Media release

Communiqué for the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) Meeting – 19 November 2010


Tonight, Ministers will celebrate the outstanding achievements of Australia’s vocational education and training providers and students at the 2010 Australian Training Awards.

MCTEE INDUSTRY FORUM

The inaugural MCTEE Industry forum provided an opportunity for ministers and key industry representatives to discuss important policy issues. The topic for the forum was ‘Driving Australia’s productivity through better use of skills: the role of government and industry’.

The forum was hosted by Skills Australia. The Chair of the Ministerial Council, Senator the Hon Chris Evans, opened the forum, welcoming ministers and representatives from industry skills councils and industry peak bodies as well as enterprise representatives from across the country.

The forum canvassed ways to achieve the better use of skills in the workplace and to create the conditions necessary for high performing workplaces. There was discussion about the scope of current government policy initiatives and whether existing programs and services could be harnessed to yield better outcomes for Australian businesses and workers.

All Ministers welcomed the opportunity to have an open discussion with key industry figures on what all governments need to focus on to lift the productive capacity of Australia’s workforce.

MCTEE BUSINESS MEETING

Australian Qualifications Framework

The Hon John Dawkins AO, Chair of the Australian Qualifications Framework Council presented advice to Ministers on ‘Strengthening the Australian Qualifications Framework’. Ministers expressed their gratitude to the Australian Qualifications Framework Council for the extensive work undertaken in formulating their advice.
A stronger qualifications framework will help build confidence in our system and make it easier for students to move between education sectors. It will result in an increasingly integrated tertiary sector, with stronger pathways between VET and higher education. It will deliver greater take-up of VET in schools, and greater connectedness between Australia and the global education market.

Ministers agreed to implement all of the Australian Qualifications Framework Council’s proposals for strengthening the Australian Qualifications Framework, subject to some important amendments:

- the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education will be located in the framework but not tied to a specific level
- the Qualifications Issuance Policy will include a limited number of permitted titles in addition to ‘Master of (field of study)’ at AQF Level 9, requesting the AQFC to provide further advice on how these could be best accommodated
- the descriptor for Certificate III will be amended to include a requirement for the supervision of staff.

Ministers also requested the AQFC to review descriptors and detailed specifications for Level 10, in consultation with Deans of Graduate Studies.

Ministers recommended the addition of a member to the AQFC with expertise in higher education.

Application of the strengthened AQF in the higher education sector will be timed to coincide with the commencement of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

**Update on new regulatory arrangements for higher education and VET**

Ministers also reviewed progress in implementing major reforms in the regulation of the Australian vocational and higher education sectors: the establishment of the National VET Regulator and TEQSA.

The Chair of MCTEE, Senator the Hon Chris Evans, said that the legislation for the National VET Regulator is expected to be introduced in the Federal Parliament next week. This represents a major step forward in improving confidence in the VET sector.

The non-referring states recorded their concerns with the draft legislation.

The Hon Verity Firth MP said that NSW would be the first state to introduce legislation to refer its regulatory powers to the Australian Government.

The Australian Government has been consulting with the states on the arrangements for establishing and operating TEQSA. States had an opportunity to comment on the draft legislation in early November.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to working together to strengthen the quality assurance of Australian tertiary education.

**International education**
The meeting was also updated on the activities of the Joint Committee on International Education, including the assessment of national implications of market changes in international education.

International education issues were of high interest to Ministers. Members noted that the Commonwealth will further consider opportunities to monitor international student issues, including relevant international migration strategies.

Ministers noted the recent release of the COAG International Students Strategy for Australia. The strategy is underpinned by a recognition that international students enrich our communities and help Australia to forge links with other countries. It is also an acknowledgement that the international education sector is Australia's third largest source of export income.

MCTEE has responsibility for overseeing the Strategy’s implementation and will report annually to COAG at the end of each calendar year from 2011.

Recognising the importance of promoting quality in international education, Ministers also agreed to introduce an International Education Provider Category to the Australian Training Awards, commencing in 2012.

**DATA & PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT**

*The participation of low SES students in higher education*

Ministers discussed the Australian Government’s targets to increase the number of low SES students participating in higher education. The Australian Government will report to MCTEE regularly on progress toward achieving the target.

Subcommittees of MCTEE and the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs will help to identify and address systemic barriers to the achievement of the targets.

*Unique Student Identifier for VET*

Following COAG’s in-principle support, MCTEE has developed a business case for the unique student identifier. Ministers provided their endorsement for it to progress to COAG for consideration of scope, design concept and implementation.

As a result of the Hawke Review of Ministerial Councils, MCTEE will be transitioning to a COAG Standing Council structure from 2011. The next meeting of Ministers will be held on 18 March 2011.

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