



One voice for every
child in public education



Australian Council of State Schools
Organisations Ltd

**Submission to:
National Architecture Review
Taskforce**

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Introduction

Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the discussion about the review of the National Architecture for Schooling in Australia (National Architecture).

About us

ACSSO represents the families and communities of more than 2.5 million children attending government schools in Australia. We are one of the oldest continuously operating parent organisations in Australia and possibly the world. We were formed in 1947 to bring together various state and territory parent groups to develop national policies reflecting the way families wanted public education to be offered for their children. Over time there have been some changes in the way our members in states and territory peak parent groups have approached national issues. ACSSO actively engages with its members and families with children in our nation's public schools to bring the family voice to national policy decisions.

Policy

We believe that the primary obligation of governments, both Federal and State, is to establish and maintain government systems of education which:

- engage with family and community at all levels of education;
- will be of the highest standard and open to all, irrespective of race, gender, religion, social-economic status, geographic location, or ability;
- can respond to changing circumstances and can develop the flexible and diverse programs necessary to meet individual needs;
- discriminates in favour of those schools and individual students facing disadvantage and/or disability.

This submission

ACSSO is pleased to have the opportunity to make comment on the Review of the National Architecture.

We note and acknowledge the role the National Architecture needs to play in leading the successful delivery of the national school reform agenda in supporting the delivery of high-quality teaching and learning across the nation's schools. The focus, along with the eight key points of reform, is to respond to the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Declaration of an education

system that promotes excellence and equity and supports young Australians to become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active, informed members of the community.

We agree, and it is reinforced by research, that the most influential factor in school learning is the classroom teacher. However, 50 years of research supports the fact that the key component for improvement in student learning outcomes is family engagement. This key factor does not appear in the report in the recommendations or the report. Nor do we see any changes proposed in the review that would improve family engagement within our schools.

“For now, more than ever, family attitudes toward school and learning have direct impact on whatever learning is to take place during this pandemic and more importantly what comes after. With teacher’s roles and influences significantly reduced, partnering in learning with families is critical in maintaining continuity of school learning. When schools re-open, the issue will not be how much learning took place, but rather, have student and family attitudes towards the importance of school learning diminished.” Dr Steve Constantino¹

The National Architecture should reflect the communities of practice model that enables all stakeholders to be actively engaged in supporting children through the education journey. Additionally, it should facilitate smooth transitions between each of the key stages of schooling.

It should be agile and adaptive and as the landscape of education evolves, so too should the national architecture around it. Current situation in point, where the education landscape has changed dramatically, albeit temporary, pedagogy and practice appear somewhat on the back foot.

No clearer a message do we have now in this time of COVID-19 that families and schools, more specifically parents and teachers, should work together and be engaged than in this time of learning from home. Does the National Architecture proposed see Family Engagement and the voice of parents as essential – is it prepared to be adaptive?

The ACSSO Board acknowledges the work that has been done by these authorities to date. ACSSO has enjoyed great relationships with each of the three entities – we would want a guarantee that this would not be diminished in any way – instead be enhanced and strengthened.

¹ Engage Every Family: Five Simple Principles by Steven M. Constantino.

Since inception ACARA built a strong working relationship with stakeholders in ensuring their ability to have a voice in the development of shape papers for curriculum; curriculum discussion groups, Literacy Learning Progressions, curriculum reviews, etc. We have made small videos for their parent resources on NAPLAN and given advice and updates on media releases, updates on MySchool, discussions prior to the release of NAPLAN reports, and are often called for a comment or advice. We have always been invited to attend forums with International speakers and we participated in both the Review by Chris Ryan and by Phil Lambert. ACSSO through its CEO, and Former Chair, was one of two organisations (the other was the Primary School Principal Organisation) asked to present to the UNESCO Study Tour in 2016 "What My School teaches us about improving transparency and accountability through public access to school data" and a former ACSSO Chair travelled to Manilla with Stanley Rabinowitz in 2018 for the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning's Policy Forum on using open school data to improve transparency and accountability in education. ACSSO is also represented on the Students with Disability Advisory Group.

Similarly, with AITSL, ACSSO met regularly with Lisa Rodgers when she was CEO and she attended a Board meeting (2018) and addressed our Roundtable (2017). We were consulted on the drafting of the teaching standards, paying particular attention to standards 3.7 and 7.3. ACSSO was granted funding along with Australian Parents Council to produce 4 Illustrations of practice for these standards in 2013 and these were completed and uploaded in 2015.

