

Friday 30 August 2019

Education Updates

Porter Releases Bills to Prevent Discrimination against Religion

The Australian Government has released draft legislation aimed at preventing discrimination on the basis of religion, which it hopes will be enacted by the end of the year. [Click here to read more...](#)

Victorian Government Considering NAPLAN 'Proficiency Certificates'

The Victorian Minister for Education, Mr James Merlino, has established an advisory committee to investigate ways of making NAPLAN more relevant for Year 9 students – including the introduction of 'proficiency certificates' that students could include with their resumes when seeking work. [Click here to read more...](#)

Grattan Proposes \$1.6 Billion Reform to Boost Teacher Quality

Education systems should attract the best teachers by offering high-achieving school graduates \$10,000 teaching scholarships, and help new teachers by creating new 'instructional specialist' and 'master teacher' roles in schools, according to a Grattan Institute report. [Click here to read more...](#)

Survey finds Students Facing High Levels of Racism

An Australian National University survey has found that a third of years 5 to 9 government school students in Victorian and New South Wales have faced racial discrimination from other students. [Click here to read more...](#)

Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards Open for Applications

Applications are open for grants offered by the Commonwealth Bank and Australian Schools Plus that recognises and rewards outstanding teachers and their achievements. [Click here to read more...](#)

The Critic's Choice

The closing date for Quit Victoria's tobacco education program, *The Critics' Choice*, has been extended to Thursday 14 November 2019. [Click here to read more...](#)

Please visit the Independent Schools Victoria website for seminars for [September 2019](#).

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Dialogue](#).

Would you like to read the briefing every week? [Sign up here](#).

Porter Releases Bills to Prevent Discrimination against Religion

The Australian Government has released [draft legislation](#) aimed at preventing discrimination on the basis of religion, which it hopes will be enacted by the end of the year.

Attorney General Christian Porter released drafts of three bills, the main one being the Religious Discrimination Bill 2019.

The bill says a religious body does not discriminate if it engages in 'good faith, in conduct that may reasonably be regarded as being in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of the religion in relation to which the religious body is conducted'.

An explanatory note issued with the draft says it would bring protection for religious belief and activity 'to the same standard' as that applying in federal anti-discrimination law regarding attributes including age, disability, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.

The government also released a draft Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Freedom of Religion) Bill 2019.

This would protect conduct by religious bodies, including educational institutions, 'which are conducted in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion'.

[Mr Porter promised](#) 'extensive' consultations on the bills, before they are presented to Parliament in October with the aim of being passed by the end of the year.

'The [main] bill would make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of religious belief or activity in key areas of public life,' he said. 'The bill does not create a positive right to freedom of religion.'

His announcement has led to a delay in the review by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) of exemptions in anti-discrimination legislation that, among other things, allow religious schools to discriminate against students and staff on the grounds of their sexuality.

The review, commissioned by the government in May this year, was due to issue a discussion paper next week and report by April next year.

But on the day the draft bills were released, the [ALRC issued a statement](#) saying Mr Porter had narrowed the review's terms of reference, confining it to issues not resolved by the bills.

'The narrowing of the terms of reference will enable the ALRC to conduct a targeted law reform inquiry that is more clearly separated from the exposure draft bill,' the commission said.

The commission will now issue a discussion paper early next year, with its final report not due until December 2020.

There was mixed reaction to the draft bills, with media reports saying some religious-based groups complained of a lack of consultation.

Shadow Attorney General Mark Dreyfus [made a similar complaint](#), saying Labor had not been consulted. Nor, he said, had religious organisations or LGBTI groups.

Mr Dreyfus withheld a detailed response to the draft until he had had time to examine all the provisions and heard 'from all groups in the community'.

Mark Spencer, executive officer for national policy at Christian Schools Australia, welcomed the bill, saying it filled significant gaps in the law.

Writing in *The Australian*, however, he expressed concern about giving the courts the power to decide what actions 'may reasonably be regarded' as being in accordance with the teachings of a religion.

