



2007

Submission to the Senate inquiry into the academic standards of school education

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1 Executive Summary

The Queensland Government's submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee inquiry into the academic standards of school education responds to the inquiry's broad terms of reference listed below:

1. *Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment, including, but not limited to:*
 - a. *the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage; and*
 - b. *the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.*
2. *The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary certificate in each state and territory.*
3. *How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.*

Additionally, the submission aims to address the interest of the Senate inquiry¹ in:

- *the perceptions and realities of standards and achievement levels in schools at a time when there is doubt in some quarters as to whether schools are adequately preparing students both for the immediate workforce and for higher education*
- *whether generic skills are adequately imparted, and whether the academic curriculum is sufficiently rigorous to meet the requirements for university study*
- *the possibly unacceptable variation across the states and territories in regard to curriculum and measurement of attainment*
- *the belief that Australia may be falling behind comparable countries in educational achievement.*

A quality school education system is at the heart of Queensland's *Smart State* commitment. In addressing the first term of reference, the submission outlines a range of Queensland initiatives, which will raise school academic standards and ensure successful transitions through each stage of schooling and from school to further education, training and employment.

In Queensland, children have the opportunity to experience quality learning in the early years with the introduction of the new Preparatory Year (Prep) in all schools. In the early and middle phases of learning the *Queensland Curriculum Assessment and Reporting, (QCAR) Framework* will define the essentials that all Year 1 to 10 students in all schools need to know and the standards of achievement they are expected to meet. In the senior years the landmark *Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF)* will improve school education outcomes and strengthen overall standards of achievement.

The submission also outlines the specific, significant investments Queensland has made to ensure students have the core knowledge and skills required to achieve within and beyond school. This investment includes strategies aimed at enhancing the literacy and numeracy standards of all students, including a \$173.1 million² investment in 2006–07.

As the most decentralised state, and with a higher proportion of Indigenous students than most other states and territories, Queensland also places particular emphasis on achieving positive outcomes for rural and remote students and Indigenous students. Targeted strategies, including the *Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Torres Strait* and *Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Cape York*, provide comprehensive, place-based responses to improve attendance, participation, retention and achievement

¹ http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/EET_CTTE/academic_standards/info.htm

² This includes \$22.5m in funding from the Australian Government.

for Indigenous students in Far North Queensland. The *Rural and Remote Education Framework for Action 2006–2008* commits the Queensland Government to improving service delivery to students in rural and remote areas with a focus on improving retention rates and literacy and numeracy outcomes.

Concurrently, Queensland is focused on improving the quality of the teaching workforce to ensure students have the best chance of academic success. Queensland has a range of initiatives in place to attract, retain and develop a workforce of teachers who achieve high-quality outcomes.

In addressing the inquiry's second term of reference the submission details Queensland's commitment to standards of achievement in the senior years. This includes an outline of Queensland's rigorous, assessment regime. It features mechanisms at both a school and a state level, including the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test, and the introduction of the Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) to recognise a broad range of learning and set standards for achievement, in areas including literacy and numeracy.

In addressing the third term of reference the comparability of Queensland and Australian students' standards with other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries is outlined, and shows that Queensland and Australian students are generally achieving at a high level.

In informing the Senate inquiry of the comparability of standards and curriculum across jurisdictions this section of the submission also provides an overview of the collaborative work undertaken, and in progress, by the states, territories and the Australian Government toward greater national consistency and comparability in regard to curriculum and measurement of attainment.

The submission affirms the Queensland Government's commitment to working together with the Australian Government and other states and territories in a federated approach to developing nationally consistent curricula that sets core content and achievement standards. In undertaking this work, Queensland supports an approach that provides flexibility for jurisdictions, systems and schools in implementing curricula for students to achieve these standards and allows for differing jurisdictional approaches to assessment. This approach is in line with the actions proposed by the states and territories through the Council of Australian Federation (CAF) Steering Committee in their report, *The future of schooling in Australia*³.

Major reforms in school education in Queensland demonstrate the Queensland Government's commitment to high standards for all students and the ongoing improvement of school education. These achievements occur in the context of an Australian Government funding policy, which includes a disparity of funding between state and non-state schools that effectively penalises the most disadvantaged students.

³ Council for Australian Federation, (2007). *Federalist paper 2. The future of schooling in Australia: A report by the states and territories.*
<http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/2007/federalist-paper.pdf>

2 Introduction

The Queensland Government is committed to high academic standards in schools. Queensland's *Smart State* commitment is to build a modern, responsive education system that equips our young people for the challenges of the 21st century.

The new Department of Education, Training and the Arts provides the opportunity to deliver high-quality education and training in a 'life-cycle' approach, with opportunities to streamline pathways for students from the early years through to senior schooling, training and higher education.

Queensland is a major service provider in education. The 2006–07 State Budget delivered a record \$5.17 billion recurrent investment and \$450.7 million in capital investment in Queensland's education sector, an 8.5 per cent increase on the 2005–06 Budget.

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, delivers high-quality public education to approximately 70 per cent of all Queensland school students through the state school system.

Key partners to achieving the *Smart State* vision for education include the non-state schooling sectors and the two statutory authorities, the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) and the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT). The 2006–07 Budget includes \$368.7 million in recurrent funding and \$46.8 million for external infrastructure and capital assistance for Queensland non-state schools.

Queenslanders need to be highly skilled and educated to meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive world and become lifelong learners. Queensland school students achieve at a level comparable to the national average and, as such, at a high level in comparison to other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The challenge for Queensland and Australia as a whole is to improve the standards of lower-performers.

The landmark cross-sectoral *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (ETRF) aim to lift school standards by providing universal access to education early in life, and requiring young people to participate in learning or employment until they are 17 years of age. The reforms also specifically aim to improve literacy and numeracy, lift standards for the Senior Certificate and provide multiple pathways for young people.

The *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting* (QCAR) *Framework* aims to ensure that all students in all Queensland schools develop the essential knowledge and skills they need to successfully progress through to the senior stage of schooling.

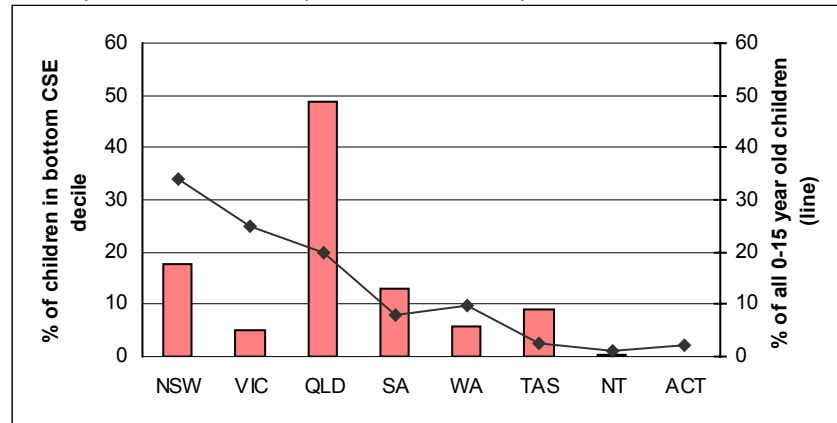
The Queensland Government is committed to delivering a quality school education to all students. As the most decentralised state, and with a higher proportion of Indigenous students than most other states and territories, Queensland places particular emphasis on achieving positive outcomes for rural and remote students and Indigenous students. In Queensland more than half of all state schools are located in rural and remote locations, with approximately one-quarter of state school students enrolled in these schools.

Queensland also has disproportionate levels of children who are at risk of social exclusion. Poverty and social exclusion have been shown to have a strong impact on children's educational outcomes⁴. A study by the University of Queensland for presentation at the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), *Indicators of Social Exclusion for Australia's Children: an Analysis by State and Age Group*, found substantial gaps between states and territories in terms of the percentage of children facing the greatest risk of social exclusion. Figure 1 below shows, using 2001 census data, that while only 20 per cent of all Australian children from birth to 15

⁴ Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P. & Richardson, D. (2006) UNICEF Innocenti Working Paper: Comparing Child Well-Being in OECD Countries: Concepts and Methods.

years of age live in Queensland, almost 49 per cent of all children in the bottom Child Social Exclusion (CSE)⁵ decile live in Queensland. This has implications for delivering consistent standards in school education across the state, while allowing for flexibility and innovation at the local level to support educationally disadvantaged students.

Figure 1: Proportion of all children in bottom CSE decile and proportion of all 0 – 15-year-old children, by State and Territory, 2001.



Source: Daly, A., McNamara, J., Tanton, R., Harding, A. & Yap, M. (2006) *Indicators of Social Exclusion for Australia's Children: an Analysis by State and Age Group*, Paper for presentation at the University of Queensland Social Research Centre Opening and Conference, 18-19 July 2006

Given the socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics mentioned above, Queensland has a high proportion of the community for whom the state sector is the sole provider of education services. In addition Queensland is the most decentralised of all the mainland states having to provide education services and infrastructure in regional communities with significant diseconomies of scale. These factors contribute to the level of funding needed to ensure a quality school education is delivered to all Queensland students.

States and territories have long argued that the current Australian Government funding arrangements for state students using the Average Government Schools Recurrent Cost (AGSRC) creates an inequity between state and non-state students. Under the 2005–08 quadrennium funding agreement non-state schools are funded at the minimum rate of 13.7 per cent of the AGSRC while state schools receive 8.9 per cent for primary and 10 per cent for secondary. To restrict the maximum percentage of AGSRC funding to the state sector to a level below the minimum provided to the non-state sector does not provide equitable outcomes for all schools in Queensland.

