

TO: QTU MEMBERS

NAPLAN must be replaced... but not by something worse

Despite finding that the decade old NAPLAN test has failed students, parents, teachers and school leaders, the final report of the 2020 Review of NAPLAN proposes to compound the suffering by expanding the test rather than abolishing it.

Commissioned by Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory in late 2019 and originally due to be released in June 2020, the 2020 Review of NAPLAN was released publicly last Friday following an unscheduled virtual meeting of the Education Council. A copy of the final report can be accessed from our website [here](#).

The report provides an extensive account of the consultation undertaken during months of investigation. Based on this investigation, the report makes 10 recommendations, made up of 36 sub-recommendations. It would be easy to get caught up in the minutiae of the report, debating the merits of individual recommendations, however, we will not be doing that. There is no capacity to pick and choose those recommendations that may appear supportable, as the review is based on the flawed premise (reflected in the terms of reference) that standardised testing in Australia must continue.

Prominent among the many high-level concerns of educators and parents was the high stakes nature of the test and the stress it creates for students, resulting in diminished wellbeing. Worse still, the current test has never actually resulted in the purported benefits to students, either now or in the past.

The first recommendation of the report speaks volumes about its limitations in terms of hearing, and responding to, the issues raised by educators, students and parents. It is recounted here to illustrate our point. The recommendation articulates the purposes of standardised testing in Australian schools, asks Ministers to confirm the role of standardised assessment in achieving those purposes, advises that we continue to conduct standardised assessment as a census test, and publicly describes and publishes the “purposes and limitations” of national standardised assessment.

In this and other recommendations, the report fundamentally fails to address the problems of NAPLAN and instead proposes to replace it with a more comprehensive, high stakes, standardised, census test.

Without acknowledging these very real concerns as valid, the report proposes to address this issue, in part, by (as detailed in recommendation 5):

- expanding the subjects tested to include science, engineering, technology and critical and creative thinking, in addition to English and mathematics
- moving the test to the earliest possible time in the school year in years 3, 5, 7 and 10
- raising the standards against which students are measured.

Perhaps the most glaring internal contradiction in the report is found in how it addresses the requirement of the terms of reference to address the international experience of standardised testing. The report found no single model in use in high performing jurisdictions and that high performing jurisdictions can and do have no standardised assessment or comprehensive standardised assessment. The report then defaults to proposing the continuation of the current model in use in Australia as the best alternative.

For more than a decade, students and the teaching profession have been struggling under the weight of the flawed NAPLAN testing regime. We cannot and will not stand by and allow a bad system to be replaced by a worse one. Enough is enough.

Where to from here? The ultimate NAPLAN ballot

At the meeting of the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) State Council on 22 August, the elected representatives of QTU members resolved to consider the decisions of the Education Council on 4 September and, if NAPLAN was not abolished and replaced by an alternative developed by the teaching profession for the benefit of students and their learning, to require an immediate ballot of members on banning anything to do with NAPLAN in 2021.

Education Council makes decisions by consensus. If all nine Ministers are unable to agree then nothing changes, and we are stuck with a dud test that costs a fortune and continues to damage students while, for two of the last three years at least, producing useless information. If all Ministers agree to the proposal in the final report of the Review of NAPLAN 2020 then everything will change, but for the worse.

Our time is coming. Whichever decision or non-decision is made by Ministers at the Education Council this Friday, we can and must protect students from another decade of high stakes standardised testing. The QTU has begun preparations for a ballot of members on a permanent and comprehensive ban on NAPLAN, so that we are ready to act if required. Ultimately, every member will have their chance to vote on whether NAPLAN, in all its forms, will be banned.

Workload reduction strategy

The progress of negotiations on workload reduction was reported to members last Friday in [Newsflash 37-20](#)

Two other important matters remain unresolved, but not because of any lack of work from the QTU to achieve clarity.

Student-free days 2021

The first matter relates to implementation of the provisions of the certified agreement in relation to the reduction in the quantum of hours of mandatory professional development to be undertaken in schools on student-free days – fifteen hours reduced to ten hours. The occurrence of a public holiday on the second day of Term 1 confuses this issue, and the department has been unable to clarify the matter for schools. The QTU has been attempting to get a resolution to this issue since Term 1 2020. The Union and the department are now formally in dispute over this issue, and it must be resolved by Friday 4 September or the matter will be progressed to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Schools will be advised of an outcome as a matter of urgency once the issue is resolved.

Early end to 2020 school year

The second issue relates to the end of the 2020 school year. The commitment of the Premier and the Minister for Education is that the school year will end on 2 December for schools in the north and west and on 9 December for schools in the east and south. A copy of the letter from the Minister containing this commitment is available from our website via this [link](#). Some members have reported that the Department of Education does not acknowledge this change to the 2020 school year and that schools are not at liberty to adjust the 2020 school year arrangements accordingly. The QTU has been attempting to resolve this issue with the department for some weeks, and the matter is the subject of further meetings this week. Members should be assured that the commitment of the Premier and the Minister is a given, and that it is the logistics that the department need to work through. Schools need certainty to begin to change the end of year timelines. Members will be notified of the outcomes on this issue as soon as they are finalised.

National Week of Solidarity: 6-12 September

The National Week of Solidarity is a week of events, online and in-person, in schools, education centres and community groups across the country in support of the call to ensure children and families seeking asylum have access to a social safety net during COVID-19. This takes place during National Child Protection Week.

There are currently more than 16,000 children and young people seeking asylum in Australia, and their families are ineligible for JobKeeper and JobSeeker – and some cannot even access Medicare. We are calling for the expansion of a basic safety net for the duration of the pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, so people are not left completely destitute and homeless.

Many schools and educators are on the frontline, and we are hearing from many educators that their students seeking asylum are coming to school hungry, are without internet and laptops for remote learning, and need additional support from teachers. There is a crisis looming and the federal government is ignoring it.

The four main ways to be involved in the National Week of Solidarity are to:

1. sign the public petition: www.nochildleftbehind.com.au/petition
2. sign and share the educators' joint statement to the Prime Minister: www.nochildleftbehind.com.au/joint_statement
3. attend an official online event: www.nochildleftbehind.com.au/online_events
4. hold an event at your school: www.nochildleftbehind.com.au/national_week_of_solidarity.

For more information about the campaign and all the events, visit: <https://www.nochildleftbehind.com.au/>.

QTU Organiser position vacant

The QTU is inviting applications for the position of QTU Organiser, Metropolitan Central (**based in Brisbane**), to commence **Monday 18 January 2021**.

The duties include: "The Organiser will assist and coordinate Union and branch organisation activities and campaigns; visit schools in their area; recruit new members; provide advice and assistance to members; investigate and report on Union affairs; negotiate with departmental officials; promote the Union and its membership; assist members in organising campaigns; and perform such other duties as required by the General Secretary". The duties and responsibilities statement and other information relevant to applying for the position are available on the QTU website www.qtu.asn.au/vacancies.

Authorised by:

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General Secretary