



# World Data on Education Données mondiales de l'éducation Datos Mundiales de Educación

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# Australia

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## Principles and general objectives of education

The Commonwealth of 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. The Australian Constitution vests control of education in the states and territories. Education legislation and practice in Australia are essentially based on the principle of equality of access to all levels of education.

In April 1999 the State, Territory and Federal Ministers of Education, meeting in Adelaide, endorsed new *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century*. The Adelaide Declaration reflected a commitment by governments at all levels to set public policies that: foster the pursuit of excellence; enable a diverse range of educational choices and aspirations; safeguard the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling; promote the economic use of public resources; and uphold the contribution of schooling to a socially cohesive and culturally rich society. The national goals focused on improving the educational outcomes of all students, reflecting the right of all young Australians to aspire to success in learning, and to have the knowledge, skills and understanding essential to their effective participation in Australian civic life. (Commonwealth Department of Education, 2001).

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, that supersedes the Adelaide Declaration, was adopted by all the Education Ministers in December 2008. Acknowledging major changes in the world that are placing new demands on Australian education, the Melbourne Declaration recalls that as a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society—a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future. In the 21st century Australia's capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation. Education equips young people with the knowledge, understanding, skills and values to take advantage of opportunity and to face the challenges of this era with confidence. Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and well-being of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. Schools share this responsibility with students, parents, carers, families, the community, business and other education and training providers. Improving educational outcomes for all young Australians is central to the nation's social and economic prosperity and will position young people to live fulfilling, productive and responsible lives. The two goals of the Melbourne Declaration are: (i) Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and (ii) all young Australian become: successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. (MCEETYA, December 2008).

Goal 2 is further described as follows. As successful learners, students:

- develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning;
- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas;
- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines;
- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines;
- are able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas;
- are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are;
- are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives;
- are motivated to reach their full potential.

As confident and creative individuals, students:

- have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well-being;
- have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future—are enterprising, show initiative and use their creative abilities;
- develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others;
- have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lives;
- have the confidence and capability to pursue university or post-secondary vocational qualifications leading to rewarding and productive employment;
- relate well to others and form and maintain healthy relationships;
- are well prepared for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members;
- embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions.

As active and informed citizens, students:

- act with moral and ethical integrity
- appreciate Australia's social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and have an understanding of Australia's system of government, history and culture;
- understand and acknowledge the value of indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians;
- are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life;



- are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia;
- work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments;
- are responsible global and local citizens. (*Ibid.*).

## Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

State governments have their own **Education Acts** to make provision for education. These were mostly initiated in the 1870-1880 period, the commencement of compulsory education. The Federal government has some constitutional capacity to influence education policy through specific sections in legislation relating to tied grants and benefits to students, as well as through the external affairs power which enables the Federal government to enter into agreements with other countries.

The Federal government, in cooperation with State and Territory governments, has played an increasing role in promoting equity and an education that reflects the government's social justice commitments. Some value perspectives within schooling, including the curriculum, are supported by legislation. In particular, the **Racial Discrimination Act** (1975), the **Sex Discrimination Act** (1984), the **Affirmative Action Act** (1986) and the **Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act** (1986) protect the rights of all Australians against unfair treatment on the basis of sex, race, marital status, pregnancy and family and career responsibilities. Recent amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act extend the sexual harassment provisions to outlaw sexual harassment of students and staff by adult students in education institutions. Provisions against sexual harassment by staff already existed under the Act.

The objective of the **Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) Education Standards**, amended in 2005, 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.

In December 2003, the Australian Parliament passed the **Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)**, designed to give effect to a higher education reform package, *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Universities Future*. The reform package is based on an integrated policy framework incorporating four foundation principles of sustainability, quality, equity and diversity.

The **Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004** detail conditions of financial assistance for government and non-government schools.

The **Skills Australia Act 2008** provides for the establishment of an independent statutory body (e.g. Skills Australia) whose primary function is to



provide advice to the Minister on Australia's current, emerging and future workforce skills needs and workforce development needs.

The **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Act No. 136** of 2008 provides for the establishment of ACARA as an independent authority responsible for the development of a national curriculum, a national assessment programme and a national data collection and reporting programme.

The **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Bill 2011** and **TEQSA (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provision) Bill 2011** will establish TEQSA and provide for the transition to the new higher education regulatory and quality arrangements. It is expected that TEQSA will be established in July 2011 as a quality assurance agency and will commence its regulatory functions from January 2012. TEQSA will join together the regulatory activity currently undertaken in the States and Territories with the quality assurance activities currently undertaken by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). This will reduce the number of federal, state and territory regulatory and quality assurance bodies from nine to one.

Legislation to establish a national regulator for the vocational education and training (VET) sector, e.g. the **National Vocational Education and Training Regulator (Transitional Provisions) Bill 2010 [2011]**, was passed by the Senate on 23 March 2011 and by the House of Representatives on 24 March 2011. This legislation is supported by a referral of powers from the states. The new regulator will operate as the Australian Skills Quality Authority from July 2011.

The **Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)** is a quality assured national framework of qualifications in the school, VET, and higher education sectors. It is a structure of recognized and endorsed qualifications that promotes lifelong learning and provides pathways through Australia's education and training system. The AQF is a key national policy instrument to protect the quality of Australian education and training wherever it is delivered. Following approval of the (revised) AQF by the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) in March 2011, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) endorsed the AQF in April 2011 with minor amendments to the descriptor, specification and title for the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. The AQF was introduced Australia-wide in January 1995 and was phased in over five years, with full implementation by the year 2000. It was developed through agreement by the State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers meeting as the (former) Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). MCEETYA established an AQF Advisory Board to protect the AQF qualifications guidelines and to promote and monitor national implementation of the AQF. In May 2008, MCEETYA agreed to replace the AQF Advisory Board with the Australian Qualifications Framework Council to provide Education and Training Ministers with strategic and authoritative advice on the AQF to ensure it is nationally and internationally robust and supports flexible cross-sector linkages and pathways. In July 2009, the MCTEE was established with responsibility for the AQF.



The **National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care** ('National Quality Framework') is expected to come into effect from 1 January 2012. The new framework will be underpinned by the National Law and National Regulations. Together they will set a new National Quality Standard and a regulatory framework for long day care, family day care, preschool (kindergarten in some jurisdictions) and outside school hours care services in all States and Territories. The **Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010** was passed by the Victoria Parliament on 5 October 2010 and the **Children's (Education and Care Services National Law Application) Act 2010** was passed by the New South Wales Parliament on 23 November 2010. The Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (Victoria) was developed by all jurisdictions and enacted by the Victorian Parliament as the host jurisdiction. The National Law, which is a schedule to the Victorian Act, can be adopted by the Parliaments of other States and Territories by reference to the Victorian legislation, except in Western Australia, where it will be adopted by corresponding legislation. (ECD Working Group, 2010). The Australian Capital Territory introduced the Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Bill 2011 in April 2011.

The age at which children may attend school is the subject of separate legislation within each jurisdiction. In 2010, the age at which a child's attendance at school becomes compulsory was 6 years for all states and territories except Tasmania, where it was 5 years. In practice, the majority of children start earlier, with minimum starting ages restricting enrolment to children aged between four and a half to five years at the beginning of the (pre-year 1) school year. The National Youth Participation Requirement describes the changes that have come into effect from 1 January 2010 for each state and territory. All States and Territories will implement the National Youth Participation Requirement which includes: (i) a mandatory requirement for all young people to participate in schooling (meaning in school or an approved equivalent) until they complete Year 10; and (ii) a mandatory requirement for all young people that have completed Year 10, to participate full-time (defined as at least 25 hours per week) in education, training or employment, or a combination of these activities, until age 17. For the purpose of the National Youth Participation Requirement, education or training will be considered full-time if the provider considers the course to be full-time or if it includes 25 hours per week of formal course requirements. (ABS, 2011). In 2009, children were required to be at school (or undertaking the school curriculum in the case of home schooling) until: reaching 15 years of age in NSW, NT and the ACT; reaching 16 years of age in VIC, SA and TAS; reaching 16 years of age or completing year 10 (QLD); the end of the year in which students turn 17 (WA). From January 2009, students in South Australia are required to be in full-time education or training until the age of 17, or until they gain a qualification (whichever comes first); this is different from the compulsory school age which stays at 16. From January 2010 students in Victoria will be required to attend school until the age of 17; students in the ACT will be required to remain in education until achieving Year 10 and then will be required to participate in full-time education, training or employment until completing Year 12 or equivalent, or reaching age 17, whichever occurs first. (ABS, 2010).



## Administration and management of the education system

A key national body is the **Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs** (MCEECDYA, previously the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs—MCEETYA). Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers meet at least once each year to consider issues of mutual interest and to coordinate collaborative activity. The MCEETYA had replaced the former Australian Education Council at the beginning of 1994. As a result of a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) decision on 30 April 2009, MCEETYA was replaced by MCEECDYA in July 2009. This decision also resulted in the formation of another new Council—the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment. 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.

Membership of the MCEECDYA comprises State, Territory, Australian Government and New Zealand Ministers with responsibility for the portfolios of school education, early childhood development and youth affairs, with Papua New Guinea, Norfolk Island and East Timor having observer status. The areas of responsibility covered by the Council are: primary and secondary education; youth affairs and youth policy relating to schooling; cross-sectoral matters including transitions and careers; early childhood development including early childhood education and care; and international education (school education).

MCEECDYA is supported by a group of senior officials who meet regularly as the **Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee** (AEEYSOC). The Council is also supported by a number of taskforces and working groups convened as needed for particular tasks. These taskforces have prescribed timeframes and reporting arrangements and are reviewed annually by AEEYSOC. The MCEECDYA also regularly consults with peak national agencies, such as the **National Catholic Education Commission** (NCEC), the **Australian Council of State Schools' Organizations** (ACSSO), the **Independent Schools Council of Australia** (ISCA), the **Australian Parents' Council Inc.** (APC), and the **Australia Education Union** (AEU) among others.

Related to the Ministerial Council, although separately constituted, were two national research and development companies receiving funding from Commonwealth and state/territory ministers for education. Both facilitate and manage cooperative initiatives in school education: the **Australian Council for Educational Research** (ACER), founded in 1930; and the former Curriculum Corporation, which commenced operation in 1990 in terms of the AEC agreement of April 1989 to work cooperatively in curriculum development. The Curriculum Corporation has been merged into Education Services Australia established in 2010 (see below).

