

National Board of Employment, Education and Training

For the Record

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Establishment and Mission

Introduction: The Context

In 1987 the Commonwealth Government established the amalgamated Department of Employment, Education and Training, which brought together within the one portfolio the full range of Commonwealth education, training and labour market programs. The purpose of the amalgamation was to provide a means for coordinating these programs more effectively to respond to Australia's changing economic, social and labour market needs.

Legislation to establish a new advisory structure with a role and responsibilities consistent with those of the new Department was introduced into Parliament in April 1988. With the proclamation of the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988*, the National Board was formally established on 1 July 1988.

The *Act* also established four specialist Councils: the Australian Research Council, the Employment and Skills Formation Council (name changed by the *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995* to the Employment and Skills Council), the Higher Education Council and the Schools Council, to assist the Board in providing advice to the Minister. Since the National Board was established, the need has emerged for particular attention to be paid to policy development in two areas of importance across the education sectors. They are language and literacy, and international education.

Following the publication by the Government in 1991 of the White Paper, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, the Minister established the Australian Language and Literacy Council as a committee of the Board under the *Act* to provide advice in relation to the development and implementation of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. The review of the operation of the National Board and its Councils, undertaken by Professor Kenneth Wiltshire, Professor of Public Administration at the University of Queensland in 1993, recommended that the Australian Language and Literacy Council be established formally as a Council of the National Board with the same status as the other Councils. The *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995* established the Australian Language and Literacy Council as a full council of the Board.

The policy significance of internationalisation of education and the need for the National Board to address its implications were highlighted by Professor Wiltshire. The establishment of the Australian International Education Foundation was announced by the Government in December 1993, and the following year the governing body of the Foundation was established as a Council of the National Board, although operating technically as a committee of the Board. Although full National Board Council status for the Council was included in the recent proposed legislative amendments to the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988*, the change was not enacted, and the Council remains as a committee of the Board.

The establishment and ongoing work of the National Board have coincided with a significant expansion in education and training and the establishment of a number of institutional responses to develop and shape that participation. At the same time an important environmental change occurred. Since 1988 the traditional role of education providers in establishing the major elements of debate, discussion and directions for reform has been profoundly challenged by, in particular, the business community, non-education and training based trade unions and the Commonwealth Government itself. The Board's structure and membership reinforced this process.

An important part of the response to the increase in demand for education and training has been to emphasise cross-sectoral approaches with a focus on such issues as articulation of courses and credit transfer between and within the sectors. These are matters with which the Board itself is vitally concerned as it is with the question of resource allocation between the sectors.

As this record makes clear, the Board and its Councils have made a considerable contribution to the attempt to improve the quality of our education and training provision. This has been achieved not only by the development of timely advice to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, but also in the important public debate which surrounded the provision of that advice. The Board, since its establishment, has striven to create a climate conducive to sustainable improvement in our education and training institutions.

This document sets out, for the record, the Board and Council activities since 1993 which together have contributed to these objectives. Following some contextual material, an overview chapter draws together the work of the Board and Councils under several key themes. This is followed by a chapter on each Council which provides additional detail on their functions and their work during the past three years.

Role and Mission

Under the *Act* the charter of the Board is to inquire into, and provide information and advice to the Minister on, matters relating to employment, youth affairs, education, training and research, and other portfolio issues referred to it by the Minister. The amendments to the *Act* that came into effect in December 1995 in the *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995* mean that language and literacy, international education and training, and adult and community education issues are now formally included within the ambit of the Board.

In developing its advice the Board is required to take account of any written directions or guidelines from the Minister on the Government's broad social, economic and budgetary policies. These directions or guidelines, which are at Appendix 1, are tabled in Parliament.

The Board may also initiate its own inquiries, as may its Councils, provided that this does not detract from work on Ministerial references. Unlike some of its antecedent advisory bodies, the Board has advisory functions only, with program responsibilities remaining with the Department.

The Board re-examined its role in February 1992 and adopted the following Mission Statement:

To promote public discussion of issues, and to provide independent advice to relevant Ministers, on national policy matters in employment, education, training and research.

This commitment to the promotion of public discussion is reflected in the emphasis placed by the Board and Councils on public consultations as an integral part of the process of developing advice. These consultations provide a means by which interest groups and members of the community at large can have input to the Board's advice. In this way, and through their broad community-based membership, the Board and Councils are able to provide a national, coordinated view on issues and provide a link between the Government and the community.

The Board and Council Chairs have taken an active role in promoting public awareness of relevant issues through their many representational activities, including presentations at conferences and membership of external committees.

Structure and Functions

The National Board of Employment, Education and Training has a two-tiered structure of Board and Councils which is supported by Counsellors appointed by the Minister, and a number of additional committees. In addition to the Chairperson and the Chairperson of each of the Councils, the Board membership includes up to seven other persons appointed by the Minister. The legislation provides for Council membership to consist of the Chairperson and between eight and ten other members. Board and Council members have a wide range of backgrounds and expertise.

The Board undertakes inquiries into relevant issues in response to references from the Minister and on its own initiative, and also draws together and integrates the operations and advice of six Councils.

- The Australian International Education Foundation Council (AIEFC) (technically a committee of the Board) is responsible for advising the Board on issues concerning the international promotion and marketing of Australia's education and training services, including:
 - the general development of policies and programs and related activities;
 - the delivery of programs and related activities; and
 - the promotion of international education and training.
- The Australian Language and Literacy Council (ALLC) is responsible for advising the Board on the implementation and further development of the Commonwealth Government language and literacy policy. It is also concerned with a range of language and literacy issues, including:
 - the acquisition of initial skills of literacy and numeracy;
 - the effectiveness of current methods of teaching languages other than English and English as a second language; and
 - the importance of plain English in public documentation.
- The Australian Research Council (ARC) is responsible for advising the Board on national research priorities and the coordination of research policy, including:
 - support for fundamental research;
 - the development and implementation of research programs; and
 - ways to enhance research personnel training and the interaction of the research sectors involved.

The Australian Research Council also advises the Minister directly on the allocation of resources under various research funding schemes.

