Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Diplomatic Academy.

THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Foundation level

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACECQA	Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Agency
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
AISC	Australian Industry and Skills Committee
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
AQFC	Australian Qualifications Framework Council
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
DET	Department of Education (Australian Government)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australian Government)
DPMC	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Australian Government)
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students
FTA	free trade agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HECS-HELP	Higher Education Loans Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program-Literacy And Numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Educational Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QILT	Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching
RTO	registered training organisation
SRS	Schooling Resource Standard
TAC	Tertiary Admission Centre
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US	United States of America
VET	vocational education and training
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency

1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this module is to provide an overview of the Australian education system. It provides a foundation to engage in this topic and apply advice from staff with operational or expert levels of knowledge in education. On successful completion you will be able to be an informed participant in multi-stakeholder forums related to Australian education.

The importance of Australian education to Australia's economy

The contribution of international education to the Australian economy is significant. The most recent figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) show that international education is valued at $19.9 billion, making it Australia's third largest export. In addition, it is estimated that 130,000 of the international students in Australia in 2014-15 will contribute as skilled migrants in the Australian workforce on graduation, representing a 3 per cent increase in the proportion of Australia's current workforce with a tertiary education.

Australian education is a dynamic and growing service market. In 2016, Australia ranked as the third largest provider of education to international students after the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK).

Currently around five million tertiary students study outside their own country. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimates this number will increase to eight million by 2025.

The ABS estimates international education to be worth a record $21.8 billion in 2016 – up 17 per cent on 2015. The ABS also estimates the sector contributes over 130,000 jobs to the Australian economy. Additionally, it is estimated that more than 130,000 students are studying an Australian qualification offshore, an area of the sector which is valued at more than $400 million per annum.

The Australian Government's National Strategy for International Education 2025 (the National Strategy) released in 2016 (https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/Australia/InternationalStrategy/Pages/National-Strategy.aspx), recognises the importance of our largest services export to our future economic prosperity. It also highlights the importance of maintaining the quality of Australian education institutions and of the international student experience, particularly in relation to employability, to continue growth in the sector. The National Strategy also speaks to the vital soft-power importance of international education cultivated through two-way mobility programs for both students and researchers and the role of qualifications recognition in facilitating global workforce mobility.

The National Strategy is framed around three key policy pillars:

- strengthening the fundamentals of our education system to deliver a high quality, world class education and student experience
- making transformative partnerships both at home and abroad through mobility initiatives and alumni connections and
- competing globally by promoting our excellence in education services and growing the opportunities to expand our international education markets.

Sources: Department of Education and Training (DET) 2016d, Export income to Australia from international education activity in 2015-16, found at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/Research-Snapshots/Documents/Export%20Income%20FY2015-16.pdf

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, International trade: Supplementary information, financial year, 2015-16, cat. No. 5368.0.55.003, found at http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5368.0.55.003

A comparatively privatised education system

The Australian education system is distinctive in that it is highly privatised in both the school and higher education sectors compared with the systems in other countries. In terms of student enrolment, in 2016 34.6 per cent of school student enrolments were in private schools but the majority of higher education enrolments (93 per cent) were in public universities. The Australian Education Act (2013; updated 2017) found at https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00310 is the principal legislation for the provision of funding to schools. The proportion of private (non-government funded) investment in Australian schools is much greater than in other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries (at almost 40 per cent for Australia compared to the OECD average of 16 per cent). The situation is similar in the higher education sector.

Source: Australian Government 2016, Budget 2016-17: Statement 5: Expenses and net capital investment (continued), 3 May, found at http://budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/bp1/html/bp1_bs5-01.htm

Robust regulatory framework

A great strength of the Australian education system is its robust regulatory framework and transparent accountability mechanisms. There are three main regulatory bodies relating to education: the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA); and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