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) had been established in 1992 by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Heads of Government as a national planning, funding and coordination body to consolidate a national vocational



education and training (VET) system. The establishment of ANTA was a significant development in the progress towards such a system. From July 2005, the responsibilities and functions of the ANTA were transferred to the former DEST. As a result of a COAG decision on 30 April 2009, the new **Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment** (MCTEE) replaced the former Ministerial Council for Vocational and Technical Education. MCTEE is the key decision-making body and has overall responsibility for the national tertiary education and employment system. The MCTEE has responsibility for: higher education; VET; international education (non school); adult and community education; the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF); employment; and youth policy relating to participation in tertiary education, work and workforce productivity. Membership of MCTEE comprises Commonwealth, State and Territory Ministers with responsibility for tertiary education and employment.

The MCTEE is also supported by (until recently) two ministerial companies providing advice and services to the Commonwealth, States and Territories ministries responsible for training. The **National Centre for Vocational Education Research** (NCVER) is a professional and independent body responsible for collecting, managing, analyzing, evaluating and communicating research and statistics about VET nationally. NCVER's vision is to contribute to improvement in Australia's education and training system by ensuring that policy and practice are based on sound evidence. Its mission is to be Australia's leading provider of high-quality, independent information on vocational education and training to governments, the education sector, industry, and the community. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Australia Ltd., established in 2006, was the other company supporting MCTEE. In the context of both a wider review of advisory structures and support mechanisms for Australian vocational and tertiary education, and the creation of new national regulatory arrangements, in 2011 MCTEE decided to wind up the ministerial company model for TVET Australia and to transition to alternative arrangements. In 2011 the **National Standards Council** (NSC) is expected to assume the functions of the National Quality Council (NQC) as part of a broader standard-setting remit. The NQC is a Committee of the MCTEE and oversees quality assurance and ensures national consistency in the application of the Australian Quality Training Framework standards for the audit and registration of training providers.

**Skills Australia** is an independent statutory body established on the basis of the Skills Australia Act of 2008 with the objective of providing for expert and independent advice in relation to Australia's workforce skills needs and workforce development needs, in order to: identify training priorities to respond to those needs; increase workforce participation; improve productivity and competitiveness; identify and address skills shortages; and promote the development of a highly skilled workforce.

The Federal government has no direct role in the administration of school education. It does, however, have an important role in cooperation with both state/territory and non-government school authorities, in identifying national priorities, and developing strategies that will enable successful implementation of agreed programmes. The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) used to support the government's commitment to shaping a better future for all Australians through learning, science and innovation. The **Department**





**of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations** (DEEWR) was created in December 2007, bringing together elements of the former departments of Education, Science and Training; Employment and Workplace Relations; and the youth and early childhood functions from the Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

The DEEWR is the lead government agency providing national leadership in education and workplace training, transition to work and conditions and values in the workplace. It works in collaboration with the states and territories and has offices and agencies throughout Australia and overseas allowing an active, national and client-focused approach. The DEEWR has the following objectives: (i) to educate and build socially inclusive communities where all Australians have the opportunity to reach their full potential and to actively participate in a rewarding economic and social life; (ii) to build and promote individual development through equitable and accessible education from early childhood services to skills training and higher education; (iii) to increase workforce participation and promote fair and productive work practices; (iv) to develop national economic potential and capability that builds future economic prosperity and international competitiveness through skills development and employment growth; (v) to actively engage with clients and stakeholders to ensure services, advice and resources respond to the needs of these groups; and (vi) to look for efficiencies and innovative, targeted and effective solutions in developing national economic potential.

The Commonwealth has responsibilities for the provision of financial assistance to students and for Australia's international relations in education, and has a shared responsibility for schooling in external territories. States and territories have the primary responsibility for funding state government schools. They also provide supplementary assistance to non-government schools. The Australian Government is the primary source of public funding for non-government schools, while also providing supplementary assistance to government schools. Most non-government schools have some religious affiliation, with approximately two-thirds of non-government school students enrolled in Catholic schools. Each state and territory determines policies and practices through its Minister, the **Department of Education and Training** (the name can vary depending on the state/territory) and the delegated responsibility given to individual schools on matters such as curriculum, student assessment, teacher employment and professional development, as well as resource allocation and guidelines for its use. A summary of the respective roles and responsibilities of the Australian and State/Territory governments is shown below:

### **Roles and responsibilities in the Australian education system**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Policy</b>	<b>Government funding</b>	<b>Admin. &amp; delivery</b>
Early childhood	Shared	Mainly States / Territories	States/Territories, non-government school authorities, community, etc.
Schools: Government	Shared	Mainly States / Territories (85-90%)	States/Territories
Non-government	Shared	Mainly Australian government (85-90%)	Non-governmental schools authorities
VET	Shared	Mainly States / Territories	Mainly States / Territories
Higher education	Shared	Mainly Australian government (56%)	Autonomous universities (within agreed policy framework)

*Source:* DEEWR, 2008.

Generally, States and Territories announce their priorities for schooling each year in the context of a strategic plan or similar documents. These priorities become the key elements in system-wide planning, and guide schools, district or regional offices and the central office of the Department directorates in their annual planning, application of budgets and in the monitoring of programmes. This direction is usually paralleled and given a special flavour by the authorities administering non-government schooling. Common themes of change management, accountability, quality improvement, and learning outcomes infuse all educational priority statements. However, as with many aspects of schooling and its administration, states and territories vary in the emphasis given to particular expressions of priorities.

The **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy** (AEP), agreed to by all State and Territory governments in 1989 and reaffirmed in 1995, formed the foundation of all indigenous education programmes. The AEP includes 21 long-term national goals to achieve equity in education, organized under four long-term major goals: (i) involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision-making; (ii) equality of access to educational services; (iii) equity of educational participation; and (iv) equitable and appropriate educational outcomes. 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: (a) within five years all indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities will be able to access a quality early childhood centre or opportunity; (b) within a decade the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy benchmark achievement will be halved; and (c) by 2020 the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in the attainment of Year 12, or its vocational equivalent, will be halved.



The National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership was established in 2004 and complements arrangements to support and strengthen teaching and school leadership already in place in various State and Territory government and non-government education authorities. The **Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership** (AITSL) has been established on 1 January 2010 to provide national leadership for Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. The Institute's role is to: develop and maintain rigorous national professional standards for teaching and school leadership; implement an agreed system of national accreditation of teachers based on these standards; foster and drive high quality professional development for teachers and school leaders through professional standards, professional learning and a national approach to the accreditation of pre-service teacher education courses; undertake and engage with international research and innovative developments in best practice; administer annual national awards for teachers and school leaders; work collaboratively with government and non-government school systems, key stakeholders including professional associations and education unions, teacher educators, business and school communities, and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and Education Services Australia (ESA). The National Professional Standards for Teachers were finalised by the AITSL and endorsed by MCEECDYA in late December 2010. The Standards make explicit what teachers should know and be able to do across four career stages (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher) and across the three domains of professional knowledge, practice and engagement.

The **Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority** (ACARA) has been established in 2008 as an independent authority. ACARA is responsible for: a national curriculum from kindergarten (or foundation) to year 12 in specified learning areas; a national assessment programme aligned to the national curriculum that measures students' progress; and a national data collection and reporting programme that supports analysis, evaluation, research and resource allocation as well as accountability and reporting on schools and broader national achievement.

The **Australian Universities Quality Agency** (AUQA) was established by the former MCEETYA in March 2000 an independent, not-for-profit national agency that promotes, audits, and reports on quality assurance in Australian higher education. It is the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education (in principle until the beginning of 2012, see below) with the responsibility of providing public assurance of the quality of Australia's universities and other institutions of higher education, and assisting in enhancing the academic quality of these institutions.

In December 2008, the *Bradley Review of Higher Education* recommended that an independent, national regulatory body be responsible for regulating all types of tertiary education. Following the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Bill 2011 and its amendments, it is expected that the **Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency** (TEQSA) will be established in July 2011 as a quality assurance agency and will commence its regulatory functions from January 2012. TEQSA will join together the regulatory activity currently undertaken in the States and Territories with the quality assurance activities currently undertaken by the AUQA. This will reduce the number of federal, state and territory regulatory and



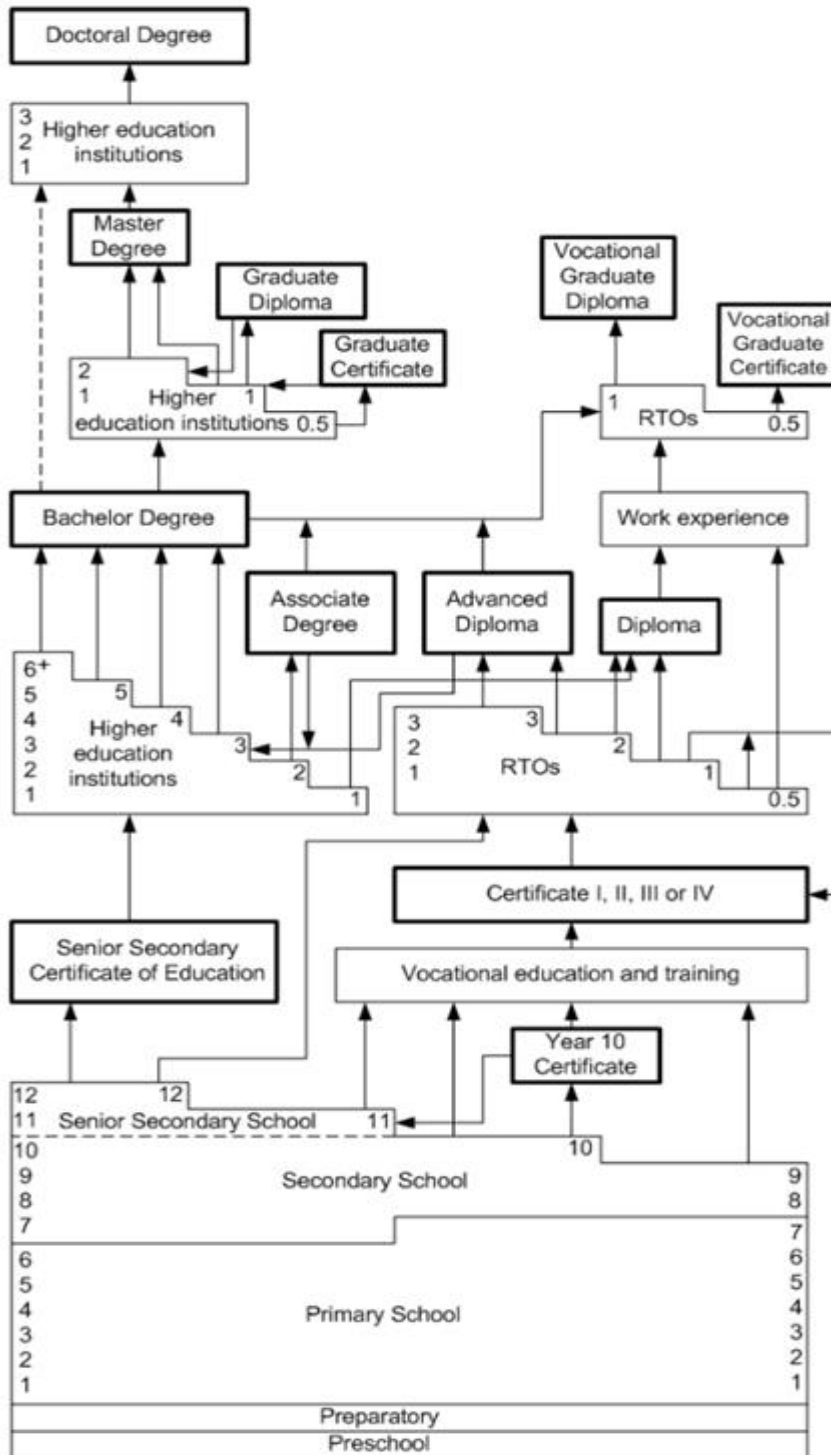
quality assurance bodies from nine to one. TEQSA will strengthen and enhance the quality of higher education in Australia by: providing for national consistency in the regulation of higher education; regulating higher education using a standards-based framework and principles relating to regulatory necessity, risk and proportionality; protecting and enhancing Australia's reputation for quality higher education and training services, Australia's international competitiveness in the higher education sector, and excellence, diversity and innovation in higher education in Australia; encouraging and promoting a higher education system that meets Australia's social and economic needs for a highly educated and skilled population; protecting students undertaking, or proposing to undertake, higher education in Australia by requiring the provision of quality higher education; and ensuring students undertaking or proposing to undertake higher education have access to information relating to higher education in Australia.

