level, in the uptake of quality e-learning in the VET sector through the enablement, facilitation and support of the transition of Australia's training system to the information age. The Framework has laid the foundation for e-learning to be mainstreamed across the training sector and is now capitalising on its past achievements while continuing to invest further in the uptake of e-learning.

¹² Research on Performance Pay for Teachers, March 2007, ACER, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D477C6A5-C8EF-4074-8619-FF43059445F8/16287/ACERPerformancePaypaperMar07.pdf>

Improving the ICT capability of teachers is a major feature of the Framework. In its earlier iterations, the Framework funded the LearnScope Program, part of a national strategy to increase the capacity of VET professionals to use flexible learning approaches and new technologies in the delivery of training. LearnScope focused on professional development to enhance the skills and understanding that underpin e-learning and e-business. It provided funding for work-based professional development projects and encouraged both individuals and teams to model sustainable practices in their own learning through a range of strategies including engagement with recent thinking about professional development in the 'knowledge era'.

On average, 70% of respondents of surveys conducted over the duration of the LearnScope Program reported that LearnScope had an impact on their ability to implement e-learning choices for clients at a 'significant' to 'highly significant' level. Survey respondents commented that they had been able to create more flexible learning options for individual learners and target groups and that technology assists them to do this. More recently, the Framework focuses on integrating professional development with other funded activities with the goal of enabling teachers to be effective managers of learning.

Each year the Framework conducts an annual survey to assess the uptake, use and impact of e-learning in Australia's VET system. The survey includes a component dedicated to VET teachers and trainers, and in 2007 the responses from 1017 teachers in the VET sector were assessed for inclusion in the survey's results. With regards to teacher use of e-learning, 68% of respondents stated that they have delivered units that use e-learning, using such methods of delivery as toolboxes, online access to materials and resources, structured learning-based email communications and use of web 2.0 technologies for learning. Over 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they now use technology to draw on a wider pool of teaching resources, 86% encourage students to draw on web-based and computer-based resources and 59% use technology to create more individualised learning for their students.

Career teachers

The Australian Government contracted the Careers Industry Council of Australia to develop and implement a set of Professional Standards for Australian Career Development Practitioners. The Standards were developed in response to recommendations in the 2001 OECD report that highlighted inadequacies in the training and qualifications of career practitioners in many countries including Australia.

The Professional Standards support the development of quality careers teachers and careers teaching in Australia by providing quality assurance, outlining minimum entry-level qualifications and defining ethical standards and ongoing professional development needs. The Standards were first published in 2006 after an extensive consultation process with career development practitioners and other stakeholders. The Professional Standards is a living document that will be reviewed from time to time to reflect best practice and needs within the field.

Other Australian Government initiatives aimed at improving pre-service teacher education and in-service professional development for career teachers include:

- a career education elective for pre-service teachers undertaking a Bachelor of Education or a Bachelor of Teaching degree

- scholarships for Career Advisers to undertake further study or an industry placement
- School and Industry Leaders' forums, and
- Career Education Lighthouse Schools projects that champion innovation and best practice.

4 The role of the education system in combating poverty, social exclusion and cultural marginalisation

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is a term often used to describe social and/or economic disadvantage and is due to a variety of factors, including lack of access to education, unemployment, low income, poor housing, crime, poor health, disability and/or family breakdown. Numerous studies show that social exclusion is often intergenerational in nature, consigning generations to disadvantage. Often this disadvantage is concentrated in specific geographic regions and locations.

With the ageing of the population and skills shortages across the economy, increasing participation presents an important economic challenge for Australia. To meet this challenge, policies must ensure that all Australians, including: young people (particularly early school-leavers), the unskilled and marginalised, mature age Australians and parents seeking to return to work are given the opportunity to participate in all aspects of Australian life and share in economic prosperity.

Policies that address social exclusion enable people to participate in a range of positive and productive social and economic activities that they might otherwise have difficulty in both accessing and sustaining. A targeted and coordinated approach to addressing social exclusion is critical to Australia's long-term economic prosperity.

The Australian Social Inclusion Agenda

The Australian Government believes that all Australians should have the opportunity and capacity to play a full role in all aspects of Australian life.

To be socially included, all Australians must be given the opportunity to:

- secure a job;
- access services;
- connect with others in life through family, friends, work, personal interests and local community;
- deal with personal crisis such as ill health, bereavement or the loss of a job; and
- have their voices heard.

The Australian Social Inclusion Agenda aims to tackle disadvantage, overcome barriers to participation, build the capacity of and create opportunities for all Australians to live economically and socially inclusive lives. This means that policies must be implemented in a coordinated manner across national, state and local governments, and with various sectors of the community.

In May 2008, an Australian Social Inclusion Board was established to act as the main advisory body to the Australian Government. The Board comprises members of the Australian community from a variety of backgrounds and consults widely to provide views and advice on how to improve social inclusion. The Board is also examining ways to build the capacity of parents and communities to keep young people at school longer and to assist the transition into higher education, further training or jobs.

Education Revolution

Education is central to the Social Inclusion Agenda and is a key element of building a just and participative society. Education not only drives productivity but also empowers individuals to reach their full potential and helps overcome disadvantage. The best education systems in the world can and do significantly reduce the effects of disadvantage, particularly socioeconomic disadvantage, while building higher levels of participation, greater social cohesion and economic prosperity.

The Australian Government recognises that there are strong links between education, workforce participation and economic and social outcomes. It aims to create one of the most educated and most highly skilled workforces in the world. This is based on a vision for early learning, 21st century schooling, and innovative education and skills development.

The Education Revolution's aims are:

- Building a Stronger Future—Increasing Australia's capacity to sustain higher economic growth with low inflation through increasing the skills base of the labour force and aligning that skills base with the needs of the economy
- Building a Fairer Australia—Raising the skills and capacity of all Australians, particularly those with low skill levels, is essential to ensuring equity in the economic, social and political life of the nation
- Preparing for Future Challenges—Australia faces significant changes to its social and economic environment through an ageing population and increasing international competition. The nation must invest in developing a world class education system and drive development of a workforce that is highly skilled, flexible and adaptable in responding to increasing global competition for skills.

Targets for Education Revolution

COAG has established a Productivity Agenda Working Group to drive the Education Revolution agenda. This is a collaborative approach by all levels of Government to progress the targets for the 2008-09 Education Revolution. These targets include:

- Universal access to early learning will be provided for all children in the year before formal schooling by 2013, noting that preschool is not compulsory in Australia.
- All Indigenous four year olds in remote Indigenous communities will have access to a quality early childhood education program by 2013.
- The gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children aged under five years will be halved within a decade.
- The gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Indigenous students will be halved within a decade.
- By 2020, Year 12 or equivalent attainment will have risen to 90%, and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attainment will have been halved.
- By 2020, the proportion of Australians aged between 20 and 64 without qualifications at the Certificate III level and above will have been halved.
- By 2020, the number of diploma and advanced diploma qualification completions will have been doubled.