2 HOW THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IS STRUCTURED

Four sub-sectors

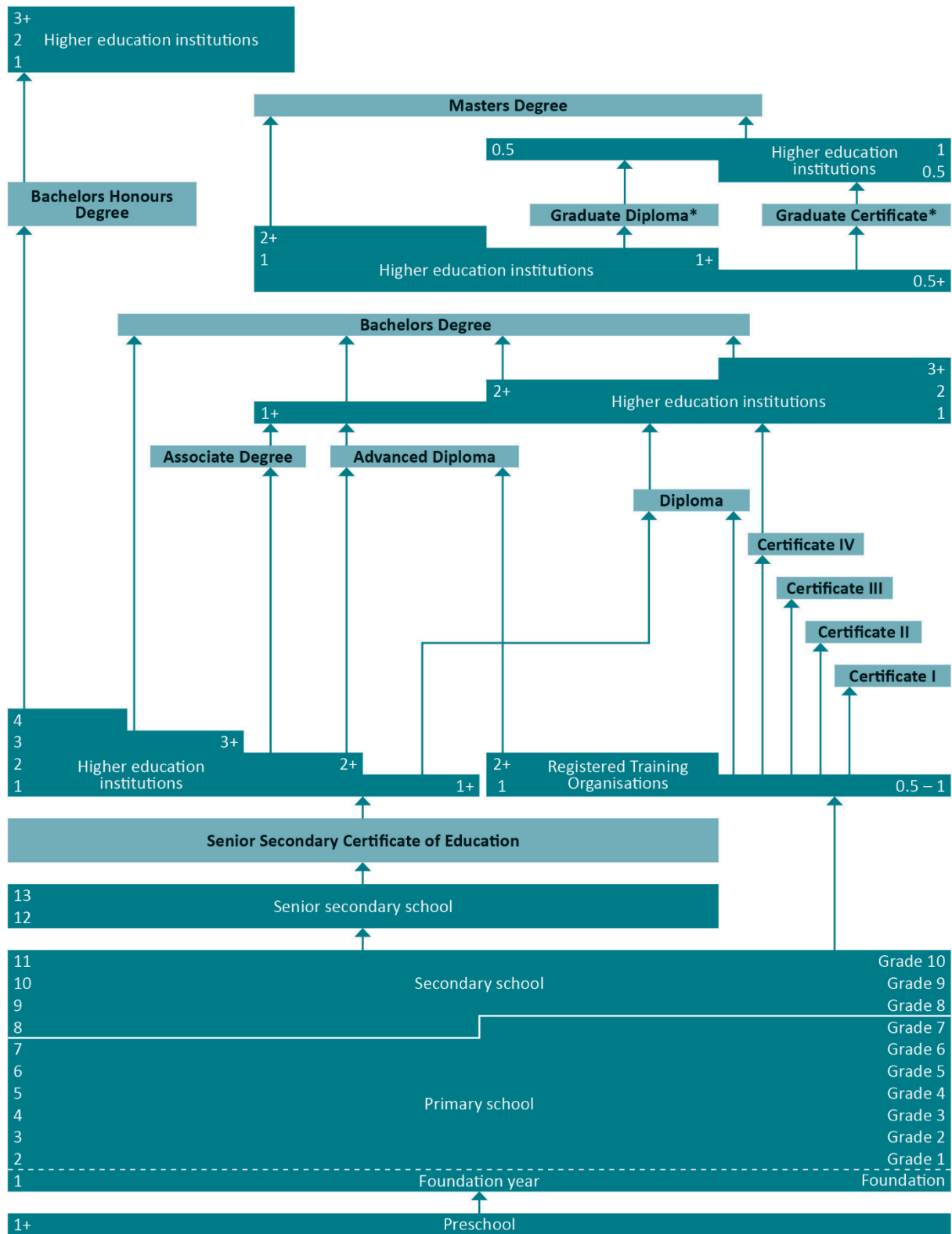The Australian education system is broadly structured as follows:

1. primary school: seven or eight years, starting at Foundation (also called kindergarten/preparatory/pre-school) through to Year 6 or 7
2. secondary school: four years from Years 7 or 8 to 10
3. senior secondary school: two years from Years 11 to 12
4. tertiary education: includes higher education and vocational education and training (VET).

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) is a national framework which covers qualifications in post-compulsory education. It has 10 levels and links school, vocational and higher education qualifications into a single national system, allowing easy movement from one level of study to another and between institutions. More about the AQF can be found at http://www.aqf.edu.au/

The study options that students can take as they progress through the formal education system are flexible, but generally the broad pathways taken are shown in the diagram below.

