



Education and Training

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

High standards in ACT school education

Discussion paper for an ACT School Standards Authority

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Minister for Education and Training



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Message from the Minister

The ACT Government aims to give all our children and young people the best possible education. To do this we need to make sure that the ACT recruits and retains good teachers, that we have a quality curriculum and that we maintain high standards in public and non-government schools.

In 2007, the Government set up the *Teacher Registration Project* to examine whether a teacher registration process would improve the status and standards of the teaching profession in the ACT. I am currently considering the final recommendations of this project. As I do so, I would like to open up community discussion on education standards more generally, so that we can build on the *Teacher Registration Project's* valuable work.



The project showed that there was strong support from the ACT community for an independent authority to be responsible for teacher registration and related matters.

The ACT already has one independent, statutory education authority, the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS). The BSSS accredits year 11-12 courses and ensures that school-based assessments for year 12 qualifications are valid and fair.

This discussion paper proposes that the BSSS be expanded so that it could establish and monitor educational standards from preschool to year 12. This would include teacher registration and could also cover curriculum frameworks, student achievement standards, registration of non-government schools and home education. Such an authority could also have some overarching responsibilities for monitoring the general standards of schooling in the ACT.

With this paper I want to build on the consultation in relation to teacher registration, to open up discussion and debate about the possibility of an ACT School Standards Authority.

I look forward to receiving input from across the community to assist the Government in developing more specific proposals to assure high standards in school education across the ACT.

Andrew Barr MLA
Minister for Education and Training

Introduction

Maintaining high educational standards across ACT schools is a key priority for the ACT Government. This paper explores how the Government might best provide objective evidence of student achievement and how it might support and strengthen standards in the teaching profession, the curriculum and schooling generally.

Community discussion on standards takes place at a time when accountability in school education is receiving a great deal of attention across Australia. In 2008 for the first time, students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across Australia will sit the same literacy and numeracy tests. All Australian states and territories have agreed to work towards a nationally consistent curriculum.

One way of providing evidence on standards would be to expand the functions of the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS). The BSSS currently has responsibility for all processes related to year 12 qualifications (the Year 12 Certificate, the Tertiary Entrance Statement and Vocational Certificates).

The paper invites community views on this option and on functions that an expanded Board might undertake. These functions could include teacher registration, maintenance of curriculum frameworks, monitoring national assessment data, the registration of non-government schools and home education.

Most Australian states and territories have independent authorities that manage quality assurance for curriculum, assessment and certification for years K-12. Some states also invest responsibility for registering schools and home education in an independent authority. Most states and territories also have independent bodies for teacher registration.

Placing these types of functions under one authority could make sense for a small jurisdiction such as the ACT. Expanding the functions of the BSSS to form an ACT School Standards Authority, rather than setting up something new, would be cost-effective and efficient.

Expanding and restructuring the BSSS into a school standards authority would clarify the roles of the Department of Education and Training (responsible for public schools), independent non-government schools (responsible to their own management boards), and the Catholic Education Office (responsible for systemic Catholic schools). The new school standards authority could be responsible for some legislative functions for non-government schools and for functions that apply across the public school and non-government school sectors.

Teacher registration

The current situation

Research indicates that the quality of teaching is the most important factor in student progress and achievement.

Key factors affecting the quality of teaching include:

- teacher education programs in universities
- requirements of teacher employers (for example, appropriate qualifications)
- explicit standards for beginning teachers and for more advanced teaching
- ongoing professional learning by teachers.

In 2004 the ACT Standing Committee on Education's report *Teaching in the ACT: shaping the future* included recommendations to improve the quality and status of the teaching profession in the ACT. The Government subsequently established the *Teacher Registration Project* (http://www.det.act.gov.au/services/tr_project.htm) to explore options for teacher registration in the ACT. The Government is currently considering the project's final recommendations.