Additionally, supplementary Australian Government funding provides more per capita targeted program funding for non-state school students than students in state schools. There are no grounds for this student inequity. Specific areas where this is most apparent include supplementary funding for Indigenous education, students with disabilities, and English as a second language (ESL) – new arrivals. All these student groups need equal assistance regardless of the school sector.

Despite these funding challenges, Queensland has a range of initiatives in place and under development that contribute to improving continuity across the stages of schooling; enhancing coherence, consistency and comparability in curriculum and assessment; and setting and raising standards of academic achievement across the state. These initiatives position Queensland well in terms of contributing to meeting the challenge of achieving further national consistency in core curriculum content and standards of achievement.

⁵ Child Social Exclusion (CSE) – is a broader measure than income poverty and includes the additional components that are considered as likely to contribute to social exclusion. In this study these included family type, schooling, education in family, occupation in family, housing tenure, parents speak English at home, labour force status of parents, personal computer usage and motor vehicle availability.

3 Term of Reference 1: Preparing Queensland School Students: Stages of Schooling and Post-Schooling

This section (Section 3) of the submission addresses the first term of reference of the Senate inquiry, namely:

1. *Whether school education prepares students adequately for further education, training and employment including, but not limited to:*
 - a. the extent to which each stage of schooling (early primary; middle schooling; senior secondary) equips students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through to the next stage
 - b. the extent to which schools provide students with the core knowledge and skills they need to participate in further education and training, and as members of the community.

The Queensland Government has a range of strategic initiatives in place and under development to ensure school students have the core skills and knowledge they need to be prepared for each stage of schooling and to transition from school into further education, training and/or employment.

The landmark, cross-sectoral *ETRF* reforms provide a comprehensive and integrated package of reforms, which:

- sets a solid foundation for Queensland’s children in the early phase of learning (Preparatory Year to Year 3)
- focuses on the distinctive needs of students in the middle phase of learning (Years 4 to 9) to improve engagement and achievement
- provides flexible education and training pathways suited to the needs of students in the senior phase of learning (Years 10, 11 and 12 and their equivalent).

3.1.1 The Early Phase of Learning

The Queensland Government provides quality learning experiences in the early years to prepare students for quality learning throughout life. Queensland has laid the foundation for success in the early years, with the introduction of the new Preparatory Year (Prep) in state and non-state schools.

The Introduction of Prep

A full-time Prep Year was made available in Queensland in 2007. In 2006–07, Queensland invested:

- \$106 million to continue to deliver new and refurbished Preparatory Year classrooms in state schools
- \$11 million in grants to state schools for Preparatory Year curriculum resources
- \$1.4 million to provide professional development for state school Preparatory Year teachers
- \$3.1 million to non-state schools to help them deliver the new Preparatory Year of schooling.

To ensure Prep provides the right learning for children to prepare them for the next step in their school education, Queensland has developed *The Early Years Curriculum Guidelines* (EYCG). The *EYCG*, developed for Prep, provides a framework for teachers to align learning, teaching and assessment, and promote continuity in children’s learning by:

- guiding teachers in making links between prior, current and future learning
- illustrating developmentally, socially and culturally responsive learning opportunities that acknowledge equity and diversity
- establishing essential connections between the *EYCG* and the Years 1 to 10 key learning area (KLA) syllabuses.

The *EYCG* is based on extensive research, which shows that early childhood programs, which encourage active learning, problem-solving, effective communication, creativity, social adjustment and participation benefit children's long-term success in achieving in education and participating as active citizens. As such, the Early Learning Areas in the *EYCG* are derived from the factors identified by research as being associated with children's later success in school education:

- Social and personal learning
- Health and physical learning
- Language learning and communication
- Early mathematical understandings
- Active learning processes.

In order to ensure all schoolchildren are achieving at the required level in Prep, and are ready to transition into Year 1, an Early Learning Record (ELR) is completed for all students undertaking Prep. The ELR is subsequently provided to Year 1 teachers as a record of each child's progress and to support future planning for the child. The ELR is also used to inform oral reporting to parents, which uses the information contained in the ELR and is supported by the evidence collated in the child's individual folio. This reporting informs parents on their child's educational progress in Prep.

Year 2 Diagnostic Net

Students' preparedness in the early years is also checked through the early identification of children who may require additional support in the specific areas of literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental to succeeding in this phase and all subsequent phases of schooling, further education and training, in the workplace and throughout life. The Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) National Reform Agenda has included literacy and numeracy outcomes as fundamental in improving the nation's productivity.

In Queensland the Year 2 Diagnostic Net monitors and assesses children's development in literacy and numeracy. As part of the Net process Years 1, 2 and 3 teachers must:

- observe and map children's progress using developmental continua for literacy and numeracy
- involve identified Year 2 children in specifically designed assessment tasks and then establish those children who require intervention
- provide support to children requiring additional assistance
- report to parents about their child's development in literacy and numeracy.

As part of the COAG National Reform Agenda, COAG and all states and territories have agreed to implement on entry to school literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessment systems for children in their first year by 2010. Queensland already has such a system in place. The Queensland Year 2 Diagnostic Net has proven to be an integral part of ensuring student literacy and numeracy standards are adequate in the early years. As a result of the Net improved student learning outcomes have been identified within Queensland state schools. For example, over the past five years the number of students identified through the Net as not requiring assistance has gradually increased as follows: in 2006, 75.8 per cent of students were identified as not requiring assistance with reading compared to 72.6 per cent in 2002; in 2006, 80.9 per cent of students were identified as not requiring assistance with numeracy compared to 77.5 per cent in 2002; and in 2006 84.9 per cent of students were identified as not requiring assistance with writing compared to 82.8 per cent in 2002.

3.1.2 The Middle Phase of Learning

The middle years of schooling occur at a time of dynamic growth and change in a young person's life. The impact of simultaneous change in physical, emotional, intellectual and social factors as students move through the middle years creates needs and challenges for this age group that are recognised as significantly different from the needs of

younger children or older adolescents. This is also a time when students may lose their enthusiasm for learning, disengage from classroom activities and can make the least progress in learning.

In Queensland state schools the implementation of the *Middle Phase of Learning State School Action Plan* (Years 4–9) recognises the importance of engaging and supporting students through these years and as they transition to the senior years of schooling. The Action Plan sets the direction, clarifies expectations and accountabilities and commits systemic support for reform.

The cornerstone of the Action Plan is alignment in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment to bring greater consistency and rigour to what is taught and greater reliability in and accountability for how it is assessed. The Action Plan includes a focus on closely monitoring students' progress in literacy and numeracy and making better use of benchmarking data resulting from the literacy and numeracy Year 5 and 7 tests. This includes a particular focus on supporting students who may be educationally disadvantaged and/or at risk of disengaging from schooling.

As a result of the Action Plan state schools will:

- have smaller class sizes, supporting a greater focus on engagement with students. The Queensland Government has in place class size targets of 28 students in Years 4 to 10, which is among the lowest in the country.
- further support students during their transitions
- increase collaboration within and across education sectors and the community
- use an existing student-free day to focus on teacher professional development and effective practice.

In the middle phase of learning, under the Action Plan, Queensland state schools are encouraged to cluster to facilitate consistent curriculum planning and pedagogy, and share information to improve the transition of students within and across primary and secondary schools.

3.1.3 Reform in the Early and Middle Phases of Learning: QCAR

The *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework* is a key element of the second stage of the Queensland Government's *Smart State Strategy 2005–2015*.

From 2008 QCAR will define the essentials that all students from Years 1 to 10 in all state and non-state schools need to know and the standards of achievement they are expected to meet. The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) has the key role in developing and implementing the *QCAR Framework*.

The introduction of the *QCAR Framework* will mean that teachers will have a clear guide as to the essential core knowledge and skills that must be imparted to students, and a guide as to how to assess that student learning in these areas has occurred.

The *QCAR Framework* addresses concerns from teachers and the community about the amount of material required to be covered in the early and middle years' curriculum. Uncluttering the curriculum through QCAR will provide more opportunity for students to achieve a deeper level of understanding in key learning areas.

The QCAR Framework includes strategies to define the 'Essential Learnings' (currently in draft), and to set standards for assessing and reporting student achievement in the early and middle years of schooling. This includes:

- defining what is essential for all Queensland school students to learn
- setting new standards to measure student achievement in the Essential Learnings
- creating a bank of assessment tools linked to the Essential Learnings and standards
- establishing statewide rigorous comparable assessment of the Essential Learnings against standards in Years 4, 6 and 9
- specifying a common framework and five-point results scale for reporting student achievement.

Rather than seeking 'sameness', the Framework promotes greater comparability across Queensland schools and provides a way of achieving more commonality in what is taught, while supporting diversity in how it is taught. In this way the Framework takes into account the distinctive needs of students and school communities across Queensland.

Essential Learnings and Standards

The draft Essential Learnings are clear statements of what is considered important for all students to know and be able to do at the end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. They describe the key concepts, facts, procedures and ways of working that students need for ongoing learning, social and personal competence and to meet complex, real-life challenges. The Essential Learnings will support problem-solving and critical inquiry, the development of deep understandings of key disciplinary concepts and also the development of key capabilities needed for working with knowledge. As part of QCAR all schools will build their curriculum around the Essential Learnings. There will be Essential Learnings for each of the following key learning areas (KLAs):

- English
- Health and Physical Education
- Languages other than English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Studies of Society and Environment
- Technology
- The Arts.

The QCAR initiative is also driven by a need for improved application of agreed standards of students' achievement. Within the *QCAR Framework*, standards will connect the Essential Learnings to assessment and reporting practices. Standards for Essential Learnings are descriptions of the expected qualities of student work.