Australian education system at a glance

```
3+
2    Higher education institutions
1
```

Masters Degree

0.5   Higher education   1
                                            institutions   0.5

Bachelors Honours
Degree

Graduate Diploma*   Graduate Certificate*

2+
1   Higher education institutions   1+

0.5+

Bachelors Degree

2+
1+   Higher education institutions

3+
2
1

Associate Degree   Advanced Diploma

Diploma

Certificate IV

Certificate III

Certificate II

Certificate I

```
4
3
2            3+               2+
1    Higher education         2+   Registered Training
     institutions            1    Organisations
              1+                                          0.5 – 1
```

Senior Secondary Certificate of Education

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13
12   Senior secondary school
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11                                                       Grade 10
10           Secondary school                            Grade 9
9                                                        Grade 8
8                                                        Grade 7
7                                                        Grade 6
6                                                        Grade 5
5                                                        Grade 4
4            Primary school                              Grade 3
3                                                        Grade 2
2                                                        Grade 1
1            Foundation year                             Foundation
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1+           Preschool
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*Graduate Certificates and Graduate Diplomas are also awarded by registered training organisations (RTOs) as VET qualifications

3 AUSTRALIAN, STATE AND TERRITORY GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

A shared responsibility

Education and training is a shared responsibility of the Australian (Federal) Government and the individual State and Territory Governments.

The Australian Government, primarily through the Department of Education and Training (DET), provides:

- funding and regulation support to early childhood education and care centres such as pre-schools and kindergartens
- partial funding of government schools and majority funding for non-government schools
- supplementary funding for VET
- partial funding for the operation of public universities through grants, scholarships and special purposes such as for teaching and research programs
- international education, under the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (updated December 2015) and the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS). Updates to the ESOS Act can be found at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Regulatory-Information/Education-Services-for-Overseas-Students-ESOS-Legislative-Framework/Recentchanges/Pages/Recent-changes.aspx

The Australian Government's key education forums, organisations, agreements and programs

Under the Commonwealth Constitution, education in Australia is primarily the responsibility of the State and Territory Governments. They are largely responsible for the funding of government schools. State and Territory Governments regulate the public and private (including faith-based) schools within their States/ Territories, oversee course accreditation, student assessment and awards for both government and non-government schools and early childhood learning centres.

Responsibilities for child care and pre-school are also shared between the Australian, State and Territory Governments, as follows:

- the Australian Government has policy responsibility for formal care (long day care, family day care, outside school hours care, and some occasional care)
- the Australian Government administers fee subsidies for child care and provides some funding to Australian Government approved services for specific purposes. Regularly updated information can be found at https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-subsidy-0
- the Australian Government oversees quality accreditation systems in early childhood education and care
- the Australian Government supports specialised pre-school for Indigenous Australians
- State and Territory Governments are responsible for the policy and funding of pre-schools. Pre-school education is delivered using a variety of funding and delivery models, including private provision

- State and Territory Governments are responsible for some occasional care centres. Some State and Territory Governments contribute financially to outside school hours care, long day care and other such services.

Source: Productivity Commission 2016, 'Overview B Child care, education and training, attachment tables and data quality information', in Report on government services 2016, volume B, section B.1, found at http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2016/childcare-education-and-training

Primary and secondary schools in Australia are either government or privately funded.

The Australian Government is responsible for:

- allocating funding to States and Territories to support service delivery and reform to meet nationally agreed outcomes
- ensuring that the funding arrangements for the non-government school sector and schools are consistent with, and support the responsibilities of the States and Territories in regulation, educational quality, performance and reporting on educational outcomes
- leading Australia's international engagement on educational matters including international assessment programs.

State and Territory Governments are responsible for infrastructure and maintenance funding, the payment of teachers, principals and non-teaching staff and the administration and management of all resources within schools.

Source: Council of Australian Governments (COAG) 2013, National Education Reform Agreement, found at http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/132422/20130923-0904/www.schoolfunding.gov.au/sites/betterschools.gov.au/files/docs/national-education-reform-agreement_0.pdf

State and Territory Governments are responsible for the administration and major funding of VET and for legislation relating to the establishment and accreditation of higher education courses. Each State has a VET system, consisting of government-funded Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and private registered training organisations (RTOs). VET qualifications are transferable between all States and Territories. Study undertaken in one State/Territory gains the same status in another.

Significant organisations and agreements focused on improving school education at a national level include:

- the Council of Australian Governments
- the Department of Education and Training
- the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
- National Partnership Agreements.

These entities are briefly outlined on the following pages.

The Council of Australian Governments

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has representation from State and Territory Governments and sets key policy directions to be adopted nationally. COAG's Education Council is one of eight Councils responsible to COAG through their Chair. The COAG Education Council provides a forum through which strategic policy on school education, early childhood and higher education can be coordinated at the national level and through which information can be shared, and resources used collaboratively, to address issues of national significance.

