

EDUCATION – Gonksi & School Reform

1. Current Situation

Debate over school funding returned to the media with the release of the *Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling* in December 2011. An overview of the Review can be found here: http://afr.com/p/home/at_glance_the_gonski_report_eUZm5S2p7mMavty655MtYM.

The Gonski Review described the current funding arrangements as follows:

“When considered holistically, the current funding arrangements for schooling are unnecessarily complex, lack coherence and transparency, and involve a duplication of funding effort in some areas.” (page xiv).

The Review also observed that the performance of Australian students has declined over the last decade. The Programme for International Student Assessment (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/> PISA) is an international benchmark for comparing student performance. In 2000, only one country outperformed Australia in reading and science and only two countries outperformed Australia in mathematics. By 2009, six countries outperformed Australia in reading and science and 12 countries outperformed Australia in mathematics.

The Review recommended that funding arrangements be reformed, through the introduction of a schooling resource standard (SRS), which would determine how schools were funded. The standard would set a minimum amount per student to achieve high educational outcomes (estimated at \$8000 per primary student and \$10,500 per secondary student). Loadings would apply to meet the extra cost educating certain students, including those of indigenous background, those with a disability, those from low income families, those from rural areas or from poor or other disadvantaged backgrounds.

This would require a \$5 billion increase in government funding to schools annually. The Review suggests that state and territory governments provide approximately 70% of funding, with the remainder provided by the Commonwealth.

<http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/coalition-to-dump-gonski-reforms-pyne-20120725-22qy6.html>

The Panel believed that these new arrangements would “drive improved outcomes for all Australian students, and to ensure that differences in educational outcomes are not the result of differences in wealth, income, power or possessions.” (Gonski xii)

2. Party Stances:

Labor

Julia Gillard announced the government’s response to the Gonksi review on 3 September 2012 (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-09-03/government-delivers-response-to-gonski-review/4239956>).

The response is called the National Plan for School Improvement. Full details for the plan can be found at the newly companion launched website: <http://www.betterschools.gov.au>.

The plan adopted many of the recommendations from the Gonski Review. Some key elements of the plan are:

- Adoption of the Schooling Resource Standard and loadings as a benchmark for individual school funding.
- Loadings will be support students who require extra support including disabled students, low-income students, Indigenous students and students with limited English skills.
- All government schools will continue to be completely government funded, through a combination of federal and state funding.
- Public funding of non-government schools would be adjusted based on parents' capacity to contribute resources.

The cost of these reforms is estimated to be \$6.5 billion extra funding per year, split between federal and state governments. Legislation that would implement these changes will be introduced at the end of 2012, with reforms phased in between 2014-20.

The National Plan for School Improvement departs from the Gonski Review over private school funding. The Gonski Review would have reduced the public funding for some private schools based on schooling resource standard. Prime Minister Julia Gillard promised that under the new plan "every independent school in Australia will see their funding increase under our plan"

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-08-20/gillard-announces-more-cash-for-private-schools/4209166>.

Coalition:

The Coalition has not yet released a formal education policy for the 2013 election (November 2012).

They have made a series of comments concerning the Gonski review. The Coalition does not support the proposals of the Gonski Review and have stated that they would repeal any reforms introduced from the Gonski review if they won government

(http://afr.com/p/national/coalition_rejects_gonski_school_U3fdEm4sAtKb4vKxox8R2J and <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/coalition-to-dump-gonski-reforms-pyne-20120725-22qy6.html>). However, Christopher Pyne, has tempered these comments, stating that the Coalition may accept Gonski changes if it was proved no school would be worse off (<http://www.oberonreview.com.au/story/313195/coalition-may-keep-gonski-plans/?cs=8>).

The coalition has said that they will maintain the core of the existing funding arrangements (<http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/coalition-to-dump-gonski-reforms-pyne-20120725-22qy6.html>).

Under the current system, funding for schools is shared between state Federal governments. This is supplemented, to varying degrees, by private sources. Federal funding mainly occurs through National Partnerships (more information here:

<http://smarterschools.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>, page 38ff Gonski). These are individual programs negotiated between states and the Federal government, which target particular needs such as disadvantaged schools or technical training. A review of these arrangements, from June 2011, can be found here:

<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/DAE-AssessingExistingFundingModelsforSchoolinginAustralia.pdf>).

Their 2010 election education policy included a number of alternative education reforms (full education platform available here: <http://www.liberal.org.au/issues/education/>)

- Better Teaching Reward Fund – this is a special fund to increase the remuneration of the best teachers. Teachers are nominated by the school principal. An independent Board of Trustees assesses all received applications and awards remuneration. Preference will be given to teachers in disadvantaged schools, teachers in regional areas and teachers in schools with a high proportion of special needs students.
- Education Card – these are vouchers that will be made available to all students with a disability. Disabled students will receive up to \$20, 000, which they can take to any school in the public or private system.

The Greens:

The Greens support the principles of the Gonski Review. The Greens were critical of the timeframe of the National Plan for School Improvement, which will not see the Gonski reforms fully implemented until 2020 (see here <http://greens.org.au/content/greens-release-their-gonski-principles-and-say-fund-schools-urgently-0>). They have called for increased funding “urgently.”

The Greens have announced five principles by which they will judge the Government’s National Plan for School Improvement and any subsequent legislation. These principles are:

1. A new needs-based funding model that promotes equity and high standards.
2. Significant investment by the Federal government in public schools, with the \$5 billion Gonski figure as a minimum.
3. A new funding model that directs new funding to public schools.
4. An education system that meets the needs of all students, particularly those with special needs.
5. All non-government schools that receive government funding should comply to high standards of transparency, accountability and community standards.

3. Background reading

- Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling - <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/ReviewofFunding/Documents/Review-of-Funding-for-Schooling-Final-Report-Dec-2011.pdf>
- *Australian Government funding for schools explained* from the Parliamentary Library gives a historical overview of the funding system up to January 2011 (i.e. until just

before the Gonksi changes hit).

<http://aphnew.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/bn/sp/schoolsfunding.pdf>.

- Grattan Institute Catching Up: Learning from the best schools in East Asia - http://grattan.edu.au/static/files/assets/00d8aaf4/130_report_learning_from_the_best_detail.pdf
- The Australia Institute arguing against a voucher scheme - http://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp_fulltext/DP88.pdf
- The 2010 Election Liberal Education Policy - <http://www.liberal.org.au/sites/default/files/ccd/Quality%20Education%20Policy.pdf>.
- The Better Schools Twitter feed: <https://twitter.com/BetterSchoolsAU>