The Standards will be comprised of a five-point scale, and by referring to the Standards, teachers will be better able to judge whether a student's progress in the Essential Learnings is above, below or on par with expectations.

QCAR will improve consistency in the quality of schooling and the comparability of assessment and reporting of student achievement standards across the state. Under the Framework, from 2009, student work of a similar standard should receive the same results regardless of the school attended, and parents will be able to see whether their child's achievement is above, below or on par with expectations.

As part of the Framework the QSA will establish an Assessment Bank to provide teachers with access to high-quality assessment tools and resources. This bank will be built up over time and provide a resource for teachers with models of good assessment, examples of student work and access for teachers to share assessment tasks they have created.

The QSA will also develop assessment tasks at Years 4, 6 and 9 to assess student achievement against the standards in English, Maths, Science and one other area. Non-state schools may also use these common tasks. These tasks will be conducted by classroom teachers and the intention is to allow students to demonstrate their best work in a range of assessment situations. Data on these tasks will be reported at a system level and to individual students. The common assessment tasks will provide reliable and comparable information about student achievement across schools and complements existing assessment and reporting functions.

A quality assurance process, driven by the QSA, will be put in place to ensure high-quality evidence of student achievement is collected, and that reported teacher judgments of student achievement are justified, comparable across schools, and based on a shared understanding of standards.

Comprehensive assessment and reporting

As part of QCAR, from 2009, all students' reports to parents provided by schools in Years 4, 6 and 9 will include information about student achievement against Essential Learnings combined with national testing and other state assessment mechanisms. This will result in comprehensive assessment and reporting arrangements for each individual student throughout Years P–12 as follows:

- School-devised assessment will continue to be conducted at each year level with reporting using a common five-point scale.
- In the Prep Year all state schools and most non-state schools will monitor children's learning progress using the Early Learning Record (ELR). At the end of Prep, parents will receive a report on their child's progress.
- In Year 2, the Year 2 Diagnostic Net will map children's development in literacy and numeracy in all state schools and most non-state schools.
- In Years 1, 2 and 3, schools will provide a standard report about each student's development in reading, writing, and numeracy.
- All students in Year 3 will participate in national tests of literacy and numeracy skills. The QSA currently provides a report to parents, which shows the individual's achievement in comparison to national benchmarks and state averages.
- All students in Year 4 will participate in comparable assessment of the Essential Learnings. Schools will report to parents using a five-point scale.
- All students in Year 5 will participate in national tests of literacy and numeracy skills. The QSA currently provides a report to parents, which shows the individual's achievement in comparison to national benchmarks and state averages.
- All students in Year 6 will participate in comparable assessment of the Essential Learnings. Schools will report to parents using a five-point scale. In addition each year a sample of Year 6 students is required to participate in a national test on either English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship or Information and Communication Technologies (one subject area covered each year).
- All students in Year 7 participate in national tests of literacy and numeracy skills. The QSA provides a report to parents, which shows the individual's achievement in comparison to national benchmarks and state averages.
- All students in Year 9 will participate in comparable assessment of the Essential Learnings. Schools report to parents using a five-point scale. In addition, all students in Year 9 will participate in national tests of literacy and numeracy skills (scheduled to begin in 2008).
- Every year a sample of Year 10 students participates in a national test on rotating topics – to date, Science (2003), Civics and Citizenship (2004) or Information and Communication Technologies (2005). Summary results are reported in state and national reports.
- Additionally, every three years a sample of students (aged 15 years) participates in international tests covering Reading and Mathematical and Scientific Literacy. Summary results are reported in state, national and international reports about student achievements.
- In Years 11 and 12 moderated school-based assessment is conducted. Students may also choose to undertake the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test in Year 12. The QSA issues a Senior Certificate to eligible students completing Year 12, which records results in senior subjects, vocational education and training (VET) and other recognised learning. The Certificate also records a result for those students who sit the QCS Test. Tertiary Entrance Statements are issued to eligible students. The Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) will be issued to qualifying students from 2008 (see section 4.1.3 for further information).

Evaluation of QCAR

Queensland has committed to a comprehensive evaluation of the *QCAR Framework*. This evaluation will involve a three-pronged approach of gathering evidence of the effectiveness of the QCAR products, the process of implementation of QCAR and the impact of QCAR on teaching practice and student outcomes.

The QSA will evaluate the QCAR products and the implementation process.

The collection of baseline data for an evaluation of the impact of the *QCAR Framework* on student outcomes over time is under way and will continue until around March 2008. Contractors will be engaged to summarise this data and to provide a report in 2008.

A second set of data collection to allow for comparison of student achievement before and after the *QCAR Framework* will occur in 2009–10.

This evaluation will both monitor the effect of the *QCAR Framework* across Queensland schools and allow for comparison with interstate and overseas schools. This data will inform education policy and ongoing actions to ensure that Queensland schooling is flexible and responsive to changing needs, and provides the very best education possible. This analysis of the two sets of data and subsequently the impact of QCAR on student performance is likely to be available by mid 2011.

3.1.4 The Senior Phase of Learning

The *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (ETRF) announced in 2002 introduced significant reforms to Queensland's education and training system. These changes included reforms to the senior phase of learning to create a more responsive system that has greater choice and flexibility.

The complex array of ETRF strategies was initially introduced over a three-year trial period from 2003 to 2005. Numerous evaluations conducted over this period provided insights into the effectiveness of multiple strategies and where changes could be made to improve outcomes.

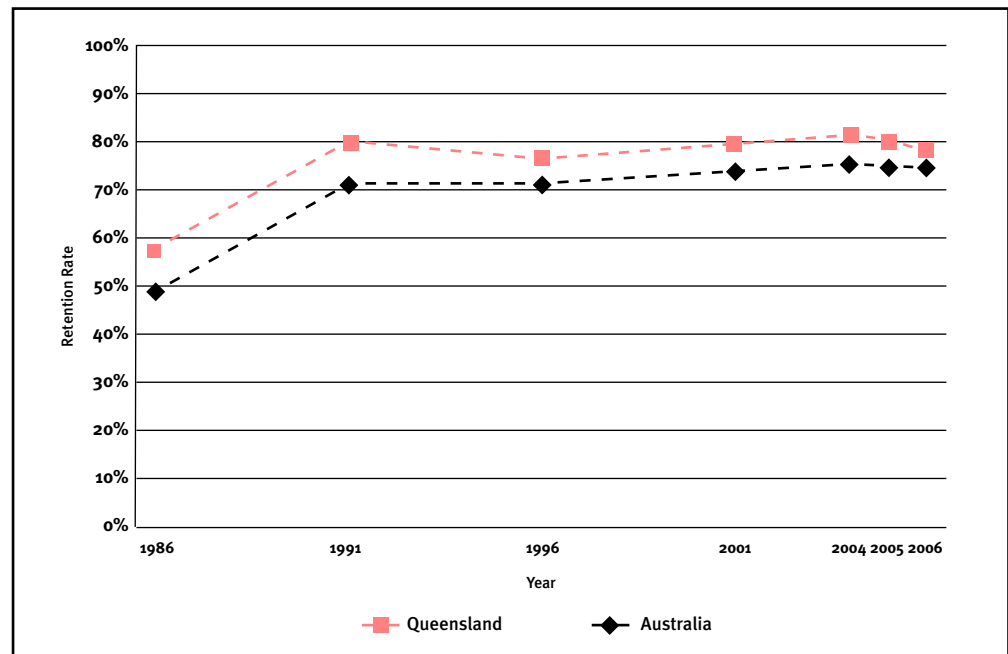
The ETRF reforms that have been introduced included a range of strategies to improve school education outcomes and strengthen overall standards of achievement. The initiatives are aimed at:

- improving student retention and participation in education and training
- improving the qualification levels of young people aged 15–17 years
- strengthening young people's transitions through the senior phase and into further education, training and employment.

Evidence across OECD nations demonstrates that completing Year 12 or its equivalent is vital in improving access to subsequent opportunities for young people. The Queensland Government is focused on improving the student retention rate to ensure students are equipped to meet the challenges of their chosen post-school destination, and to participate as members of the community.

Figure 2 shows that over the past 20 years Queensland student retention from Years 7 to 8 to Year 12 has been higher than the national average.

Figure 2: Student Retention Rates Years 7/8 to Year 12, Queensland and Australia, 1986–2006.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, cat. 4221.0, Schools Australia, 2006

At the individual student level, in 2006 legislative changes were enacted to ensure young people remain in education, training or employment until the age of 17 or until they receive certain qualifications. The legislation also requires all schools to register their students with the QSA in the year before they complete Year 10, or turn 16, whichever comes first. This process initiates an individual learning account, which provides students and their parents or guardians with access to information about their achievements in school subjects, recognised VET programs and their progress toward the new QCE.

As part of ETRF, at the individual level, students also benefit from the development of Senior Education and Training (SET) plans. Year 10 students of state schools now develop individual SET plans for the senior phase of learning (non-state schools undertake similar processes). These plans detail what students need to achieve in order to successfully transition through the senior phase. They are developed with the students and their parents or guardians and can be reviewed periodically by the student and the learning provider to include changes to learning options. SET plans are based on the premise that the best results are achieved by adolescent learners when they are included in the decision-making process.

From 2008 individual students who have completed Year 12 may also qualify for the new QCE. The QCE recognises the broader range of learning that students can choose from. This includes traditional academic school subjects, Vocational Education and Training (VET), higher education subjects taken while at school, extracurricular qualifications in areas such as music, speech and drama, and sport, as well as learning achievements from self-directed learning projects, or projects completed in conjunction with a workplace or community organisation. The QCE will be a valued qualification for individuals and employers as it reflects the breadth, depth and standard of learning achieved (see section 4.1.3 for further information).