2020 Summit

The Australia 2020 Summit (held in 2008) through its Strengthening Communities, Supporting Families and Social Inclusion stream, examined the challenges facing Australian families and communities in the context of social change. Discussion focused on ways of including the most at-risk members of Australian society, including those living in poverty, migrants, prisoners, Indigenous Australians and young people. There was broad support for the development of a national strategy or action plan to address poverty, including the establishment of an independent Poverty Commission to set minimum standards for income and entitlements.

5(a) Approaches, scope and content of inclusive education

Indigenous Education

The Indigenous specific education programs introduced by governments and other education providers address specific areas of disadvantage. Increasing inclusive education is a goal across all sectors from early childhood to higher education.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) was endorsed by all Australian education providers, both government and non-government, in 1989. The AEP forms the basis of programs and initiatives implemented to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous people.

The 21 goals of the AEP cover four areas:

- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision making
- equality of access to educational services
- equity of educational participation, and
- equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

*Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008*¹³

MCEETYA has also given priority to Indigenous education. MCEETYA has eight priority areas for Indigenous education and training:

- i. improving Indigenous literacy
- ii. improving Indigenous numeracy
- iii. increasing the employment of Indigenous Australians in education and training
- iv. improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students
- v. increasing Indigenous enrolments
- vi. increasing the involvement of Indigenous parents/community members in educational decision making
- vii. increasing professional development for staff involved in Indigenous education
- viii. expanding culturally inclusive curricula.

Recipients of funding under the Indigenous Education Program are required to report annually to the Australian Government on outcomes in these eight priority areas of Indigenous education, including the use of culturally inclusive curricula and the employment of Indigenous staff. In each year of the Indigenous Education Program quadrennium (2005-2008), targets have been established against performance indicators for each of the priority areas.

Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008, endorsed by MCEETYA in 2006, makes recommendations in five domains. These domains provide a framework for the promotion of inclusive education in all educational sectors and will engage Indigenous students and communities resulting in increased participation and improved outcomes.

¹³ http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf

Through their endorsement of the paper, Australian ministers for education have agreed with the recommendation that “Ministers affirm that strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation”. The recommendation recognises the importance of inclusive education and the role of school leadership in ensuring that this occurs through education systems.

COAG’s strategic platforms for Indigenous education

COAG has identified seven strategic platforms that need to be in place in order to address Indigenous disadvantage. These strategic platforms are:

- healthy homes
- safe communities
- health
- early childhood
- schooling
- economic participation, and
- governance and leadership.

The Australian Government is using these platforms to address Indigenous disadvantage in an integrated way. Strategies aimed at achieving improvements in just one area will not work in isolation — these platforms must fit together through the integration of policy ideas and their implementation.

As part of the COAG schools reform plan, the Australian Government will provide a National Partnership payment to the States and Territory Governments for the delivery of better education outcomes from disadvantaged school communities. The Governments will work together to identify disadvantaged school communities and they will then receive well targeted and integrated support.

Schools

Priorities for the COAG in schools

The Australian Government considers that the COAG reform agenda must deliver real changes in three core areas¹⁴:

- raising the quality of teaching in our schools
- ensuring all students are benefiting from schooling by building strategies based on high expectations of attainment, engagement and transitions for every student, especially in disadvantaged school communities, and
- improving transparency and accountability of schools and school systems at all levels.

¹⁴ Quality Education: The case for an Education Revolution in our Schools, August 2008, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/168E67E8-B266-44E3-BC7C-9169F663E55B/0/QualityEducationEducationRevolutionWEB.pdf>

School-to-work Transition

The Australian Government established the National Youth Career and Transitions Advisory Group (2005) to provide advice on school-to-work transition programs and related issues. As a result, in 2006 the Career Advice Australia initiative commenced delivery of coordinated and enhanced career development and transition support services for young Australians aged 13-19 through national, regional and local networks. The aim is to provide a comprehensive service to the majority of students in secondary schools and more targeted support to students with special needs, complementing State and Territory activities.

The Australian Government policy will improve social inclusion, participation and productivity through youth transition policies. This focuses on:

- support for a range of learning pathways through the On-The-Job Training Program, Mentors For Our Students Pilot Program, Trade Training Centres in Schools Program and enhanced Schools-Business Linkages
- business, parent and community engagement
- support for young people disconnected, or at risk of disconnecting from education, and
- building national capacity and provide universal access to quality career services.

Higher Education

Indigenous education in the Higher Education Sector

The Indigenous Education Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) provides a policy mechanism for the Australian Government to consult with the Indigenous community on higher education issues and provides policy advice to the Minister on:

- identifying and developing strategies to improve student outcomes
- developing an Indigenous research culture for Indigenous academic staff and postgraduates
- strengthening the institutional responsibility for improving Indigenous students' outcomes and the role of Indigenous Support/Education Units, including best practice
- strategies for increasing the employment opportunities and career paths for Indigenous higher education staff
- identifying and promoting best practice in the course content in the education of Indigenous students
- encouraging Indigenous content in courses to ensure that all graduates understand Indigenous cultures
- promotion and protection of Indigenous intellectual property in higher education.

Vocational Education and Training

People with a disability – Bridging Pathways Blueprint

The Bridging Pathways Blueprint is the national strategy to improve the training outcomes and employment opportunities for people with a disability in VET. The revised Blueprint, which was endorsed by Ministers responsible for training in 2004 and reaffirmed in 2006, outlines five priorities for action:

- progressing a whole life approach
- measuring what we are achieving

- delivering on the ground
- engaging key players, and
- improving employment outcomes.

It also guides all Australian State and Territory Governments and stakeholders in VET planning and delivery for people with a disability.

Advisory taskforces in VET

One of the key strategies in place to ensure inclusiveness in the VET sector has been the establishment of new client advisory arrangements. These were endorsed by MCVTE in November 2006.

The advisory arrangements are comprised of three advisory taskforces and an overarching Advisory Alliance. The three client advisory taskforces are:

- the National VET Indigenous Advisory Taskforce
- the National VET Disability Advisory Taskforce, and
- the National VET Equity Advisory Taskforce, which addresses issues related to all clients with a particular emphasis on clients experiencing barriers in relation to access, participation and outcomes in the VET system.

The strategic objectives of the advisory taskforces are to see improvements in the following areas for all of the client groups:

- sustainable employment outcomes, including increased levels of apprenticeship participation and completions
- higher level qualification attainments
- effective transitions from school or community to training and from training to further education and employment
- participation rates at least proportionate to the representation of each group in the population, and
- the capacity of the VET system to contribute to addressing whole of life barriers to training and employment.

To assist in forming their advice, the taskforces consult and build partnerships with stakeholders and the VET system, identify research priorities and pilot projects and monitor progress against performance measures.

The role of the Advisory Alliance is to identify synergies of work, shared priorities and intersecting issues, to ensure streamlined information and reporting process to NSOC and MCVTE to enable responsive strategic action at the highest levels.

NSOC committed to review the advisory arrangements before the end of 2008, and the Advisory Alliance is currently undertaking this review with the intention of providing a recommendation on new arrangements to NSOC in late 2008.

