

**SUMMARY OF EDUCATION MINISTER SENATOR SIMON BIRMINGHAM
AT THE ACDE BOARD MEETING. FEBRUARY 12, 2016.**

The following outlines key points were made by Federal Education Minister, Senator Simon Birmingham, during an hour-long discussion with the ACDE Board and representatives of South Australian universities, who were invited to the meeting at Flinders University on February 12, 2016.

Change of Minister, but not policy

Teacher quality is still central to the Higher Education and Education portfolio.

Need to celebrate best of education

We will continue to improve quality of ITE students and existing teachers but we shouldn't be shy about saying we have one of the world's best education systems.

If there is too much focus on the problems, where quality can improve, this can have negative repercussions.

'If that perception translates into actually not attracting some of the best and brightest into the profession and not attracting those who have the greatest capacity to give whatever their background may be,' the Minister says.

Improving quality of existing teachers

Minister Birmingham is interested in:

- Looking at ways to support the professional development of existing teachers
- Addressing 'harder questions on whether there are better ways to consider, from time to time, how some may exit the profession as well'.

Parental Engagement

The Minister wants to do more in terms of parental engagement. The key questions for consideration are: 'How we do drive the support, assistance, knowledge and understanding of parents to help them do their best to hold up their end of the bargain?'

Re-establishment/re-appointment of the Higher Admissions Standards Panel and its terms of Reference is not only focused on ITE. It is to look overall at the ATAR debate, transparency of admissions standards and the impact of pressures in the demand-driven system.

It was not initiated that in the hope that we could 'drive back to a narrow look at ATAR scores as the answer. But a recognition that we need to look at the different attributes', the Minister says.

The Minister later added that the States being signatories to mutual recognition agreements had a bearing on the NSW Minister's desire to introduce minimum ATARs.

Admission Standards

We need to have clear transparency around who is coming into our universities to undertake and be admitted to our programs.

We need to find ways to ensure life experience and so on is properly captured in a way that gives confidence and credibility that the people, we have coming in, have the ability to succeed the field of study they are undertaking and ultimately their career.

Graduate Standards

The Numeracy and Literacy Test aims to provide a minimum standard for initial teacher education graduates. It is up to universities to decide whether they think they can get a student to that minimum standard.

What matters is the quality of students at graduation, the quality of transition as they enter classrooms.

‘Whether they were of that minimum standard when they walked in the door of the university shouldn’t really bother us’, he says.

The Minister does not see the logic in the States, which register teachers, looking at using a benchmark like a minimum ATAR that represents something a graduate did several years before registration.

Sub Bachelor

The Minister is keen to keep possible expansion of the sub Bachelor on the table. The demand-driven system for undergraduates has not given universities enough choice in how to expand when, for many students, preparatory programs would be beneficial. Attrition rates could drop because those who aren’t appropriate could still complete the preparatory program and explore career pathways other than teaching. In other fields, the sub-Bachelor qualification may be all they end up needing to succeed.

‘The sub-Bachelor is one of the most important equity mechanisms we can apply,’ the Minister says. It is a means of expanding access to university, while recognising that that Bachelor level programs are not for those without sufficient academic standards.

Professional Development

The Minister is open to exploring ways to support teachers to refresh skills or expand their professional expertise and enter into leadership roles. He is not convinced that everyone who teaches needs a Masters. He sees AITSL’s work on school leadership and lead teachers as a good foundation on which to build. However, he says, the focus has been on the undergraduate space and there is currently a lack of coherence around post-graduate structures, which needs to be addressed. The challenge will be policy development timeframes. He is conscious that compact agreements for universities are up for renewal in less than 12 months.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

The Minister is looking forward to receiving the results of the MATSITI evaluation and seeing what can be done to get more Indigenous students through our universities and into the classroom.

The Minister met the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council on *Closing the Gap* day. Areas discussed included the understanding Australians have of Indigenous culture, Indigenous history, the positive aspects of Indigenous history not just pre-settlement. The Minister is confident that the umbrella of the National Curriculum provides scope for all of those things to be taught. The question is whether teachers have the confidence, the knowledge, the resources available to them all to ensure we are able to promote and celebrate the positive aspects of Indigenous history and culture to students throughout Australia, regardless of the scale of the Indigenous population they may have, or whether there's an Indigenous teacher in the school. Part of that is probably a resourcing question, so teachers know where to go to get that information to support the delivery of the curriculum, and part is what happens in the institutions where they are prepared for teaching prior to entering the profession.

(Professor Peter Buckskin drew attention to the RRR – Respect, Relationships and Reconciliation– website, which will be launched in June, and will provide resources for academics, ITE students and teachers).