Under the ETRF agenda more than 100 Youth Support Coordinators have been employed to work with young people at risk of not transitioning into or completing the senior phase of learning. This is a collaborative initiative between the Department of Education, Training and the Arts and the Department of Communities and serves as an early intervention and prevention program to ensure the engagement of all young people in learning.

The ETRF reforms also involve more career and personal support for students. In addition to the introduction of SET plans, additional support includes:

- assisting schools and TAFE Institutes to coordinate VET and enhance career guidance and counselling
- funds for services that support students who have fallen through the education and training net
- a Community Mentoring Program, which aims to improve participation, retention and attainment in learning for 14 – 17-year-olds, through experienced mentors with local knowledge and expertise
- an individualised, online career information service offering information to help young people and their parents map a pathway to a QCE and beyond. To support the online career information service, there is a career counselling service for students and parents
- a comprehensive career education website.

At the local level *District Youth Achievement Plans (DYAPs)* involve a plan of action to help young people, particularly those aged from 15 to 17 years, reach their learning, training and career goals. A DYAP coordinates programs and services for young people at the local level, across state and non-state schools, VET providers and other services in order to ensure successful transitions for young people.

In addition, the *Industry–School Engagement Strategy* encourages local relationships and skills solutions between businesses and schools. As part of this strategy Queensland state schools have developed partnerships with the information and communications technology, wine tourism, aviation and minerals and energy industries.

The ICT Industry Project, involving the Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) and Microsoft Australia, is designed to increase direct student pathways into the ICT and related industries. Current achievements within the ICT Industry Project include:

- the development of a new industry designed, vendor certified course designed to result in direct employment opportunities for students
- partnerships with post-secondary training providers and tertiary institutions to provide students with end-to-end training pathways.

The Queensland College of Wine Tourism (QCWT) is a purpose-built facility to provide education and training for the wine tourism industry in Queensland. The QCWT partners with a number of Queensland state schools, the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE and the University of Southern Queensland.

The QCWT partnerships provide seamless transition for almost 800 students, from entry-level school-based training to VET pathways to post-graduate studies in wine science and business in the following areas:

- Hospitality
- Tourism
- Business – Wine Tourism
- Wine Science
- Agriculture
- Food Processing – Wine
- Food Processing – Viticulture.

The Aerospace Project includes 17 Queensland state schools and five major aerospace partners. Recent successes include 421 students studying the Queensland Studies Authority subject of Aerospace Studies.

The Queensland Minerals and Energy Academy (QMEA) and the Queensland Resources Council partnership is designed to encourage students to enter careers in the minerals and energy sector in response to skills shortages being faced by the sector. The partnership provides students with work experience, on-site activities and opportunities to take up traineeships and apprenticeships. As at 30 September 2006, there were 26 school-based apprenticeships employed in the industry.

Over four years, from 2007, the Industry–School Engagement Strategy will be expanded to include five new Industry Trade Centres. The centres will provide a learning environment that duplicates the expectations and discipline of the workplace, and will be based in an established industry setting, linked to a specific industry or group of like industries and require support from industry to be established.

At a systemic level, the Queensland Government has also expanded the range of options available to young people in the senior phase of learning. This includes ensuring that even more young people in schools have the opportunity to undertake school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SATs). SATs are considered highly effective in strengthening young people’s transitions to employment, as well as to further education and training.

Queensland has a strong record of providing high-quality SATs, and continues to lead the nation in the number of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships. The National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) reports that Queensland accounted for 40.5 per cent of all SATs commencements nationally in 2006⁶.

In recognition of the important role that SATs play in strengthening young people’s transitions from school to employment or further education and training, the Queensland Government has committed to doubling the number of SATs commencements by 2009.

The *Next Step* Destination Survey and Report provides information about the destinations of students who complete Year 12 in all state and non-state Queensland schools and subsequently the success of initiatives aimed to assist students to successfully navigate the senior phase of learning.

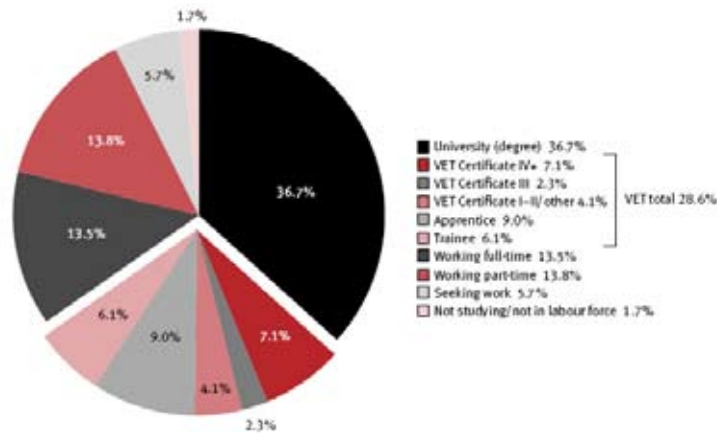
The *Next Step* Survey was introduced in 2005, prior to the introduction of Australian Government reporting requirements regarding post-school destinations. Care must be taken when drawing comparisons between 2005 findings and 2006 findings due to changes in the survey methodology adopted across the two years and the response rates (59.9 per cent and 77.5 per cent respectively). However, generally, in the two surveys a number of destination categories showed similar results including the proportion of students entering degree-level programs at university, the proportion of Certificate III students, and the proportion of Certificate I – II students and apprentices.

Key findings of the 2006 *Next Step* Survey include that more than 90 per cent of Year 12 completers were studying or in paid employment, and that about two-thirds (65.3 per cent) continued in some recognised form of education and training in the year after they left school.

⁶ NCVER data is based on the Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information and Statistical Standard (AVETMISS): The Statistical Standard for New Apprentices. The NCVER data is sourced from *Australian vocational education and training statistics: Apprentices and trainees - September quarter 2006*.

Figure 3 below provides further information on the main destinations of Year 12 completers.

Figure 3: Main Destinations of Year 12 completers in Queensland in 2006.



Source: The *Next Step Report 2006*, Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, The University of Melbourne for the Queensland Government Department of Education, Training and the Arts.

Of the 34.7 per cent of Year 12 completers who did not enter post-school education or training, more than a quarter (27.3 per cent) were employed, 5.7 per cent were looking for work and 1.7 per cent were neither working, seeking work or studying. Of these 1.7 per cent or 533 Year 12 completers cited the main reasons for not looking for work as:

- a disability
- a wish to travel
- acceptance of a job starting later
- family commitments.

The results of the *Next Step Survey* show that a significant proportion of Queensland Year 12 completers were engaged in post-school tertiary education or vocational education and training (VET) in the year after leaving school. Engagement in post-school education and training is linked to improved outcomes including later employment prospects.

In Queensland the results of the survey are used to provide information to the policy development arms of the Department of Education, Training and the Arts, and that of other schooling sectors, and to individual schools to assist schools in planning their services for senior students. It is important to note that the results of the 2006 *Next Step Survey* do not reflect the full impact of the ETRF reforms. Students affected by the introduction of these reforms will complete Year 12 in 2008 and be surveyed in 2009.

Other important measures of whether school education adequately prepares students for their chosen post-school pathway include those measures that monitor students' success in their pathway over time.

Indicators related to successful outcomes for students who go on to higher education generally include university attrition, retention and student progress rates, which are published for each university. These factors are not calculated for school-leaver entrants only. The large body of research about transition to university, attrition and first-year university experience identifies a wide range of factors at play in a school student's performance at university including, but not limited to, career direction changes, conflict between family and study, personal illness and social difficulties⁷.

⁷ Long, M., Ferrier, F. & Heagney, M. (2006). *Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in first year*, Monash University ACER. <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/678FF919-3AD5-46C7-9F57-739841698A85/14398/final.pdf>

However, a longitudinal study by the QSA in 2004⁸ involving eight Queensland universities and three TAFE Institutes and their year 2000 first-years found that 77 per cent of continuing students and 67 per cent of non-continuing students thought their senior schooling had prepared them well for their current study. They found most useful the subjects undertaken (72 per cent), encouragement by teachers and others (71 per cent), nature of the teaching program (62 per cent), school resources (61 per cent) and career guidance (48 per cent). The study also noted that attrition (total dropping out) was relatively low (4 per cent), and that course change was more common (23 per cent).

3.1.5 Literacy and Numeracy

Although Queensland students (and Australia as a whole) perform well in international comparisons of literacy and numeracy achievement, of key concern are the students who are not meeting minimum benchmarks or proficiency standards.

The percentage of Queensland Year 3 students achieving the national benchmarks in reading, writing, and numeracy has been generally comparable to the national percentage over the past five years. In 2004, the results improved and were again comparable with national results, except for 2004 Numeracy and 2002 and 2003 Writing, where the Queensland percentage fell below the national percentage.

In 2005 the percentage of Queensland Year 5 students achieving the reading benchmark was below the national standard. However, the achievement levels of Year 5 Queensland students in the areas of numeracy and writing were comparable to the national performance.

The percentage of Queensland students achieving the national benchmarks at Year 7 is comparable or higher than the national percentage. This applies across all curriculum areas – Reading, Writing, and Numeracy – and has been consistent since the inception of Year 7 reporting.

Across Australia, in 2005, Indigenous students performed below the level of other students in all areas of national literacy and numeracy benchmark testing. Queensland students who have a language background other than English (LBOTE) had lower levels of achievement than LBOTE students nationally with the exceptions of Year 3 Reading and Year 7 Writing and Numeracy where Queensland LBOTE students' performance is comparable to that of all LBOTE students nationally.