- The Employment and Skills Council (ESC) is responsible for advising the Board on matters relating to employment, vocational education and training and skills formation, including:
 - the granting of Commonwealth financial assistance for vocational education and training;
 - employment policies, programs and services; and
 - the general development of vocational education and training.
- The Higher Education Council (HEC) is responsible for advising the Board on higher education, including:
 - general development;
 - funding (including reporting on aspects of the operation of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988*);
 - consultation with institutions on educational profiles; and
 - identification of priorities for staffing and facilities.
- The Schools Council (SC) is responsible for advising the Board on primary and secondary education, including:
 - general development;
 - funding; and
 - the setting of priorities for staffing and facilities.

Activities of the Board and Councils are outlined in Chapters 3 to 8.

Links with the Department of Employment, Education and Training

When the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988* was debated in Parliament, a document describing proposed working relationships between the National Board and the Department of Employment, Education and Training was also tabled. This document still forms the basis of the working relationship at a general level.

The document indicated that the Department would serve as a resource to the Board and Councils, just as to the Minister, and would help to ensure that the Board and Councils have the best possible basis for their advice. The National Board Secretariat would act as a link between the National Board and the much wider resources and expertise of the Department. The Department's Executive would have a close relationship to the Board

Executive and have regular contact to discuss issues. Senior Departmental officers would be involved in meetings of the Board and Councils if so requested. Other more specific documentation was issued in October 1988 to provide further guidance to Departmental officers on the general principles to be observed in their dealings with the National Board.

There is considerable individual contact between Board Executive members and the Departmental Executive and other officers. The Board receives much support from the Department, including briefings provided by senior officers to Board meetings and information and advice on particular issues. Where appropriate the Department's area offices provide assistance to the Board with meetings and consultations held interstate.

Links with Other Advisory Groups and Agencies

The Board's enabling legislation also established the Commonwealth/State Consultative Committee, under the chairmanship of the Secretary of the Department, to provide advice to the Board and Councils concerning State and Commonwealth policies and priorities in employment, education, training and research. This Committee was to be the main means of State Government input to Board advice. In practice the Committee did not fulfil this expectation, meeting only twice, and it was abolished by the *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995*. State and Territory Government views are provided through ministerial forums and through consultations conducted by the Board and Councils.

Women's Employment, Education and Training Advisory Group (WEETAG)

The Women's Employment, Education and Training Advisory Group reports directly to the Minister and provides independent advice on women's issues within the portfolio. The Group comprises eleven members: one woman each from the National Board and its Councils, and two representatives each from the union and business sectors. Ms Heather Ridout, Director of the Metal Trades Industry Association, and a member of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and the Employment and Skills Council, is the current convenor.

Issues raised by the Advisory Group are brought to the attention of the National Board and its Councils through its common membership with the Board and its Councils. Secretariat services are shared by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the National Board Secretariat.

Other Agencies

The Board is involved with a number of other Commonwealth agencies through its work program and that of its Councils. These agencies include the Department of Industry, Science and Technology, the Department of Social Security, the Department of Human Services and Health, the Department of Industrial Relations, and the Department of Primary Industries and Energy.

The Board has established links with other advisory bodies such as the Australian Science and Technology Council, the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council, the Coordination Committee on Science and Technology, the Social Security Advisory Council and the Primary and Allied Industries Council.

Grants for Innovative Projects

The Board has an allocation each year for the funding of innovative projects to support its work program. Each March the Board considers proposals for projects to be funded from the program allocation for the next financial year. The allocation for 1995–96 is \$934 000 and for 1996–97 is \$965 000.

The program allows the Board and Councils to sponsor research projects which will inform various aspects of their work and contribute to the development of advice to the Minister. The type of research commissioned under this program is determined by the priorities and work programs of the Board and Councils. It is not a general research program and consultants and project teams are accountable to the sponsoring Council and the Board.

A detailed list of innovative projects appears as an Appendix to the National Board's *Annual Reports*. Since the inception of the National Board, 126 projects have been approved and, of these, 64 have contributed to published reports. Over the last three financial years, 54 projects have been completed or are in progress.

Overview

When developing its advice the Board addresses several significant themes which it believes are integral to the current context in employment, education and training. These themes are:

- cross-sectoral interfaces;
- access and equity;
- employment;
- quality;
- resource and cost implications; and
- work organisation and management.

These themes have been reflected in the major activities of the National Board in recent years, with the emphasis being on matters which span the functional responsibilities of the Councils. Three issues stand out in particular: the promotion of cross-sectoral issues between the education and training sectors; lifelong learning; and the facilitation of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning arrangements. Other areas which have been examined by the Board are the convergence between general and vocational education; employment, focusing on the needs of older workers and regional differences; and the impact of new developments in computer and communications technology on work organisation and employment, skills, education and training.

In 1993–94 the Board provided twenty-two advices to the Minister, and produced four commissioned reports and seven other documents, a total of thirty-three publications. During 1994–95 a total of thirty publications were produced, including twelve advices to the Minister and eleven commissioned reports. Since July 1995 fifteen advices have been provided to the Minister and thirteen other documents have been produced, including six commissioned reports. As the advice that is prepared is informed by community consultations, specifically with relevant organisations, this volume of published work provides an indication of the extent of the consultations that have been undertaken by the Board and its Councils on the range of issues confronting the portfolio in recent years.

Cross-sectoral Issues

Following the Wiltshire Review of the National Board, the Board has increased its focus on cross-sectoral issues. The Board's advice, *Science and Technology Education: Foundation for the Future*, adopted a cross-sectoral focus and included a compilation of initiatives which address barriers to enhanced achievement in science and technology at the school level, in the tertiary sector and in the community, sponsored by both the public and private sectors.

A reference on cross-sectoral matters received in 1994 sought the Board's advice on the possibilities for better collaboration between higher education and vocational education and training in order to increase responsiveness to the needs of industry and non-metropolitan communities. The Board's response to this reference, a major piece of work in 1994 and 1995, recommended further collaboration between TAFE, industry and higher education over highly specialised facilities and equipment, and an increase in the provision of higher education programs by TAFE colleges in non-metropolitan communities.