The above and further information about COAG's Education Council can be found at http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/. Their 2014 Terms of Reference can be found at http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/Council/EC-Terms-of-Reference.aspx

The Department of Education and Training (DET)

The key Australian Government agency responsible for national education policies and programs is the Department of Education and Training (DET) whose responsibilities include:

- early childhood
- schooling
- higher education
- higher education teaching and research
- vocational education and training (VET)
- International Education.

DET delivers the Australian Government's priorities and goals through the development and implementation of education policies and programs. The goals are achieved in conjunction with the State, Territory and regional networks, and through engagement with non-government stakeholders.

The above and further information about DET can be found at its website https://www.education.gov.au/

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides national leadership for the Australian, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. AITSL provides leadership in the accreditation of Initial Teacher Education programs and the promotion and embedding of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers and Principals.

The National Education Agreement

Under the National Education Agreement (2014), all the respective Australian Governments have agreed to work together toward the objective that Australian schooling provides a high quality and equitable education for all.

4 EARLY CHILDHOOD AND COMPULSORY SCHOOL EDUCATION

Early childhood education

The role of early childhood education is to provide care and supervision of children, to prepare children for school, and to ensure that children are able to effectively participate in subsequent learning opportunities. Early childhood education programs are conducted in community programs, pre-schools and other child-care settings.

Australia's participation rates at age four have risen markedly since 2005 (from 53 per cent in 2005 to 89 per cent in 2016) representing the fourth highest increase in the OECD.

Source: OECD 2016d, Starting Strong IV: Early Childhood Education and Care Data Country Note: Australia, found at http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/ECECDCN-Australia.pdf

Primary and secondary schools

There were 9,414 schools in Australia in 2016 with approximately 3,798,226 students.

Source: ABS 2017a, Schools, Australia, 2016, found at
http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4221.0Main+Features12016?OpenDocument

It is compulsory for children to have commenced school by the time they have turned six years of age. Most children start between four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half years. Children generally attend primary school until they are 11 or 12 years of age. Primary schools offer programs from Foundation to Years 6 or 7.

Since 2010, it has been mandatory in all States and Territories for students to complete Year 10 and participate full time in education, training or employment, until they are at least 17 years old.

Primary schools focus on developing essential literacy, numeracy and social skills, and provide foundational knowledge to children about the world around them.

In some jurisdictions middle schools have been introduced. Middle schools offer programs for students in Years 7 to 10 (although this varies from school to school). On leaving middle schools, students often attend high schools or colleges to complete the Years 10, 11 and 12.

In jurisdictions where there are only primary and secondary schools, students between the ages of 13 and 18 years attend high schools or secondary schools. Progressively, as students move from primary into secondary schools, subject matter becomes increasingly specialised.

Students who complete their secondary school program at Year 12 or equivalent are awarded a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. They then leave school to undertake vocational or higher education courses and/or start work. The secondary retention rate in Australia in 2016 (i.e. the number of school students who commenced Year 7/8 and completed Year 12, expressed as a percentage) was 80.9 per cent for male students and 87.8 per cent for female students.

Source: ABS 2017a, Schools, Australia, 2016, found at
http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4221.0Main+Features12016?OpenDocument

More information about Australian school structures can be found in the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) National Report on Schooling in Australia, found at: http://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia-2013

Government and non-government schools

In 2016, the number of students enrolled in Australian primary and secondary schools grew by 47,253 (1.3 per cent) compared with 2015 to a total of 3,798,226. In 2016, the proportion of students enrolled in government schools increased from 65.2 per cent in 2015 to 65.4 per cent. The proportion of students enrolled in Catholic schools fell by 0.2 per cent over the same period. Enrolment in Independent schools remained at 14.4 per cent.

Source: ABS 2017a, Schools, Australia, 2016, found at
http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4221.0Main+ Features12016?OpenDocument

Regular updated data on education can be found at the ABS website available at: http://www.abs.gov.au/education

More information regarding Australia's performance in primary and secondary schools can be found at the OECD website available at: http://www.oecd.org/education/school/

English as the official language

English is the official language of Australia and the main language of instruction. Some schools offer bilingual programs or programs in other languages.

Academic year

The Australian academic year begins in late January or early February for school students, and runs to mid-December. Most schools have three or four terms a year. Some jurisdictions have flexibility about the school year to allow for specific community contexts. In northern Australia, for example, the school year begins in January, and the tuition times are structured to allow a four-week break in the middle of the year, when the weather is drier and cooler.