All Australian teacher education faculties have their own accreditation processes for teacher education courses. The University of Canberra (UC), for example, uses a reference group with employer and teacher representation, as part of its accreditation process. The Department of Education and Training (DET) also provides feedback to ACT teacher education faculties on the performance of recruits from their programs. Teacher registration bodies in other states and territories all have some involvement in the accreditation process for teacher education courses.

Currently, DET, the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and individual independent schools have their own pre-employment requirements. These requirements are broadly consistent. They include teacher qualifications and evidence that there are no barriers to applicants' suitability to work with children.

All Australian states and territories have endorsed in principle the *National Framework for Professional Standards for Teachers (2003)*. Most states and territories now have in place or are developing teacher professional standards that are consistent with this framework. The ACT does not yet have a formal framework. DET, the CEO and individual schools have a range of strategies in place to support teaching standards. Systems and schools have programs of professional learning for staff to maintain and improve their professional knowledge and practice.

Proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority

Community consultation on the *Teacher Registration Project* indicated strong support for a body, independent of DET, to undertake teacher registration. It may be appropriate for the BSSS, with an expanded set of functions, to do this work.

The *Teacher Registration Project* comprehensively analysed issues related to teacher registration and teacher standards. Any decision on a school standards authority would build on this strong foundation.

If the school standards authority were to take on the responsibility for teacher registration, it would need to have appropriate membership, structures and resources to manage the process. Operations would need to be transparent and rigorous to ensure public confidence. Registration should also make ACT teachers eligible for recognition in other states and territories.

The *Teacher Registration Project* recommended that teacher registration should require all ACT teachers to meet agreed professional standards and that the registration body should have a role in establishing standards and in approving teacher education programs. If the education standards authority were to take on teacher registration, the management of these related functions would also need to be considered.

Do you agree that the BSSS could be expanded and restructured to manage teacher registration? What related functions should this include?

What suggestions do you have to make sure that a school standards authority could do such work effectively?



Curriculum frameworks

The current situation

In the ACT, curriculum frameworks identify essential learning for all students. Within these frameworks, schools and teachers have the flexibility to develop courses and programs of study that meet the needs of their particular students and communities.

Every Chance to Learn, the curriculum framework for ACT schools (preschool to year 10) is being implemented in ACT schools from 2008. The framework details 10 principles and 25 Essential Learning Achievements. 'Markers of progress' describe achievements expected of students at the end of each phase of development. *Every Chance to Learn* was developed and trialled through a collaborative process that involved the public and non-government school sectors.

In years 11 and 12, teachers from the public and non-government sectors develop course frameworks for endorsement by the BSSS. Course frameworks cover broad areas of study (such as science or mathematics). After the BSSS has endorsed course frameworks, schools use them to develop courses for accreditation by the Board. The Board has also identified a set of student capabilities that should be developed through any program of study in years 11 and 12. These capabilities are consistent with the Essential Learning Achievements of *Every Chance to Learn*.

Recently, a lot of work has been done nationally to support greater consistency of curriculum across Australia. The ACT has been active in this work. The Australian Government has now proposed the development of a national curriculum (preschool to year 12) in key learning areas. All states and territories have agreed to support a National Curriculum Board to oversee this work.

Proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority

A school standards authority could be responsible for maintaining curriculum frameworks from preschool to year 12. If an authority were given this role, it would take over the maintenance of the ACT curriculum framework (preschool to year 10) and the responsibilities for course frameworks in years 11 and 12.

Having one body responsible for curriculum frameworks across the years of schooling and across sectors would provide greater curriculum consistency, support the improvement of standards and help students make the transition from year 10 to year 11. Schools would still have responsibility for developing courses and programs of study that met their particular needs, as they do now.

As outlined above, a national curriculum will be developed in the coming years, under the direction of a National Curriculum Board. Development of a national curriculum in mathematics, sciences, English and history by 2010 will mean that ACT frameworks in these areas will need to be reviewed.

A school standards authority would take responsibility for the review of the P-10 curriculum framework and relevant 11-12 course frameworks to identify their consistency with agreed national requirements. The authority would initiate collaborative work across the public and non-government sectors when changes to curriculum frameworks were required. This process would continue over later years, as other subject areas came on line nationally.

