

ACARA's submission to the Productivity Commission on building a skilled and adaptable workforce

September 2025

ACARA is steadfastly committed to continuing to contribute to improvement in the learning of all young Australians through world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting, and welcomes the Productivity Commission's focus on supporting our teachers and a focus on equitable and purposeful use of artificial intelligence (AI).

ACARA would like to thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the *Building a skilled and adaptable workforce – interim report*.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established in 2008 to improve the quality and consistency of school education in Australia through a national curriculum, national assessment, data collection and performance reporting. ACARA's legislated functions¹ in relation to teacher support materials specifically include to:

- provide school curriculum resource services, educational research services and other related services; and
- provide information, resources, support and guidance to the teaching profession.

In line with our Charter,² ACARA provides expert advice and delivers national curriculum, assessment and reporting for all Australian education ministers.

ACARA is part of the National Education Architecture, which also includes the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), Education Services Australia (ESA) and the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO). This national architecture will play a critical role in supporting the delivery of many initiatives identified in the interim report, and ACARA stands ready to support this important work.

School education and productivity

It is important that any proposals that seek to improve productivity through school education are clearly aligned with and designed to support Australia's nationally agreed Goals for Schooling, as articulated in the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration 2019.³ The Education Declaration sets national goals that reflect our shared hopes for young people and the kind of society we want now and into the future, and highlights education as central to Australia's future prosperity and social cohesion.

These goals are:

1. The Australian education system promotes excellence and equity; and
2. All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

¹ Australian Government, [Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008](#), Federal Register of Legislation, 2008.

² [Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Charter](#), ACARA, 2022.

³ Department of Education, [Alice Spring \(Mparntwe\) Education Declaration](#), Department of Education, 2019, accessed 4 September 2025.

The Australian Curriculum brings these goals to life by outlining the knowledge and skills students need for the future. High expectations at a national level, supported by quality teaching and strong community involvement, ensure education benefits all Australians. While productivity underpins the sustainability of Australian communities and society, it is essential that education also fosters our broader ambitions, including personal development, civic engagement and lifelong learning, which support national prosperity.⁴

A quality education system ensures that young people are prepared for the workforce and empowered to lead healthy, meaningful and connected lives.

Curriculum plays a pivotal role in shaping the educational experience and future readiness of young Australians. It establishes clear expectations for learning and serves as a foundation for equitable, high-quality outcomes. In high-performing education systems, these expectations are ambitious and consistently supported through excellence in teaching, strong school and system leadership, and active engagement from families, communities, business and industry⁵.

The Australian Curriculum's learning areas, informed by their foundational disciplines, establish the core foundation for student learning across the nation. Through defined content descriptions and achievement standards, the curriculum articulates both what students should be taught and the expected quality of their learning outcomes – providing a consistent benchmark for educational policy, system accountability and strategic planning.

ACARA provides resources to support teachers and school leaders as they implement the Australian Curriculum; for example, work samples, illustrations of practice and professional learning modules.

The support as proposed by the Productivity Commission interim report to help our teachers deliver and achieve our collective and agreed goals for schooling in Australia is welcomed.

Teachers and school leaders are the cornerstone of Australia's K–12 education system. Their expertise, relational capacity and professional judgement are critical to advancing student learning and wellbeing.

AITSL's Teaching Standards provide a nationally consistent framework through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, which clearly articulate and define the role of educators in fostering student growth and development. These seven standards, structured across three domains – Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice and Professional Engagement – guide teacher progress across career stages and underpin quality teaching across diverse contexts.

The first and foundational standard is knowing students and how they learn; as a teacher progresses, they will learn a knowledge-rich and disciplined-based curriculum, and the best ways to set achievable goals for their student cohorts. As teachers deepen their practice, they build curriculum expertise and refine their capacity to set meaningful, achievable goals tailored to their student cohorts.

To realise the full potential of tools such as generative AI and accessible lesson planning materials, it is essential to support both curriculum implementation and educator capability in tandem. Teaching is inherently complex, requiring deep disciplinary knowledge, adaptive expertise and sustained professional support. Research shows that focusing on strategies for deep understanding has a greater influence on student learning than other interventions⁶.

⁴ Department of Education, *Benefits of educational attainment*, Department of Education, 2024, accessed 10 September 2025; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education economic and social outcomes*, OECD, 2024, accessed 10 September 2025.

⁵ ACARA, *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, Curriculum Design Paper*, ACARA, 2013, accessed 11 September, 2025.

⁶ J Hattie and S Clarke *Visible Learning: Feedback* (1st ed.), Routledge, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429485480>.

Investing in educator support is not ancillary – it is central to delivering high-quality, equitable education for all young Australians.

Access to high-quality lesson planning materials

The interim report's reference to lesson planning materials affirms the centrality of lesson design in effective teaching practice. Lesson planning is a core professional responsibility that demands time, expertise and contextual responsiveness. Providing high-quality, curriculum-aligned planning resources is essential to support teachers in translating curriculum into meaningful learning experiences. This work requires professional judgement and care to draw on the research of what works and shape learning to meet the needs, backgrounds and aspirations of all students⁷.

To meet curriculum standards while fostering deep engagement and equity, teachers and school leaders must be supported with both time and tools. This investment helps to uphold the integrity of curriculum delivery across Australian schools.

Improving access to high-quality lesson planning materials can help when it is developed with the profession and respects the complexity of teaching as a teacher's role, and involves bringing together deep subject knowledge, pedagogical skills and an understanding of their students.