Apart from the focus on non-metropolitan communities in the Board's cross-sectoral advice, the educational and skills needs of non-metropolitan areas also received specific attention in *Cultivating the Human Factor: Employment and Skills in Australia's Rural Industries*, a report undertaken by the Employment and Skills Council as a supplementary advice to its small business report, *The Shape of Things to Come: Small Business Employment and Skills*. This report highlighted the need to improve employment and skills formation opportunities in the rural sector by developing a strong training culture. It also recommended that funds be provided for rural industries to develop entry and middle level skills training.

A major report produced by the Schools Council in 1994, *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students: Final Report*, also had important cross-sectoral implications. The report recommended a greater degree of integration of general and vocational education. It also suggested that this integration would be helped by designing national curriculum frameworks which incorporate nationally consistent standards and nationally recognised pathways. A companion volume to the final report, *A Compendium of Good Practice*, was released in 1995. It contains examples of current initiatives in the school sector to prepare students for entry into employment.

The early work undertaken by the Australian Language and Literacy Council had a cross-sectoral focus. The recommendations of *Speaking of Business, the Needs of Business and Industry for Language Skills* relate to vocational education and training, higher education, adult and community education, and the role of industry. A second piece of advice, *Incorporating English*

Language and Literacy Competencies into Industry Standards concluded that there were to date no models of English language and literacy competencies in existing industry standards; this led to a further reference to the Council to explore the process of developing such a model, and this work is still in progress.

Cross-sectoral issues have also arisen in relation to credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning, which has been an area of considerable work by the Board for a number of years. In its third and final advice on credit transfer, *Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning*, the Board noted a range of key issues affecting the development and expansion of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning arrangements. These included the need to encourage networking and the exchange of information between sectors, as well as the development of appropriate educational pathways and the establishment of a national credit bank or agency. The report also noted the need for agreement at a national level for frameworks for the recognition of prior learning to ensure consistent policies and standards for assessment. More recent work has involved an examination of the relationship between general and vocational education in post-school education and training in relation to credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning.

Cross-sectoral issues was one of the themes which emerged from joint advice on intellectual property prepared by the Australian Research Council and the Higher Education Council during 1994–95. The advice proposed a range of activities aimed at improving communication between the higher education sector and industry on the protection, management and exploitation of intellectual property arising from university research. Also proposed were actions relating to work organisation and management aimed at enhancing the skills base for both academics and postgraduate students within universities. The intention of these actions was to ensure that researchers developed a better understanding of the importance of integrating the management and exploitation of intellectual property into the wider context of a business plan.

A recent major focus of the National Board has been on lifelong learning, in recognition of the fact that economic pressure on Australia to be internationally competitive means that enterprises and their employees must have the skills to be able to adjust to rapid change. For this reason lifelong learning is considered to be essential for Australia's future.

The Higher Education Council's advice, *The Enabling Characteristics of Undergraduate Education*, and its accompanying commissioned report on lifelong learning in undergraduate education, outlined the means by which universities develop in graduates the capability and willingness to continue

learning throughout their lives. Such means include the development of lifelong learning skills, staff development, review of course content and structure, and recognition of formal and informal education.

The Board itself has undertaken further work on the development of lifelong learning skills and attitudes: its advice, *Lifelong Learning—Key Issues*, was provided to the Minister in November 1995. In its advice the Board:

- recognised the need for a national system for the recognition of prior learning for all sectors and in the workplace;
- recommended an evaluation of the implications of educational assessment in the senior secondary school years, and assessment of competency-based training in the vocational education and training sectors; and
- recommended the targeting of resources to train teachers, teacher educators and trainers in the new technologies and acknowledges the need to ensure that all people have access to education and training through these technologies.

Access and Equity

The theme of access and equity pervades much of the work undertaken by the Board and its Councils. For example, credit transfer and recognition of prior learning arrangements seek to improve not only the efficiency of the education and training system but also access for a range of disadvantaged groups.

The Employment and Skills Council produced two supplementary reports on small business dealing with specific equity issues. One report related to the position of women in small business. This report, *Making it Work: Women in Small Business*, concluded that, although the rate of small business ownership by women is growing at approximately twice the rate of ownership by men, there is a lack of research and documentation of effective models relating to women as owners/managers of small business or as employees in small business. The Council strongly supported the need for training and mentoring for women in small business. The position of women was also examined in *Women in the Teaching Profession*, a report commissioned by the Schools Council. This report concluded that women were under-represented in promotional positions and needed better articulated career paths. The report examined other issues such as the impact of workplace reform and problems with professional development opportunities.

In *Science and Technology Education: Foundation for the Future*, the National Board recognised the need to increase the participation of women, people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those from low socio-economic groups in science and technology. The Board recommended that the Commonwealth Government

continue to support projects which encourage women to pursue science at school and tertiary levels, although it acknowledged that significant gains had already been made.

The second supplementary report on small business, *More than Able: People with a Disability and Small Business*, recommended special support measures to assist disabled people in setting up small businesses. The Board was pleased to sponsor the production of audio-cassettes of this publication for people with print disabilities, at the request of the Royal Blind Society.

The needs of disabled people in higher education were examined in *Guidelines for Disability Services in Higher Education*, a commissioned report for the Higher Education Council. One of the major recommendations of the report was that there should be alternative assessment policies to meet the individual requirements of students with disabilities, and that different types of disability require different assessment strategies.

As 1993 was the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the Board focused on the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a number of reports that were produced in that and subsequent years. A commissioned report by the Schools Council, *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Students*, concluded that many schools were not meeting the needs of Aboriginal students. The report also concluded that teachers require appropriate training and that professional development must be provided on an ongoing basis to be able to meet the needs of Aboriginal students.

The importance of vocational education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was recognised by the Employment and Skills Council in *Australian Vocational Certificate Training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*. The Council regards the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (now known as the Australian Vocational Training System) as an important vehicle by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can improve their participation and outcomes in training and employment. In *Raising the Standard: Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce*, the Council argued strongly for providing improved opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It recommended the development of flexible strategies and middle level skills training opportunities, particularly for those people living in remote communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were also the focus of a commissioned report currently being printed for the Australian Language and Literacy Council titled, *The Land Still Speaks, A Review of Aboriginal*

and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance and Development Needs and Activities. The review was undertaken to identify strategies to maintain and retain Australian indigenous languages.