Students from other countries

There were 554,179 international students of 192 nationalities studying in Australia in 2016. Approximately 43 per cent of international student enrolments were at the higher education level.

Source: DET 2016c, End of year summary of international student enrolment data-Australia-2016, found at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/MONTHLY%20SUMMARIES/2016/12_December_2016_FullYearAnalysis.pdf

National Curriculum and assessment

Australia has a National Curriculum for schools which has been progressively developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA was established under Section 5 of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act (Cth) on 8 December 2008. ACARA's functions include development of National Curriculum, administration of national assessments and associated reporting on schooling in Australia. ACARA's strategic directions are set by its Charter and any other written instructions from the COAG Education Council. Their work includes the introduction of curriculum frameworks and learning outcomes that are to be common across all schools, from Foundation (i.e. Kindergarten) to Year 12. Roll-out of the national standardised Australian Curriculum began in 2012.

Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) website, found at http://www.acara.edu.au

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

- NAPLAN tests the sorts of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life, such as reading, writing, spelling and numeracy. The assessments are undertaken nationwide, every year, in the second week in May
- NAPLAN comprises tests in four areas (or 'domains'):
  1 Reading
  2 Writing
  3 Language Conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation)
  4 Numeracy
- NAPLAN tests skills consistent with the school curriculum
- The 2016 NAPLAN results showed that almost 94 per cent of children have met national minimum standards for their age/stage.

Source: ACARA 2016b, NAP: National Assessment Program, found at http://www.nap.edu.au/

5 VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The primary goal of VET is to provide students with the practical skills and experiences to perform tasks effectively and safely across a wide range of employment fields. Courses are provided by government-funded TAFE institutes, adult and community education centres and private RTOs. VET can begin in secondary school and many VET institutions have formal pathways arrangements with universities whereby VET students have assured entry into university on successful completion of their VET qualification. Some institutions, such as Victoria University, identify as 'dual-sector' offering both higher education and VET. Just as in the school and higher education sectors, there is a blend of private and public organisations providing VET programs in all States and Territories. There were approximately 4.5 million students enrolled in VET courses in Australia in 2015.

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) website, found at https://www.ncver.edu.au/

6 HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education requires intensive study over a number of years to achieve a recognised high-level qualification. The Australian higher education sector offers a wide diversity of programs that lead to highly regarded and internationally recognised qualifications. There are 43 universities in Australia, of which two are international universities and one is a private specialty university. About one-quarter of students enrolled in Australian universities come from overseas. A list of these universities is available on the National Register at the TEQSA website found at http://www.teqsa.gov.au/national-register

The Australian Government provides public funding to the higher education sector through the Higher Education Support Act, 2003 (amendments can be found at https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017C00003).The Government provides funding to universities to contribute to the costs associated with each domestic student enrolled.

In 2015, 1,410,133 domestic and international students were enrolled in Australian university programs.

Source: DET 2016g, Summary of the 2015 full year higher education student statistics, found at https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/2015-student-summary

Public universities are established or recognised under State and Territory legislation. TEQSA is the national independent regulator for the higher education sector. TEQSA registers and assesses the performance of higher education providers against the Higher Education Standards Framework, and undertakes both compliance and quality assessments of providers. It does this mainly through registration/re-registration processes and through course accreditation/re-accreditation processes for providers without self-accrediting authority.

Source: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) website, found at http://www.teqsa.gov.au/

For further information, see the Higher Education modules.

A significant feature of the tertiary education landscape in Australia is the large proportion of international students, representing approximately 25 per cent of all students enrolled at Australian universities. Australia is a key destination for students from around the world, hosting

more than 8.5 per cent of the world's overseas students. International education contributed $19.9 billion to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2015-16.

In order for international students to receive a visa to study in Australia they must be offered admission to study a program at an institution on the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS).

Most international students enrolled in Australia are from the Asia region. Significant differences occur, however, across sub-sectors. For example, the majority of Chinese students are enrolled in higher education while Indian students are predominantly enrolled in VET.

Source: DET 2016e, International student data 2016, found at
https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Pages/InternationalStudentData2016.aspx

For further details, please see the Practitioner Level Module.

Undergraduate admission pathways

Admission to an undergraduate degree is usually based on a student's Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). The ATAR is calculated by a State or Territory Tertiary Admission Centre (TAC) based on a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education (Year 12 Award) or International Baccalaureate. The ATAR is used in all States and Territories except Queensland (where an Overall Position is calculated).