**Education Services Australia** was established in 2010 (through the merger of Curriculum Corporation and Education.au) as a national, not-for-profit company owned by all Australian education ministers. The main function of the company is to support delivery of national priorities and initiatives in the schools, training and higher education sectors, in particular to: (i) advance key nationally-agreed education initiatives, programmes and projects by providing services such as devising, developing and delivering curriculum and assessment, professional development, career and information support services; and (ii) create, publish, disseminate and market curriculum and assessment materials, ICT-based solutions, products and services to support learning, teaching, leadership and administration.

In all Australian states, there has been a significant devolution of responsibilities to the individual schools from the central department. Schools generally now have more scope for initiative in many significant areas: internal and class organization; student admission; teaching approaches; methods of assessment; discipline; community relations; etc. Many of the previous mechanisms adopted at the state level for the control and supervision of schools have been dismantled, to be replaced by much less intrusive quality control measures. Professional teacher associations and parent associations have direct influence in the implementation and administration of learning and teaching in schools.

## Structure and organization of the education system

### Australia: structure of the education system



Source: Australia Education International, 2008.

### Australia: structure of primary and secondary schooling by state

School year level	State/Territory		
	NSW, VIC, TAS, ACT NT	SA	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 (NWS, ACT, NT); kindergarten (VIC, TAS)	Preschool	Kindergarten (WA) Preparatory (QLD)

Sources: DEEWR, 2008; ABS, 2010.

Note: (\*) Non compulsory, excluding Tasmania for pre-year 1. NSW: New South Wales; VIC: Victoria; TAS: Tasmania; ACT: Australian Capital Territory; SA: South Australia; NT: Northern Territory; QLD: Queensland; WA: Western Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that the structure of schooling in the NT changed in 2008 with Year 7 now considered part of secondary education (previously it was the last year of primary education). (ABS, 2010).

### Pre-school education

In most states and territories, early childhood education (generally called preschool or kindergarten), is not compulsory and is offered in a range of settings, e.g. government and non-government schools, community-based preschools, community-based childcare centres and private-for-profit childcare centres. Government preschools are often integrated or associated with the school system. 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. School starting ages vary from state to state, but children usually participate in preschool from the age of three and a half or 4. School education begins with a preparatory year (or foundation in terms of the Australian curriculum) before Year 1 for five-year-olds. It is known as kindergarten (in NSW and the ACT), reception (in SA), pre-primary (in WA), transition (in the NT), or preparatory (in VIC, QLD and TAS). The preparatory year is not compulsory but enrolment is almost universal.

### Primary education

Primary education is from Year 1 to Year 6 or 7, depending upon the state/territory in which children live. All government primary schools and the great majority of non-government primary schools are co-educational. There are no standard examination requirements for progression through primary school, and no formal certificates are awarded. Students progress to secondary school on the basis of having completed the



final year of primary school and on the recommendations of teachers in consultation with parents. All students are accepted into secondary school without further examinations.

## Secondary and post-secondary education

The length of secondary education varies, being either five or six years depending on the state/territory concerned. Most government secondary schools are co-educational, but within the private sector there are a significant number of single-sex schools and colleges. Secondary (or high) school is from Year 7 or 8 to Year 10. Typically the first one or two years of secondary school cover a general programme undertaken by all students. In later years students take a core group of subjects and electives. Senior secondary school (or college) covers Years 11 and 12. Senior secondary education offers a range of programmes which prepare students for future study, employment, and adult life. The Senior Certificate of Education (or a different name, depending on the state/territory concerned) is awarded after successful completion of the final two years of secondary education. Depending on their chosen career path, senior secondary students can also study vocational subjects towards Certificates 1-4 (qualifications located at levels 1-4 of the Australian Qualifications Framework–AQF), and go on to a vocational education and training (VET) institution to gain further specific industry skills and knowledge. Some schools also issue or give credit towards Certificates 1-4 (the majority of school programmes are at Certificate 1 and 2 levels). VET institutions award certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas. Diplomas and advanced diplomas are also awarded by universities; most of them, however, are issued in the vocational education and training sector. Some VET institutions have agreements with certain universities that give students with diplomas and advanced diplomas credit towards bachelor's degrees. The number of credits received depends on the subjects covered in the course and the agreements in force. Typically, Certificate 1 takes six months to one year to complete; Certificate 2 takes six months to one year; Certificate 3 takes one/two years or longer; and Certificate 4 takes six months to two years.

## Higher education

After Certificate 4, higher professional education institutes as well as some universities offer programmes lasting one to two years and leading to the award of a diploma (level 5 of the AQF) or an advanced diploma after one and a half to two years of study (level 6 of the AQF). Universities and other higher education institutions also offer two-year programmes leading to an associate degree (level 6 of the AQF) that can be part of a pathway leading to a bachelor's degree. The most common qualification awarded by universities and other higher education institutions (higher professional education institutes) is the bachelor's degree (qualifications located at level 7 of the AQF), requiring a minimum of three years of study (normally four years in the case of law, engineering, agriculture, and social work; five years in the case of architecture, veterinary science, and dentistry; six years in the case of medical degrees, i.e. MB BS). A bachelor's degree with honours (level 8 of AQF) takes an additional year after the bachelor's. Honours may also be granted where outstanding achievement is recorded in a bachelor's degree course of four or more years. Universities also offer combined bachelor's degrees programmes (e.g. covering two subject areas), normally lasting five years. Students can also pursue graduate and



vocational graduate certificates (typically taking six months to one year) and graduate and vocational graduate diplomas (typically taking one to two years) for developing vocational knowledge and skills in a new professional area; these qualifications are located at level 8 of the AQF. A master's degree (level 9 of the AQF) takes either a minimum of one year after a bachelor's degree with honours or a minimum of two years after a bachelor's degree. The length of a doctoral degree (level 10 of the AQF) may vary considerably, but typically requires three to four years of study and research.

All states and territories other than Tasmania normally provide a four-term school year. The first term commences at the end of January and the year generally ends between 13 and 20 December. Tasmania has a three-term arrangement with a later starting date, often up to mid-February, and an end date of around 20 December. The number of school days can vary from year to year and varies from state to state, with the general range being 200 to 209 days per year. Higher professional education institutes and universities operate on a semester system, with opening times determined by their governing authorities, the general view being that a set of reasonably common dates across Australia is advantageous.

## The educational process

Prior to the establishment (2008) of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) responsible for the development of a national curriculum from kindergarten (or foundation) to year 12 in specified learning areas, constitutional responsibility for curriculum matters rested solely with individual State and Territory governments, within the framework of nationally agreed policies and directions as well as government legislation in relation to equity matters and Federal government funding policy in relation to strategic initiatives. The description below applies to curriculum policies preceding the process of implementation of the national curriculum.

Within each State and Territory, Ministers, departments, statutory authorities and individual schools determine policies and practices about curriculum. In some States and Territories decision-making in relation to curriculum matters is the direct responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Education Department, while in others that responsibility resides with the Minister through a statutory body such as a Board of Studies or Curriculum Council. The freedom to select, interpret and devise the day-to-day curriculum varies from State to State within certain mandated requirements relating to learning outcomes and the needs of particular groups of learners. While all States and Territories have adopted an outcomes-based framework approach to curriculum planning and delivery, approaches to choice of content vary. In some States teachers select content using illustrative support material as a guide, while in others the process is more prescriptive, selection being based on broad syllabi that set out descriptions of content for teachers to follow. At post-compulsory level, the senior secondary curriculum leading up to the Year 12 certificate is highly centralized under boards of studies responsible for curriculum and assessment. In most cases, a mixture of central and school-based assessments is required based on prescribed courses. The training sector uses a competency-based curriculum, some of which is being taken up in senior secondary schooling.



All States and Territories have authorities whose responsibilities include course accreditation, course advice and student assessment. Some of these authorities focus on the senior secondary years only, while others are responsible for syllabus and course advice from primary through to senior secondary. In general, school education is very much based on a learner-centred approach to curriculum development and pedagogy. One of the key principles underpinning the frameworks that have been developed in recent years is a commitment to ensure that teaching and learning programmes reflect the diversity of students' needs and interests, while at the same time ensuring that common and agreed learning outcomes are able to be achieved. Some schools may choose to take on a specific curriculum focus such as aquaculture, environmental education, languages other than English, learning technologies, music, sport, or visual and performing arts, acting as a model of professional practice at either a local network or State level. In such cases, schools would typically be required to undergo a selection process to achieve this status. In terms of co-curricular or extra curriculum offerings, activities ranging from various sports to music, debating or chess are available at most schools. At all levels, including senior secondary, camps and excursions based on aspects of the curriculum are also offered as optional extras. Parental permission is required for student involvement in such activities. Many non-governmental schools are denominational and, as such, provide religious education as part of their curricular programme.