At all year levels in all curriculum areas, students in very remote locations perform at levels below that of other students. This pattern is evident in Queensland as well as in other jurisdictions. In Queensland, in 2005, the performance for very remote students in Year 3 Reading and Year 3, Year 5 and Year 7 Writing is above that of very remote students nationally.

In order to boost student literacy skills the Queensland Government is investing \$173.1 million⁹ in 2006–07. This will support a range of literacy and numeracy interventions, including funding for specialist support teachers and teacher aides, interventions to support students with literacy or numeracy difficulties and support to conduct the Year 2 Diagnostic Net.

In addition, Queensland has committed an additional \$35.6 million over four years to provide targeted support to upper primary students in state and non-state schools who struggle to meet the national benchmarks in literacy in the Year 5 test.

Queensland will invest \$49.8 million over four years to implement the *Literacy; the Key to Learning; Framework for Action 2006–2008*. This Framework for state schools details the

⁸ Queensland Studies Authority. (2004). *Attrition and Persistence of first-year Tertiary Students in Queensland, Longitudinal Research Study*. <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/research/te/docs/attrit-yr1.pdf>

⁹ This includes \$22.5m in funding from the Australian Government.

practical steps being taken to achieve excellence in literacy teaching and learning. The Framework focuses on 17 actions, which address four key challenges of:

- Literacy teaching
- Literacy learning
- Literacy in the curriculum
- Literacy leadership.

In developing and introducing initiatives to raise the level of literacy and numeracy skills of students, Queensland has focused on supporting educationally disadvantaged students. Particularly, achievement in literacy and numeracy is correlated with the socioeconomic circumstances of students.¹⁰

In order to further monitor student achievement standards, the Education Queensland Identifier (EQID) provides the opportunity to track state school students as they move from one year to the next and between state schools. The EQID is a unique code allocated to state school students and was introduced in 1999.

The EQID facilitates longitudinal, individual student data that will more accurately reflect the 'value added' component of schools and programs, and enable more comprehensive research and evaluation of programs and strategies. For example, the EQID allows the analysis of a student's Year 3, 5 and 7 test information irrespective of which state school the student attended. This information can also then be made available to the state high school the student enrolls in for Year 8 allowing informed placement of students within classes and programs.

The EQID also makes it possible to achieve more accurate tracking of students throughout their years of schooling. This leads to greater accuracy and understanding of student transfer, retention rates, and student destinations and the impact of these movements on student outcomes and on resourcing and servicing requirements.

3.1.6 Targeted Strategies

As well as providing quality learning outcomes for all students in all stages of schooling, the Queensland Government also delivers targeted approaches to students with specific needs.

The Department of Education, Training and the Arts' *Inclusive Education Policy* encourages schools to provide personnel with professional development that enhances understanding of how certain social, cultural, economic and geographic factors interrelate and impact on different families and groups in their communities and influence educational outcomes for individuals and groups of students. These factors include poverty, health, gender, ability or disability, ethnicity, location, religion, cultural and linguistic diversity and sexuality.

While significant initiatives for particular groups of students are detailed below, it is important to note that many strategies introduced into the Queensland system are in place to specifically assist lower-performing students. These students are most likely to be experiencing educational disadvantage.

Indigenous Students

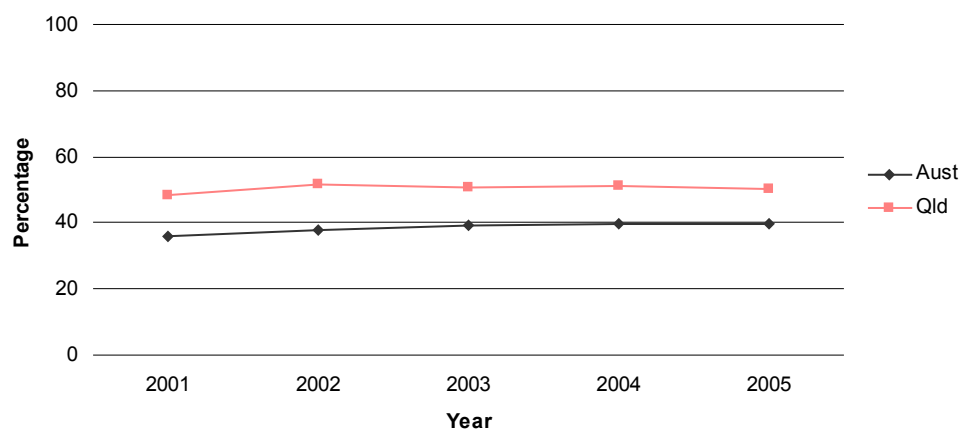
The *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* endorsed by State, Territory, Australian Government and New Zealand Education Ministers sets the priorities for Indigenous education in Australia. Queensland is committed to delivering positive outcomes for Indigenous students in line with this agreed direction.

Queensland has a set of key commitments to improve participation and achievement for Indigenous students, and to measure progress in a number of strategies. These

¹⁰ MCEETYA National Report on Schooling in Australia, Preliminary Paper. (2005) *National Benchmark Results Reading, Writing, and Numeracy Years 3, 5 and 7*.

commitments include improving the standards of education. This means that high expectations are held for Indigenous students in terms of educational achievement. There is also a focus on improving Indigenous students' employment and career development and literacy, and in developing school and community partnerships to achieve this. Figure 4 below shows the apparent retention rate for Queensland Indigenous state school students has been consistently higher (10 per cent or more) than the rate for Indigenous students at a national level over the five-year period to 2005. This is one example of an improved outcome for Indigenous students in Queensland schools.

Figure 4: Apparent Retention Rates Years 7/8–12, Indigenous Students Queensland and Australia – State Schools 2001–2005.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, cat. 4221.0, Schools Australia, 2006

In Queensland *Partners for Success* (2000) is the key strategy for achieving high standards of education for Indigenous students in Queensland state schools. It includes:

- targets for attendance, literacy, numeracy, retention and employment of Indigenous people in each school, with reporting systems to ensure that high standards are achieved
- sharing of successful practices in Indigenous education, through Centres for Excellence in Indigenous Education and a High Achiever Principals Network
- specialist support services, such as Learning Engagement Centres
- recruitment, selection, induction and training strategies to enable high standard teachers working with Indigenous students.

More recently the *Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Torres Strait* (December 2005) and *Bound for Success: Education Strategy for Cape York* (July 2006) have been developed as regional strategies for Indigenous education in Far North Queensland.

Bound for Success assists high standards of education in these regions through:

- expansion and improvement in the quality of pre-Prep education services in Cape York, including a specially designed early learning program that incorporates Indigenous perspectives for early childhood and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) learning
- introduction of a new consistent curriculum across all Cape York schools in Years P–10
- introduction of a new consistent curriculum across Torres Strait schools in Years P–10
- introduction of culturally relevant, rigorous assessment tasks for schools across Cape York and the Torres Strait
- information on student progress to parents, education round tables and other consultative processes, to support community aspirations for educational improvement
- an individual learning plan for each student, supported by a new diagnostic tool and annual assessments of literacy and numeracy

- transition support services for Indigenous students from Cape York, the Torres Strait and Palm Island who have to live away from their remote home communities to access secondary education.

In 2006–07, the Queensland Government, under the *Bound for Success* initiative, will provide an additional \$3.5 million in recurrent funding and \$6.2 million in capital funding for projects to support Indigenous children transition from home to school and remain in secondary school.

These strategies operate on the assumption that Indigenous students are capable of high achievement, despite the difficult circumstances in which many of them live. For this to occur, initiatives focus on both high standards of educational inputs (curriculum, teaching, professional development, support services, facilities) and monitoring high standards of educational outcomes (literacy, numeracy, retention, destinations after school).

Rural and Remote Students

As previously mentioned, rural and remote school students tend to achieve at lower levels than all other students. Queensland has a high proportion of rural and remote schools and students in comparison to other jurisdictions. More than half of all state schools in Queensland are located in remote and rural areas. As at August 2006, there were 118,582 full-time students enrolled in state schools in rural and remote Queensland, accounting for more than 24 per cent of the total state school student population.

Through the *Rural and Remote Education Framework for Action 2006–2008*, the Queensland Government has committed systemic support to drive excellence and improvement in rural and remote education in Queensland over a three-year period from 2006–07 to 2008–09. The Framework is designed to improve service delivery to students in rural and remote areas with a focus on improving retention rates and literacy and numeracy outcomes.

The Framework builds on the principles and intent of the *National Framework for Rural and Remote Education* (2001) developed by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, and adapts its essential enablers to address the key challenges for education in rural and remote areas of Queensland. The Framework's five key drivers are:

- Relevant and Engaged Learning
- Respecting Cultural Diversity
- ICTs and Multimodal Delivery
- Personnel and Workforce Capability
- Environments and Resourcing.

During 2007–09 the Queensland Government will establish up to nine Rural and Remote Education Centres of Excellence. The Centres of Excellence will receive funding to support the development of processes and programs to share best practice with rural and remote schools across Queensland. Many schools in rural and remote Queensland have developed innovative teaching and learning practices to meet the unique challenges and education needs associated with living and learning in rural and remote locations.

In 2007, a homestay program for geographically isolated students in Years 10, 11 and 12 will also be piloted. As part of this program participating students will enrol in one of seven high-performing state high schools on the eastern seaboard, and live away from home with a local family in homestay accommodation to complete their education.