Other undergraduate admission pathways include:
- a VET qualification, such as a Certificate III or IV
- additional requirements such as an interview, portfolio of work, prerequisite courses, and/or a demonstrated interest or aptitude for the study program
- mature age entry for students over 25 years based on related work experience, an entrance examination, or a demonstrated aptitude for study.

Source: DET 2015, Country education profiles: Australia, found at
https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Documents/ED15-0091_INT_Australia_Country_Education_Profile_2015_ACC.pdf

Academic year

For VET students, the Australian academic year begins in late February/early March. Vocational institutes and higher education institutions usually have two semesters with exams or assessments held in June and November. The long summer holiday break is from November to February. Some higher education institutions have introduced a third 'semester' that runs in the summer months.

Lifelong learning

The Australian education system has a commitment to lifelong learning – that is, learning that is undertaken at all stages of life. In the 12 months to April 2013 (latest available data), for example, it was estimated that of the 17.1 million Australians aged 15-74 years:
- 3.7 million (22 per cent) participated in formal learning
- 4.6 million (27 per cent) participated in work-related training
- 1.4 million (8.4 per cent) participated in personal interest learning.

Source: ABS 2013, Work Related Training and Adult Learning, found at
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/4234.0~Apr+2013~Main+Features~Barriers+to+participation+in+non-formal+learning

7 TEACHER WORKFORCE

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was established by the Australian Government to provide national leadership in teaching and school leadership. AITSL plays a key role in national educational reform on behalf of the Australian, State and Territory governments under direction from the Minister for Education and Training. AITSL's key areas of focus include:

- supporting and advancing the quality of teaching and school leadership
- national approaches to improve the quality of initial teacher education in Australian higher education institutions
- undertaking research and evaluation to create high-quality publications and resources to support teachers and schools leaders and
- acting as the designated assessment authority for skilled migration to Australia for pre-primary, primary, middle, secondary and special education teacher occupations.

Teachers' salaries

Teachers' salaries vary widely across countries. In most countries, teachers' salaries increase with the level of education they teach. The difference in salary between a similarly experienced pre-primary and upper secondary teacher in Finland, for example, is 55 per cent, and in Mexico, 82 per cent. However, this is not the case in Australia, where the difference in salary is less than 5 per cent.

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2016b, Education at a Glance 2016: OECD indicators, found at http://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm

8 INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Australia has high levels of participation in early childhood programs, schooling and completion of higher education in comparison with other countries. It also has well-prepared teachers and strong school leadership.

However, the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) over the past twenty years show that, although Australian students perform at levels above the OECD average, overall performance has flatlined or declined since 2000. In addition, rural and Indigenous populations have lower academic performance and less access to tertiary education than the national average.

There are also significant differences between student performance in the PISA tests for students from the different Australian States and Territories. See the Practitioner Level Module on the Australian Education System for more information about PISA and TIMSS.

Source: OECD 2015a, Education policy outlook: Making reforms happen: Australia, found at http://www.oecd.org/publications/education-policy-outlook-2015-9789264225442-en.htm

See also Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) 2016, TIMSS: What it will take to lift maths and science learning?, available at https://rd.acer.org/article/timss-what-it-will-take-to-lift-maths-and-science-learning

Labour-market outcomes by education level reflect well on the Australian education system. Australia has strong overall employment rates, with educational attainment increasing the likelihood of being employed. Graduates of vocational education do particularly well in the labour market: 95 per cent of 25-64 year-old Australians who have attained vocational education qualifications were employed in 2015, comparing favourably with the OECD average of 92 per cent.

However, Australia ranks among those OECD countries in which increasing educational attainment for women has not yet translated into better labour-market participation and earnings. In 2015, women with a Bachelor degree or higher, for example, earned 75 per cent of the earnings of their male counterparts. Similarly, starting salaries for women with a Bachelor degree or higher were on average $2,000 per year lower than their male counterparts. Income parity has not been achieved.

Sources: Bryant, G & Guthrie, B 2016, Graduate salaries 2015: A report on the earning of new Australian graduates in their first full-time employment, found at http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Graduate-Salaries-Report-2015-FINAL1.pdf

DET 2015, Country education profiles: Australia, found at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/Documents/ED15-0091_INT_Australia_Country_Education_Profile_2015_ACC.pdf

Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2016, Gender pay gap statistics, found at https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/Gender_Pay_Gap_Factsheet.pdf

You can also learn more about statistics regarding education in Australia at the Australian Bureau of Statistics website http://www.abs.gov.au/Education

An activity for you

Think about your country program or a country known to you and answer the following question.