At the national level, decision-making in relation to curriculum matters is supported by research undertaken on behalf of Ministers through agencies such as the Australian Research Council, universities and associated research centres. Federal, State and Territory governments responsible for education also commission research that is undertaken within their own jurisdictions either collectively or on an individual basis. As part of an ongoing commitment to quality improvement and accountability, education systems conduct regular reviews of their curriculum and assessment processes. A key feature of curriculum development and renewal in the Australian context is the support given to classroom-based research and associated teacher professional development. As part of professional development programmes, schools and teachers are supported to undertake research based on the specific needs and interests of their students and the local school community. The outcomes of such research are typically disseminated to other schools through professional networks and may be used to inform system-wide curriculum development. Often such programmes are run in conjunction with, or contracted out to, teacher professional associations.

The *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (released in 1999 and updated/superseded by the *Melbourne Declaration* in 2008), stated that, in terms of curriculum, students should have:

- attained high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding through a comprehensive and balanced curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling encompassing the agreed eight key learning areas, namely: the arts; English; health and physical education; languages other than English; mathematics; science; studies of society and environment; technology; and the interrelationships between them;



- attained the skills of numeracy and English literacy; such that, every student should be numerate, able to read, write, spell and communicate at an appropriate level;
- participated in programmes of vocational learning during the compulsory years and have had access to vocational education and training programs as part of their senior secondary studies;
- participated in programmes and activities which foster and develop enterprise skills, including those skills which will allow them maximum flexibility and adaptability in the future.

The National Goals have provided a common and agreed framework for the development of outcomes-based curriculum in the compulsory years of schooling. Following on from the development of national statements and profiles in the early 1990s, most states and territories have revised their curriculum frameworks. For example, Victoria released its revised Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF II) in 2000, following a review of the original 1995 framework which was based on the National Statements and Profiles work of the early 1990s. South Australia was implementing in 2001 its new South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework, which included the mandated requirements for learning from birth to Year 12. New South Wales reworked many of its primary syllabi and published in March 2002 a K-10 Curriculum Framework as part of an overall review of the curriculum. The Northern Territory also released a new curriculum framework identifying learning outcomes from Transition to Year 10. Queensland worked on the redevelopment of its Years 1 to 10 curricula and released a number of new syllabi. Tasmania launched the process of redefining its curriculum from birth to the end of the compulsory years of schooling through a five-year Curriculum Consultation (2002-2005). Australian Capital Territory finalized in 2007 the process of developing its first curriculum framework P-10, agreed to by all sectors. Furthermore, in 2003 the National Statements of Learning in English, mathematics, science and civics and citizenship, were embedded in every jurisdiction's curriculum.

A number of common underlying principles and assumptions, stemming from the joint commitment to the National Goals, can be found in the different State and Territory frameworks. Expressed in a variety of ways, these revolve around concepts of connectedness, inclusivity, resilience, adaptability, individual empowerment and civic responsibility, partnership and development of communities of learning, as well as futures-oriented skills and abilities such as critical thinking, creativity, enterprise and innovation. All framework statements strive to make clear the notion that learning is a lifelong process, which should be seen as a continuum of development from the very early years. The frameworks have provided a structure within which schools and teachers can build educational programmes 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.

By way of summary, curriculum initiatives and reforms have been typically driven by a combination of factors including overall government social and economic policy, regional development plans and programmes, and the need to respond to various political pressure groups and local community interests. Increasingly governments are working in close partnership with business, industry and community

groups to deliver relevant and cost-effective education programmes and services. In many cases, innovations developed by individual jurisdictions are picked up and implemented or adapted more broadly at the national level. Alternatively individual jurisdictions and/or schools, may receive special funding to develop pilot programmes in areas of particular interest or expertise. Extensive community consultation is a typical feature of curriculum reform in the Australian environment, along with involvement of teachers in all stages of the development process. (Department of Education, 2001).

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, that supersedes the Adelaide Declaration, was adopted by all the Education Ministers in December 2008. The Ministers agreed to the statement of educational goals (e.g. goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; goal 2: all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens) and identified three broad categories of intended educational outcomes that the curriculum should deliver for students:

- A solid foundation in knowledge, understanding, skills and values on which further learning and adult life can be built: the curriculum will include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. It will also enable students to build social and emotional intelligence and nurture student wellbeing through health and physical education in particular. The curriculum will support students to relate well to others and foster an understanding of Australian society, citizenship and national values including through the study of civics and citizenship. As a foundation for further learning and adult life, the curriculum will include practical knowledge and skills development in areas such as ICT and design and technology which are central to Australia's skilled economy and provide crucial pathways to post-school success.
- Deep knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications: the curriculum will enable students to develop knowledge in the disciplines of English, mathematics, science, languages, humanities and the arts; to understand the spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life; and open up new ways of thinking. It will also support the development of deep knowledge within a discipline, which provides the foundation for interdisciplinary approaches to innovation and complex problem solving.
- General capabilities that underpin flexible and analytical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise: the curriculum will support young people to develop a range of generic and employability skills that have particular application to the world of work and further education and training, such as planning and organizing, the ability to think flexibly, to communicate well and to work in teams. Young people also need to develop the capacity to think creatively, innovate, solve problems and engage with new disciplines.

Education Ministers also defined the learning areas for all Australian students as follows: English; mathematics; sciences (including physics, chemistry and





biology); humanities and social sciences (specifically history, geography, economics, business, civics and citizenship); languages, the arts (specifically dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts); health and physical education; and technologies (specifically design and technology and information and communication technology). The Declaration contains a commitment by Australian governments to ensure a world-class curriculum at national and local levels.

The process of developing a national curriculum was formalized through the creation of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2008. ACARA is committed to a process of curriculum development that: is based on agreed curriculum design principles; involves high-level curriculum expertise nation-wide; provides opportunities for national consultation; establishes achievable timelines with available resources; and ensures high-quality curriculum documents.

The process, directed by ACARA, has been highly collaborative and it has been designed to generate broad engagement with, and discussion and feedback about, the shape and content of the Australian curriculum. It involves four interrelated phases: curriculum shaping, curriculum writing, implementation, and curriculum evaluation and review. Curriculum shaping involves the development of a paper for each learning area setting out a broad outline of the proposed curriculum. Expert advice is sought in the development of an initial draft shape paper released for wide public consultation. Curriculum writing involves teams of writers, supported by expert advisory panels and ACARA curriculum staff, who draft content descriptions and achievement standards for Foundation to Year 12. The draft for each learning area is released for public consultation and is subsequently revised in light of the feedback. Curriculum implementation sees the Australian curriculum delivered in an online environment for school authorities, schools and teachers to use. ACARA works with state and territory curriculum and school authorities to support their ongoing implementation planning. Curriculum evaluation and review processes are put in place to monitor and review the Australian curriculum based on implementation feedback. The evaluation process may result in minor changes to, or a revision of, the curriculum. Over 30,000 stakeholders contributed to the development of the first four learning areas by responding to the draft versions of the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum. (ACARA, 2010).

The structure of the curriculum for each learning area is as follows:

- Rationale: explaining the place and purpose of the learning area in the school curriculum and how it contributes to meeting the goals of the 2008 Melbourne Declaration.
- Aims: identifying the major learning that students will be able to demonstrate as a result of learning from the curriculum.
- Organization: providing an overview of how the curriculum in the learning areas will be organized Foundation (or K) to Year 12.
- Content descriptions: specifying what teachers are expected to teach. They include the knowledge, skills and understanding for each learning area as students progress through schooling. The content descriptions provide a well-researched scope and sequence of teaching, within which teachers determine how best to cater for individual students' learning needs and



interests. Examples that illustrate each content description can be found in elaborations. These are provided for teachers who may need further information to better understand the content description.

- Achievement standards: describing the quality of learning (the depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill) typically expected of students as they progress through schooling. Students who achieve the standard are well prepared to progress to the next level. The sequence of achievement across F/K–10 describes and illustrates progress in the learning area. This sequence provides teachers with a framework of growth and development in each of the learning areas.

Students need to develop a set of skills, behaviours and dispositions, or general capabilities that apply across subject-based content and equip them to be lifelong learners able to operate with confidence in a complex, information-rich, globalised world. To this end, the Australian curriculum pays explicit attention to how seven *general capabilities* and three *cross-curriculum priorities* contribute to, and can be developed through, teaching in each learning area. The general capabilities are represented within and across learning areas to different degrees. They encompass skills, behaviours and dispositions that students develop and apply to content knowledge and that support them in becoming successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens. The seven general capabilities are: literacy; numeracy; information and communication technology (ICT) competence; critical and creative thinking; ethical behaviour; personal and social competence; and intercultural understanding. Quality teaching in each of the learning areas will always contribute to a student's development of general capabilities. The Australian curriculum reinforces this expectation by incorporating the general capabilities into the content descriptions in the learning areas, in ways appropriate to each area. ACARA has developed, for each capability, a conceptual statement and learning continuum.

The rationale for the cross-curriculum priorities is that the Australian curriculum must be both relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues with which they are dealing. With this in mind, the curriculum gives special attention to three priorities: one national priority, one regional priority and one global priority. These will immerse students in learning beyond their local context. The three cross-curriculum priorities are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (national focus): to ensure that all young Australians are given the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, their significance for Australia and the impact these have had and continue to have on our world.
- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia (regional focus): to reflect the importance of young people knowing about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. As young people learn about and develop a better understanding of the countries and cultures of the region, they appreciate the economic, political and cultural interconnections that Australia has with the Asia region.
- Sustainability (global focus): to develop in young people an appreciation of the need for more sustainable patterns of living, and to build capacities



for thinking, valuing and acting necessary to create a more sustainable future.

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) has been considered in the development of the Australian Curriculum for the first years of formal schooling. The curriculum builds on the framework and is designed to accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school. In planning preschool programmes teachers will continue to use the EYLF (see below under pre-primary education). (ACARA, 2010).