The homestay pilot offers a number of benefits for geographically isolated students as well as participating schools and their communities, including:

- access to an additional education pathway to the senior phase of learning
- providing a less expensive schooling option for those families who struggle to meet the costs associated with sending their child to a non-state boarding school

- providing enhanced access to an extensive range of education, training courses and extracurricular activities
- access to quality homestay accommodation with local families who provide a safe, warm and friendly environment
- facilitating cultural exchange and building relationships between urban and remote students and their families.

Students in Care

The Queensland Government also provides additional assistance to students who are in the care of the State, and who are considered as among the most disadvantaged of the student population.

Queensland data shows that children and young people in the care of the State do not perform as well at school as their peers, and their results in the Years 3, 5 and 7 tests in state schools are below the state average. The Queensland Government aims to provide safe and stable educational experiences that enable these students to achieve their individual educational goals.

Queensland is investing more than \$5.1 million per year recurrently through the *Education Support Funding Program* to fund individual strategies detailed in each student's *Education Support Plan (ESP)*.

Students with Disabilities

Queensland provides a broad range of educational programs and support services, including specialist teachers available in primary, secondary and special schools to support students with a disability throughout the phases of learning.

In the early years the Queensland Government provides Early Childhood Development programs and services for children prior to Prep who are suspected, or diagnosed, as having a disability with significant educational support needs. These programs enable the assessment of children's individual educational support needs prior to Prep and provide support to enable children's successful transition into Prep.

The Queensland Government has allocated more than \$458 million within the 2006–07 budget to support students with disabilities in Queensland state and non-state schools.

Gifted and talented students

The Queensland Government's *Smart State* agenda puts an added focus on the importance of establishing provisions in all state schools that identify gifted students, engage them in learning and enable them to develop their abilities.

The Queensland Government has responded to the needs of gifted students through a number of systemic initiatives and local strategies designed to build on the abilities and talents of students and deliver curriculum offerings that best meet their unique needs. Initiatives include:

- *Framework for Gifted Education*. This framework describes state schools responsibilities in addressing the needs of students who are gifted. It details tools that support identification of gifted students.
- Guidelines for acceleration. This strategy enables schools to provide subject acceleration and year level advancement in order to respond to student needs and abilities.
- Professional development support through the *Gifted Education Professional Learning Community* on the Learning Place website. This site captures unit plans, teaching strategies, tools to support identification of gifted students and advice and information for teachers and parents.
- School-based extension and enrichment programs. Individual schools continually develop programs for specific groups of students including those with identified gifts and talents.

- The Queensland Government has also allocated funding of \$118 million for the establishment of three Queensland Academies for its 'best and brightest'. The academies for maths, science and technology and the creative arts opened in 2007. The academy for health sciences is expected to open in 2008. The academies offer students the opportunity to interact with other bright students in state-of-the-art facilities and the opportunity to fast-track tertiary study and gain industry experience.

3.1.7 Developing a Quality Workforce

The Queensland Government is committed to providing high-quality educational service to its students and school communities. One of the keys to ensuring students have the best chance of academic success lies with the education workforce.

At the April 2007 MCEETYA meeting all Governments acknowledged that recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and commitment to the profession is critical to educational quality.

Queensland is committed to attracting, retaining and developing a workforce of teachers who achieve high-quality outcomes. The Queensland Government spends more than \$40 million per annum in the ongoing professional development of its large and geographically dispersed school-based workforce.

Professional development, strategies to reward high-performing teachers and performance evaluation practices are essential building blocks for establishing and maintaining a teaching workforce capable of achieving high standards. Current Queensland initiatives focused on raising the status of the teaching profession include:

- *Queensland College of Teachers* – established in 2006, the College promotes the importance of teaching as a highly valued and ethical profession and regulates entry to and ongoing membership of the profession in Queensland.
- *Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers* – the Queensland College of Teachers has established professional standards for teachers, as part of major government reforms to teacher registration. These standards outline the skills, knowledge and abilities teachers must possess for registration purposes. One of the standards is focused on the teaching and assessment of literacy and numeracy. The development of these standards was informed by the MCEETYA National Framework for Professional Standards for Teaching and the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy.
- *Rewards and Recognition Programs* – the Queensland Government offers a number of scholarships, grants and awards and incentives through a rewards and recognition program for its current and future employees. This includes a focus on pre-service scholarships for students from rural/remote areas of the state and Indigenous students and scholarships and grants to enable employees to pursue individual professional development opportunities, continue their tertiary studies or undertake a national or international study/professional development program.
- *Leadership Matters: Leadership capabilities for Education Queensland principals* is a new framework that recognises the vital role of principals in influencing the quality of teaching and student outcomes. Five related leadership capabilities – Educational, Personal, Relational, Intellectual and Organisational – form the basis of the framework. *Leadership Matters* is supported by a suite of professional development programs available to current and aspiring state school leaders.

The quality of teaching can be affected by a range of additional variables including the funding of teacher places at university, the quality and rigour of pre-service training and the calibre of candidates entering the profession.

At the April 2007 MCEETYA meeting, states and territories called on the Australian Government to work with them to identify specific actions that will support principals in managing their workforce. These include adequate funding for teacher education places; enforcing the HECS/HELP cap for teacher education, particularly for maths and science

students; and relieving the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) from state-funded teacher education scholarships.

Tied to the achievement of teacher quality is the provision of teachers in areas of shortages. Currently in Queensland there is a shortage of teachers in the areas of special education, manual arts and graphics (design and technology) and senior mathematics and science. While the Queensland Government has been working with the Deans of Education at Queensland universities since 2003 to improve the match between Queensland teacher graduates and available teaching jobs in Queensland schools, there are areas of specific Australian Government responsibility that would assist in this process.

These include readjusting the current HECS/HELP structure for teachers, particularly for those who study particular specialist areas of high need, and removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) requirements for teacher training scholarships. Extending the FBT concessions that apply to Health employees to Education employees would be of immense benefit in making teacher employment packages more attractive and comparative to those of other professions. It would also assist Queensland to attract and retain high-quality teachers, particularly to rural and remote Queensland and in specialist areas.

Additionally, it is vital that the next generation of teachers is equipped to drive improvements in the literacy and numeracy outcomes of students. The Australian Government also has primary responsibility for pre-service teacher education. A key investment would be to provide additional funding to universities to assist in aligning and updating pre-service teacher education courses to strengthen the focus on teaching literacy and numeracy and improve teacher practicum, while maintaining the diversity of the courses offered.

4 Term of Reference 2: Queensland Year 12 Academic Standards

Section 4 of this submission specifically addresses the second term of reference of the Senate inquiry included below:

2. *The standards of academic achievement expected of students qualifying for the senior secondary certificate in each state and territory.*

The Queensland Government is committed to the highest standards of education as well as to a flexible education and training system. Queensland is committed to increasing educational standards through the provision of rigorous assessment and quality assurance practices to ensure comparable achievement.

Queensland's assessment regime involves a long tradition of mechanisms at both school and state level which support high standards. Building on the strength of Queensland's current system, the Queensland Government is introducing new reforms, such as the QCE, as part of ETRF reforms, to strengthen the overall standards of achievement of Year 12 completers.

4.1.1 School-based Assessment and Moderation

Queensland operates a system of externally moderated school-based assessment in the senior years of schooling (Years 11 and 12). In this system, students are taught and assessed by schools, rather than through a point-in-time external exam. This school-based system of assessment occurs within a rigorous statewide quality assurance framework.

Firstly, the QSA approves syllabuses for senior certification. Senior syllabuses describe criteria and standards for determining levels of student achievement on exit from a school work program.

Schools then develop work programs for each QSA subject they are offering in Years 11 and 12. These school programs must then be approved by the QSA as programs for which the students' results may be recorded on QSA certificates. This approval process involves the relevant review panel checking a school's work program against the corresponding syllabus to ensure that the requirements of the syllabus have been met.

Then, within schools, the school principal and subject moderators (subject teachers, subject coordinators or heads of department) implement the approved work programs, assess students and apply the syllabus assessment criteria and standards, and undertake internal moderation processes where required.

Students' standards of achievement are able to be compared across the state in 'Authority subjects' through an extra layer of moderation by a comprehensive system of external moderation. This system involves the QSA, through state and district review panels: monitoring schools' assessment practices; reviewing the proposed levels of student achievement from each school before certification; and conducting random samples of student work after certification.

Queensland's system of school-based assessment and moderation is essential in maintaining standards. School-based assessment and moderation has a wide range of significant benefits including:

- providing opportunities for teachers (within a rigorous quality assurance framework) to assess students using a range of assessment methods. These methods may include group work, oral presentations and assignments as well as written exams. This caters for the varied learning styles that can be found in any group of students and enables the full range of processes and skills identified in the syllabus to be assessed.

- providing an opportunity for students to be continuously assessed by teachers. This gives teachers the opportunity to provide timely and comprehensive feedback to students about how they might improve their level of performance.
- ensuring students are judged on their overall performance over two years of senior study rather than on their performance in a one-off exam. This system also subsequently reduces exam anxiety for students and encourages a more consistent approach to learning that students will require in further education, training and employment.

4.1.2 Queensland Core Skills Test

Integral to the rigour of the senior schooling assessment regime is the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test. The QCS Test assesses the common elements of the senior curriculum, employing three modes of response – extended writing, short response and multiple-choice. Students who are eligible for an Overall Position (OP) are required to sit for the QCS Test, while students who are ineligible for an OP may elect to do so.

A student’s individual QCS result is expressed as a grade from A (highest) to E. Although this result is reported on their Senior Certificate, it is not used on its own in the calculation of their OP for tertiary entrance. Data from the QCS Test scores of all OP-eligible students at a student’s school, however, do contribute to a student’s OP calculation. These data are combined in two ways – by subject-groups at the student’s school and by the whole-school group – and are used for scaling purposes to allow comparisons between subjects and between schools.