Rodney Croome, an LGBTI equality and anti-discrimination advocate, condemned the draft legislation, saying it was a political gesture designed to 'please [the government's] conservative religious base'.

Writing in *The Age*, he said the government was 'giving special legal privileges to prejudice'.

- People of faith cherish the right to express it, Mark Spencer. *The Australian*, 30 August 2019
- What is the religious discrimination bill and what will it do? *The Guardian*, 29 August 2019
- The government has released its draft religious discrimination bill. How will it work? *The Conversation*, 30 August 2019
- What are the new religious discrimination laws about? Judith Ireland, *The Age*, 29 August 2019
- This is not a religious freedom bill, it's a license to hate, Rodney Croome, *The Age*, 30 August 2019
- Churches mount revolt on draft laws, Geoff Chambers, *The Australian*, 30 August 2019

Victorian Government Considering NAPLAN 'Proficiency Certificates'

The Victorian Minister for Education, [Mr James Merlino](#), has established an advisory committee to investigate ways of making National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) testing more relevant for Year 9 students.

These could include introducing 'proficiency certificates' that students could include with their resumes when seeking work, and moving NAPLAN tests from years 3, 5, 7 and 9, to years 4, 6, 8 and 10.

[Mr Merlino said](#) that while Victorian students in years 3, 5 and 7 had made 'significant improvements' – Victorian primary schools achieved the best results in '7 of the 10' NAPLAN measures – the Year 9 results didn't 'reflect what students are capable of'.

Mr Merlino said that more needed to be done to ensure that Year 9 students 'see the relevance of NAPLAN and are better engaged', and that linking a student's efforts in Year 9 to their career opportunities would encourage them to give their best efforts when they sit NAPLAN.

He acknowledged there may be 'mixed views' about the proposals, but said the government wanted to hear from 'principals, teachers, parents and students about how we can make NAPLAN relevant and ensure Year 9 students are engaged and giving it their best shot'.

The president of the Australian Education Union Victorian branch, [Ms Meredith Peace](#), said that students should not think of NAPLAN as a 'determinant of their future' and that linking standardise testing results with career opportunities would 'not lead to better student engagement or better pathway outcomes'.

Victoria is not the only state to see poorer NAPLAN results from secondary students.

Australian Minister for Education [Dan Tehan said](#) that, nationally, 'Year 5 numeracy, years 3 and 5 reading and spelling, and Year 3 grammar all returned results above the NAPLAN 2008 baseline average', but that outcomes for years 7 and 9 writing tests were 'below the writing test benchmark set in 2011'.

- Pass and fail on NAPLAN. Editorial, *Herald Sun*, 28 August 2019
- \$20bn flop: schools fail to lift kids. Rebecca Urban, *The Australian*, 28 August 2019
- Jobs link proposal for Year 9 NAPLAN. Adam Carey, *The Age*, 29 August 2019
- Year 9 toughest time for students. Adam Carey, *The Age*, 29 August 2019
- Merlino's NAPLAN call worth studying. Editorial, *The Age*, 29 August 2019
- NAPLAN has lost sight of its main purpose, Steven Lewis. *Herald Sun*, 29 August 2019
- No, minister! Keep NAPLAN results away from student job applications. Jessica Holloway and Steven Lewis, *The Conversation*, 29 August 2019

Grattan Proposes \$1.6 Billion Reform to Boost Teacher Quality

Education systems should attract the best teachers by offering high-achieving school graduates \$10,000 teaching scholarships, and help new teachers by creating new 'instructional specialist' and 'master teacher' roles in schools, according to a Grattan Institute report.

The report, [Attracting high achievers to teaching](#), by Peter Goss and Julie Sonnemann, outlines three reforms aimed at stopping 'bright young Australians ... turning their back on the profession'.

The suggested reforms are:

- offering \$10,000 cash-in-hand scholarships to high-achievers to study teaching, with the requirement that they work in 'government schools for at least several years'
- creating two new roles in schools, to give the best teachers extra time and pay to improve teaching at their schools and in their regions:
 - 'instructional specialists', 5-to-8 per cent of teachers, would receive \$140,000 per year
 - 'master teachers', half a per cent of teachers, would be paid \$180,000 per year
- a \$20 million-a-year recruitment campaign.