In December 2010, Education Ministers endorsed the content for Foundation to Year 10 Phase 1 learning areas of English, mathematics, science and history. Foundation (F) in the Australian curriculum refers to the year before Year 1 (jurisdictions can continue to use their current definitions, e.g. kindergarten, pre-primary, reception, transition). The Phase 1 learning areas are being implemented across F/K–10 over the period 2011–2013. The second phase of the Australian curriculum development involves geography, the arts and languages. The third phase (yet to be conclusively planned) will focus on the remaining learning areas identified in the 2008 Melbourne Declaration, namely information and communication technology and design and technology, health and physical education, economics, business and civics and citizenship. Learning areas currently not included in Australian curriculum development will continue to be the responsibility of State and Territory education authorities. The curriculum for Years 11 and 12 is being developed as courses in the same broad learning areas that articulate with the content descriptions and the achievement standards for the K–10 years. The curriculum will offer opportunities for specialization in learning, including within the regular school programme and through accredited vocational education and training. States and territories will continue to offer subjects that do not overlap significantly with the Australian curriculum.

The Australian curriculum (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>) is an online curriculum that provides flexibility in how it can be accessed and organized. For example, users can view, download and print the curriculum for a particular learning area at one year level or across multiple year levels. They can also view, download and print content with a focus on one or more of the general capabilities or cross-curriculum priorities. The rationale, aims, content descriptions and the achievement standards published on the Australian curriculum website in December 2010 were displayed as version 1.0 of the curriculum. In January 2011 there was a change to the glossaries for some of the learning areas and this change was noted by a change to version 1.1 (version 1.2 as of May 2011).

### **Pre-primary education**

As mentioned, early childhood education (generally called preschool or kindergarten), is not compulsory and is offered in a range of settings, e.g. government and non-government schools, community-based preschools, community-based childcare centres and private-for-profit childcare centres. Government preschools are often integrated or associated with the school system. 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. School starting ages vary from state to state, but children usually participate in preschool from the age of three and a half or 4.

Programmes generally comprise a structured, play-based educational programme, designed and delivered by a degree qualified early childhood teacher. Preschool education is typically offered to children aged 3 to 5. Preschool is the year before the preparatory year, and is not compulsory. It is sometimes referred to as kindergarten, as in Tasmania and Western Australia. Programmes consist of several half-day sessions, or the equivalent in full days and combine structured learning and creative individual activities. School education begins with a preparatory year before Year 1. It is known as kindergarten, reception, pre-primary or transition. The preparatory year is not compulsory but enrolment is almost universal. The focus of the preparatory year is on the overall development of the child. The curriculum is linked to the primary curriculum and focuses on literacy, mathematics, physical skills, and personal and social skills in preparation for Year 1.

In 2008, all Australian governments made a commitment through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) that by 2013, “all children in the year before formal schooling will have access to high quality early childhood education programmes delivered by degree-qualified early childhood teachers, for 15 hours per week, 40 weeks of the year, in public, private and community-based preschools and childcare centres.”

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is part of the COAG’s reform agenda for early childhood education and care and is a key component of the Australian Government’s National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care. It underpins universal access to early childhood education and will be incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions. The EYLF describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children’s learning from birth to 5 years of age, as well as their transition to school. The Framework has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children’s learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. The Framework also recognizes the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development.

The EYLF has been developed collaboratively by the Australian and State and Territory Governments with substantial input from the early childhood sector and early childhood academics. The Framework has incorporated feedback from an extensive consultation process, including two national symposiums, national public consultation forums, focus groups, an online forum and case-study trials. It has been endorsed by COAG in July 2009. In December 2009, COAG agreed to establish a new National Quality Framework (NQF) for early childhood education and care (which incorporates the EYLF). From January 2012, the NQF will set a new quality standard for early childhood education and care providers. The National Quality Standard will improve quality through: (i) improved staff to child ratios to ensure each child gets more individual care and attention; (ii) new staff qualification requirements to ensure staff have the skills to help children learn and develop; (iii) a new quality rating system to ensure Australian families have access to transparent information



relating to the quality of early childhood education and care services; (iv) the establishment of a new national body (in principle, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority) to ensure early childhood education and care is of a high quality. The new NQF will cover long day care, family day care, outside-school-hours care, and preschools (or kindergarten) in the first instance.

The new National Quality Standard is divided into seven areas that contribute to the quality of early childhood education and care. These areas have been identified by research and are: educational programme and practice; children's health and safety; physical environment; staffing arrangements (including the number of staff looking after children); relationships with children; collaborative partnerships with families and communities; and leadership and service management.

The EYLF guides early childhood educators in developing quality early childhood programmes. It describes the early childhood pedagogy (principles and practice) and the outcomes required to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to age 5, including their transition to school. The EYLF underpins the implementation of more specific curriculum relevant to each local community and early childhood setting. As it is focused on children from birth to 5 years of age, other frameworks will be applicable to school age children.

The EYLF conveys the highest expectations for all children's learning from birth to 5 years and through the transitions to school. It communicates these expectations through the following five learning outcomes: (a) children have a strong sense of identity; (b) children are connected with and contribute to their world; (c) children have a strong sense of well-being; (d) children are confident and involved learners; and (e) children are effective communicators. Based on a view of children's lives as characterized by *belonging*, *being* and *becoming*, the Framework is designed to inspire conversations, improve communication and provide a common language about young children's learning among children themselves, their families, the broader community, early childhood educators and other professionals.

Curriculum encompasses all the interactions, experiences, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development. The emphasis in the Framework is on the planned or intentional aspects of the curriculum. The Framework supports a model of curriculum decision-making as an ongoing cycle. This involves educators drawing on their professional knowledge, including their in-depth knowledge of each child. Working in partnership with families, educators use the learning outcomes to guide their planning for children's learning. In order to engage children actively in learning, educators identify children's strengths and interests, choose appropriate teaching strategies and design the learning environment. Educators carefully assess learning to inform further planning. Educators draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's learning by: adopting holistic approaches; being responsive to children; planning and implementing learning through play; intentional teaching; creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning; valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families; providing for continuity in experiences and enabling children to have successful transition; assessing and monitoring children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes. (DEEWR, 2009).



The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) is a population based measure of young children's development. Teachers complete a checklist for children in their first year of full-time school which measures five key areas of early childhood development: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge. As a population measure, the AEDI examines early childhood development across the whole community, providing a snapshot of how children in the local area have developed by the time they start school. In 2009, the AEDI was completed nationwide for the first time. A total of 15,522 teachers from 7,422 schools (government and non government) from all over Australia reported on the above-mentioned five key areas of 261,147 (97.5% of the estimated five-year-old population) children in their first year of full-time school. Preliminary results were released in December 2009 (community maps) and May 2010 (community profiles). In April 2011, updated AEDI data was released. Results show that, in the year before entering full-time school, 85.7% of all Australian children were reported to be in some form of non-parental care and/or educational programmes. Almost 25% of Australian children start school developmentally vulnerable on at least one of these domains, and just over 10% on two or more. For indigenous children and children living in lower socio-economic communities the rates are substantially higher. Furthermore, these numbers vary significantly across states and territories and even more so across communities. These data reaffirm the need and opportunity to make a difference before children start school.

Following the success of the first national implementation of the AEDI in 2009, the Australian government has made a commitment to collect this important data every three years.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Childhood Education and Care Survey, the proportion of children aged 0-11 using formal child care has increased over time, from 14% in 1996 to 22% in 2008. During this period the proportion of 0-11 year old children using long day care has doubled, and now accounts for more than half (54%) of all formal care. Usage of informal care has remained relatively stable, representing 36% of children in 1996 compared to 34% 12 years later. The number of children using approved child care services was 871,107 in September 2009. Of the 871,107 children in approved care in September 2009, 69% were aged 0-5 years. The average amount of time individual children spend in care has also increased. In 2004, children attending long day care did so for an average of 19 hours per week. This has increased to an average of 26 hours in 2009. The number of long day care services increased from 4,751 in the September quarter 2005 to 5,758 in the September quarter 2009. Long day care services now represent 42% of all services in the child care sector. Nationally the proportion of long day care services that were privately managed increased from 71% in 2004/05 to 75% in 2008/09. During the same period the proportion of the sector that was government managed remained stable at approximately 3% (predominantly local government), while the proportion of community managed services fell from 26% to 22%. (DEEWR-OECECC, April 2010).



## Primary and secondary education

As mentioned, primary education is from Year 1 to Year 6 or 7, depending upon the state/territory in which children live. There are no standard examination requirements for progression through primary school, and no formal certificates are awarded. Students progress to secondary school on the basis of having completed the final year of primary school and on the recommendations of teachers in consultation with parents. All students are accepted into secondary school without further examinations. The length of secondary education varies, being either five or six years depending on the state/territory concerned. Secondary (or high) school is from Year 7 or 8 to Year 10. Typically the first one or two years of secondary school cover a general programme undertaken by all students. In later years students take a core group of subjects and electives. Senior secondary school (or college) covers Years 11 and 12. Senior secondary education offers a range of programmes which prepare students for future study, employment, and adult life. The Senior Certificate of Education (or a different name, depending on the state/territory concerned) is awarded after successful completion of the final two years of secondary education.

Depending on their chosen career path, senior secondary students can also study vocational subjects towards Certificates 1-4 (qualifications located at levels 1-4 of the Australian Qualifications Framework–AQF), and go on to a vocational education and training (VET) institution to gain further specific industry skills and knowledge. Some schools also issue or give credit towards Certificates 1-4 (the majority of school programmes are at Certificate 1 and 2 levels). VET institutions award certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas. Diplomas and advanced diplomas are also awarded by universities; most of them, however, are issued in the vocational education and training sector. Some VET institutions have agreements with certain universities that give students with diplomas and advanced diplomas credit towards bachelor's degrees. The number of credits received depends on the subjects covered in the course and the agreements in force. Typically, Certificate 1 takes six months to one year to complete; Certificate 2 takes six months to one year; Certificate 3 takes one/two years or longer; and Certificate 4 takes six months to two years.

Before the introduction of the Australian curriculum following the Melbourne Declaration of 2008, in the compulsory years of schooling the curriculum has been based upon the eight key learning areas set out in the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (1999 Adelaide Declaration). Many systems have stipulated overarching or core learnings that are embedded throughout the key learning areas. The development of these essential or core learnings has been seen as an ongoing process that takes place both in the context of formal learning and in everyday life. Most States and Territories have retained the eight key learning areas agreed to in the National Goals, although with some modification. New South Wales, for example, implemented six key learning areas in the primary years and there have been minor name changes and other re-arrangements in some of the other States and Territories. At the senior secondary level each State and Territory has its own external accreditation process, which serves the double purpose of certifying school completion at Year 12 and ranking students for entry into tertiary institutions. Several





States also provide certification at Year 10 level through a State-based or school-moderated assessment process.