Employment

Employment issues have featured in work undertaken by the Board in recent years. In October 1993 the National Board sponsored a seminar on innovative solutions to long-term unemployment. As a follow-up to this seminar, the Board commissioned in 1994 a research project on *The Employment Potential of New Industries*. The purpose of the project is to investigate the potential of the environment and community service industries to generate viable long-term unsubsidised employment. Conducted by the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne, an interim report was submitted to the Board in January 1995. The final report is expected in March 1996.

The Employment and Skills Council has provided advice on small business employment. In addition to the supplementary reports already mentioned, the main report, *The Shape of Things to Come: Small Business Employment and Skills*, recommended various measures by which small business performance could be supported and strengthened. The report mentioned the problem of the fragmentation of policies and programs available to small businesses and the need for an integrated strategy by government.

As part of its advice, *Making the Future Work*, the Employment and Skills Council looked at developing labour market strategies to improve the employment opportunities and prospects of mature and older-aged jobseekers and the special problems of jobseekers in regions of high unemployment. In 1994–95 the Council continued this work with two new references relating to access to employment and training by mature and older-aged workers and the quality and relevance of training provided under *Working Nation* (1994) initiatives.

The Employment and Skills Council has also undertaken major work on the impact of the new converging technologies on employment, skills and education and training. The term ‘converging technologies’ is used to refer to the merging of technologies in the communications (including telecommunications) field and in the computer and information technology field. These technological changes are impacting on industry, creating a need to consider the skills in demand, or likely to be in demand, in the future. The Council’s advice provided input to the development of the Commonwealth’s national strategy for information and communication services and technologies.

Quality

The increasing numbers of students enrolling in all levels of education and training have put pressure on the systems to provide expanded opportunities for a wider range of students while sustaining high quality outcomes.

Improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school environment was canvassed in two Schools Council reports, *Workplace Learning in the Professional Development of Teachers* and *Five to Fifteen: Reviewing the 'Compulsory' Years of Schooling*. The first addressed the issue of the quality of teaching, and found that teachers believe that the quality of their teaching depends mainly on the extent of their workplace learning. *Five to Fifteen* looked at ways of improving quality in schools. The report recommended examining how the concept of 'Total Quality Management' could be relevant to schools and how it might contribute to quality assurance programs.

The Higher Education Council has provided advice to the Minister in relation to the quality of distance education. The advice was supported by two commissioned reports, *A Study of the Academic Results of On-Campus and Off-Campus Students*, and *Costs and Quality in Resource-based Learning On- and Off-Campus*. The latter report indicated that the quality of the service provided to students could be raised by wider and more effective use of resource-based learning.

The Higher Education Council's advice mentioned earlier, *The Enabling Characteristics of Undergraduate Education*, and the accompanying commissioned report, *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education*, were also concerned with the issue of quality in higher education. The Council argued that moving lifelong learning skills and attitudes to the centre of undergraduate programs will require institutions to pay attention to all aspects of their operation, from their 'institution-wide' policies, to the stated aims and objectives of individual undergraduate courses, and the assessment and teaching techniques used by academic staff. The Council has recently considered the issue of quality assurance in the higher education sector again, following three years of activity by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, a committee established by the Minister on the recommendation of the Council. The Council's views were incorporated in its response to the reference on discretionary funding.

The Australian Language and Literacy Council has been examining quality in two areas of the teaching profession, in response to two references from the Minister. The first concerns the provision of high quality teachers of English literacy and English as a second language, and the Council in its advice dealt with a range of issues, including recruitment of teachers, pre-service training, continuing professional development and the monitoring and review of teacher education literacy programs. The second reference relates to the quality and

supply of teachers of languages other than English. The Council expects to forward advice to the Minister in March 1996.

Costs and Resourcing

Questions of costs and resourcing are integral to most of the issues dealt with by the Board, and have been addressed specifically in a number of pieces of advice. Infrastructure funding was the theme of a major piece of advice, *Higher Education Research Infrastructure*, prepared by the National Board in 1993. The Board advised that an additional \$125 million was needed in infrastructure funding to adequately support the existing research activity of the higher education system. In arriving at its final figure, the Board took into account the impact of non-Commonwealth competitive grants, the Cooperative Research Centres program and collaborative research with industry on infrastructure funding.

The Schools Council was asked by the Government to participate, along with the Department of Employment, Education and Training, in a *Review of the Level of Commonwealth Recurrent Funding to Government Primary Schools*. During 1994–95 the Council conducted an extensive consultation program with major national and state interest groups before developing its advice on a series of desirable models for the Commonwealth funding of primary schools. The three suggested scenarios all assume an increase in funding to government primary schools between 1996 and 2000, and were accompanied by suggestions for improved accountability arrangements and improved literacy outcomes.

The Schools Council also released a commissioned report, *Developing Indicators of Infrastructure Needs in Secondary Schools*, which provides a set of indicators designed to assist schools to plan the most effective use of their limited financial resources. The provision of adequate and appropriate infrastructure requirements for schools is important, particularly when new curricula and teaching approaches are being introduced.

Specific resourcing issues in higher education were addressed in *Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students*, a report commissioned by the Higher Education Council. The study involved eighteen institutions of higher education which were selected on the basis of their commitment to improving access and equity for educationally disadvantaged groups. The aim of the study was to estimate the extra costs involved in widespread implementation of good access and equity strategies.

Consistent with other Board activities on the theme of resource and cost implications, the Australian Research Council has addressed a reference from the Minister which asked it to examine the performance of the Institute of

Advanced Studies at The Australian National University and to advise on the allocation of research funds to the Institute. During 1994–95 the Council and the University coordinated reviews of the individual Schools and Centres of the Institute by international peer review teams. The second stage of the review, the review of the Institute as a whole, was undertaken in the second half of 1995, and the Council reported to the Minister in December 1995.

Work Organisation and Management

Workplace reform is an important issue that has been addressed in several reports of the Board and its Councils. The reports have included specific recommendations about workplace organisation and management, as well as advice intended to achieve more effective organisation and quality management practice over time. The advice relates to human resource development, human resource capability, workplace performance and its relationship to education and training.

