Submission on Interim Report – Building a skilled and adaptable workforce

12 September 2025

ESA (Education Services Australia) welcomes the Interim Report's recognition that high-quality digital resources and tools are enablers for powerful productivity gains; reducing workload for teachers and better preparing students for their participation in Australian society. We support a single national platform for lesson planning material and a coherent national approach to edtech innovation and AI. Realising the benefit of these solutions requires significant co-operation and co-ordination, with clear roles for ESA, other relevant national agencies and jurisdictions, sectors and systems of schools. Achieving this presents practical complexities that warrant the Commission's consideration.

Recommendation 1.1

We support a single national online platform that can also be an aggregator of quality content from jurisdiction sources, as it ensures value for money, leverage of investments already made across the country and responsiveness to local curricula and priorities.

Since 2009, ESA has been operating Scootle, the national, free portal which provides access to more than 16,000 quality curriculum resources. Scootle is upgraded annually and recent enhancements include: discovery through the Australian Curriculum and Schools Online Thesaurus, infrastructure to support jurisdiction content sharing with the Teaching Tools Network and Single Sign On reducing teacher time and effort. All have been delivered in collaboration with jurisdictions and on stable and secure technical services. By design, Scootle draws from content repositories and resource hubs as well as reputable online resources. This approach provides free, centralised access to quality-assured curated curriculum-aligned resources for all Australian teachers.

As referenced in our initial submission ESA is currently proposing a refresh of the Scootle service that delivers an updated national online platform that is aligned to the objective in this recommendation. The need for this updated version of Scootle is to address limitations of the ageing technology in the current platform and greater flexibility to address jurisdictional, sectoral and national policy priorities. ESA's proposal is a co-operative model with the national agencies that draws on ACARA's expertise and work and AERO's evidence base on quality instruction, delivered through ESA's experience in platform development and delivery capabilities. ESA has been partnering with NATSIEC in the development of this proposal to ensure that the solution would include access to appropriate and safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander created and curated curriculum resources and metadata.

Any national platform must also be able to accommodate localisation and contextualisation at jurisdiction, school and classroom level to deliver the intended benefit for teachers (as highlighted in the Report). ESA's proposed approach leverages current jurisdictional investments in resource stores and teacher-facing front-end portals while providing equitable access for all.

Recommendation 1.2

A national approach that draws on the lessons and leverages the capabilities from innovations in individual jurisdictions would be welcome. The potential to achieve economy of scale in public funding procurement is attractive, and success will again depend on co-operation and thoughtful co-ordination. An edtech toolkit needs to work with the current vendor marketplace and jurisdictional procurement models, while clearly

identifying areas that should be invested in and operated for the national benefit. As referenced in our initial submission, the Safer Technologies 4 Schools (ST4S) initiative is a standardised approach to evaluating digital products and services used by schools across Australia and New Zealand against a nationally consistent security, privacy, and child safety control framework. The standards framework has been developed in partnership with all systems and sectors and is the basis through which ST4S evaluates software and platforms in use in Australian schools. ST4S provides free, independent, clear and consistent advice to schools, reducing duplication of research, testing effort and risk to users in a rapidly growing international market. Its success has come from strong engagement with industry as well as jurisdictions, and it is referenced in many jurisdictions' edtech tools procurement processes. ST4S has already been updated to include privacy, security, and child-safety controls for AI enabled edtech.

ST4S provides a 'readiness check' for edtech vendors to understand how their products meet the standards, and supporting information assists them in planning changes before their assessment submission. The approach has been welcomed by the industry and feedback provided by vendors and industry bodies highlights the value of a clear national approach which is a prerequisite for procurement in many jurisdictions and sectors.

ESA is currently proposing to extend the ST4S approach with a responsible AI edtech standard (covering human and social wellbeing, transparency, fairness and accountability) and an education quality standard (covering both design and impact, developed by AERO to be implemented by ESA). All this work aligns and supports the objectives for this recommendation and could be further built on. ESA has recently provided a proposal for consideration by AESOC to continue both the responsible and effective AI edtech work (including for it to be used in jurisdiction procurement) noting that efficacy standards could also be applied to non-AI edtech.

We propose ESA lead a co-operative model that uses an existing national working group to implement the responsible AI standard, and which draws on the capability that exists in AERO's emerging standards work on edtech efficacy to extend the ST4S. This would provide clear guidance for the private edtech market, support jurisdiction and school purchasing decisions or nation-wide procurement and create a pathway to scale promising innovations wherever they arise.

In relation to the acquisition of national AI tools, ESA is currently working with a number of states as well as AI providers to explore options to develop a proposal for a national AI education infrastructure service which would enable best practice AI use by Australian teachers to be scaled safely and cost-effectively across the nation.

Addressing specific questions

1. We believe ESA is well placed to take on the responsibility as the national agency for both lesson planning materials and for procurement (and where appropriate development) of advanced edtech, co-ordinating delivery and drawing on the capabilities of other relevant national agencies and jurisdictions. This is underpinned by ESA's structure as a ministerially-owned not-for-profit company with a focus on education technology, and is supported by our experience, and strong record of success, in operating national projects at scale, such as NAPLAN Online and Scootle.
2. We don't believe changes to the Australian Curriculum or roles of the national education agencies are required to deliver these recommendations. Local adaptations of the Australian Curriculum can be managed and supported, through effective, established collaboration.
3. On funding implications, without commenting on the size and scale of investment required, we believe the current cost-sharing models for national education initiatives are well suited for both recommendations. There is also scope for the education content and ed-tech sector to contribute to funding initiatives, subject to articulating and demonstrating benefits to their business models either in the cost to access markets or to deliver their solutions.