What advantages or disadvantages do you think would result from having one school standards authority with P-12 responsibilities for curriculum frameworks?

What suggestions do you have to make sure that the school standards authority could do such work effectively?

Student achievement standards

The ACT has a strong tradition of school-based assessment across all years of schooling. Teachers assess and report student progress and achievement in subjects or learning areas. Teachers provide reports to parents at least twice a year, using A-E grades and additional descriptive information.

In implementing the new P-10 curriculum framework, teachers will use the ‘markers of progress’ to help them make judgements about student achievement. In years 11 and 12, grade descriptors in course frameworks help teachers determine standards for student achievement in a course of study.

Schools and systems support their teachers in the use of valid and reliable assessment methods. Teachers also compare student work across groups and classes. In years 11 and 12 there are formal moderation processes, established and managed by the BSSS, to ensure that school-assessed achievement standards are comparable across all ACT schools. Additional mechanisms are in place to ensure that scores used in the university admissions process are fair to all students.

The public and Catholic school systems and independent non-government schools are responsible for assessment and reporting policies from preschool to year 10. DET manages the process of year 10 certification. Schools are responsible for the content of Year 10 Certificates.

All Australian Ministers of Education have agreed to a program of national assessments to measure student achievement across the country. ACT students participate in this National Assessment Program. The program consists of:

- annual testing of literacy and numeracy for all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 (from 2008, this will replace ACT literacy and numeracy testing)
- testing of science through a national sample of year 6 students (every three years)
- testing of information and communication technology (ICT) through national samples of students in years 6 and 10 (every three years)
- testing of civics and citizenship through national samples of students in years 6 and 10 (every three years)
- participating Australian students’ involvement in the OECD *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) and the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS).

Currently, DET manages the administration of the National Assessment Program in the ACT, across both the public and non-government sectors. DET holds the data from the national program and provides information to the Minister and to non-government systems and schools.

The BSSS is responsible for assessment, reporting and certification policies related to senior secondary qualifications (the ACT Year 12 Certificate, the Tertiary Entrance Statement and Vocational Certificates). In 2006, Australian Ministers of Education set up a working party to examine how senior secondary reporting and senior secondary certificates could be made more comparable and consistent across Australia.

Proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority

If the authority had responsibilities for monitoring student achievement standards, it could organise testing under the National Assessment Program each year, across both the public and non-government

sectors. DET would continue to have the main role in ACT participation in national policy work. Non-government schools would continue to contribute through their national representatives.

Outcomes of the National Assessment Program provide a snapshot each year of the achievement of ACT students and provide evidence of how well students are performing against curriculum goals. A school standards authority would be well placed to hold all National Assessment Program data. The authority could then provide independent reports to the Minister on educational achievement across the ACT school sectors. Each school system and/or school would be responsible for analysing its own data and implementing any necessary improvements.

The authority would continue to carry out the current functions of the BSSS in relation to senior secondary assessment and certification. The Board would also contribute to the national work that is occurring on senior secondary reporting and certification.

The authority might also be given responsibility for the policy and processes of year 10 certification.

Having a school standards authority with responsibilities from preschool to year 12 would not change the ACT Government's commitment to school-based assessment. Teachers would continue to have the primary responsibility for assessing and supporting student progress and achievement.

What advantages or disadvantages would there be if a school standards authority were responsible for managing the National Assessment Program and reporting on student achievement across the ACT?

What suggestions do you have to make sure that the school standards authority could do such work effectively?

Should a school standards authority be responsible for the processes of Year 10 Certification?

Registration of non-government schools and home education

Current situation

School registration

Under the *Education Act 2004*, the Minister approves the registration of non-government schools. To be registered, a school must provide evidence that it can function effectively and provide education of an expected standard. This means, for example, that the school has qualified teaching staff and offers an appropriate curriculum. Registration must be renewed at least every five years. Currently, DET manages registration processes for non-government schools.

Home education

In the ACT, parents have the right to choose the educational environment for their children's learning. This includes the option of educating their children at home.