In *Raising the Standard: Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce*, the Employment and Skills Council examined the types and levels of skills required in the Australian workforce. The report argues that the character of workplace change requires an increased emphasis on developing and utilising middle level skills in the Australian workforce. The Council concluded that although demand for, and supply of, middle level skills are increasing, the increase will not be adequate to meet the needs of the economy, and that action is needed to achieve a more rapid and qualitative growth in both supply and demand.

The work undertaken by the Schools Council on its Ministerial reference on pathways in the post-compulsory years acknowledged that schools are forging stronger links with employers to ensure that senior secondary programs are relevant to contemporary and future requirements, and to secure access to workplace learning opportunities for their students. As well, the introduction and implementation of key competencies and the Australian Vocational Training System bring competency-based approaches to pedagogy and assessment. Teachers therefore need to be assisted to upgrade their knowledge of modern workplaces and to adapt their teaching and assessment practices.

In 1994–95 the Board developed advice on the Karpin report, *Enterprising Nation*, on management education and training in Australia. The Karpin report arose out of previous initiatives and activities of the Employment and

Skills Council and the Board in the area of management. These culminated in the setting up of the Industry Taskforce on Leadership and Management Skills which was chaired by Mr David Karpin.

Future Directions

This overview has provided some indication of the depth and scope of the work undertaken by the Board and its six Councils in the last three years. As the material in the following summary and ensuing chapters indicates, the current and future work program of the Board and each Council demonstrates a similarly high level of activity focused on the strategic issues confronting the portfolio.

The Board is currently considering a number of areas of possible activity with significant cross-sectoral implications. These include the impact of tertiary entrance rankings and university and TAFE admission procedures on students' subject and career choices, and, in conjunction with WEETAG, an examination of the issues relating to the changing structure of work and the impact of the new industrial climate on women, especially women with family responsibilities. The Board is also in the process of developing a work plan on how to address a number of significant issues in the area of the preparation of teachers and the continuing professional development of teachers in the context of the future of school education.

The Australian International Education Foundation Council expects to provide advice to the Minister on its first Ministerial reference, an examination of the ways of encouraging and promoting partnerships between business enterprises and education and training providers, by mid-1996. The Australian Language and Literacy Council plans to finalise three pieces of advice in the first half of 1996: on the supply and quality of language teachers; an assessment of needs in plain English in the public and private sectors; and a report of a pilot study to examine the process of constructing a model of incorporating English language and literacy competencies within a particular industry.

The Australian Research Council will continue activities which fulfil its mission of providing advice on research funding and research policy, and to promote research and research training of the highest quality. Current Ministerial references include an examination of the overall level of support for research into topics of specific interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and an examination of the Council's balance of funding across the disciplines to ensure consistency with meeting the research needs for Australia's national priorities. The Higher Education Council will continue to meet its statutory obligations to report on the operation of educational profiles and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme, and will focus on two references recently received from the Minister. These concern

options for improving quality control in Australian management schools through the development of a professional accreditation system, and an examination of existing arrangements for Commonwealth funding to indigenous higher education students.

The Employment and Skills Council is currently examining two issues at the request of the Minister. The first reference seeks the Council's advice on the quality and relevance of training being provided under *Working Nation* initiatives. The second concerns issues relating to the employment, training and retraining of the mature and older-aged labour force, and follows on from an earlier reference which was responded to in the Council's report, *Making the Future Work*. The major focus of the Schools Council's work in 1996 will be the Ministerial reference on the impact of new technology on schooling in the next century. Other projects include ongoing work on modern approaches to management in schools, with a view to developing a resource kit on management practices which could be used for teachers in all Australian schools, and the commissioning of a consultancy on the establishment, use and management of electronic networks in schools.

Evaluation of Board and Council Policy Advice

Professor Wiltshire in his review of the National Board highlighted the need for a system of performance evaluation, particularly in relation to the advice produced by the Board and its Councils. The Board has put in place a process for reviewing the outcomes of its advice, involving a review of advice approximately one year after the advice has been forwarded to the Minister, to assess its effectiveness. In recognition of the importance of this issue, the Board is currently considering other options to enable it to assess the effectiveness of its key output, policy advice.

National Board

Role and Mission

The National Board of Employment, Education and Training provides coordinated, independent advice to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training across the range of issues relevant to the portfolio.

The National Board is asked specifically to inquire into:

- education;
- youth affairs;
- employment and training;
- national research priorities, the coordination of research policy and Australian collaboration in international research;
- language and literacy;
- international education;
- adult and community education; and
- any other matter requested by the Minister.

As an integral part of the process of developing advice for the Minister and, in order to be fully informed on each issue and to present a balanced view, the Board seeks to maintain effective communication links with State and Territory employment, education and training authorities, providers and other organisations and individuals with an interest in employment, education and training matters.

The National Board is responsible for drawing together and integrating the operations and advice of its six Councils. While the Board usually refers matters to one of its specialist Councils for the preparation of draft advice, where the issue spans the activities of more than one of the Councils, the Board deals with the matter itself.

National Board Review

At the time of establishment a commitment was made to review the operations of the Board and its Councils at the end of the first five years. The review was undertaken by Professor Kenneth Wiltshire of the University of

Queensland in 1993. The review concluded that the National Board had fulfilled the bulk of the high expectations which were held for it when it was established. The review recognised the strengths inherent in the structure and operation of the Board, which enable it to address cross-sectoral and international issues drawing on the expertise of its Councils and Committees. However, the report did find that some aspects of the structure and functions of the Board could be improved, resulting in amendments to the 1988 *Act*, which finally received Royal Assent on 16 December 1995.

Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995

The *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995* proposed amendments to the principal *Act* to give effect to certain aspects of the Government's response to the Wiltshire Review of the National Board.

The amendments:

- created one new Council, the Australian Language and Literacy Council, which replaces a Committee established by the Minister under the *Act*.
- abolished the Commonwealth/State Consultative Committee which had become redundant; and
- streamlined mechanisms for appointment of Board and Council members.

The *Amendment Act* also makes other minor and technical amendments to the principal *Act* and provides for transitional arrangements.

Work Program

During 1995–96 the Board intends to continue its work in a number of areas, including lifelong learning, credit transfer and the recognition of prior learning, long-term unemployment and a number of cross-sectoral issues. Each year the Board considers proposals for inclusion in the budget. Some of these are based on recommendations already included in Board advice; others are entirely new. The Board proposals are provided to the Minister for his consideration as part of the budget development process.