In Queensland OPs provide a statewide rank order of students (on a 1 to 25 scale, 1 being the highest) based on students’ achievement in Authority subjects studied for the Queensland Senior Certificate. A student’s OP shows how well that student has performed in their senior studies when compared with the performances of all other OP-eligible students in Queensland.

OPs are used in the selection of students for tertiary education courses. Each year all states and territories produce an overall measure of their final year students’ achievements in a common index, the Interstate Transfer Index, which allows for comparison across the states and territories and across time for applicants applying to a university in another state or territory.

4.1.3 Qualifying for a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE)

The Queensland Government is currently introducing the QCE based on young people achieving a significant amount of learning to an agreed standard. Added to this all students must demonstrate a set standard of literacy and numeracy. While a wide range of learning can count towards the QCE, only learning that meets rigorous quality controls counts.

The QCE has been developed to recognise the broad range of learning that students undertake. The QCE means students and the community know what is expected of students and as such provides a valued passport to further education, training and employment.

The QCE is a broad-based qualification, which enables recognition of student achievement in the senior phase of learning, including in VET courses, school-based apprenticeships, university subjects and structured workplace learning. This strategy is designed to engage more young people in learning as it allows for students to tailor a learning program that meets their skills, needs and ambitions and recognises core skills including those related to employability.

As part of the QCE, students’ achievement will be measured through a system of credits. A student will need to obtain 20 credits to qualify for the QCE, at least 12 of which must come from completed core studies. The remaining eight credits can come from a combination of core studies or other learning achievements such as structured

workplace learning projects, university subjects or recognised certificates in such areas as music, sport or drama.

Students who don't achieve sufficient credit points to be awarded the QCE at the end of Year 12 can continue to work towards qualifying for the certificate at a later date.

The new QCE will be awarded for the first time in 2008. In addition all students who finish Year 12 will receive a Senior Statement, which is a record of all their results in studies that may contribute to senior secondary certification, regardless of whether they qualify for a QCE.

4.1.4 Review of Senior Syllabus

Queensland recognises the importance of sequencing learning to flow on from the Key Learning Areas used in Years 1–10 to the senior years of schooling and beyond. It also recognises the importance of ensuring that the curricula are organised to keep pace with the current needs of learners and contribute to an education system that is responsive to the changing demands of society and the economy. To ensure Queensland senior syllabuses are responsive to these needs, the QSA has been conducting a review of senior syllabuses over the past two years. Specific proposals are due to be developed by the end of 2007.

The review of senior syllabuses aims to build on the successes of the existing syllabuses, align the syllabus structure to recent and emerging reforms in education and to provide a framework that will enable students to meet future challenges. This review will inform the development of an overarching framework and plan for the redevelopment of the suite of syllabuses in the senior phase of learning.

4.1.5 Monitoring School Performance

The quality of the school that a student attends impacts on their achievement.

Queensland has a strong commitment to monitoring the performance of state school outcomes to promote continuous improvement, improve school accountability and strengthen school planning and review processes.

In Queensland a comprehensive suite of data on state schools is available to enable principals, managers and other senior staff to analyse information on school performance. Many of the data sets are delivered online through the Corporate Data Warehouse, which may be accessed by principals and other education employees.

In Queensland state schools Executive Directors (Schools) monitor actual school performance against expected performance. Executive Directors (Schools) are also charged with focusing on developing principal leadership.

The *School Improvement and Accountability Framework (SIAF)* requires Queensland state schools to complete an annual operational planning and reporting cycle and a three-year strategic planning and reviewing cycle.

In addition all state schools undertake a Triennial School Review as part of the three-year cycle. This review involves the principal's supervisor, the Executive Director (Schools), who is responsible for ensuring that the three-year strategic plan developed at the school level is relevant and meaningful for the future effectiveness of the school.

Queensland state schools may also be reviewed at any time as part of a *Review by Exception/Review of Exemplary Practices* process.

A Review by Exception may take place in response to significant changing circumstances at a school, where there is uncertainty about the school's strategic direction, or where the school requires assistance to undertake improvement strategies. In this process a

team of departmental reviewers, usually external to the school, is led by the Executive Director (Schools). This review process identifies:

- strategies that focus on school improvement
- factors that have inhibited learning in the school
- processes that will provide an avenue for productive dialogue for improving performance
- strategies to be included in the development of action plans for school improvement.

A Review of Exemplary Practices may also be called in response to outstanding performance in a school to determine those exemplary practices that can be promoted and shared with other schools.

5 Term of Reference 3: Comparability of Academic Standards

In addressing the third term of reference of the inquiry listed below, the submission outlines data that shows that generally Queensland and Australian students' level of performance in comparison to other OECD countries is considered to be at a high level. Additionally, this section focuses on the stated interest of the Senate inquiry in the comparability of curriculum content and standards across Australia.

3. *How such academic standards compare between states and territories and with those of other countries.*

5.1 International comparability

With the emergence and growth of the global economy, international comparisons are being used to assess how well national education systems are performing. International comparisons provide benchmarks to assess education systems' performance in certain areas, and to identify potential strategies to improve student achievement.

Generally, Australian school students achieve at a high level in comparison to other OECD countries. Queensland students achieve at a level comparable to Australia as a whole, and as such also perform at a generally high level.

Australia participates in international studies of academic achievement through two highly regarded programs, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). By participating in these studies Australia becomes part of the international education community that, through research, aims to improve student outcomes globally.

5.1.1 Programme for International Student Assessment

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an internationally standardised assessment of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy outcomes for 15-year-old school students. PISA data is not focused on school curricula and formal examinations but on young people's capabilities to apply knowledge in daily life¹¹.

PISA was developed by participating countries and first administered in 2000. The assessment takes place in three-yearly cycles. PISA participants include all 30 OECD countries, and the international averages reported are based on only those countries.

In 2000 the average performance of 15-year-old Australian students on the reading, mathematics and scientific literacy scales in the PISA tests was well above the OECD average, and exceeded only marginally by Japan, Korea and Finland. What is important about this result is that Australian schools performed so well, despite having a much higher proportion of English as a Second Language (17 per cent) and migrant (12 per cent) students than other OECD countries¹².

In 2003, 41 countries participated in PISA, including all 30 member countries of the OECD. In 2003 results only four countries (Hong Kong-China, Finland, Korea and the Netherlands) performed significantly better than Australia in mathematical literacy. In reading literacy only Finland achieved significantly better results than Australia and only three countries (Finland, Japan and Korea) outperformed Australia in scientific literacy. These latest results show that Australia's 15-year-old students have a level of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy among the best in the world. Australia's results

¹¹ Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P. & Richardson, D. (2006) *UNICEF Innocenti Working Paper: Comparing Child Well-Being in OECD Countries: Concepts and Methods*.

¹² Power, C. (2004). *The Bassett Oration: Towards 2010: Australian Education in an international context*. New Horizons in Education, Vol 111, 2004.

were above the OECD average in mathematical, scientific and reading literacy as well as in problem, solving and in each of the four mathematical literacy subscales: quantity, space and shape, change and relationships and uncertainty¹³.

Queensland's mean scores for both PISA mathematics and science are not statistically different from the Australian results. Therefore, in both mathematical and scientific literacy, Queensland students' performance is considered to be at a high level.

5.1.2 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

The standard of achievement of Australian students is also evident in results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). TIMSS was developed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement to measure trends in students' mathematics and science achievement. Offered in 1995, 1999, and 2003, TIMSS provides participating countries with the opportunity to measure students' progress in mathematics and science achievement on a regular four-year cycle. TIMSS focuses on the mathematics and science curriculum, identifying what concepts and processes students have learned, what factors are linked to students' opportunity to learn, and how these factors influence students' achievement¹⁴.

Through participation in TIMSS, Australia has gained reliable and timely data on the mathematics and science achievement of our students compared to that of students in other countries. TIMSS participants include 13 industrialised countries as well as middle-income and developing nations from around the world and international averages reported are based on all participants. In the latest TIMSS cycle in 2002–03, at Year 8, 46 countries participated and in Year 4, 25 countries participated.

Australian students performed moderately well in TIMSS 2002–03 mathematics with the average scores achieved by Australian students about the same as the international average for Year 4 and higher than the international averages for Year 8. In science, Australian students achieved above the international average at both year levels.

Although Australian students performed well overall in TIMSS 2002–03 a relative lack of improvement in comparison to other countries was evident. When the performance of Australian students in 2002–03 is compared to the results in TIMSS 1994–95 their performance has not gone backwards; it has actually improved in some areas, namely in Year 8 science¹⁵.

The TIMSS 2002–03 results showed that Queensland and Australian results for both Science and Mathematics, for Year 4 and Year 8, were comparable.

5.2 Jurisdictional comparability

The states, territories and the Australian Government have been working collaboratively toward achieving greater national comparability in regard to curriculum and measurement of attainment.

5.2.1 Standards of achievement

The performance of school students in states and territories is able to be compared across jurisdictions against a number of nationally agreed measures.

¹³ Research Developments, Issue 13., (Winter 2005), *International achievement studies: Lessons from PISA and TIMSS*, Australian Council of Educational Research - http://www.acer.edu.au/publications/newsletters/resdev/rd13/RD13_PISA_TIMSS.html

¹⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, (2007). *Report on Government Services 2007*.