Under the *Education Act 2004*, students are registered for home education through a process managed by DET. The legislation requires parents to demonstrate how they will provide high quality education for their children. The Chief Executive of DET approves registration for a period of no longer than 2 years. Renewal of registration requires evidence of high quality education being provided in the home.

Proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority

School registration

It may be more appropriate for a school standards authority, rather than DET, to manage the process of registration and registration renewal for non-government schools. If a school standards authority had this responsibility, any perceptions of conflict of interest between the public and non-government school sectors may be avoided.

Home education

Responsibilities for the registration of students for home education could also be transferred to the school standards authority. This would make approvals of home education independent of the public school sector.

Do you think it would be appropriate for the registration of non-government schools to be managed by the school standards authority instead of by the Department of Education and Training (DET)?

Should the responsibility for registering students for home education also be transferred from DET to a school standards authority?

What suggestions do you have to make sure that the school standards authority could do such work effectively?

Schooling standards

Current situation

Under the *Education Act 2004*, requirements for registration of non-government schools include evidence that teaching staff are appropriately qualified, that the school has appropriate policies and facilities to meet agreed curriculum standards, that it can provide for the safety and welfare of students, and that it has processes to monitor the standard of educational outcomes. These conditions might be seen as minimum standards for schooling generally.

Research on school effectiveness identifies key factors that schools need to address as they develop and maintain excellence. These include:

- values and vision
- leadership and strategic planning
- high quality teaching
- significant and relevant curriculum
- sound assessment and reporting practices
- physical and social environments that support learning
- family and community participation.

Factors such as these underpin school review and development processes in the ACT, including those formally used in the public school system and systemic Catholic schools.

All public schools participate in a school development and review process over a three-year cycle, under *The School Improvement Framework*. School Boards oversee these reviews and provide reports to DET. The review process is based on comprehensive self-evaluation and includes an external validation component in the third year of the cycle.

Non-government schools follow internal processes of school self-evaluation, usually over a five-year cycle. This lays the foundation for registration renewal as required under legislation.

Proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority

A school standards authority could be given a role in monitoring the standards of ACT schooling generally. The authority could, for example, develop a set of high level performance indicators for school effectiveness across both the public and non-government sectors. This would enable the school standards authority to make independent reports to Government. This would provide an additional level of accountability and quality assurance for all ACT schools.

Schools could be required to report to the authority every five years, drawing on the information from their school review or registration renewal process. Any process should avoid duplication and operate at a higher level of generality than school and system processes.

What role, if any, do you think the proposed school standards authority should have for reporting to Government on the overall standards of schooling in the ACT?

What suggestions do you have to make sure that the school standards authority could do such work effectively?

Other issues

If the BSSS were to be restructured and expanded to undertake some or all of the functions outlined above there would need to be detailed consideration given to the membership of the authority, its structure and organisation and the sustainability of its operations.

Among issues that would need attention would be the status of the Office of the Board, which implements Board policies and provides administrative support. Under current legislation, DET provides staff and resources to the Office of the Board. The Executive Officer of the Board reports both to the Board Chair and to the DET Chief Executive. It may be more appropriate for the administrative unit of a restructured authority to be resourced independently of the DET budget.

Under current legislation, the BSSS could not undertake the range of functions suggested in this paper. Legislative changes would be required to both the *Education Act 2004* and *The Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act 1997*.

Concluding remarks

This discussion paper is intended to initiate a process of community consultation on the important issue of establishing, maintaining and improving standards in all ACT schools.

The paper has proposed that an existing statutory body, the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies, be expanded and restructured to manage a range of standards functions. These would apply across public and non-government schools and in home education, from preschool to year 12.

Standards have been discussed in the areas of teacher registration; curriculum frameworks; student achievement; registration of non-government schools and home education; and schooling generally.

If the ACT education community, and the public more generally, respond positively to the suggestions made in this paper, an extended consultation process will follow. This will allow members of the ACT community to consider more detailed proposals for an ACT School Standards Authority.