The Board is currently considering areas of further work in particular issues with significant cross-sectoral implications. The Board has been concerned about the impact of tertiary entrance rankings and university and TAFE admission procedures on students' subject and career choices and on curriculum and assessment practices in secondary schools.

Arising from the Schools Council's interim advice on the Future of Schools in the Knowledge Society, the Board is in the process of developing a work plan on how to address a number of significant issues in the area of the preparation of teachers and their continuing professional development in the context of the future of school education.

In addition, WEETAG has proposed that it work with the Board to look at issues relating to the changing structure of work and the impact of the new industrial climate on women, especially women with family responsibilities.

Cross-sectoral Issues

Building on the work of the Schools Council in its report, *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students*, which examined collaboration between schools, the vocational education and training sector, industry and higher education, the Board focused on the types of collaboration which occur at the interfaces between TAFE, higher education and industry. The Board sought to determine whether these types of collaboration have the potential to meet the needs of industry, to facilitate the movement of higher education students to vocational education and training and to increase the participation of non-metropolitan communities in higher education. Tabled in November 1995, the report, *Cross-sectoral Collaboration in Post-secondary Education and Training*, recommends further collaboration between TAFE, industry and higher education over highly specialised facilities and equipment and an increase in the provision of higher education programs by TAFE colleges in non-metropolitan communities.

The report is supported by two research projects into Australian education and training. The Board commissioned Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu to examine employer demand for education and training, with particular emphasis on employer requirements of new graduates, and Dr Gerald Burke from the Centre for the Economics of Education and Training at Monash University to focus on recent reforms in education and training. Dr Burke also provided a description of student numbers, resources and outputs (in terms of qualification levels) of the post-compulsory education and training sectors. Both these reports are available in a publication titled *Demand for and Dimensions of Education and Training* released in November 1995. The report by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu generated considerable public debate in newspapers and on radio.

Lifelong Learning Issues

Extensive consultations, the organisation of a forum and submissions from National Board Councils, revealed continuing strong support for lifelong learning and the identification of several issues affecting the ability of people to acquire lifelong learning attributes and participate in lifelong learning.

Specifically, the Board recommended an evaluation of the implications of educational assessment in the senior secondary school years and assessment of competency-based training in the vocational education and training sectors. The Board also recognised the need for the acceleration of the design and implementation of a national system for the recognition of prior learning for all sectors and in the workplace. Given the importance of developments in the converging technologies on education and training, resources should be targeted to train teachers, teacher educators and trainers in the new technologies and to ensure that all people can gain access to education and training through these new means.

The advice, *Lifelong Learning—Key Issues*, has been provided to the Minister and will be tabled as soon as practicable.

Credit Transfer

The Board has undertaken further work concerning the relationship between general education and vocational education, in post-school education and training. This work has focused on the need to develop credit transfer and recognition of prior learning measures that will allow generic vocational skills to be recognised when students move between the sectors. The work also provides a description of movements between TAFE and higher education and vice versa. In addition, some attempt was made to address the quality and quantity of generic vocational skills provided by TAFE colleges and universities. The Board expects to publish its findings in March 1996. It will also provide advice to the Minister at the same time.

Employment Initiatives

On 21 October 1994 the Board commissioned the Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at The University of Melbourne to undertake a study of the employment potential of new industries. The study is to provide a rigorous economic assessment of the potential of emerging industries in areas such as environmental and community services to provide substantial amounts of unsubsidised employment. A focus of the consultant's research is whether

voluntary and subsidised work in these industries has economic characteristics which might allow it to become self-sustaining employment. A final report is expected in March 1996. The Board may then provide advice to the Minister.

Review of Appointment Procedures for Australian Research Council Committees and Discipline Panels

During 1993–94 the Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training conducted an inquiry into the organisation and funding of research in higher education. In its report the Committee noted the research community's concerns in relation to panel structure and transparency and fairness of the processes. The Committee subsequently recommended an independent assessment of the procedures for appointing members of the Australian Research Council's discipline panels.

In March 1995 the National Board was formally requested by the Minister to review the procedures for appointing members to serve on Australian Research Council discipline panels. The advice, *Review of Appointment Procedures for Australian Research Council Committees and Discipline Panels*, has been completed.

The Minister has accepted the recommendations which the Board, through the Australian Research Council, and the Department will be implementing in 1996.

Other Activities

The National Board is often called upon to provide input into, and responses to, major issues and reports which have implications for the portfolio. Some of these matters are initiated by our own portfolio Minister, for example, the Industry Taskforce on Leadership and Management Skills. Others arise from activities of other portfolios but have significant implications for employment, education and training.

National Board Conference

The National Board, as part of its dissemination and advisory role, sponsors and organises conferences on issues it considers to be of strategic importance to the portfolio. In 1995 it organised a conference on the economics of education, *Efficiency and Equity in Education Policy*, which discussed the provision of high quality education and training within the limits of Australia's economic resources.

Australian International Education Foundation Council

Role and Responsibilities

Announced by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training in December 1993, the Australian International Education Foundation Council was established on 9 August 1994 and first met in September 1994.

Established as a committee of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training under the provisions of the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988*, the Council is responsible for providing independent advice to the Minister on issues concerning the international promotion and marketing of Australia's education and training services. This includes advice on:

- the general development of policies and programs and related activities;
- the delivery of programs and related activities;
- the promotion of international education and training;
- Australian collaboration in international research which is likely to promote international education and training; and
- the effects of international education and training.

The Australian International Education Foundation (the Foundation) was officially launched by the Minister on 29 September 1994. The Council provides advice to the Office of the Foundation, which is located within the Department of Employment, Education and Training, on Foundation programs and management issues.

The Chair of the Australian International Education Foundation Council is Mr Eric Mayer and the Council has nine members appointed on the basis of their expertise and experience.

Council Status

Although full National Board Council status for the Council was included in the recent proposed legislative amendments to the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988*, that change was not enacted, and the Council has remained as a committee of the National Board.

