

# **SPEECH**

**The Hon Christopher Pyne MP**

**Minister for Education and Training**

**Leader of the House**

**“The Future of Teacher Education: The  
Australian Government’s response to the  
TEMAG Report.”**

**Inaugural Hedley Beare Memorial Lecture**

**Australian Council for Educational Leaders**

**SMC Conference & Function Centre**

**66 Goulburn Street Sydney, NSW**

**11.00 am Friday 13 February 2015**

## Introduction

I am pleased to be here today, to honour Hedley Beare and outline the Government's agenda for school education in 2015 and beyond.

I also acknowledge that Hedley's sons, Tim and Martin are here today.

I will be giving particular emphasis today to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group Report – *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*, and outlining the Government's response.

It is significant we are launching the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) Report at this Australian Council for Educational Leaders' (ACEL) function.

It recognises that ACEL is at the forefront of education practice and improvement and our desire to engage with you.

And as this is the inaugural Hedley Beare Memorial Address, it also gives special honour to his important contribution to education.

Hedley Beare was a giant of the Australian education system, he grew up and spent his early professional years in my home state of South Australia.

He was an exceptional scholar and writer on education matters, a school teacher early in his career, and the inaugural director of the education systems established in each of the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

Very few people have the opportunity to found one education system, let alone two!

These are remarkable achievements.

His achievements were acknowledged when he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2009.

The citation for this award summed up his diverse contribution:

*“For service to education at secondary and tertiary levels as an academic and administrator, to policy development, and to a range of professional associations.”*

Hedley Beare has left a great legacy to education.

ACEL is to be congratulated in initiating this memorial lecture series which seeks to honour Hedley Beare's great contribution.

I hope the lecture becomes one of the key events on the education calendar and will stimulate genuine dialogue and debate about the future of education in Australia.

### **The Australian Government's education achievements**

Before discussing TEMAG I want to give a brief report of this Government's achievements in education.

When the Government was elected we knew there was an urgent need to drive long term policies to improve the quality of our education system.

We accept the basic principle, based on the evidence, that education policy should not be measured by how much money has been allocated, teacher numbers, or classroom sizes, but rather what actually works to improve student outcomes.

That is why the Government's *Students First* policy focuses on those areas where the evidence indicates a positive impact on student performance can be made.

These include:

- increasing school autonomy
- ensuring our curriculum is robust and relevant
- promoting parental engagement
- improving the quality of teaching

We have made considerable progress in implementing these four priorities.

We have:

- implemented the Independent Public Schools initiative to promote greater school autonomy across most states and territories;
- initiated the successful independent review of the Australian Curriculum;
- funded the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) to research and develop ways to increase parental engagement.

- provided a national needs-based funding system, which ensured certainty and stability to schools, provided loadings for students facing disadvantage, resulting in record school funding over four years from 2014-2017;
- ensured faster NAPLAN turnaround and gained agreement from all states and territories to move NAPLAN Online from 2016;
- appointed Professor John Hattie as the new chair of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL);
- provided additional resources for STEM subjects;
- successfully amended the *Australian Education Act* to rectify a number of errors and we will introduce amendments to reduce command and control aspects of the *Act* in 2015;
- introduced alphabetic teaching approaches under our Flexible Literacy in Remote Primary Schools programme to address poor literacy results in remote primary schools.

These are achievements I am proud of, but there is still much to do.

## **Reasons for appointing TEMAG**

In pursuit of the quality teaching aspect of my *Students First* policy, I appointed TEMAG to examine how we can better prepare teachers with the right mix of academic and practical skills.

The reasons I appointed TEMAG are clear.

As the Commonwealth is the prime funder of teacher education, providing in 2014 \$600 million across 450 programs and 48 institutions and involving some 80,000 pre-service teachers, we want to know that taxpayers' funds are being spent effectively.

More importantly, despite record school funding and smaller class sizes, Australian student performance as measured by the OECD has declined in both relative and absolute terms.

This decline has to be arrested.

And research highlights that the best way to improve student performance is to improve teaching quality.

As Professor Hattie has stated:

*“Research shows that the quality of the teacher is the single greatest **in-school** influence on student achievement.”*

And only this month Andreas Schleicher, OECD Director of Education and Skills said:

*“The highest performing education systems in PISA tend to systematically prioritise the quality of teachers over the size of classes.”*

We know from the many previous reviews – Professor Bill Loudon has suggested there have been at least 101 – that there are real problems about the quality of teacher education.

We know from surveys of students that there is dissatisfaction about their classroom readiness.

And there are debates about appropriate entry level of students into teaching courses, and the number of students in relation to workforce demand.

Despite all these reports and evidence, these issues have not been effectively addressed previously.