Do you think that an ACT School Standards Authority, independent of the public and non-government school sectors, is a good idea? What do you think the main benefits would be?

What standard functions might it have responsibility for managing?

Do you think that the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies should be expanded and restructured to do some or all of the work outlined in this paper?

What do you think should be the priorities for further community consultation on this issue?

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The Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act 1997, ACT Government

<http://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/1997-87/default.asp>

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http://www.decs.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/sci_Framework.pdf



High standards in ACT school education: A discussion paper for an ACT School Standards Authority
Community response form

The purpose of this discussion paper is to seek your views on how standards in ACT education might be maintained and improved.

Firstly, the Government seeks responses on the concept of expanding the functions of the ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) to form a new school standards authority, with specific responsibilities across the public and non-government school sectors, from preschool to year 12.

Secondly, the Government is interested in your views about the functions such a school standards authority should manage and how the work might be undertaken.

You may download this form from <http://www.det.act.gov.au/>. **Responses need to be submitted by 14 March 2008.**

Please indicate your personal or professional role and the sector in which you work or have a particular interest. You may tick more than one box.

| | <i>Role</i> | <i>Public schools</i> | <i>Catholic</i> | <i>Independent</i> |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Teacher | | | | |
| Principal | | | | |
| Parent / carer | | | | |
| School Board member | | | | |
| Parent committee member | | | | |
| Educational administrator | | | | |
| Union representative | | | | |
| Member of the public | | | | |
| Other stakeholder (please specify) | | | | |

The following information is optional for personal submissions:

| | | | |
|---------------|--|----------|--|
| Name | | | |
| Phone contact | | Postcode | |

If you have completed this response on behalf of an organisation (e.g. school, committee, board, professional association), please complete the details below:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Name | |
| Position | |
| Organisation | |
| Contact details | |

Community response form

An ACT School Standards Authority

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below.

| | <i>Strongly disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly agree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Having an ACT School Standards Authority is a good idea. | | | | |
| The ACT Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) could be expanded and restructured to form such a school standards authority with responsibilities for preschool to year 12. | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |

Functions of an ACT School Standards Authority

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statements below.

The new school standards authority (built on the foundation of the BSSS) could manage the following functions:

| | <i>Strongly disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly agree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Teacher registration | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |
| Curriculum framework maintenance and review (P-12) | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |
| National Assessment Program administration and reporting of student achievement | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |
| Managing the Year 10 Certificate process | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |

Functions of an ACT School Standards Authority (continued)

The new school standards authority (built on the foundation of the BSSS) could manage the following functions (Please indicate whether you agree or disagree):

| | <i>Strongly disagree</i> | <i>Disagree</i> | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly agree</i> |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Registration of non-government schools | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |
| Registration of students for home education | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |
| Reporting on schooling standards generally | | | | |
| Comment | | | | |

Suggestions for the operations of an ACT School Standards Authority

If you agree that the BSSS could be expanded and restructured to undertake some or all of the functions listed above, do you have suggestions for how this could work effectively?

| Function | Suggestions |
|---|-------------|
| Teacher registration | |
| Curriculum framework maintenance and review | |
| Managing and reporting on the National Assessment Program | |
| Managing the Year 10 Certificate process | |
| Registration of non-government schools | |

Community response form

Suggestions for the operations of an ACT School Standards Authority (continued)

If you agree that the BSSS could be expanded and restructured to undertake some or all of the functions listed above, do you have suggestions for how this could work effectively?

| | |
|---|--|
| Registration of students for home education | |
| Reporting on standards of schools generally | |

Your conclusions

Having considered the questions in this response form, you may wish to make a final comment on the issues raised in the discussion paper. You may also wish to raise other issues and priorities that you think should be addressed in any ongoing consultation process.

Additional comments, questions or issues

When you have completed the form, please submit it:

By post to:

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ACT Department of Education and Training
GPO Box 158 CANBERRA ACT 2601

or by email to:

schoolstandards@act.gov.au

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