If you were asked to provide a colleague in your country program (or a country well known to you) with a three point 'key features of the Australian education system', what would you tell them?

You might consider highlighting the following issues:

Do all children have to go to school in Australia?

Is education managed by one centralised government?

In Australia, does VET tend to lead to employment?

What are some gender differences?

An activity for you

Thinking about the education system in Australia and in your current country program or a country known to you, consider the following questions.

Which entities make the policy decisions affecting the allocation of education and training resources?

How does this differ from the situation in Australia?

9 AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION: KEY POLICY INITIATIVES

Policy Initiative 1: Equity

Australia has positive and negative indicators in relation to equity. Australia has a lower than average proportion of students at the lower end of performance measures although these results have not improved since 2000. Recent TIMSS data, for example, continue to show that provincial, remote and Indigenous students have lower school performance and completion rates than those of their urban and non-Indigenous counterparts.

These issues have been addressed through initiatives in early childhood education (Investing in the Early Years - A National Early Childhood Development Strategy, 2009, available at http://www.startingblocks.gov.au/media/1104/national_ecd_strategy.pdf and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the Closing the Gap national strategy which includes a focus on educational outcomes, see http://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/

Source: Thomson, S Wernert, N O'Grady, E &Rodrigues, S 2016, TIMSS 2015: A first look at Australia's results, found at http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=timss_2015

Policy Initiative 2: Higher education and training

In Australia 84 per cent of 25-34 year-olds have attained an upper secondary education, which is 2 per cent above the OECD average. VET is offered in senior secondary schools as well as through TAFE and RTOs. Australia has a high graduation rate in comparison with other OECD countries. In 2008, the Australian government commissioned a review of higher education (The Bradley Review, available at http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A32134). Significant recommendations from the review were that by 2020, 40 per cent of 25- to 34-year-old Australians have a higher education degree and, in the same period, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level would be students of low socio-economic background. In 2016, the proportion of 25- to 34-year-old Australians with a higher education degree increased to 42.9 per cent.

Source: OECD 2017, Education GPS: Australia: Overview of the education system, found at http://gpseducation.oecd.org/ CountryProfile?primaryCountry=AUS&treshold=10&topic=EO

Policy Initiative 3: Quality schools and quality teaching

Australia is making a concerted effort to improve school teaching and leadership. The establishment of AITSL in 2010 was designed to provide national leadership in this area. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers were also developed in 2010 and set out the skills and knowledge teachers at different career stages are required to demonstrate. The Australian Professional Standard for School Principals and the National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality (2009-13) have also contributed to an increased focus on teacher quality and school improvement. For more information see https://www.aitsl.edu.au/

Policy Initiative 4: Robust and transparent assessment measures

All Australian schools participate in the NAPLAN for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. In 2010, the Australian Government launched the My School website (http://www.myschool.edu.au) which allows public access to a range of information about Australian Schools including performance in NAPLAN. The My Skills website (http://www.myskills.gov.au/) has been available since 2012. My

Skills provides information to connect individuals and employers with training organisations. The Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website (http://www.qilt.edu.au/) provides information about universities, such as course information, fees and the results of student satisfaction surveys.

Source: OECD 2016c, Education Policy Outlook, found at http://www.oecd.org/edu/policyoutlook.htm

Policy Initiative 5: Indigenous education

Quality and achievement in Indigenous education is a major and ongoing challenge for Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and deserves particular attention when discussing the Australian education system.

In 2008, COAG established six key Closing the Gap targets to reduce the inequities between Indigenous and other Australians. Three of the targets focus on education.

The Closing the Gap targets are:

- to close the life-expectancy gap within a generation
- to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- to ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities within five years
- to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade
- to halve the gap in Indigenous Year 12 achievement by 2020
- to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The most recent Closing the Gap report (2017), found at http://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/ctg-report-2017.pdf shows that some of these targets are not on track. The original target to ensure access for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities to early childhood education, for example, expired unmet in 2013.

Policy Initiative 6: The New Colombo Plan

This initiative is a signature initiative of the Australian Government which aims to lift knowledge of the Indo-Pacific in Australia and strengthen people-to-people and institutional relationships, through study and internships undertaken by Australian undergraduate students in the region. An internship component is a hallmark of the New Colombo Plan.

The New Colombo Plan is intended to be transformational, deepening relationships with the region, both at the individual level and through expanding university, business and other stakeholder links.