Indigenous Australians in the VET sector

The 2005-2008 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce¹⁵ aims to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians by requiring States and Territories to:

- provide additional training places in regional and remote locations for Indigenous Australians
- achieve an overall increase in participation of Indigenous Australians at higher qualification levels, specifically at Certificate III and above
- establish a Joint Indigenous Funding Pool to maximise education and training outcomes for Indigenous students, and
- report on strategies and performance measures for each strategy in their annual VET plans.

During 2006, jurisdictions increased the number of training places for Indigenous Australians in regional and remote locations by 16% (7,900 places) and increased the numbers of Indigenous Australians at higher qualification levels by 7% (1,500 places).¹⁶

*Partners in a Learning Culture – the Way Forward*¹⁷, the revised Blueprint for Indigenous Australians, is the nationally agreed strategy for action to improve training opportunities and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians in VET. The Blueprint includes six priorities:

- building capacity of the VET sector through Indigenous involvement
- creating more pathways for Indigenous Australians from school to training and employment
- improving funding frameworks
- ensuring the development of culturally appropriate products and delivery
- links to employment, and
- growing VET sector partnerships.

Additionally, *Shaping Our Future*¹⁸, Australia's national strategy for VET 2004-2010, includes a key objective relating to the engagement of Indigenous people in the VET system. It establishes an objective that Indigenous Australians will have skills for viable jobs and their learning culture will be shared.

Progress against this and all objectives is measured using a set of agreed key performance measures, which are reported in the Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational Education and Training System. The latest report published is 2006.¹⁹

¹⁵ http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/agreement

¹⁶ Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational Education and Training System 2006, published in 2008, <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/AA26CEA5-5CA9-49CB-B968-27F5EFC47C2D/22440/2006ANR.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/E879AF00-53E7-4087-812A-5064A50E0BFB/6398/THEWAYFORWARDfinalJune05.pdf>

¹⁸ http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/98206EC7-3B9A-4A58-991F-4F28010BF825/16445/national_strategy.pdf

¹⁹ http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/profiles/ANR_VET_2006.htm

5(b) Making policies on inclusive education

Australian Government policy initiatives have been designed to improve educational attainment and enhance transitions from school to further education, training or employment. Research has shown that educational attainment can have longer term economic and social benefits for the individual and Australia as a whole.²⁰ Policies which enhance access to school and further education for all Australians are a key priority of the Australian Government.

This chapter provides statistics and research that inform inclusive education.

Indigenous Australians

Despite improvements in recent years, the educational outcomes of Indigenous Australians remain well below those of most non-Indigenous Australians.

For Indigenous students, attainment of Year 11 and Year 12 or its vocational equivalent remains low. These outcomes limit the post-school options and life choices of Indigenous students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage.²¹

Apparent retention rates for Indigenous Year 12 students are much lower than for non-Indigenous students (43% and 74% respectively in 2007). Of non-Indigenous Australians, 50% do not have a non-school qualification compared with 71% of Indigenous Australians. Labour force participation rates for Indigenous Australians are almost 20 percentage points lower than for the non-Indigenous population.²²

There is therefore an urgent need to challenge the prevailing view that disparity in the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is 'normal' and that incremental gains are acceptable. Social polarisation arising from globalisation and unequal opportunities to join the 'knowledge economies' further underlines the critical importance of addressing the disparity in educational outcomes.²³

A culturally appropriate response and inclusive curriculum ensures that students' backgrounds and needs are recognised. This acknowledges and incorporates the knowledge, experiences and contributions of a wide variety of cultures.

Indigenous Australians in the VET sector

In 2007, Indigenous students reached record representation in VET, accounting for 4% of all students. The proportion of Indigenous students in VET is substantially greater than the proportion of Indigenous students in higher education. This suggests that VET offers a more accessible pathway to further education for Indigenous people.

²⁰ Access Economics, 2005, The economic benefit of increased participation in education and training

²¹ Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008, http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf

²² An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda, http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/071122_social_inclusion.pdf

²³ Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf

In 2007, women accounted for 47% of all Indigenous VET students. This is in contrast to the higher education sector where Indigenous female students accounted for 65% of all Indigenous students.²⁴

The numbers of VET students from non-English speaking backgrounds also reached record highs in 2007. The proportions of Indigenous students undertaking higher level courses, which are associated with better employment outcomes, are low in comparison with other VET students.²⁵

This disadvantage has been created from a series of factors, both current and historical, including difficulty in accessing education and non-inclusive education. Issues of non-inclusive education and poor educational outcomes for Indigenous people are being addressed through policies which have been endorsed by all Australian Governments.

Early Childhood

Why does Australia need to invest in early childhood education?

Research has shown that children develop much of their intellectual abilities, personality and skills by the age of five. The experiences which children have in the early years of life set neurological and biological pathways that affect their health, learning and behaviour throughout their life.²⁶

Providing access to high quality early education programs in the year before formal schooling is one of the best ways for the government to assist children from disadvantaged background get the best possible start in life.²⁷ Early learning eases the transition to primary school and has a direct and positive impact on future educational, employment and health outcomes.

The Nobel Prize winning economist, Professor James Heckman, argued that investment in the early years is significantly more cost effective than remediation in later years.²⁸ Early interventions for disadvantaged children increase earnings and promote social attachment, with returns to dollars invested on earnings gains alone as high as 15-17%. Heckman's cost-benefit analysis of US early childhood programs show the positive effects of early childhood interventions on IQ and a wide range of social behaviours.

Access to early childhood education in Australia

It has been estimated that in 2006, around 20% of all eligible children in Australia did not access early childhood education prior to commencing primary school. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to miss out. For example, less than half of Indigenous children currently receive an early childhood education.²⁹

²⁴ Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational Education and Training System 2006, published in 2008.

²⁵ Annual National Report of the Australian Vocational Education and Training System 2006, published in 2008.

²⁶ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, *From Neutrons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, Washington, D.C: National Academy Press

²⁷ National Institute of Early Education Research, 2004, 'The Universal vs. Targeted Debate', in *Preschool Policy Matters*, Issue 6, April 2004.

²⁸ Heckman, James J., 2005 'Lessons from the Technology of Skill Formation, February 2005', National Bureau of Economic Research Working paper No. W11142, February 2005.

²⁹ Budget Education Revolution 2008-09, http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/ministerial_statements/download/Education.pdf

Australia spends just 0.1% of GDP on preschool compared with an average OECD expenditure of 0.5%, and is ranked last in the OECD for expenditure on pre-primary education.³⁰ It is this situation which the current Australian Government aims to address as a high priority.

Schools

Students who are struggling to get the basics right are more likely to come from low SES backgrounds. On average, Indigenous students are more than 2.5 years behind non-Indigenous students. Education and schooling are therefore a crucial part of the social inclusion agenda.³¹

Literacy and Numeracy skills

Literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to shaping an individual's capacity to be an active and productive participant in the economy and in society.³²

The Australian Government believes that students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, need to develop essential learning skills early in life to increase their chances of becoming employed and participating in post-school education and training. Without fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, children will be impoverished learners and unable to contribute fully to society.³³

Nationally agreed literacy and numeracy benchmarks for Years 3, 5 and 7 in Australia represent minimum standards of performance at a particular year level, below which students have difficulty progressing at school. Ministers for education have agreed that the national goal should be for all students to achieve at least the benchmark level of performance.