Education Ministers have agreed that substantial implementation of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history will have been achieved by the end of 2013. In the first year of the Australian curriculum's implementation, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will collect further samples of student work and will validate the achievement standards, drawing on data from schools. While the process of implementing the new curriculum is a matter for each State and Territory, ACARA will assist the jurisdictions through leadership and advice, and by coordinating implementation planning. Implementation paths and timelines, up to the end of 2013, are likely to vary by learning areas depending on the extent of the differences between the new curriculum and existing State and Territory curricula. For each phase of Australian curriculum development, ACARA will work with State and Territory education authorities to map the extent of change and assist them in developing implementation plans. (ACARA, 2010).

For some areas the Australian curriculum has been written with the intention that it is taught to all students in each year of schooling from Foundation to Year 10, with decisions to be made subsequently about further learning in the senior secondary years. For other areas the curriculum will be written for Foundation to Year 12, but with the intention that it is taught to all students across Foundation to Year 8, with subsequent decisions to be made about further learning in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12. Specific decisions about expected learning and options for further learning are to be taken in 2011. The Australian curriculum has been written to focus on an entitlement for all students while acknowledging that the needs and interests of students will vary and the curriculum should support schools and teachers to respond to these needs and interest. As a result, the curriculum will articulate what is expected for all students to learn as well as articulating additional learning options. Specific decisions about entitlements and opportunities for additional learning are to be taken in 2011.

The objectives of the Australian curriculum are the same for all students. The curriculum should offer students with special education needs rigorous, relevant and engaging learning experiences. The majority of students with special education needs can engage with the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum provided the necessary adjustments are made by education authorities, schools and teachers to the complexity of curriculum content and to the means through which students demonstrate their learning. In order to meet students' learning needs, teachers will use a range of assessment information to locate the students' current level of achievement on the learning continuum represented by the Australian curriculum and then modify their teaching in line with students' achievement levels. For a small percentage of students with special education needs, the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum content and achievement standards may not be accessible, meaningful and relevant even with adjustments. Most of these students have a significant intellectual disability. During 2011, ACARA is expected to develop additional curriculum content and achievement standards for this group of students in order to develop an Australian curriculum that is inclusive of every learner. (*Ibid.*).



The Australian curriculum builds on the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and on its key learning outcomes, namely children: have a strong sense of identity; are connected with, and contribute to, their world; have a strong sense of well-being; are confident and involved learners; and are effective communicators. The Australian curriculum is designed to accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school.

The curriculum for children between 5 and 8 years of age (typically Foundation to Year 2) recognizes the importance of communication, language and building relationships. It gives priority to foundation knowledge, understanding and skills that all children are expected to develop to enhance their opportunities for continued learning. In these years, priority is given to literacy and numeracy development because these are the foundations on which further learning is built. The foundation for literacy is built primarily in English and the foundation for numeracy primarily in mathematics. However, both literacy and numeracy must be reinforced and strengthened through learning in other contexts including science, history, geography and technologies. Priority is also given to motor skills development, physical activity and the development of safe and healthy personal practices through the teaching of health and physical education. Equally, all students in these early years will have the opportunity to develop their sensory, cognitive and affective appreciation of the world around them through exploratory and creative learning. The opportunity to learn a language may also be available, subject to school and curriculum authority arrangements.

The curriculum for students between 8 and 14 years of age (typically Years 3 to 8) is increasingly organized through distinct learning areas and also highlights and promotes links between learning areas to deepen knowledge and understanding. While continuing to prioritize English and literacy and mathematics and numeracy, the Australian curriculum will deliver a comprehensive education that has children learning in each of the other areas of learning. While the curriculum focuses on an entitlement for all students, it also describes additional learning that might be provided in areas such as the arts, humanities and social sciences, and technologies. In secondary school settings, for example, the curriculum enables schools to build on a broad general education, organized around core learning areas, and to offer opportunities for students to select additional areas of study matched to their interests and needs.

The middle and upper secondary years of schooling can be seen as a period of transition to adulthood. In Years 9 and 10, the Australian curriculum will be written to build on prior learning and deepen understanding in each learning area. During the development of the curriculum for these years of schooling consideration will be given to who will determine what each student will have the opportunity to learn. Such consideration will take account of the opportunities to build on and deepen prior learning, to broaden learning, including through vocationally-oriented pathways and national trade cadetships, and to sustain student engagement and improve achievement. The Australian curriculum does not make assumptions about how the curriculum will be delivered in schools. Schools will continue to make decisions about how best to organize student learning according to student needs and interests and school and community contexts. In some cases, students will commence accredited senior secondary studies (general or vocational in nature) or undertake



other programmes developed by the school. Flexibility is important because it allows schools to provide learning pathways that extend the learning entitlement and ensure all students are fully engaged and prepared to continue learning into the senior secondary years.

The curriculum for students aged 16 to 18 years of age (typically Years 11 and 12) provides students with increased opportunities to make choices about pathways through school and beyond. These choices are informed by previous success and enjoyment, future options for training, learning or employment, and the setting in which the learning is to occur. Many young people in this age range have already been in part-time employment or will take up part-time jobs while undertaking their senior secondary schooling. The senior school curriculum offers more opportunities for specialization in learning, including within the regular school program and through accredited vocational education and training. (ACARA, 2010).

In an early paper on curriculum design (ACARA, November 2009) it has been observed that there is significant variation in the placement of Year 7 within curriculum and school arrangements. While five states and territories have Year 7 as the first year of secondary schooling and the other three have it as the last year of primary schooling, there is considerable variation in the ways that schools are organized including separate primary and secondary schools, middle years structures and K–10/12 school structures. The curriculum will be designed for Year 7 to be taught in a range of settings. The curriculum will be organized by years of schooling, with age-related developmental considerations. This approach to curriculum design does not preclude schools and school authorities aggregating curriculum content across years to facilitate a stage of schooling delivery strategy or to facilitate composite or multi-age class arrangements. Some States and Territories allow early commencement of senior school studies, based on curriculum documents designed for ‘Year 11 and Year 12 students’. The curriculum documents will be designed for Years K–10 and Senior Secondary Years. This does not preclude states and territories continuing to allow early commencement of senior secondary years’ curriculum. (ACARA, 2009). The curriculum design paper also included the following notional time allocations intended to guide the first stage of curriculum writing:

Learning area	Weekly time allocation			
	Years K-2	Years 3-6	Year 7	Years 8-10
English	7 hours	6 hours	4 hours	4 hours
Mathematics	5 hours	5 hours	4 hours	4 hours
Science	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours
History	30 minutes	1 hour	2 hours	2 hours

Source: ACARA, 2009.

Achievement standards provide an expectation of the quality of learning students should typically demonstrate by a particular point in their schooling, that is, the extent of their knowledge, the depth of their understanding and the sophistication of their skills. Achievement standards comprise a written description and illustrative student work samples. The achievement standards can support formative and summative assessment practices and provide a basis for consistency of assessment and reporting. 78. The sequence of achievement standards, Foundation to Year 10,



describes and illustrates progress in the learning area. This sequence provides teachers with a framework of growth and development in each of the learning areas. This will assist teachers to plan for and monitor learning during the course of a semester or year. It will also assist teachers to make judgments about the extent and quality of learning.

The development of the achievement standards takes into account what is known from research about the development of student learning in the different learning areas. If teachers are to understand individuals' current levels of attainment so they can target students' needs in their teaching, they must have a grasp of the growth and development of students' thinking about fundamental concepts in an area of learning. A sequence of achievement standards across Foundation to Year 10 provides teachers with a sequence of development which will assist them to do this. The achievement standards for each learning area will be validated during the first year(s) of implementation of the Australian curriculum. For the senior secondary years of schooling, course-specific achievement standards will be developed. These will describe a range of levels of achievement expected of students studying the particular course. They will make no assumptions about methods of assessment and will allow flexibility for teachers, schools and jurisdictions to determine the particular assessment methods to be used for informing judgments about student learning. ACARA will work with State and Territory curriculum and certification authorities to develop an agreed model for the development of senior secondary achievement standards. For English, mathematics, science and history the development of senior secondary achievement standards will occur in 2011.

Under current national agreements, twice a year all schools are required to provide parents and carers with plain language reports on student progress and achievement, using grades A–E or an equivalent five-point scale, clearly defined against specific achievement standards. ACARA will work with State and Territory curriculum and school authorities to develop nationally consistent approaches to assessment and reporting. Until there is agreement on such approaches, assessment and reporting of student achievement will continue to be determined by relevant State or Territory curriculum and/or school authorities. The Australian curriculum achievement standards provide a basis for a nationally-consistent approach to assessment and reporting. Schools will be responsible for assessing their students and reporting their progress and achievement.

Schools and teachers continue to have the flexibility to enable students to progress at different rates through the curriculum. The year-by-year structure of English, mathematics, science and history provides an indication of the content and achievement standards it is expected most students in particular grades will meet, but more importantly it provides a map that defines key indicators of learning development and progress. It continues to be the case that schools and teachers should provide flexible pathways to enable every student to make progress in their learning. To meet students' learning needs and cater for the wide range of performance in classes, teachers need to be able to identify current levels of student achievement using the Australian curriculum and tailor their teaching in line with these levels. In many cases, this will involve identifying and filling in specific gaps in a student's knowledge, understanding or skills while still focusing instruction on the curriculum content described for their particular year of schooling. In other cases, this will

involve focusing instruction on curriculum content at a lower or higher level than that set out for a particular year of schooling.

Teachers will use the achievement standards, at the end of a period of teaching, to make on-balance judgments about the quality of learning demonstrated by students and specifically whether they have achieved at, above or below the standard. In making these judgments, teachers will draw on assessment data they have collected during the course of the teaching period as evidence. These judgments about the quality of learning will be one source of feedback to students and their parents and will inform formal reporting processes. If teachers have judged that student achievement is below the expected standard this suggests there should be some review of the teaching programmes and practice to assist individual students in improving their learning in the future. It also suggests additional support and targeted teaching will be needed to ensure the student does not fall behind.

Assessment of the Australian curriculum will take place at different levels and for different purposes, including: (i) ongoing formative assessment within classrooms for the purposes of monitoring learning and providing feedback, for teachers to inform their teaching and for students to inform their learning; (ii) summative assessment for the purposes of twice-yearly reporting by schools to parents and carers on the progress and achievement of students; (iii) annual testing of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 students' levels of achievement in aspects of literacy and numeracy conducted as part of the National Assessment Programme–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); (iv) periodic sample testing of specific learning areas within the Australian curriculum as part of the National Assessment Programme (NAP). Education Ministers have agreed that substantial implementation of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history will have been achieved by the end of 2013. (ACARA, 2010).