The New Colombo Plan ensures a growing two-way exchange with the region, with an increasing number of Australian undergraduates heading to the region to complement the thousands of students from the region coming to Australia to study each year. Around 17,500 students have been funded by the Plan in the first four years of the program and it is anticipated that, as the program expands, 10,000 students will be supported each year.

Source: Department of Foreign Affairs & Trading (DFAT) c.2016a, New Colombo Plan fact sheet, found at http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/new-colombo-plan/resources/Pages/new-colombo-plan-fact-sheet.aspx

Policy Initiative 7: Resourcing schools

In 2010, the Australian Government commissioned an independent review: Review of Funding for Schooling (Final Report, December 2011) also known as The Gonski Review

(https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/review-of-funding-for-schooling-final-report-dec-2011.pdf). It found that funding arrangements for schools were unnecessarily complex, lacked coherence and transparency, and involved a duplication of funding effort in some areas. The review found that similar schools with similar students are receiving different amounts of money and many schools are not receiving enough to educate their students to the highest standards. The review recommended needs-based funding for each school student, with additional loading for disadvantaged students.

In June 2017, the Parliament of Australia assented to the Australian Education Amendment Act 2017 (colloquially known as the Gonski 2.0 reforms). The amended Australian Education Act 2013 will deliver an additional $23.4 billion in funding for Australian schools over the next 10 years. The Act states that by 2023, Australian Commonwealth funding for government schools will rise from the current average of 17 per cent to 20 per cent and funding for non-government schools will grow from an average of 77 per cent to 80 per cent. The amounts are based on the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS), which comprises a per-student funding amount (base amount) and loadings to meet the additional needs of disadvantaged students and schools. It takes into account all Australian Government funding, State and Territory Government funding, and a notional contribution per student by non-government schools as measured by their 'capacity to contribute'.

Sources: Australian Education Amendment Act 2017, found at https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2017A00078

An activity for you

Thinking about the education system in Australia and in your current country program or a country known to you, consider the following questions.

How do these policy issues and developments compare with the issues currently being faced in your country program or a country known to you?

Are there similarities?

Are there major differences?

1O TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Assessment questions

Answer the following questions by ticking 'True' or 'False'. Once you have selected your answers to all the questions, turn the page to 'The correct answers are...' to check the accuracy of your answers.

Question 1

The Australian Commonwealth Government has full responsibility for the delivery of school education in Australia.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 2

An important goal of vocational education and training (VET) is to provide young people with a broad set of skills to prepare them for their future working lives.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 3

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides the hierarchy of educational qualifications in Australia.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 4

The portfolio of work handled by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training includes international education, higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and early childhood education.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 5

It is mandatory in all States and Territories for students to complete Year 10 and participate full time in education, training or employment, until they are at least 17 years old.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 6

Each public university in Australia is established with its own Act of Parliament.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 7

The regulatory responsibility for early childhood education is shared between the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

Question 8

Australian has developed a standardised National Curriculum for schools.

Is this statement true or false?   ☐ True   ☐ False

The correct answers are...

Question 1

The Australian Commonwealth Government has full responsibility for the delivery of school education in Australia.

This statement is false. The major responsibility for Australian school education is held by the States and Territories. The Australian Government does provide substantial financial support to both government and non-government school education.

Question 2

An important goal of vocational education and training (VET) is to provide young people with a broad set of skills to prepare them for their future working lives.

This statement is true. An important goal of VET is to provide young people with a broad set of skills to prepare them for their working lives. VET provides students with practical skills and experiences to enable them to work in a specific industry. While life skills development is an essential component of VET training, a primary goal of VET is to provide people with the practical skills and experiences that are required by specific industries so that as workers, they can perform tasks effectively and safely.

Question 3

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides the hierarchy of educational qualifications in Australia.

This statement is true.

Question 4

The portfolio of work handled by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training includes international education and research, higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and early childhood education.

This statement is true. The Australian Government Department of Education has responsibility for: international education and research, higher education, VET and early childhood education.

Question 5

It is mandatory in all States and Territories for students to complete Year 10 and participate full time in education, training or employment, until they are at least 17 years old.

This statement is true.

Question 6

Each public university in Australia is established with its own Act of Parliament.

This statement is true.

Question 7

The regulatory responsibility for early childhood education is shared between the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

This statement is true.

Question 8

Australia has developed a standardised National Curriculum for schools.

This statement is true.

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