Work Program

From its first meeting in late 1994 the Council has pursued a vigorous work program which has included:

- supporting and encouraging the development of an international marketing strategy for the Australian Qualifications Framework to be implemented on a country-by-country basis;
- receiving its first Ministerial reference;
- making a submission to the Senate *Employment, Education and Training Amendment Bill 1995*;
- commencing a project to identify effective practice in the vocational education and training sector in international education and training; and
- undertaking an extensive consultation program.

Providing Advice

The Council is scheduled to report on its first Ministerial reference by mid-1996. This advice will examine ways in which government might encourage and promote partnerships between business enterprises and education and training providers to increase Australia's competitiveness in the international services market and improve Australia's export performance. The Council is also currently examining other possible Ministerial references.

As well as Ministerial references, findings and effective strategies emerging from, for example, the Council's current project identifying effective practices in the vocational education and training sector in international education and training can contribute to additional advice to the Minister or may inform the sector directly.

Advisory Role to the Foundation

The Council has to date largely focused on issues relevant to guiding the work of the Foundation in its first year of operation. In particular, the Council has provided advice on the:

- development of a strategic statement for the Foundation which articulates the Foundation's goals and vision and the medium to long-term directions for the international education and training community;
- country business plans which form the basis for the work of the Offshore Network;
- principles underpinning Foundation services to its subscribers;
- development of market research and information reporting;

- approaches to defining and presenting Australian education exhibitions; and
- Australian studies programs and alumni activities.

The Council has also identified a number of priority projects which it has asked the Office of the Foundation to undertake, including:

- the development of a marketing strategy for the Australian Qualifications Framework;
- a survey of overseas students who choose not to study in Australia; and
- an assessment of the application of new technologies to the delivery of international education and training.

Consultation

The Foundation is a partnership between government and the education and training community in order to help market Australian education and training internationally. The Council views consultation as an indispensable element in performing its functions, both for keeping itself fully informed and in disseminating information. The Council:

- held consultations in Brisbane, Sydney and Perth during 1995 and is scheduled to hold consultations in Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart during 1996;
- supported the establishment of sectoral working groups to consult on Foundation matters and to provide regular feedback and reports to the Council;
- participated in the Foundation's consultations regarding the development of the Country Business Plans; and
- meets, as appropriate, with Australian Ambassadors to discuss the Council's work as well as consulting widely on an informal basis with leaders in education and training.

Future Directions

The Council is currently considering its 1996 work program which will take into account the increasing market emphasis placed on the Asia-Pacific region and initiatives developing through the Commonwealth Government's *Innovate Australia* statement.

Australian Language and Literacy Council

Role and Responsibilities

The Australian Language and Literacy Council provides advice to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training on the effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government's language and literacy policy and on strategies to be used, targets to be considered, and priorities to be given, in monitoring, implementing or further developing the policy. The Council also advises on the granting of financial assistance by the Commonwealth for the teaching and learning of languages and literacy skills.

The White Paper, *Australia's Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy*, identified four goals.

1. All Australians should develop and maintain effective literacy in English to enable them to participate in Australian society.
2. Australians must substantially expand and improve the learning of languages other than English.
3. Australia should maintain and develop those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages which are still transmitted, and should record, where appropriate, those languages which are not.
4. Interpreters and translators, the print and electronic media and libraries should expand and improve the language services they provide.

The Council's current issues include:

- the acquisition of initial skills of literacy and numeracy;
- literacy difficulties facing both children and adults;
- the effectiveness of current methods of teaching languages other than English and English as a second language;
- the importance of plain English in public documentation;
- the provision of literacy education within teacher education programs;
- Aboriginal English and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages; and
- the role of adult and community education providers in the field of adult literacy.

Work Program

Past References

The Council has previously provided advice to the Minister on the adult English language and literacy provision offered by the community-based sector, on the needs of business and industry for language skills, and on the incorporation of English language and literacy competencies into industry standards.

The Council's most recent advice, *Teacher Education in English Language and Literacy*, was tabled in Parliament in November 1995. This advice was the result of an extensive series of consultations, invited submissions and commissioned reports. Its recommendations were aimed at improving English literacy standards in the community by addressing the need for high quality teaching of English literacy and English as a second language. The issues dealt with included, among others, recruitment of teachers, pre-service training, continuing professional development and the monitoring and review of teacher education literacy programs.

Current References

Supply and Quality of Teachers of Languages Other Than English

The Council is currently responding to a request by the Minister to advise on the supply and quality of language teachers. The Council commissioned a literature review, surveyed Faculties of Education, reviewed major research as expressed in key reports in recent years and analysed policy documents from States and Territories. The Council also commissioned the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia to construct a database of statistics for current students, teachers and courses in languages as a starting point for predicting future demand.

The Council will be considering a draft report in February and expects to forward advice to the Minister in March 1996.

Plain English and Accessible Reading Materials

The Council is currently responding to a request by the Minister to assess needs in plain English in the public and private sectors. It was also asked to assess the needs of specific groups of adult readers for accessible reading materials and to develop a strategy with principles, guidelines and criteria to assist the implementation of this objective of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy.

To assist in the preparation of advice the Council commissioned consultants to prepare reports on plain English in the public, private and legal sectors. In addition, the Council surveyed Commonwealth Departments to determine their current policies and practices with respect to plain English. The needs of special groups for accessible reading materials are also being examined.

The Council expects to report to the Minister by June 1996.

Literacy Model Pilot Study

In August 1994 the Minister for Employment, Education and Training asked the Council to undertake a pilot study which would follow up its advice on the treatment of English language and literacy competencies within industry standards. The pilot study would explore the process of constructing a model, or models, of incorporating English language and literacy competencies within a particular industry. This study was to be carried out in conjunction with a Competency Standards Body and in cooperation with the National Framework of Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Competence project.

The Council selected the Warehousing and Distribution Industry as the Competency Standards Body. Consultants have submitted a draft final report and are expected to complete the task early in 1996. The Australian National Training Authority has already indicated that feedback from this study, with modifications to the model based on the results of the study, will be used to make recommendations relevant to other industries. The Council expects to report by June 1996.

Other Activities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages

The third objective of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy states that Australia should maintain and develop those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages which are still transmitted, and should record, where appropriate, those languages which are not. The Council commissioned a project to examine four sites in which indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages had been successfully maintained and to identify reasons for such successful language maintenance. The report, *The Land Still Speaks, A Review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance and Development Needs and Activities*, makes a major contribution to an extremely important issue on Australia's language and literacy agenda. It is currently being prepared for printing and distribution.