According to the *2006 National Report on Schooling in Australia*³⁴,

- 7% of all Year 3 students do not meet relevant reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks
- 12% of Year 5 primary school students do not meet the reading benchmarks
- 10% of Year 7 students are below the benchmark level for reading and more than 7% achieve below the benchmark level for writing
- Just over 20% of Year 7 students are not meeting the benchmark levels for numeracy.

Levels of achievement amongst Indigenous students and students living in very remote regions remain significantly lower than the overall standard, as do literacy achievement levels for boys. For example, the results for Indigenous students in Year 7 numeracy showed that less than half met the benchmark in 2006. Of all very remote students, 47% achieved the benchmark in Year 7 numeracy compared to 72% of all remote students.

³⁰ Budget Education Revolution 2008-09, http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/ministerial_statements/download/Education.pdf

³¹ Budget Education Revolution 2008-09, http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/ministerial_statements/download/Education.pdf

³² Rothman, S. and G. McMillan, 2003, *Influences on Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, ACER

³³ Budget Education Revolution 2008-09, http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/ministerial_statements/download/Education.pdf

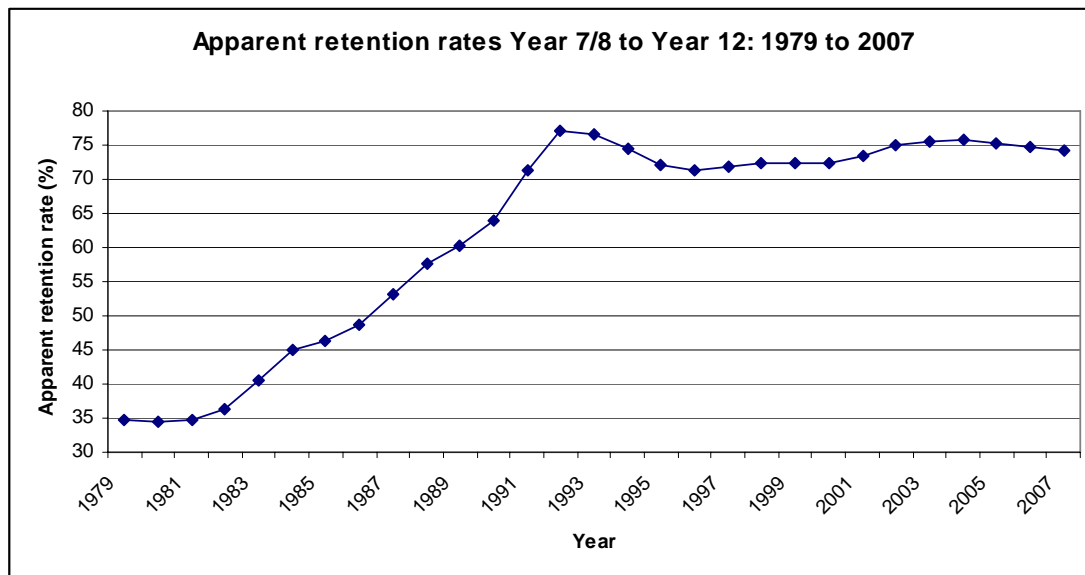
³⁴ http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Benchmarks_2006_Years35and7-Final.pdf

Educational Attainment

School attainment is positively linked to higher levels of employment and labour force participation; lower unemployment; labour force re-entry; higher wages; and higher levels of productivity. Early school leaving can also be correlated with significant personal and social costs, increased potential contact with the health and criminal justice systems, and intergenerational disadvantage.³⁵

Participation in upper secondary education in Australia is not high by international standards. While other OECD countries have progressively improved school completion rates, these rates in Australia have changed little over the past decade. In 2007, the apparent retention rate of all Australian full-time students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 was 74%, which has remained relatively stable since 1996. The Australian Government aims to lift the rate of students attaining a Year 12 or equivalent outcome to 90% by 2020. This requires big improvements among the most disadvantaged groups.

Figure 8: Apparent retention rates Year 7/8 to Year 12: 1979 to 2007



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007, *Schools Australia*, Catalogue No. 4221.0

Australia is now ranked 20th in terms of the percentage of 25-34 year olds who have completed upper secondary education or its equivalent.³⁶

International comparisons in literacy and numeracy

According to the 2006 OECD's *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*³⁷,

- In the period between 2003 and 2006, Australia declined in both its absolute and relative performance in reading literacy, and its relative performance in mathematical literacy.

³⁵ COAG National Reform Initiative Working Group, Human Capital Reform: Report by the COAG National Reform Initiative Working Group, 10 February 2006.

³⁶ Council for the Australian Federation 2007, Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia, September, based on OECD (2006) Education at a Glance

³⁷ www.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en_32252351_32236191_39718850_1_1_1_1,00.html

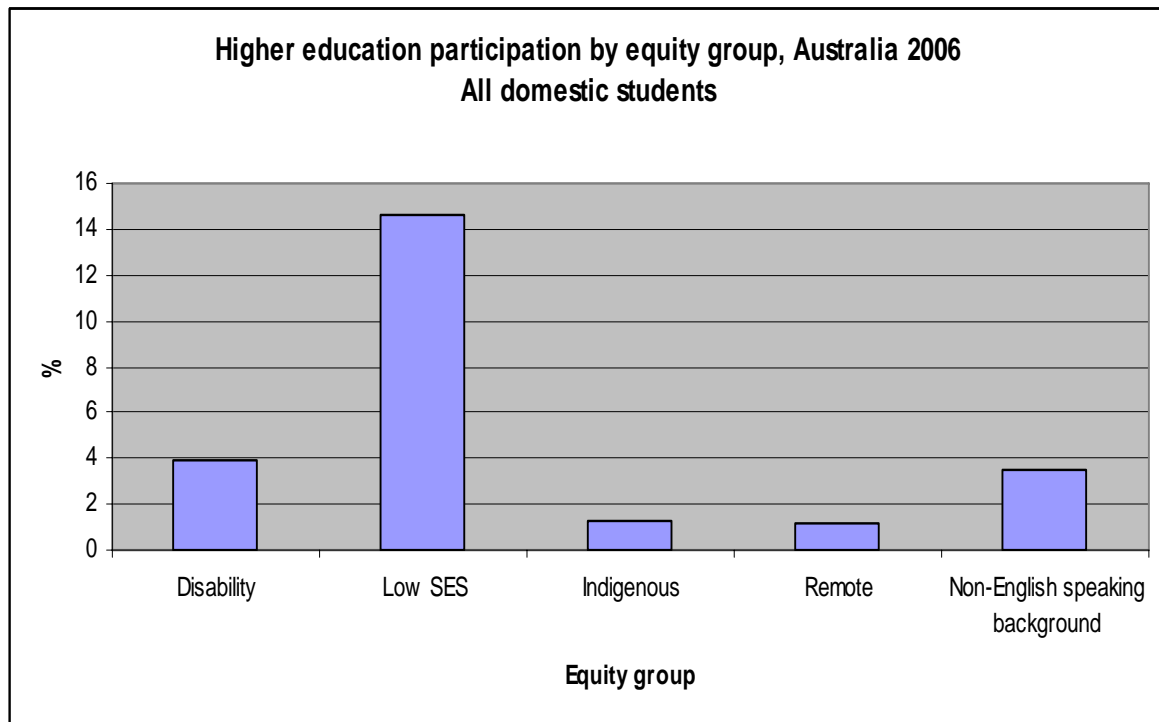
- Australia has a long 'tail' of underperformance linked to disadvantage. The PISA results indicate that from 2000 to 2006, the percentage of students who are less than proficient at reading or maths has not reduced.
- International testing also shows that the reading performance of Australian students at the high end of the achievement scale has declined between 2003 and 2006.

