



Presidents Message July 2019

The deficit reporting model

We are used to reading lengthy articles on the deficits in Australian education. Our PISA scores are falling, there is not a strong enough uptake in science and maths despite the perceived importance of STEM in science and industry, the study of foreign languages in schools is at an all-time low, our teachers are not drawn from the high achievers in graduating cohorts, and their preservice training courses are not adequate.

Shine a positive light

It's useful, then, if I shine a positive spotlight on some of the key developments and improvements that I see occurring across the nation in recent years.

We can remind ourselves that in a number of areas, including equity of access to quality education, we continue to perform reasonably well.

Another thought: a decade ago I travelled extensively around Australia on behalf of school parents in one jurisdiction, and my companions and I were almost unable to dig deeply into curriculum issues because there was no common ground with an Australian curriculum. Parents and students have been the great winners of [ACARA's](#) endeavours for national consistency. While we have some way to go, it is now much easier to see our children's learning opportunities and learn from each other.

ACARA also remains positively self-critical, is committed to providing a world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting model and in our own regular meetings with their senior staff they have demonstrable examples of benchmarking their own practice internationally.

Distance education

The tyranny of distance applies as much to educational opportunity and practice as to any other provision of service in a country thirty times larger than the United Kingdom. It can be one of the most prohibitive and limiting factors to students succeeding, unless addressed imaginatively and proactively.

Readers will be aware of the work of the nation's schools of the air and of distance education but I am not sure any of us are sufficiently aware of the commitment of parents and caregivers who are the very backbone of this system.

It has been a salutary lesson in my recent professional work to engage in a range of visits with parents and children in our most isolated geographic regions and to marvel at the work being done by the women (and it mostly is women) who manage the teaching of their children, sometimes in multiple year levels, while juggling the demands of a family business and household.

Rural innovation

And so, my positive spotlight turns to one jurisdiction's proactivity in this regard.

This year the Queensland Department of Education established four rural and remote Centres for Learning and Wellbeing. Each has satellite campuses, and is staffed by a senior Principal who provides professional development for staff in the local area, manages health and wellbeing, and to provides the locus for interagency support to the community.

Queensland parents were widely consulted in this strategy, and have been welcomed as partners at each site. We hope they will avail themselves of the sophisticated infrastructure that is becoming available, including the IT solutions being put in place.

I have noted before that parent and family engagement needs to begin with professional educators in individual schools who provide a climate for positive change. Here is an example where a system has responded imaginatively to

disadvantage in a significant move to address equity issues. It is an experiment that will be watched with great interest.

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