Currently, until Year 11 assessment is mainly carried out in schools using a variety of assessment methods including projects, assignments, group research and investigation, oral presentations, classroom tests and classroom participation. Assessment may also include school-wide examinations. State- or territory-wide external examinations may also be conducted. In Year 11 and 12, the most common methods for senior secondary evaluation include external examination, moderated school-based assessment, non-moderated school-based assessment and external scaling tests. (AEI, 2008).

The VET sector includes a variety of recognized providers: publicly funded institutes of Technical and Further Education (TAFE), including combined TAFE and university bodies in some States and Territories, adult and community education organizations and increasingly, individual enterprises and schools. There are over 4,000 Registered Training Organizations (RTO) operating in the sector. Many of these providers also offer programmes in addition to recognized VET such as adult and community education and fully commercial non-accredited training. Entry to VET programmes is flexible. There are many pathways into VET programmes, and admission can be based on a number of factors, such as: completion of Year 10; completion of Year 12; completion of a prerequisite qualification; work experience; demonstrated ability or interest; or interview.



In 1998, a major reform of the apprenticeship/traineeship arrangements occurred with the introduction of New Apprenticeships. New Apprenticeships (now called Australian Apprenticeship) subsumed the former apprenticeship and traineeship arrangements under a single more flexible system of contracts of training between an employer and an employee. Apprentices agree to achieve a level of competency through a combination of work-based training and training with a RTO. These programmes can be taken either part time or full time and are sourced from Training Packages. These programmes lead to skills that are recognized nationally by the relevant industry, and to AQF qualifications. Australian Apprenticeships cover both traditional trade areas and non-trade areas in service and para-professional fields. Training Packages are nationally recognized and developed by industry to meet industry needs. A Training Package usually includes more than one AQF qualification, depending on the type and level of competencies achieved, and the options for specialisation. Training Packages are delivered by RTOs. (AEI, 2008).

The VET system has multiple pathways. The pathways provide choices for individuals to move between study and training undertaken at school, at an RTO, at university, or in the workplace. Movement between vocational education and training and higher education programs is based on articulation agreements between institutions. Articulation often involves a sequential pathway between qualifications in vocational education and training and higher education, allowing students to progress from one qualification to the next, and offering multiple entry and exit points.

The States and Territories are responsible for the network of public TAFE institutes. In 2003, there were 79 TAFE institutes and other government providers operating out of more than 5,461 locations across the country, and there were 1.72 million students enrolled in vocational education and training (excluding VET in school students), representing a 35% increase since 1995. Out of the total enrolments, 75.6% were enrolled in TAFE institutes and other government providers, 14.2% were enrolled with community-based providers and the remaining 9.8% undertook training with other registered providers. The Australian Government provides about 27% of the public expenditure on VET while the remaining 73% is provided by the States and Territories. (DEST, 2004).

TAFEs are the largest providers of vocational education and training. They are owned and administered by state and territory governments. TAFEs may be called institutes of technology or colleges or institutes. Some TAFEs are affiliated with universities. They offer a comprehensive range of programmes on-site, in workplaces and in schools. TAFEs mostly operate on a two semester or three-term year. Programmes are based on Training Packages or are accredited by the relevant state or territory training authority. Programme areas include information systems and technology, business, management, and VET teacher and assessor education. Technical colleges are for senior secondary students in Years 11 and 12 to enrol in part-time apprenticeships in traditional trades while they complete their final years at school. They provide academic studies relevant to a career in trade and trade-related vocational courses as well as developing employability and entrepreneurial skills. Technical colleges focus on key industries such as metals and engineering, automotive, building and construction, electro-technology and commercial cookery. (AEI, 2008).





In 2003, there were 9,607 schools in Australia of which 6,930 were government schools and 2,677 were non-government schools. Primary schools comprised 69.1% of schools while 15.2% were secondary schools. A further 11.5% were combined primary and secondary schools and 4.1% were special schools. In 2003 there were 3,318,620 full-time students attending school, 67.9% of whom attended government schools. Of the 1,929,170 primary school students, 71.7% attended government schools, while 62.7% of 1,389,450 secondary students attended government schools. (DEST, 2004).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in 2010, across Australia, there were 6,743 government schools (71%), 1,708 Catholic schools (18%), and 1,017 independent schools (11%). There were 6,357 primary schools, 1,409 secondary schools, 1,286 combined primary/secondary schools, and 416 special schools. Excluding special schools, 70% of schools were primary, 16% were secondary and 14% were combined primary/secondary schools.

There were 3,510,875 students (of whom 23,996 part-time) in Australian schools distributed through states and territories as follows: 32% in New South Wales; 24% in Victoria; 21% in Queensland; 10% in Western Australia; 7% in South Australia; and 5% between Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Sixty-six per cent of students attended government schools, 20% attended Catholic schools, and 14% attended independent schools. There were 162,831 students who identified as indigenous in Australian schools in 2010. This was an increase of 4% from 2009. In the same period the number of non-indigenous students increased by less than 1%. New South Wales and Queensland had the largest number of indigenous students with almost 50,000 in these states; however, the Northern Territory had the highest proportion of students identifying as indigenous at 41%. Concerning full-time students by level of school education, there were 2,010,327 primary students (of whom 1,389,263 in government schools) and 1,476,552 secondary students, of whom 893,094 in government schools. The number of teaching staff (persons) was 286,135 (204,103 females and 83,032 males), corresponding to 251,421.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching staff. There were 126,889.5 FTE primary teaching staff (of whom 103,078.4 females), and 123,532.3 FTE secondary teaching staff (of whom 71,515.9 females).

The FTE student to teaching staff ratio in Australia has decreased between 2000 to 2010, from 17.3 to 15.7 for primary, and 12.6 to 12.0 for secondary level schooling. In 2010, student to teaching staff ratios for government primary and secondary schools were 15.4 and 12.3, compared with 16.5 and 11.7 for non-government schools. Generally student to teaching staff ratios have decreased across all affiliations, states and school levels in the last ten years.

In 2010 the school participation rate (FTE students) was 95.7% for 15-year-olds, 86.7% for 16-year-olds, and 65.6% for 17-year-olds. The apparent progression rate was 97.1% for grades 8-10, 71.3% for grades 8-12, and 74.1% for grades 10-12. (ABS, 2011).

## Assessing learning achievement nationwide

This interest in using student outcomes in assessing efficiency and effectiveness of school systems is not new. During 1989, as part of a broader OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) project, Australia co-operated with 18 countries in identifying possible indicators of student outcomes. As the *Report on Government Service Provision* (1995) notes, “assessing the performance of school systems is a complex and difficult task. The difficulties are threefold. First, reaching consensus on the specific objectives of school education; second, selecting and precisely defining indicators that address these objectives; and third, allowing for differences in the environment within which school services are delivered.”

Nearly all States and Territories have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, system-wide assessments to capture a snapshot of overall achievement in key learning areas. Given this coalition of interest, the July 1996 decision of the (former) MCEETYA to commence the development of a small number of common indicator outcomes in literacy and numeracy, is set in context and bears testimony to the advantages of collaboration and the value of working towards nationally comparable data.

When State and Federal education ministers promulgated the new *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* in 1999, they also initiated work on measuring and reporting educational outcomes nationally in six key areas of schooling: literacy, numeracy, science, information technology, VET, and student participation and retention in and completion of schooling. The Federal government has played a key role in the work of the MCEETYA task force, the National Education Performance Monitoring (NEPM) task force established to develop the appropriate performance measures. In the longer term, performance measures and targets are expected to be extended to other key curriculum areas, such as civics and citizenship and enterprise education.

As part of this effort, the Federal, State and Territory and non-government school authorities have been reporting on developments in school education in Australia each year through the *Annual national report on schooling in Australia* (ANR), published by the (former) MCEETYA. The ANR reported progress towards the National Goals, concentrating on the priority areas agreed by Ministers. It included statistical data on students and schools and expenditure on schooling. It also provided information on access and participation, retention, attendance, completion and transition and available student attainment data, including national data on the literacy and numeracy achievement of students.

The Federal government has been a key partner in developing and gaining national agreement on literacy and numeracy benchmarks, e.g. nationally-agreed minimum acceptable standards for literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7. In 1998, students in all States and Territories were assessed in Years 3 and 5 against the literacy standard for the first time. The majority of students from each of Years 3 and 5 achieved the reading benchmark in 2000. As the benchmark represents the minimum level of competence deemed necessary to allow meaningful participation in



the school learning programme, this result is not surprising. However, approximately 7% of Year 3 students and 13% of Year 5 students were unable to achieve the benchmark. The majority of students in each of Years 3 and 5 attained the appropriate numeracy benchmark in 2000. There were substantial differences between the achievement of numeracy benchmarks by Indigenous students and all students. (MCEETYA, 2000).

Currently, the National Assessment Programme—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests are conducted in May each year for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. All students in the same year level are assessed on the same test items in the assessment domains of reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. Each year, over one million students nationally sit the NAPLAN tests. The tests are developed collaboratively by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the States and Territories, the non-government education sectors and the Australian Government. The NAPLAN tests broadly reflect aspects of literacy and numeracy within the curriculum in all States and Territories, and the types of test questions and test formats are chosen so that they are familiar to teachers and students across Australia. NAPLAN tests were equated so that the 2010 results can be compared with those for 2009 and 2008. Equating enables the results from NAPLAN tests in different years to be reported on the same achievement scale.

NAPLAN results are reported using five national achievement scales, one for each of the NAPLAN assessment domains of reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. Each scale consists of ten bands, which represent the increasing complexity of the skills and understandings assessed by NAPLAN from Years 3 to 9. Six of these bands are used for reporting student performance in each year level. Student raw scores on tests are converted to a NAPLAN 'scale score' so that those scores can be located on national scales for each domain. As regards 2010 NAPLAN results, 93.9% of Year 3 students were at or above the national minimum standard in reading, 95.6% in writing, 91% in spelling, 92% in grammar and punctuation, and 94.2% in numeracy. In the case of Year 5 students, 91.3% were at or above the national minimum standard in reading, 93.1% in writing, 91.9% in spelling, 92.2% in grammar and punctuation, and 93.6% in numeracy. For Year 7 students the percentages were 94.8% in reading, 92.6% in writing, 92.9% in spelling, 91.5% in grammar and punctuation, and 95% in numeracy. For Year 9 students, the percentages were 90.7% in reading, 87.2% in writing, 89.6% in spelling, 90.8% in grammar and punctuation, and 93.1% in numeracy. (See: *NAPLAN Summary Report 2010*).