TEMAG was appointed to provide me with up-to-date practical advice on how to tackle quickly these long standing problems.

That we are releasing today not just the TEMAG report, but also the Government's detailed response shows how serious I am about implementing TEMAG's recommendations.

Almost all of TEMAG's recommendations will be delivered within the next two years.

TEMAG found that there is, and I quote:

*“... a high degree of variability in the quality of practice across initial teacher education in Australia. There are examples of excellent practice, where providers deliver evidence-backed programs that are constantly reviewed and improved. Disturbingly, there are also significant pockets of objectively poor practice, and these must be addressed decisively.”*

Our schools, students, aspiring teachers and the teaching profession deserve better.

TEMAG's recommendations focus on the important issues that have to be addressed to improve teacher education.

The Report has **five themes** across 38 recommendations:

The first theme is a stronger quality assurance of teacher education courses.

I was concerned about the finding that, while there are examples of excellent practice in teacher education, there are courses that lag way behind in quality.

This means there are significant differences in the level of preparation of beginning teachers entering our schools.

The current accreditation of teacher education courses is letting us down by not providing rigorous quality assurance.

New South Wales' recent audit of teaching literacy highlights that accreditation does not currently require universities to provide evidence to support the teaching practices they include in their courses.

This is simply not good enough.

We need to overhaul the accreditation of courses to expect more of universities.

We need universities to show that their courses are grounded in evidence-based teaching practices that improve student learning outcomes.

We need to be confident that a graduating teacher has the practical skills ready for the classroom to maximise the learning of every student they teach throughout their career.

I note TEMAG recommends a new national regulator for initial teacher education.

I do **not** believe establishing such a body will necessarily deliver better quality assurance nationally.

Instead, the Government will utilise the expertise of existing federal bodies to achieve this outcome and work with existing state and territory bodies to improve the national accreditation standard.

We already have in place the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) which has played a major role in the development of professional standards.

I believe AITSL can build on this work.

AITSL will be given greater responsibility to improve the quality of initial teacher education.

It will work with state and territory teacher regulatory authorities to increase the rigour of assessment of courses for accreditation purposes.

Additionally, to ensure these standards have an impact on university courses, a stronger relationship will be established between AITSL and the Tertiary Education Quality and

Standards Agency (TEQSA), the higher education sector's independent regulator.

This will ensure that these two key organisations work together to investigate the quality of any teacher courses identified as a concern.

AITSL will develop instructions that make clear what information universities must provide to gain course accreditation.

This will include how each course has been designed and how this ensures that beginning teachers gain the skills they need.

Importantly, to gain full course accreditation universities must show that their graduates are classroom ready, demonstrate how their graduates are having a positive impact on student learning, and that employers are satisfied with the graduates they produce.

AITSL will work with state accreditation panels to improve their assessment of courses. This will include making sure that the panels have the skills and knowledge required to make these assessments.

We are not asking that universities to provide *more* information to have their courses accredited. Rather, we are seeking *better quality* information so that a more accurate assessment of course quality can be made.

AITSL will also be instructed to monitor and revise accreditation arrangements on an ongoing basis to make sure the stronger quality assurance actually impacts on the classroom readiness of graduates.

The second theme is more rigorous selection for entry to teacher education courses.

TEMAG recommends that more sophisticated approaches are needed to select entrants into teacher education who will make the best teachers.

I acknowledge that effective teachers possess a range of qualities that include both academic ability and the personal characteristics needed to engage students.

We regularly hear reports that the quality of entrants to teaching has dropped in recent years.

It is often speculated that this is due to the lowering of the minimum Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) for entry to teacher education at some universities.

The Government does not support single approaches such as ATAR cut-offs, though we understand this might be supported in some jurisdictions.

However, we do support more sophisticated and transparent approaches to selecting the right candidates for entry into the teaching profession.

At present, there is very little publicly available information on how universities delivering teacher education select students, and the factors they are consider when making decisions.

I want to make it clear that this is not the case at all universities.

We have some top quality courses selecting students with demonstrated high academic achievement, with rigorous screening of applicants.

But I want this to be the rule, rather than the exception.

Without transparency it is difficult for those considering becoming a teacher to know what is needed to enter the teaching profession.

It is also important for public confidence in the profession that beginning teachers possess the skills and characteristics of highly effective teachers.

I will instruct AITSL to identify best practice in selection and develop specific criteria to assist universities to select the right people for entry into teacher education.

The criteria will make clear the academic capabilities expected of teachers.

It will include examples of tools that can be used to assess the personal attributes of teaching candidates against those important for teaching.

Universities will be required to be transparent about the methods they use to select students into teaching courses.

Importantly, teachers must possess strong literacy and numeracy skills to foster the development of these skills in their students.