¹⁵ Research Developments, Issue 13., (Winter 2005), *International achievement studies: Lessons from PISA and TIMSS*, Australian Council of Educational Research - http://www.acer.edu.au/publications/newsletters/resdev/rd13/RD13_PISA_TIMSS.html

The Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures developed collaboratively through MCEETYA provides a process to enable nationally comparable reporting of progress toward the *National Goals of Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. The core of the Framework is a schedule setting out the Key Performance Measures (KPMs) and an agreed assessment and reporting cycle for the period 2003–11. Testing presently occurs in Years 3, 5 and 7 and Ministers have agreed to report on a number of priority areas including literacy and numeracy.

The literacy and numeracy programs annually assess the full cohort of students in Years 3, 5 and 7. From 2008 state tests will be replaced by a national assessment program, which will include the introduction of a Year 9 test (in addition to Years 3, 5 and 7). While Queensland is committed to national testing for literacy and numeracy and has worked collaboratively with all jurisdictions in preparation for the first national tests, there are significant financial, organisational and logistical impost on states and territories in moving to a national assessment program.

Queensland has established that the addition of the Year 9 cohort (approximately 58,000 students), and the more complex logistical and operational aspects associated with conducting national testing is likely to more than double the cost in administering these assessments.

Queensland presently manages and administers its own literacy and numeracy tests for Years 3, 5 and 7 at a cost of around \$3.5 million per annum. At the April 2007 MCEETYA meeting, states and territories noted that the Australian Government is not prepared to provide adequate funding of the proposed national assessment program.

At present, Years 3, 5 and 7 Queensland students' results are on a par with the national result. For example, the most recent results available from the 2005 tests show that 95 per cent of Queensland Year 7 students achieved the benchmark for writing and 88.1 per cent for reading. Importantly, the range for all other jurisdictions, excluding the Northern Territory, was between 83.6 per cent and 95 per cent for writing, and between 85.6 per cent and 95.1 per cent for reading. The Northern Territory's high proportion of Indigenous and low socioeconomic status students provide specific challenges for their education system.

The science, civics and citizenship, and information and communications technology assessments test a sample of students in Year 6 and Year 10 on a rolling triennial basis¹⁶. Students in every state and territory, in both state and non-state schools, are tested.

National testing programs are aimed at driving school improvement and enhancing outcomes for all students. While the KPMs provide a degree of comparability of state and territory student results, it is recognised that any comparison of results requires an understanding of influences, which may play a role in student achievement. These include the structural differences between the education systems, which result in students who have been participating in schooling for different amounts of time sitting the same test. For example, Queensland students who commenced school prior to the introduction of the universally available Prep Year (from 2007) will have spent, on average, less years at school than their fellow students in all other jurisdictions. The socioeconomic background of students and whether students usually speak English are also acknowledged as having an influence on levels of literacy and numeracy achievement¹⁷.

Additionally, it is important that students' achievement in literacy and numeracy is not used to enable the comparison of schools in the form of league tables. This level of data,

¹⁶ MCEETYA (2006) Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures
<http://www.mceetya.edu.au>

¹⁷ MCEETYA National Report on Schooling in Australia, Preliminary Paper. (2005) National Benchmark Results Reading, Writing, and Numeracy Years 3, 5 and 7.

which is currently not available, has the potential to breach student privacy and risks the identification of students and schools, particularly those schools that are in isolated or small geographic locations and the unfair comparison of schools' performance.

5.2.2 Curriculum content

The states, territories and the Australian Government have also been working collaboratively toward achieving greater national comparability in curriculum for a number of years.

The knowledge and skills incorporated in Queensland school syllabus documents is founded in the national collaborative effort in curriculum development, which began in Australia in June 1986.

This work began when the Australian Education Council (AEC) resolved to support the concept of national collaboration in curriculum development to minimise unnecessary differences in curricula between states. The 1989 *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* identified eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs) for national collaborative curriculum development. In 1991, after widening the scope of earlier activities, the AEC decided that statements and profiles would be developed for these eight broad learning areas, forming a template of the knowledge and skills to be taught and learnt in Australian schools.

In the period following the Hobart Declaration, significant national collaboration resulted in the development of a statement and a profile in each of the eight areas of learning. The statements provide a framework for curriculum development. The belief that these eight KLAs could effectively encapsulate the range of desirable learnings offered in schools Australia-wide was affirmed in the *Adelaide Declaration on the National Goals of Schooling for the Twenty-First Century* signed by State, Territory and the Australian Government Ministers through MCEETYA in 1999.

Shaping the Future (the 1994 Wiltshire Report), a wide-ranging review of Queensland curriculum, endorsed the eight national KLAs as the broad framework for Queensland state schools. The Queensland School Curriculum Council was subsequently established and took on the role of developing Years 1–10 syllabuses and resource materials. Queensland adopted the national statements and profiles as a guide to the development of the Years 1–10 syllabuses.

In 2001, the *Years 1–10 Curriculum Framework for Education Queensland Schools* (2001) was released. It outlines policies and practices that support planning for core learnings and associated pedagogy, assessment and reporting required for all state school students in Years 1 to 10, in eight Key Learning Areas. The Curriculum Framework acknowledges Queensland's agreement to the Adelaide Declaration and provides school communities with the structure to build education programs that prepare students to participate and communicate in new and complex social, cultural and economic futures.

MCEETYA Ministers have endorsed national Statements of Learning in English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship and Information and Communication Technology. The implementation of these Statements by all jurisdictions is in progress with Statements required to be addressed and incorporated into syllabus and curriculum documents by 1 January 2008.

Queensland has continued its support of and contribution to national collaboration on a range of initiatives including the national Statements of Learning, which are currently being embedded in Queensland Essential Learnings as part of the *QCAR Framework*.

Queensland has also been collaborating nationally through an Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) Working Party on a feasibility study investigating approaches to the development of a common five-point reporting scale for senior secondary schooling through an initial trial in agreed subject areas including: English, Mathematics, Chemistry and French. The progress of this work demonstrates that all jurisdictions are working towards greater comparability of reporting and assessment measures while allowing for jurisdictional flexibility.

Additionally, the findings of the Australian Government commissioned report, *Year 12 Curriculum Content and Achievement Standards* released earlier this year, indicates that there is already a high degree of similarity across jurisdictions of the core curriculum in senior secondary subjects, particularly in mathematics and the sciences.

The study, conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), compared content, curriculum and standards of Year 12 subjects across Australia in English (including English Literature), Australian History, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry.

The study provides some key principles that also inform a way forward. Essentially, the ACER report proposed:

to retain the situation in which senior curricula are independently developed and managed across the states and territories, but ensure there is greater clarity in the language and symbols used to describe aspects of curriculum and assessment; greater consistency in curriculum arrangements, including the identification of a core of common curriculum content in selected senior subjects; and clearly stated achievement standards, which provide increased comparability of results on senior certificates.

However, for each of a number of identified senior school subjects they proposed:

- developing clear statements of core curriculum content within which schools and teachers have flexibility in relation to teaching strategies and learning contexts. This curriculum 'core' should clearly identify what all students in Australia taking that subject are expected to learn, regardless of where they live
- developing a set of achievement standards as a nationally consistent description of how well students are expected to learn the core in each subject. These achievement standards should allow for different methods of assessment, but be sufficiently clear to provide comparable student results.

5.2.3 Further enhancing comparability

In considering approaches to developing and implementing national consistency in curriculum, the Queensland Government supports a focus on maximising rigour and comparability while allowing for diversity, innovation, flexibility and responsiveness to local needs. This approach would include sharing areas of best practice with a focus on improving the quality of school education and equipping all students with the knowledge, skills and attributes that they need to succeed in their chosen pathways.

Queensland is committed to working with the Australian Government and other states and territories in a federated approach to developing nationally consistent curricula that sets core content and achievement standards. In undertaking this work, Queensland supports an approach that provides flexibility for jurisdictions, systems and schools in implementing curricula for students to achieve these standards and allows for differing jurisdictional approaches to assessment.

This aligns with one of the actions proposed by states and territories through the Council of Australian Federation (CAF) Steering Committee in their report, *The future of schooling in Australia*¹⁸. It is also in line with the decision made at the April 2007 MCEETYA meeting. All jurisdictions committed to working together and with other relevant organisations, including representatives of the Catholic and Independent school sectors, to develop nationally consistent curricula and share high-quality curricula material. The curricula will set core content and achievement standards that are expected of students at the end of their schooling and at key junctures during their schooling, starting with English, mathematics and science; and provide flexibility for jurisdictions, systems

¹⁸ Council for Australian Federation, (2007). Federalist paper 2. *The future of schooling in Australia: A report by the states and territories.*
<http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/production/reports/pdfs/2007/federalist-paper.pdf>

and schools to implement curricula for students to achieve these standards. MCEETYA also agreed that the standards would underpin the national testing and measurement program to be agreed by governments, to measure student progress.

Queensland's work to date on national collaborative projects and in developing and implementing significant reforms across the state, including the *QCAR Framework*, the introduction of the QCE and commencing the review of senior syllabuses, demonstrate Queensland's ability to add significant value to these complex tasks.

6 Conclusion

Generally, Queensland school students perform at a level comparable to that of Australian students as a whole, and Australian students are considered as performing at a high standard on international measures in relation to comparable countries.

The Queensland Government's commitment to providing a high-quality school education and to high standards for all students is demonstrated in this submission. Major reform in Queensland including the *Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF)*, the development of the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting (QCAR) Framework* and the new *Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE)* will further enhance the levels of achievement of Queensland school students.

Queensland is also committed to the significant, ongoing further collaborative work with other Australian jurisdictions to further improve school education standards through greater core curriculum consistency in particular subject areas, and subsequently the comparability of student achievement.