Australia participated in the 2009 OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy which involved 65 countries/economies. A total of 353 Australian schools and 14,251 students participated in PISA 2009. Overall, Australian students performed very well. In reading literacy Australian students, with a mean score of 515 points, scored significantly higher than the OECD average of 493 points. In mathematical literacy Australia achieved a mean score of 514 points, which was significantly higher than the OECD average of 496 score points. In scientific literacy Australia achieved a mean score of 527 points, which was significantly higher than the OECD average of 501 score points.



Although the OECD average for reading literacy has not changed between 2000 and 2009, ten countries have significantly improved their performance over this time, while five countries, including Australia, have declined significantly. Australia was the only high performing country to show a significant decline (by 13 score points) in reading literacy between PISA 2000 (with a mean score of 528 points) and PISA 2009 (with a mean score of 515 points). The average mathematical literacy performance of Australia declined significantly (by 10 score points) between PISA 2003 and PISA 2009, while there was no significant change in the OECD average over this time. There was no significant change in the average performance of Australian students between PISA 2003 and PISA 2006 in mathematical literacy. The mean performance of Australian students in scientific literacy remained unchanged between PISA 2006 and PISA 2009.

On average, the performance of indigenous Australians in reading literacy was 82 score points lower than that of non-indigenous Australians. Indigenous students performed, on average, 76 score points lower than non-indigenous students in mathematical literacy. Indigenous students performed, on average, 81 score points lower than non-indigenous students in scientific literacy. The average reading literacy score of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile was significantly lower than that of students in the highest socioeconomic quartile (by 91 score points). In mathematical literacy, students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile scored, on average, 90 score points lower than students in the highest socioeconomic quartile. In scientific literacy, the gap between students in the highest and lowest socioeconomic quartiles was, on average, 96 score points. (Thomson et al., 2011).

Australia also participated in the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which focused on Year 4 students (mostly 9-year-olds, assessed in 36 of the participating countries) and Year 8 students (mostly 13-year-olds, assessed in 49 of the participating countries). Over 8,000 Australian students in 457 schools participated in the main sample of TIMSS 2007. Two organizing dimensions, a content dimension and a cognitive dimension, framed the mathematics and science assessment for TIMSS 2007, analogous to those used in the previous TIMSS studies.

The only area in which Australian achievement has shown improvement over the cycles of TIMSS since 1995 has been in mathematics at Year 4. However, in Year 8 mathematics and Year 4 science there has been no change to Australia's scores and in Year 8 science scores have declined significantly. This is in comparison to other countries that have improved already high scores, often associated with systemic and curricular reform. These results suggest that greater attention be given to curriculum and teaching in junior secondary science, particularly in the areas of physics and chemistry. A failure to give sufficient attention to science in the junior secondary years is likely to have consequences for building the basis for education in the science-based occupations and for building a scientifically literate community. In addition, there are curriculum issues.

Related to this is the issue of teacher preparedness to teach. While most Year 8 teachers believed they were well-prepared to teach all of the mathematics topics covered in TIMSS, and around three-quarters of Year 8 science teachers felt they were well-prepared to teach science, this was only the case for half of the primary

teachers surveyed. Further analysis needs to be conducted on this issue. There also seem to be some areas where teachers have misplaced confidence; that is, where teachers believe they are well-prepared to teach the subject matter but where the achievement of their students is not high. Professional development might well be needed to address this discrepancy. Other important policy considerations are the gender differences in favour of males in both mathematics and science at Year 8 (particularly after a number of years in which there were no such differences); the disparity in achievement between those from a high socioeconomic background and those from a low socioeconomic background; and the education of indigenous students. (Thomson et al., 2007).

## Teaching staff

Within each State and Territory, ministers, departments and individual schools determine policies and practices on teacher utilization and professional development within established employment guidelines. Teacher education for all levels of schooling takes place in universities or accredited non-government colleges. To become a teacher, most states and territories require at least four years of university level training as the minimum pre-service or initial teacher education component.

Primary teacher education and some lower secondary teacher education took place in Australia for many years at teachers colleges. The teachers colleges were mainly government institutions but there was a small number of non-government colleges run by religious orders/authorities and non-sectarian agencies. They offered a three-year Diploma of Teaching which was available until the early 1990s, then replaced by the four-year Bachelor of Education. Bachelor's degrees requiring three years of full-time undergraduate study were on offer until the late 1990s. (AEI, 2008).

A broad range of postgraduate courses is being taken by teachers as part of their continuing professional education. These include the traditional Ph.D and M.Ed. courses with a research base, and extend to master's degrees by course-work and professional doctorate, specifically designed to cover teachers' professional development needs. Universities offer a wide range of specialist teaching qualifications at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Qualifications include those for adult and community education, educational administration, Aboriginal education, art, business, computing, English as a Second Language, health and physical education, librarianship, music, religious studies, special education and educational psychology and counselling. Programmes vary in structure, content and nomenclature.

Typically, teacher education programmes consist of: professional studies (theoretical knowledge and skills required for the teaching profession); curriculum studies (subject knowledge and pedagogical skills); and practical training, e.g. supervised professional training for between 12 and 20 weeks. All courses are required to include studies in Aboriginal and cross-cultural awareness, teaching children with special needs, and information and communication technology (ICT).

Vocational education and training (VET) teachers must be able to conduct education and training programs and to assess skills based on the industry-endorsed competency standards. Teachers usually have qualifications and substantial





employment experience in specialized fields. For those planning to teach VET in a secondary school a Bachelor Degree qualification specializing in secondary education is normally required. A range of Bachelor Degree programmes are offered in the VET teacher training specialization. Generally these programmes require two years of part-time study for those with an existing non-VET teaching qualification or Bachelor Degree in another field. Programmes provide a combination of professional studies in education focusing on adolescents, curriculum studies in areas of specialization and teaching methodology. Alternative programme structures include a one-year, part-time program for practising teachers with a three-year Diploma of Teaching in a vocational field; or four years part-time by distance education for those with a two-year Certificate of Teaching in a vocational field.

Teacher registration is a state and territory responsibility. State and territory teacher registration authorities determine the conditions for teacher employment and qualification requirements. Each state and territory has different requirements based on the teaching skills required for different schooling structures, curriculum approach and assessment methodology. (*Ibid.*).

As mentioned, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL, previously known as Teaching Australia) has been established on 1 January 2010 to provide national leadership for Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. The National Professional Standards for Teachers were finalised by the AITSL and endorsed by MCEECDYA in late December 2010. The Standards make explicit what teachers should know and be able to do across four career stages (graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead teacher) and across the three domains of professional knowledge, practice and engagement. The Standards support the 2008 Melbourne Declaration and the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality. More recently, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA) has agreed to establish national accreditation of initial teacher education programmes. MCEECDYA endorsed the document *Accreditation of initial teacher education programmes in Australia: Standards and Procedures* on 15 April 2011. National agreement on accreditation of initial teacher education programmes is an historic step in improving teacher quality in Australia. For the first time, programmes preparing teachers will be assessed based on whether their graduates meet the National Professional Standards for Teachers.

The Standards and Procedures were developed through extensive national work drawing on the expert knowledge of a number of key stakeholders and organisations involved in initial teacher education. They are the culmination of a long history of development over at least a decade. This initial work was followed by extensive consultation on a draft proposal in September 2010 to provide all interested parties with the opportunity to shape the development, content and structure of the standards and procedures for the accreditation of initial teacher education.

The key elements of quality teaching are described in the National Professional Standards. They articulate what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead. The stages reflect the continuum of a teacher's developing professional expertise from undergraduate preparation through to being an exemplary classroom practitioner and a





leader in the profession. The Graduate Standards will underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programmes. Graduates from accredited programmes qualify for registration in each state and territory. The Proficient Standards will be used to underpin processes for full registration as a teacher and to support the requirements of nationally consistent teacher registration. The Standards at the career stages of Highly Accomplished and Lead will inform voluntary certification. The Standards and their descriptors represent an analysis of effective, contemporary practice by teachers throughout Australia. Their development included a synthesis of the descriptions of teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement used by teacher accreditation and registration authorities, employers and professional associations. Each descriptor has been informed by teachers' understanding of what is required at different stages of their careers. An extensive validation process involving almost 6,000 teachers ensured that each descriptor was shaped by the profession.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that over the period 2000-2010 non-government teaching staff numbers increased by 32%, from 77,490 to 102,410 while government teaching staff numbers increased by 10%, from 166,507 to 183,725. Similar increases were recorded in the full-time-equivalent (FTE) value of teaching staff<sup>2</sup> employed over this time (30% and 9% respectively). Between 2000 and 2010, across Australia, male teaching staff (FTE) increased by 5% while female teaching staff (FTE) increased by 20%. However, the proportion of teaching staff (FTE) that is male has decreased 9% in this time, with males now less than one third of all teaching staff (FTE). In 2010 the majority of male teaching staff were employed in secondary schools, 68% compared to the 32% in primary schools. The proportions of male and female teaching staff were much closer in secondary schools than primary schools. Males accounted for 42% of secondary teaching staff (FTE) in 2010. This was a reduction of 8% based on figures from 2000. Males comprised 19% of primary school teaching staff (FTE), a decrease of 11% since 2000. (ABS, 2011). In 2009, of all FTE teaching staff, 69% were female and 31% were male. A higher proportion of FTE teaching staff in primary schools were female (80%) compared with teaching staff in secondary schools (58% female). (ABS, 2010).

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## Web resources

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Australia Indigenous Portal: <http://www.indigenous.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Australia Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Ltd.: <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities: <http://www.acaca.org.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

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Australian Early Development Index: <http://www.rch.org.au/aedi/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Australian Education International: <http://www.aei.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Australian Qualifications Framework: <http://www.aqf.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Australian Universities Quality Agency: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations: <http://www.deewr.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs: <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Education Network Australia: <http://www.edna.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Education Services Australia: <http://www.esa.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Links to State/Territory Education Departments and other related sites: <http://www.aussieeducator.org.au/education/governments/statesandterritories.html> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]



Links to State/Territory Education Departments and other related sites (another site): <http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/links,11581.html> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs: <http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy: <http://www.naplan.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd.: <http://www.ncver.edu.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

National Training Information Service: <http://www.ntis.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

Skills Australia: <http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

TVET Australia Ltd.: <http://www.tvetaustralia.com.au/> [In English. Last checked: May 2011.]

*For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>*