The 'tail' of underperformance in Australian schools is concentrated amongst students from low SES status families and Indigenous students. For example, the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in PISA mathematics and reading literacy is equivalent to more than two years of formal schooling. The difference between students from the lowest SES quartile and those in the highest is also more than two years of schooling in both reading literacy and mathematics.³⁸

Higher Education

Indigenous Australians and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-represented in higher education. Universities need to provide effective learning environments for a diverse student group. Governments and universities need to work together to ensure that disadvantaged groups have equal access to higher education and are not prevented by economic circumstances, disability, gender, or language or cultural background.

Figure 9: Higher Education participation by equity Group, 2006, domestic students



Source: DEEWR Higher Education Student Statistics, 2006

Data exclude domestic students whose permanent home address is overseas.

Low SES data are based on 2001 Census SEIFA.

Remote categories are derived from MCEETYA classifications, which replace the old Rural and Isolated categories.

³⁸ Quality Education: The case for an Education Revolution in our Schools, 27 August 2008.
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/deewr/About/QualityEducation-ThecaseforanEducationRevolutioninourSchools.htm>

Vocational Education and Training

A range of VET programs have been developed that are designed for specific vulnerable learner groups, including:

- culturally appropriate training programs for Indigenous Australians in rural and remote areas
- vocational and life-skills programs for people with a specific physical or intellectual disability
- English language courses for recently-arrived immigrants and overseas students, and
- remedial literacy and numeracy courses for adults—often immigrants—who had limited schooling.

The Australian, State and Territory Governments also have a wide range of subsidies and support programs that allow learners with special needs to participate in mainstream VET programs, including apprenticeships and traineeships. Employers can also receive incentives or subsidies for learners with special needs who undertake training.

Only indicative statistics on VET learners with special needs are available because information about the severity of the disadvantage is difficult to obtain. Of the students in the public VET system in 2006, 4% identified as Indigenous Australians, about 7% had a disability that limited their ability to undertake their VET program, approximately 15% came from a language background other than English and about 30% had a highest education level of year 10 or below, with some students having multiple disabilities or belonging to more than one of these categories.³⁹

³⁹ NCVET, National VET Provider collection, 2006

5(c) Specific approaches and measures on inclusive education

Indigenous Education

Access to education for Indigenous people in remote communities

Enabling Indigenous people in remote communities to access education is an element of inclusive education. The Australian Government has recognised the education obstacles faced by people living in remote areas by directing greater funds to these areas and by developing programs and initiatives of direct benefit.

Examples are the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program (IYMP) and the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP). The IYMP provides Indigenous young people, mostly from remote areas, with the opportunity to relocate to a major centre to take up training and employment opportunities while the IYLP provides scholarships for Indigenous students, generally from remote areas, to attend high performing schools (government and non-government, day and boarding) and universities. These initiatives allow young Indigenous students from remote areas to access educational opportunities not available in their home communities.

The Australian Government will work with the Indigenous Land Corporation to establish three new boarding facilities in the Northern Territory to enable Indigenous secondary students from remote areas to undertake secondary education. This initiative addresses the lack of access by remote Indigenous students to secondary schooling and will assist in improving Year 12 retention, or its vocational equivalent, and performance for Indigenous students.

Northern Territory Emergency Response

On 21 June 2007, the Australian Government announced the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in response to the *Little Children are Sacred* report from the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse.

NTER measures include education initiatives to address issues of Indigenous access to, participation in and outcomes from education. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) estimate that there are 2,000 children of school age who are not enrolled in education, and of the 8,000 who are enrolled, around 2,500 are not attending school sufficiently regularly to benefit from their education.

The NTER measures are designed to increase the numbers of Indigenous children enrolled and regularly attending school, and to meet the anticipated increase in the numbers of Indigenous students attending school in remote communities.

The *School Nutrition Program* is one of the NTER education measures funded by the Australian Government. It provides breakfast and lunch to Indigenous school-aged children in remote communities. It is aimed to improve school attendance and engagement by Indigenous children. Nutrition programs can boost attendance and qualitative data shows that students who have consumed a meal before school are better able to concentrate and engage in their education.

Early Childhood

The Australian Government's vision for early childhood is comprehensive and recognises the critical role of early learning in building social inclusion. The vision places a strong emphasis on supporting the optimal development of children so that all children are fully prepared for learning and life.

In July 2008, as part of the Australian Government's commitment to Indigenous Australians, COAG agreed in principle to a National Partnership with joint Federal and State funding to address the needs of Indigenous children in the early years. At the same time COAG committed to the development of a proposal for integrated children and family centres that would deliver a range of early childhood education, care, health and parenting services. While these reforms extend beyond a focus on education, they reflect COAG's recognition that early childhood development is an area of complex interactions between a range of social policy areas.

Non-mainstream services including Indigenous child care

Several types of non-mainstream child care services are funded by the Australian Government. Non-mainstream services are provided by not-for-profit organisations and are delivered mainly in rural, remote or Indigenous communities, providing access to early childhood learning and child care where the market would otherwise fail to deliver. The cost to families for using these services is minimal as the Australian Government meets the majority of the costs involved in providing these services.

Types of non-mainstream services include:

- flexible/innovative services
- mobile child care services
- multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
- Indigenous playgroups
- Indigenous outside school hours care and enrichment programs, and
- crèches including Jobs, Education and Training (JET) crèches.

Schools

Interfaith and interschool cooperation

In June 2006, as part of a National Action Plan (NAP) to address interfaith and interschool cooperation, DEEWR finalised a research project: "Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education"⁴⁰. Key findings and recommendations of the report were used as a basis to establish a new values-based pilot program for social inclusion in school education in the second or implementation phase of the NAP.

In July 2006, the Australian Government announced a series of measures as part of the NAP. One of these was a place-based and whole-of-government pilot program entitled: "Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Understanding in School Settings" which will be implemented initially in two schools in New South Wales. Pilot programs aim to strengthen

⁴⁰ www.valueseducation.edu.au/values

interconnectedness between Islamic students, parents and community leaders from different SES backgrounds and belief systems.

An Even Start – National Tuition Program assists educationally disadvantaged students who need additional support to acquire satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills. In 2008, the program provides personalised literacy or numeracy assistance to students across all sectors who did not meet the 2007 national benchmarks in literacy or numeracy in Years 3, 5 and 7.