We have also enjoyed an ongoing relationship with ESA having considerable input to their projects, particularly Safe Schools Hub and myfuture and often meeting with key personnel.

Unlike the many other reviews into education past and present, this review into the National Architecture appears somewhat different.

First, it is being made under the auspices of the Education Council rather than the Federal Education Minister.

Second, its establishment was not accompanied by any public statement by the Education Council or ministerial press release concerning its terms of reference or membership. We were unaware of this review until recently. The stakeholder engagement in the formation of this review was very targeted. In the past decade there has been the Nous group's 2014 report on "Future arrangements for national education entities," the 2015 review of ACARA, and the 2015 Functional and Efficiency Review of the Commonwealth Education Department.

We do, however, welcome the discussion around potential revisions to the current frameworks so that they can be more timely, responsive, and effectively and cohesively engage with students, parents, and the teaching communities. How will this be embedded in the new architecture?

Our concerns of note include:

- The relationship of the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority with the current National Architecture is not particularly clear – there would be great benefit for a collaborative effort between early childhood teaching standards and the Early Learning Framework. Transitions depend on greater alignment.
- We note in the flow chart that it appears to be a top down approach from Australian Curriculum and Teaching Services (ACTS) to school leaders and teachers.
- ACSSO Board members noted that ACARA, AITSL and ESA are relatively new agencies, having been in existence for just on a decade. Whilst continuing to review and improve is valuable our concern is that forming new organisations key elements, personnel and expertise will be lost. Also, time will be lost. Forming a new body takes time and money in the with the development of new roles and bringing jurisdictional stakeholders on board.
- Should there be changes, will we see any issues of separation of duties with the merger? NSW merged their Board of Studies and Teacher Institute into one body – will there be discussion surrounding “lessons learnt” during that process, in particular their relationship with Early Childhood?
- Combining AITSL and ACARA could pose some challenges, and teaching could become potentially subsumed by curriculum, become neither future focused nor agile. How can we ensure there is a balance? There is value in having two separate bodies with specialised focus so all issues are effectively developed and represented.
- There needs to be further discussion around governance – the four models that are in the current consultation paper are not clear in the complexities.
- We believe governance of the ACTS structure appears narrow with the absence of a Board – one of either representatives or people chosen for their skills and expertise in the areas and rather just a CEO reporting to the Education Council. We have grave concerns for accountability and transparency of any decision making. Good governance relies on strong leadership with clear vision and a culture of building constructive relationships that give an opportunity for inclusiveness and collaboration – the latter is not clear in the paper.

- We question, from the paper presented, the proposed structure's ability to capture the diversity of need within our schools. Whilst pleasing to see the recommendation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert advisory committee, we see no direct mention for students with additional needs, students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, etc. The National Architecture must meet the needs of these groups with resourcing of curriculum support and professional learning for leaders and school staff.
- While we note the inclusion of the expert advisory committees, the function appears to be somewhat bureaucratic and not inclusive of those closer to the frontline of schools and we question the effectiveness of these committees to perform their duties.

We believe the commissioning, implementation and outcomes of the national education reforms can be dramatically improved through greater engagement with teachers. It is imperative that the function be not lost in bureaucracy. Whatever measures are put in place should relate to improved educational outcomes for students without shifting the burden of data collection and analysis and record keeping for professional learning directly onto teachers. Further administrative requirements only serve to remove them from the classroom and from planning to meet the needs of the students they teach. It is also essential that in any reshaping that balance is maintained to ensure that no one function dominates another.

In response to the question with regard to how the Education Council, Australian Education Senior Officials Committee (AESOC) and Council's standing working groups support improved performance by the National Architecture, we clearly see the need for the acknowledgement of Family Engagement as a key impact on the outcomes of students throughout the work. This could be, in the first instance, modelled by Education Council, AESOC and the working groups' closer engagement with ACSSO.

While there has not been a major focus on Family Engagement to date, despite the evidence, any reshaping of the National Architecture provides an ideal opportunity to increase and embed the level of Family Engagement as a genuine tool for improving student learning outcomes.

ACSSO has enjoyed its working relationships with the educational entities supporting the current National Architecture and we are committed to an ongoing relationship with the resultant organisation(s) in whatever form the future holds.

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