[Mr Goss said](#) that great teachers were the 'key to better student performance,' and that the reforms in the report could 'transform Australia's teaching workforce'.

He said that many high-achieving students applied to be teachers in 'high-performing countries such as Singapore and Finland', but that high-achieving Australians were put off the profession by the 'self-reinforcing' low status of teaching here.

The report recommends all three schools sectors implement the proposals, but says the non-government sectors 'should fund the reforms themselves, without extra taxpayer money'.

The Australian reported that Victorian Minister for Education, James Merlino, was in favour of increased pay for the best teachers, saying:

If you think about the impact that the best teachers and principals have on young people, for the rest of their lives, it's a noble profession ... They should be right up there with doctors and lawyers.

- \$80k pay rises to tackle 'low status' of teaching. Fergus Hunter, *The Age*, 26 August 2019
- 'Pay the top teachers \$80k more to lure best'. Emily Ritchie, *The Australian*, 26 August 2019
- Call to put teachers on pay par with lawyers. Sascha O'Sullivan, *The Australian*, 26 August 2019
- In search of excellent teachers. Editorial, *The Australian*, 26 August 2019

Survey finds Students Facing High Levels of Racism

An Australian National University survey has found that a third of year 5 to 9 government school students in Victoria and New South Wales have faced racial discrimination from other students.

The [Speak Out Against Racism \(SOAR\)](#) survey asked 4664 students and 202 staff in government schools about their experiences with relation to racism and racial bullying, bystander responses, health and wellbeing and school connectedness.

Findings from the survey include:

- more than half (60 per cent) of the students said that they had witnessed other students being racially discriminated against
- more than 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds said that they been racially discriminated against by their peers
- nearly half (43 per cent) of the students reported that they had seen teachers racially discriminate against students
- almost two thirds (63 per cent) of students 'agree or strongly agreed' that their teachers were good at dealing with racism when it happens
- almost a fifth (19 per cent) of teachers 'agree or strongly agreed' that racial discrimination was a serious problem at their school.

Shadow Minister for Education, [Tanya Plibersek, said](#) that 'no Australian should be subject to racism, and this is especially so in our schools'.

- Racism 'rife' in Victorian schools. Charlotte Grieve, *The Age*, 27 Aug 2019
- Schools home to racist bullies. Ashley Argoon, *Herald Sun*, 27 Aug 2019

Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards Open for Applications

Applications are open for grants offered by the Commonwealth Bank and Australian Schools Plus that recognise and reward outstanding teachers and their achievements.

The Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards celebrate excellence in teaching and school leadership and are open to teachers and school leaders from all schools. Applications are particularly encouraged from teachers and school leaders at schools in disadvantaged communities.

Educators can win a \$45,000 teaching fellowship, which includes a \$25,000 project for their school.

The CEO of Australian Schools Plus, [Ms Rosemary Conn, said](#) that the awards give leading educators the chance to collaborate with colleagues across the country and champion innovative practices in their schools and the broader education system.

Applicants are asked to show how they have initiated or contributed to 'measurable, significant and ongoing improvements in student learning, achieved through identifying students' needs and applying high impact, effective and evidence-based teaching or leadership practices'.

Nominations close 5.00 pm on Friday 27 September 2019. For more information, to nominate a teacher or principal, or to apply, visit the [awards website](#).

The Critic's Choice

The closing date for Quit Victoria's tobacco education program, The Critics' Choice, has been extended to Thursday 14 November 2019.

Quit Victoria coordinates *The Critics' Choice* each year as part of a strategy to reduce the prevalence of tobacco smoking amongst young people (see [Weekly Briefing 16/2019](#)).

Students in years 5 to 10 who take part in the program watch a series of anti-smoking advertisements from around the world in class, and vote for which one they feel is most effective in deterring young people from smoking.

To learn more, visit [The Critics' Choice website](#).