Tuition includes a pre- and post-tuition assessment. The pre-tuition assessment will help the tutor design an individual learning plan for the child. The post-tuition assessment, conducted in the final tuition session, will measure the child's progress.

State, Territory and sector education authorities administer the delivery of tuition services provided through schools in their jurisdictions. A private tuition coordinator is responsible for tutorial arrangements for eligible students where parents/caregivers choose to have tuition conducted by a private tutor. Parents/caregivers can choose school-based or non-school based private tuition for their eligible child.

Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY

Youth Allowance, Austudy and ABSTUDY payments provide significant assistance for students from low income and Indigenous backgrounds to participate in full-time education, training or apprenticeships. Indigenous students assisted by ABSTUDY are provided a fortnightly living allowance and additional components to help with the costs associated with attending school.

Digital Education Revolution

The Australian Government aims to provide sustainable and meaningful change to teaching and learning in Australian schools that will prepare students for further education, training and to live and work in a digital world. This is part of the Education Revolution to create a world-class education system for Australia. The Australian Government will work together with State and Territory Governments and non-government education systems to jointly implement this Revolution.

Every Australian student from Year 9 to Year 12 will have access to a computer, irrespective of whether they attend a government, non-government or independent school. This will ensure that no child misses out on the learning and career opportunities that computers can provide.

Initiatives under this investment include:

- support the deployment of fibre connections to Australian schools, delivering broadband speeds of up to 100 megabits per second
- supply students and teachers across Australia with online curriculum tools and resources for the classrooms of the 21st century
- online curriculum material, professional development for teachers and development of web portals for parents
- ICT equipment including computers, interactive whiteboards, data projectors, digital cameras, and

- technical frameworks, standards and a digital curriculum, ensuring that students and teachers have access to online curriculum resources and learning tools.

National curriculum

In 2007, through COAG, all Australian Governments committed to the development and implementation of a rigorous and world-class national curriculum from kindergarten to Year 12. The development of a continuum of learning in literacy and numeracy skills, ranging from basic competence in the early years through to the advancement and extension of these skills in the middle and later years of schooling, will be a foundation of the new national curriculum. It will be developed by 2010, and implemented by the States and Territories from 2011.

The Australian Government has established the National Curriculum Board which brings together nominees from each State and Territory and the non-government school sector to oversee the development of national curriculum. The Board will consult with the wider education community, including parents, teachers, principals and professional organisations, and will draw upon the considerable curriculum expertise in the States and Territories. The Board will draw upon existing exemplary curriculum materials from the States and Territories and other educationally high performing countries.

A national curriculum will bring many benefits. It will provide clear and explicit agreement on the curriculum essentials that all young Australians should have access to, regardless of their SES background or the location of their school. It will provide teachers and parents with a clear understanding of what needs to be covered in each subject and in each year level. The national curriculum will also facilitate teacher and student mobility across Australia and prevent curriculum inconsistency from being a major disincentive to the 340,000 Australians (including 80,000 school-aged students) who move interstate each year.

National Student Attendance Unit

The National Student Attendance Unit (NSAU) commenced a research project to develop a national picture of the extent of non-attendance and non-enrolment among compulsory school aged children. The project will also identify successful practice strategies for promoting school attendance and enrolment and recommend additional initiatives to address these issues.

In June 2008, DEEWR entered into a joint funding agreement with the West Australian Department of Education and Training to manage the implementation of a three-year Plan of Action which will address the high incidence of non-attendance among transient Indigenous students in the border regions of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

English as a Second Language – New Arrivals

The Australian Government continues to provide funding under the *English as a Second Language-New Arrivals (ESL-NA) Program* to enable newly-arrived school students from non-English speaking backgrounds to gain the English language skills they need to successfully participate in mainstream schooling and beyond. The Australian Government's 2007-08 Budget provided additional funding under the *ESL-NA Program* for refugee students in recognition of their pre-migration experiences and low levels of schooling. For newly

arrived students, particularly refugee students, intensive support to improve English language skills is one of the best ways to improve their educational outcomes and future employability so that they may participate more broadly in Australian society.

VET in Schools

VET in Schools programs contribute to lifelong learning by providing school students with access to wider alternatives in the post-compulsory years. It assists in improving Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by ensuring there are adequate choices available to those students who wish to pursue a vocational pathway.

The School Grants for On-the-Job Training initiative will enable VET students in Year 9 to Year 12 to access one day a week of on-the-job training for 20 weeks a year. This will provide real work experience and make graduating students more attractive to employers.

Youth Transitions programs

a) Local Community Partnerships

As part of the Career Advice Australia initiative, career and transition support services are facilitated by Local Community Partnerships for all young Australians aged 13–19 years. They are community based organisations which focus on helping young Australians gain relevant skills, experience and professional career guidance. Targeted strategies for students with special needs are provided, including for Indigenous young people: assessment of the cultural appropriateness of each intended workplace; engagement of the Indigenous community; intensive support for the students; and mentoring strategies that provide young Indigenous people with a role model.

Other strategies are also developed for students with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, or those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As there are vast distances between some regions across Australia, locally based service provision addresses some of the challenges associated with servicing remote areas and allows more young people to be reached.

b) Youth Pathways

For those young people most at risk of not attaining Year 12, Youth Pathways assists participants to overcome barriers to their effective engagement with education, training or work. Youth Pathways aims to reduce the number of young people who leave school early, and are not working or in education 12 months after leaving school. The primary focus of the initiative is to assist at-risk young people to make a successful transition through to the completion of Year 12, and ultimately to further education, training or employment and active participation in the community. The program achieves this by providing young people with intensive individual assistance and support. Providers are funded to support 25,500 young people each year in 100 regions across Australia.

Measures taken at the point of exit and at the medium-term destination point 12-18 months later show positive outcomes for participants:

- Of the participants in 2007 for whom an outcome was known after they had left Youth Pathways, almost 75% remained in or returned to school, approximately 11% were in other education or training, and around 7% were participating in other productive activities. Overall, for the 2007 cohort, upon exiting Youth Pathways, over 90% of those with a known outcome were actively engaged in some form of education, training or work.
- Longer term destinations for the 2006 cohort of participants (at 12–18 months afterwards) were measured through a sample survey. This showed that, of those who responded: almost 40% were still at school, 25% were in other forms of education or training, and 25% were in other productive activities. This shows that at the medium term destination point, over 90% of respondents were engaged in some form of productive activity.
- Since the implementation of the *Helping young people stay in education* initiative in 2007, 4,278 young people with mental health issues have been assisted through Youth Pathways.
- As at August 2008, 1,647 young people have been identified as having a possible mental health issue that was a barrier to their successful participation in education. Mental health issues have been identified as a potential barrier to successful participation in education, training or employment.