It is my expectation that teacher education students will be broadly in the top 30 per cent of the population in literacy and numeracy.

The Government will work with universities to make available a national literacy and numeracy test for teacher education students graduating from 2015.

From 2016, all teacher education students will be required to pass the test before they graduate.

The third theme is improved and structured practical experience for teacher education students

TEMAG makes clear that practical experience within teacher education courses must give students opportunities to connect what is learnt at university with real world practice.

That TEMAG found that this does not always occur is a great concern to me.

I am aware of excellent examples of practical experience, delivered through strong partnerships between universities and schools.

This focus on high quality practical experience must be embedded in every teacher education course.

Practical experience needs to prepare beginning teachers for the realities of teaching. This includes the skills and confidence to raise the learning outcomes of diverse student groups, and to work with parents to achieve this.

Better connecting what teacher education students are learning at university with their practical experience in schools is essential.

To achieve this goal, I will instruct AITSL to develop the essential requirements of effective practical experience in partnership with universities, schools and education authorities.

Importantly, the requirements will also include a focus on the supervision and assessment of teachers undertaking practical experience.

The fourth theme is robust assessment of graduates to ensure classroom readiness

TEMAG noted that there is currently no guarantee, even upon graduation, that beginning teachers are really ready for the classroom.

It proposes that effective assessment of teacher education students is central to remedying this.

And that while there are a number of universities undertaking comprehensive and student-focused assessment, the rigour of this assessment varies.

It is important that Australian parents, students and communities have confidence that all teaching graduates have been rigorously assessed throughout their course and that beginning teachers are ready for the realities of the classroom.

Universities must work more closely with schools to undertake ongoing, rigorous and iterative assessment of teacher education students.

This must include the collection of evidence throughout the duration of study that can be presented to accreditation bodies and employers to demonstrate the classroom readiness of graduate teachers.

I will instruct AITSL to clearly outline for universities what robust and ongoing assessment practices for teacher education students involve and how these practices are to be consistently applied in partnership with schools.

AITSL will also set clear expectations that universities and students collect evidence throughout the course, resulting in a portfolio of evidence that shows each student has developed the knowledge and skills to be classroom ready before they graduate.

TEMAG proposes that to further increase the classroom readiness all primary teachers should graduate with at least one subject specialisation, prioritising science, mathematics or a language.

The Government also agrees with TEMAG that greater emphasis must be given to core subjects of literacy and

numeracy, with a particular focus on phonics and phonemic awareness.

In particular, we must ensure that all graduates have skills in teaching literacy, especially phonemic awareness and phonics, like the successful Explicit and Direct Instruction model trialled in Cape York by Noel Pearson and now being expanded beyond Cape York by Good to Great Schools funded by the Australian Government.

Children who are not taught in these key areas, during the early years of their education, disengage with these important subjects, which leads to declining performance and engagement throughout their schooling.

Consequently, new accreditation processes will include a requirement for such subject specialisation for primary teachers.

The fifth theme is to improve national research and workforce planning

TEMAG concluded that reliable research into teacher education effectiveness in Australia and robust teaching workforce data, is currently lacking.

This is holding us back from having the best teaching profession we possibly can.

Therefore, AITSL, will establish a research focus on the effectiveness of teacher education and teaching practices to address this.

I will also work with state and territory education ministers and their teacher regulatory authorities to build on existing data sources, such as the *Staff in Australia's Schools Survey* and the *National Teaching Workforce Dataset*.

This will assist in better connecting the supply of teaching graduates with workforce demand.

### **Next steps**

*Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* is a landmark development in the quest to improve teaching quality in Australia.

TEMAG's recommendations are far reaching, but sensible, practical, and mainstream.

They are entirely achievable and this Government is determined to have them implemented.

Consequently, our response has avoided creating new institutions, but rather built on existing ones that are respected and have the expertise to implement the recommendations.

We understand that improving teaching quality is a national issue needing a coordinated response that must use all the resources and advantages of our federal system.

This is why we will work collaboratively with the states and territories and their respective accrediting bodies.

It also requires the support from other stakeholders – deans of education, academics, primary and secondary principals, parents and the teaching profession itself.

TEMAG may not be the last teacher inquiry in our lifetime, but it will be the one that will lead to real improvements in the quality of teaching in Australia.

That is what we all want.

I thank all those who contributed to TEMAG and especially Professor Craven for chairing this Advisory Group.

He was ably supported by his fellow committee members: Professor Kim Beswick, Professor Eeva Leinonen, Professor Field Rickards, Mr John Fleming, Mr Trevor Fletcher, Ms Michelle Green, and Dr Ben Jensen.

It is a great achievement.

In the spirit of Hedley Beare, I look forward to working together to implement the changes that are needed to make a real difference for Australia's future.

**ENDS**