The central question is not just whether lesson planning resources will help, but whether they represent the best use of limited resources. Significant investment in these materials may require trade-offs with other areas of education funding.

The Productivity Commission's final report will need to consider the following factors.

- **Lesson planning materials are valuable support but cannot substitute for high-quality teaching.** Teachers must meet professional standards, including deep subject expertise. Yet across Australia, particularly in regional and disadvantaged communities, teachers are frequently asked to teach outside their field of expertise/qualification. For example, a teacher with limited mathematics knowledge and background may be tasked with delivering Year 10 mathematics using lesson plans they cannot confidently interpret. This scenario not only undermines teacher efficacy and morale but also compromises student learning outcomes.
- While providing curriculum-aligned planning resources is helpful, it is not sufficient. A sustainable solution requires **strategic investment in recruitment, initial teacher education and ongoing professional development**, ensuring that every student has access to expert teachers across all discipline areas, including primary and secondary specialists.
- Given the significant variation in student capabilities within individual classrooms, it is essential that lesson planning frameworks support differentiation and contextualisation. **Teachers must be empowered through professional development to design and/or adapt lesson plans** to meet the diverse learning needs of their students in their school context. This adaptability and teacher capability is critical to ensuring equitable access to learning and fostering inclusive educational environments.
- **The scale of the task is significant.** Developing lesson plans across eight learning areas, spanning 13 years of schooling and multiple levels of complexity, represents a major national effort. Jurisdictions have already committed tens of millions of dollars to this work, reflecting the scale of investment required to ensure curriculum-aligned, high-quality resources are available to every teacher in every classroom.

⁷ J Hattie, *Visible Learning: The Sequel, A Synthesis of Over 2,100 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, Routledge, 2023
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003380542>.

- **A national platform for curriculum-aligned resources is a logical and timely proposition, but it must reflect the realities of Australia's federated education system.** A single, accessible entry point has the potential to streamline access and strengthen support for teachers across jurisdictions. However, its development must be collaborative and respectful of the shared governance arrangements that underpin education policy and funding arrangements. National agencies like ACARA, AITSL, ESA and AERO, working in partnership with state and territory departments and non-government education authorities, are well-positioned to steward this effort. Their collective expertise and system reach provide a strong foundation for a platform that is coherent, scalable and responsive to the diverse needs of Australian teachers.
- **Evidence of impact is essential.** While lesson-level resources can help reduce teacher workload, their value must be assessed through robust evidence of improved student learning outcomes. Without this, there is a risk of prioritising convenience over effectiveness. Other strategies, such as investing in teacher capability across career stages, may yield greater long-term benefits. This is particularly critical considering persistent challenges such as high workforce turnover and the prevalence of out-of-field teaching. Strengthening educator expertise and stability remains central to delivering equitable, high-quality education for all learners.

Ensuring equitable access to educational technology and artificial intelligence

Emerging evidence highlights the potential of educational technology (edtech) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance student outcomes and improve productivity across the economy. However, in this rapidly evolving landscape, their integration into education must be intentional, equitable and grounded in pedagogical purpose. These tools should be designed to strengthen, not replace, the professional expertise that sits at the heart of effective teaching and learning. Equitable access, thoughtful implementation and sustained support for educators are essential to ensuring that technology serves as an enabler of deep learning, not a substitute for the relational and instructional depth that only teachers can provide.

As Leslie Loble, who is also the Deputy Chair of the ACARA Board, noted in her earlier submission: "Initial teacher education and ongoing professional development should explicitly cover how to evaluate, adapt, and integrate edtech to support educational goals."⁸

Loble raises key points in relation to edtech tools, including generative AI, referring to the need to consider the design, use and governance of edtech tools, and the need to ensure equity in access to quality digital learning and teaching tools⁹.

Technology should be designed and implemented with attention to broader educational goals, such as equity, student safety and wellbeing, cost-effectiveness, and how students learn.

Acknowledging there are potential benefits in the use of edtech, those benefits will only be achieved through consideration and management of the key risks, which are:

- poor pedagogical design not grounded in evidence
- weak data governance, which may reinforce existing biases or inequalities
- low engagement due to digital access gaps or limited digital literacy.

⁸ L Loble, [Submission to the Productivity Commission on Building a skilled and adaptable workforce Inquiry](#), Productivity Commission, 2025, accessed 8 September 2025.

⁹ L Loble and A Hawcroft, 'Shaping AI and Edtech to Tackle Australia's Learning Divide', *Open Publications of UTS Scholars*, University of Technology Sydney, 2022 <https://doi.org/10.57956/kxye-qd93>.

To ensure edtech supports education effectively, Australia needs robust national frameworks, standards and guidance that ensure tools are:

- evidence-based and pedagogically sound
- safe and culturally responsive
- governed by strong data protections that **proactively** support First Nations Data Sovereignty
- integrated with teacher development and support.

These recommendations outlined in the interim report align closely with the remit of the National AI in Schools Taskforce (the Taskforce). The National AI framework under development is one way that this work is already underway. The Taskforce is comprised of representatives from all jurisdictions, school sectors and the national agencies (AITSL, AERO, ESA and ACARA), and is well positioned to lead coordinated efforts in this area.

ACARA remains deeply committed to improving learning outcomes for all young Australians through world-class curriculum, assessment and reporting. We welcome the Productivity Commission's emphasis on supporting teachers and advancing the equitable, purposeful integration of artificial intelligence in education, ensuring that innovation strengthens, rather than replaces, the professional expertise in the heart of teaching and learning.