As a part of the Mental Health Initiatives implemented in Australia in January 2007, Youth Pathways service delivery was modified to incorporate a focus on identifying participants who may have a mental health issue and referring them to the appropriate assistance. Funding for this initiative was increased to support additional numbers of these young people, from 17,000 to a total of 25,500 places annually.

c) Connections program

The *Connections* program provides young people disconnected from mainstream schooling with another chance at learning, through flexible and accredited education and training options delivered in supported community settings. This helps these young people get back on track and reach their potential. *Connections* is available in 55 regions across Australia and helps up to 3,000 young people per year.

d) Other Youth transitions programs

The Career and Transition Support Services, Structured Workplace Learning, and Adopt a School programs facilitate hands-on learning experiences in a specific industry sector and provide targeted strategies for students with special needs. They include those with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, Indigenous students, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those at risk of leaving school early. This may involve working in collaboration with Local Community Partnerships, Youth Pathways and Connections providers and a range of other specialist service providers.

Schools-Business Linkages

The Australian Government is committed to improving partnerships between industry and education, and implementing innovative programs to prepare students to move successfully

from school to further education, training or work. Improving Schools-Business linkages will increase access to authentic, hands-on learning experiences, improve young people's understanding of career options and provide more transitions options for Indigenous students and students in low SES and regional areas. Improved schools-business linkages can assist in improving Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates and encourage wider participation by business and industry in building skills for the future and reducing educational disadvantage.

Higher Education

Improving equity in Higher Education

The Australian Government will implement measures to strengthen Australia's universities and other higher education institutions by undertaking reform, improving equity and by supporting students to study in areas of national priority.

To improve equity in higher education that will make it easier for all students from low-income families to go to university, the Australian Government will

- double the number of undergraduate Commonwealth Scholarships by 2012. This will give more young people from a low SES background the opportunity to participate in higher education
- halve the cost of HECS-HELP for those studying in key disciplines including early childhood education
- provide new places supported by the Australian Government by 2011 to replace full fee paying places. This will ensure that students have access to higher education on merit and not on their ability to pay.
- increase the number of postgraduate scholarships from 4,800 to around 10,000 by 2012.

Review of Higher Education

A Review of Australian Higher Education commissioned by the Australian Government is currently underway. *Underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity* is a key term of reference for this Review. The Australian Government has signalled that supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds will be a key objective of further reform. The Review will guide the development of higher education in the future to ensure this sector has the capacity to meet the needs of the Australian community and economy.

Achieving greater social inclusion through access and opportunity is a key objective for this Review.

The Terms of reference for the Review includes:

- Diverse, high performing institutions with a global focus: Developing a diverse, globally focused and competitive higher education sector with quality, responsive institutions following clear, distinctive missions to provide higher education opportunities to students throughout Australia.

- **Productivity and participation:** Enhancing the role of the higher education sector in contributing to national productivity, increased participation in the labour market and responding to the needs of industry. This includes the responsiveness of the sector in altering the course mix in response to student and employer demand and an understanding of trends in the economy, demography and the labour markets served by higher education.
- **Effective and efficient investment:** Improving funding arrangements for higher education institutions as they relate to teaching responsibilities, taking into account public and private benefits and contributions to inform the development of funding compacts between the Australian Government and institutions.
- **Underpinning social inclusion through access and opportunity:** Supporting and widening access to higher education, including participation by students from a wide range of backgrounds.
- **Enhanced quality and high standards:** Implementing arrangements to ensure that quality higher education is provided by public and private providers and that this is widely understood and recognised by clients of the higher education sector.
- **A broad tertiary education and training sector:** Establishing the place of higher education in the broader tertiary education sector, especially in building an integrated relationship with VET.
- **Policy linkages:** The review will collaborate with and take account of the work of the Review of the National Innovation System and Skills Australia. It will also consult with State and Territory tertiary education authorities.

Vocational Education and Training

VET FEE-HELP

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to increasing productivity and addressing skills shortages, the VET FEE-HELP loan scheme was introduced into the VET sector in 2008. VET FEE-HELP is an income contingent loan scheme that is part of the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP). It assists eligible, full fee-paying students to pay for all or part of their VET tuition fees when studying one or more of the following accredited VET courses of study with an approved VET provider:

- graduate certificate
- graduate diploma
- diploma, and
- advanced diploma.

For courses at the diploma and advanced diploma level, an approved VET credit transfer arrangement must be in place to a Bachelor degree with a higher education provider.

Applications for Registered Training Organisations to be approved as VET providers for their students to access VET FEE-HELP assistance commenced in July 2008. It is anticipated that students will be able to access VET FEE-HELP later in 2008.

National Disability Coordination Officer Program

At the beginning of 2008, the Australian Government implemented the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) program. This will target the barriers that people with disability face in gaining access to, and successfully completing, post-school education by creating a comprehensive network of National Disability Coordination Officers. These Officers work to build links between education, training and employment sectors, so that people with disability have access at all levels.

Training Initiatives for Indigenous Adults in Regional and Remote Communities

This program funds projects aimed at attracting, engaging and supporting Indigenous adults in regional and remote communities to take up training, as well as building the diversity and capacity of the training market in these communities.

Joint Indigenous Funding Pool

The 2005-08 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce established the Joint Indigenous Funding Pool which strategically targets funding to maximise education and training opportunities and improve outcomes for Indigenous students, particularly in regional and remote locations.

The Joint Indigenous Funding Pool (JIFP) is managed by States and Territories in line with the agreed implementation arrangements. This included running a competitive selection process against agreed national eligibility criteria to identify providers with proven track record in delivering successful training outcomes to Indigenous Australians.

Funding has been committed to train Indigenous students at the Certificate I to IV level in a range of industry areas including aged care, business, building and construction, information technology and conservation and land management.

5(d) Improving the quality of teaching and improving learning outcomes

Improving literacy and numeracy

The Australian Government will deliver a National Literacy and Numeracy Action Plan as part of its Social Inclusion Agenda. This Plan will be developed in partnership with schools, State and Territory Governments and non-government school systems. It will use results from the National Literacy and Numeracy Tests held in May 2008 and from international policies which have worked.

The Australian Government will provide funding for research to provide data to inform an evidence-based approach to literacy and numeracy programs and teacher professional development. The Australian Government has invited State and Territory Governments to propose pilot programs in disadvantaged school communities to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students.

The Australian Government will provide funding to ensure extra literacy and numeracy support is provided to schools and students most in need of help. This will reduce underperformance among disadvantaged schools and lead to overall improvements in reading, writing and numeracy outcomes.

Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs (LNSLN)

The LNSLN aims to improve literacy, numeracy and other learning outcomes for students who are educationally disadvantaged including students with disability. The program has three elements: Schools Grants, National Projects and non-government support centres. Schools Grants funding is distributed to government and non-government school authorities according to allocations which reflect the wide range of students who have special needs. The National Projects element supports projects aimed at improving the educational outcomes of educationally disadvantaged students including improved literacy and numeracy outcomes. The non-government support centres element assists children with disability who receive services provided by non-government centres.

