

**Learning and Technology World Forum 2010:
Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills
Monday 11 January 2010**

Address by Ms Lisa Paul PSM

Thank you Barry.

Australia is very proud to be a founding country in the 21st Century Skills project. Current school reforms in Australia are squarely aimed at positioning Australian students to live and work in a globalised, digital world. The 21st Century Skills project lines up powerfully with Australia's reforms.

The Australian Government was elected in 2007 on a platform for an Education Revolution. Reforms in assessment for 21st Century skills, in curriculum, reporting, quality teaching and leadership, eliminating disadvantage, rewarding performance, and infrastructure; are all being implemented simultaneously, right now. Most of these reforms are so important that they represent historic "firsts" since the creation of Australia as a nation in 1901.

Key elements of the reforms include:

- Historic National Partnerships with Australian state governments aimed at increasing the number of students completing senior secondary schooling, improving teacher quality, boosting literacy and numeracy skills and raising achievement in disadvantaged school communities.
- The Digital Education Revolution which is providing new ICT equipment for all secondary schools to achieve one to one support, providing high speed broadband connectivity to schools at 100mb/s and providing the building blocks for nationally consistent tools and resources to support education.
- The Building the Education Revolution which is modernising and providing world-class school facilities. This program is also a key element of the Australian Government's response to the global financial crisis and is the largest school modernisation program in Australia's history, representing expenditure of more than 1% of GDP.

In addition, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established in May 2009 with responsibility for creating Australia's first ever national curriculum, ground breaking national assessments aligned with the curriculum and reporting nationally on school and system performance.

The establishment of ACARA brings together curriculum, assessment and reporting for the first time at the national level and, I must say, given the profile, importance and extent of the test, Australia is extremely fortunate in having Professor Barry McGaw as ACARA's Chair and Tony McKay as its Deputy Chair.

National Curriculum in Phase 1 will be developed by 2010 and implemented across Australia by 2011.

Achievement standards across the new national curriculum areas will make the depth of understanding, knowledge and skills expected of students at any year level explicitly clear. They will represent an historic reference point for greater consistency in classroom practice.

The national curriculum will be underpinned by general capabilities across all learning areas aligned with 21st Century skills. The general capabilities include creativity and innovation; problem solving and decision making; information and ICT literacy; teamwork and personal and social responsibility.

Importantly, the new national curriculum will be published online. It will be supported by resources and tools online. This will allow greater sharing of content and resources across Australia and take collaboration between schools to a whole new level. It will help Australian teachers use 21st Century skills themselves.

The National Assessment Plan Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is the annual assessment of all Australian students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in reading, writing, language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation) and numeracy. As a large scale, high stakes assessment, NAPLAN enables assessment of, and comparison between, annual assessments. But, importantly, its design – around competence scales for each domain across all year levels – allows each student's performance to be monitored as they progress through schooling.

Students can also be assessed, and reports can be generated, against the full range of achievement; not just a minimum or proficient standard. Flowing from the NAPLAN assessments:

- Teachers receive diagnostic information at the school level and each student.
- Parents are provided with reports on how their child is doing compared with other students at the school and across Australia.
- National and state results are published each year as a measure of overall system performance.
- And from 28 January results will be able to be compared publicly between schools with statically similar school communities.

It is important that our assessment program is contemporary and harnesses the benefits of new technology. The National Assessment Program will be reviewed by ACARA to align it with the national curriculum. The lessons we learn through the 21st Century Skills project will help inform Australian curriculum and assessment development and new assessments will be developed to take into account 21st Century skills.

The Digital Education Revolution I mentioned earlier is providing the necessary building blocks for online curriculum and assessment delivery. Electronic assessment will provide better ways of measuring student performance. For example, by using computer based assessment that marks student responses in real time, instead of every student sitting tests of identical difficulty, the computer can generate questions better targeted to each student's skill level.

In conclusion, Australia is committed to a contemporary and sophisticated national assessment strategy.

We are proud to be a foundation member of the 21st Century Skills project, and we are proud of our national curriculum and assessment reforms which are being ably led by Professor Barry McGaw and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

Thank you.