Improving quality of teachers

It is well established that teacher quality is the single greatest in-school influence on student engagement and results. In addition evidence indicates that improving the quality of the teaching workforce is fundamental to any overall improvements in schooling.⁴¹

Research also demonstrates that one highly effective way to improve the quality of teaching is to increase the pool of potential teachers. This means improving pathways into teaching, improving recruitment and retention policies (which affect hiring, retention of quality teachers and removal of low performers) and linking pay and promotion more closely with teachers' performance.⁴²

⁴¹ Hanushek, E.A. Some Simple Analytics of School Quality, National Bureau of Economic Research, Massachusetts, 2004

⁴² Hanushek, E.A. & Rivkin, S. G. Pay, Working Conditions and Teacher Quality in The Future of Children, Vol.17, No. 1, Spring 2007.

National Partnership on Quality Teaching

Through COAG, Australian Governments are developing a National Partnership on Quality Teaching that will implement reforms designed to:

- raise the average level of performance overall, by improving pathways into teaching, for example by developing a new scheme to recruit high-achieving graduates into teaching in partnership with business
- support improvement in recruitment and retention policies (that affect hiring, retention of quality teachers and removal of low performers) and reward outstanding teacher performance, and
- allocate the right teachers and school leaders to the schools with high needs, by providing the right incentives and support.

National accreditation system for teacher education courses

In June 2008, MCEETYA agreed to progress the establishment of a national accreditation system for teacher education courses. An Australian Executives Systems Officials Committee working group is developing for endorsement:

- a national graduate and program standards that all teacher education courses would need to be designed against
- a proposal for governance, processes, accountability and quality assurance mechanisms, and
- a business case to support the proposed arrangements addressing commensurate resourcing, timetabling, effectiveness, and efficiency issues.

These initiatives aim to improve the quality of teaching graduates by promoting greater pre-service time in the classroom and implementing a more national approach to accreditation and standards.

Improving the Practical Component of Teacher Education

In 2008, the Australian Government introduced the *Improving the Practical Component of Teacher Education* (IPCTE) program. The program assists higher education providers with the costs associated with offering additional quality professional experience placements for their pre-service teacher education students.

Higher education providers can use their IPCTE program grant to improve the quality of professional experience in relation to any of the following:

- its management and organisation
- partnerships and relationships with schools and other professional placement settings
- the student experiences while on placement and the connections between school and campus based study
- providing support for students undertaking placements in rural and remote Australia, Indigenous communities or difficult to staff schools
- providing flexibility and support for students undertaking placements who have family, carer or employment commitments, and
- consulting State and Territory Governments and the non-government school sectors to align pre-service teacher education programs (including professional experience) with workforce planning needs.

Rewarding contribution to quality schooling

The Australian Government recognises and supports the work of teachers. A child's likely performance at school is affected by the quality of their classroom interactions with their peers and teachers.

The Australian Government provides funding in prizes to celebrate the Australian Government National Awards for Quality Schooling. These annual Awards recognise and reward teachers, principals, and support staff who make an exceptional contribution to their school community and outcomes for students. The Awards help to build a better understanding and greater appreciation in the wider community of the work done in Australian schools, and are a way of sharing good ideas and practice among school communities across the country.

In addition, the Australian Government will provide funding for research to identify the best ways to reward quality teaching.

Indigenous education

The Australian Government has committed to providing an additional 200 teachers in the Northern Territory to assist in the education of up to 2,000 students of compulsory school age who may not have been enrolled in schools in the 73 prescribed communities subject to the NTER.

Prior to their deployment in remote communities these teachers undergo a comprehensive preparation program during which they will undertake seven units at a Graduate Certificate level across a number of qualifications as pre-service training.

The Australian Government will also establish a Quality Teaching Package focusing on developing and training local Indigenous teaching staff who are more likely to stay in remote locations over the longer term.

The Australian Government is also providing professional development support to teachers in the Northern Territory as part of the NTER. It will promote the use of accelerated literacy and Standard Australian English approaches and develop and sustain a workforce of high-performing school leaders and quality teachers in the communities. This emphasises on developing the local Indigenous education workforce. This will assist Indigenous school-aged children to achieve critical foundation skills in literacy and numeracy.

As part of the 2008-09 Budget, the Australian Government committed to provide assistance to teachers to enable them to develop Individual Learning Plans, which identify individual learning needs for every Indigenous school student up until Year 10. These Individual Learning Plans will be prepared and maintained by teachers who will receive professional development materials both in hard copy and on-line to assist them with the development of these Plans.

Helping children with autism

In response to the increasing number of children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Australia, the Australian Government is providing additional targeted support for

these children, their parents, carers, teachers and other professionals through the *Helping children with autism* package. The package is being implemented through the Departments of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Health and Ageing and DEEWR over 2007-08 to 2011-12. The package recognises the importance of diagnosis and early intervention treatments and services for children with ASD, along with the need for positive partnerships between their families and schools.

The two initiatives being delivered through DEEWR are:

- professional development for teachers and other school staff who are working with students with ASD to increase their understanding, skills and expertise in working with those students and
- workshops and information sessions for parents and carers of school aged children with ASD to assist them to develop productive partnerships with their school teachers and school leaders

Equipping Teachers for the Digital Age

Australian teachers are given opportunities to increase their proficiencies in using ICT in teaching and learning through a range of professional development activities funded by the Australian Government.

Under the National Secondary School Computer Fund, the Australian Government is working with universities and educators to ensure teachers are well equipped to use computers as a learning tool.

Reframing the Future

Reframing the Future is a major workforce development initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments. It provides a professional learning framework for educational change, staff learning and organisational capability building in VET and complements other staff development programs provided by State/Territory bodies, other agencies and RTOs. It assists VET practitioners to become highly skilled and VET organisations to become high performing with participating organisations and industries making matching contributions to individual projects.

The program has been in operation since 1997, is largely submission based, and currently provides funding for approximately 200 projects per year involving VET teachers, trainers, assessors and managers across public, private and enterprise RTOs and industry bodies.

Reframing the Future requires that funded projects develop project action plans linked to both national training system priorities and the host organisation's strategic goals. Projects are work-based and are underpinned by relevant adult learning theory, action learning and action research methodologies, and by learning organisation and communities of practice theory and practice, where relevant.

Education Investment Fund

As part of the Australian Government's *Education Revolution*, an Education Investment Fund (EIF) has been established to support capital expenditure and renewal and refurbishment in universities and vocational institutions as well as in research facilities and major research

institutions. This is a substantial investment in our educational institutions in the coming years, transforming the capacity of these sectors to educate and train Australians.

Early Childhood

The Australian Government will fund 500 additional early childhood higher education places in each year from 2009 to 2011. This will help support the Government's commitment to ensure children have access to high-quality pre-primary education and will benefit students preparing for a career in early childhood education.

Improving career development and options

Scholarships for school, TAFE and university career advisers are awarded under the Career Advice Australia initiative, and aim to improve the standard of career advice provided to young people and the standing of career advisers.

Australia's national online career information and exploration service, *myfuture.edu.au*, is used by teachers, career advisers, parents and others who help people, including students, to plan their career. It contains useful information on occupations, courses, training providers, industries, the local and national labour market, scholarships and more. *myfuture.edu.au* is accessible on the internet at www.myfuture.edu.au and is available to all Australians. It is a joint initiative between the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

The Australian Government produces a range of quality career and information tools for teachers and young people that contribute to quality decisions about their future.