The Implications of Technology for Language Teaching

Using innovative projects funds allocated by the National Board, the Council is managing a project which will investigate and report on the probable role of technology in language learning beyond the year 2000. The project will look at technology available, or likely to become available, relevant to language education and how such technology will impact upon curriculum design and teaching/learning methodology.

The Council has selected a consultant and expects the work to be completed within six months of the contract being signed.

Future Activities

At its December meeting the Council developed a work program for 1996 based on a reassessment of the four goals of the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. In February the Council will consider proposing to the Minister that the 1991 Policy be reviewed and, where necessary, reconstructed and that the Council undertake this important task.

Australian Research Council

Role and Responsibilities

The Council's mission is to provide advice on research funding and research policy, and to promote research and research training of the highest quality for the benefit of the Australian community, with a particular responsibility for basic and applied research, and research training in the higher education sector, all of which contribute to Australian development and the formation of international links.

The Council makes recommendations to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training on national research priorities, the coordination of research policy and the distribution of resources allocated to a range of specified research schemes, taking account of the spectrum of research policy advice given to Government by a variety of Commonwealth agencies and of other research funding provided by the Commonwealth.

Structure

The Australian Research Council is supported by five advisory committees, four of which have responsibility for managing the Council's funding programs.

- Institutional Grants Committee—special research centres, key centres of teaching and research, the small grants program, research infrastructure (equipment and facilities);
- Research Grants Committee—research grants to individuals and teams;
- Research Training and Careers Committee—Australian Postgraduate Awards, Fellowships;
- University–Industry Research Collaboration Committee (replaced the Collaborative Research Grants Panel)—Collaborative Research Grants, Australian Postgraduate Awards (Industry); and
- Planning and Review Committee—coordination and planning.

The work of the five committees is supported by four discipline panels, consisting of persons with outstanding records in research.

- Biological Sciences;
- Engineering, Earth and Applied Sciences;

- Physical, Mathematical and Chemical Sciences; and
- Social Sciences and Humanities.

Policy Initiatives

Institute of Advanced Studies, Australian National University

In September 1991 the Council was asked to provide advice on the allocation of research funds to the Institute of Advanced Studies, based on five-yearly reviews, and to monitor the work of the Australian National University's Advisory Committee on Collaborative Activities.

The first review of the performance and funding of the Institute was conducted during 1995. It was jointly managed by the Council and the Australian National University and included individual reviews of each School and Centre, as well as a review of the Institute as a whole. The review required the development of performance measures comprising contextual and bibliometric data, the preparation of submissions by each of the Schools and Centres and the public, and peer reviews of each of the Schools and Centres. The Council reported to the Minister in December 1995.

In accordance with the Minister's reference the Council has completed three reports monitoring the Institute's progress in meeting targets for collaborative activities with other Australian universities, the most recent being *Collaborative Activities of the Institute of Advanced Studies, The Australian National University: Third Annual Report*. The Council notes that the Institute has exceeded the targets set for collaborative activities for 1993 and 1994 of 7 per cent and 8 per cent respectively.

Ecologically Sustainable Development

Following work undertaken in the Office of the Chief Scientist during 1992, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the principles for ecologically sustainable development in the National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). This strategy requires that ecologically sustainable development objectives be written into the charters of Commonwealth research funding and performing agencies to be used as criteria in determining priorities for the allocation of funds.

In September 1993 the Council received a Ministerial reference requesting information as to how the principles of the National Strategy can be implemented with respect to research programs. In response, the Council

commissioned a study entitled *Australian Research for Ecologically Sustainable Development* to determine the level of ESD-related research currently supported under Council programs and to develop a methodology for classifying such research. The advice, *Australian Research for Ecologically Sustainable Development*, forwarded to the Minister in May 1995, discussed the level of ESD-related research and proposed a means of encouraging multidisciplinary research of particular relevance to ecologically sustainable development.

Intellectual Property

This reference arose from the report, *The Role of Intellectual Property in Innovation*, presented to the Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council in June 1993, and from recommendations on this report to Government from an interdepartmental committee. The Minister asked the Council, in conjunction with the Higher Education Council, to advise on ways to raise awareness of intellectual property in higher education institutions.

The resulting report, *Maximising the Benefits: Joint ARC/HEC Advice on Intellectual Property*, analyses the level of coverage of intellectual property issues in academic staff development and training for undergraduate and postgraduate students. In the report the Councils suggest that each university should have a policy on intellectual property issues. The two Councils have also undertaken to arrange a forum during 1996 to facilitate discussion of the issues.

Research on Topics of Specific Interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

In response to a request by the Minister to examine the overall level of support for research into topics of specific interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the Council has commissioned the Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to investigate research activities in this category, to develop a classification system and to undertake consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities on any gaps in current research. The Council expects to report to the Minister by the end of 1996.

Funding Strategies for Basic Research

Towards the end of 1990 the Minister asked the Council to advise whether the ARC's balance of funding across the disciplines was consistent with meeting the research needs for Australia's national priorities. The Government has reiterated its interest in achieving an appropriate balance of funding across discipline areas in its recently announced response to the Industry Commission's Review of research and development.

During 1995 the Council undertook a number of activities to assist in its deliberations about possible changes in the balance of effort across disciplines and across ARC programs. These activities included commissioned studies and extensive consultations. Identifying the links between research in the various disciplines and national priorities is not an easy task since the links are complex and often indirect. As a first step the Council considered the likely profile of the national research effort in 2010 in terms of social, economic, cultural and environmental objectives. The year 2010 was chosen as a focus for decision-making to coincide with similar future needs exercises by the Australian Science and Technology Council and the Business Council of Australia. It expects to reach a set of decisions by July 1996, and will report to the Minister subsequently.

Funding Programs

The Council advises on a number of research funding schemes.

Research Grants

The Research Grants Program supports high quality research by individuals or research teams in all research areas, except clinical medicine and dentistry. Large grants (above \$20 000 or \$30 000 a year, depending on the research field) are considered by the Council with the assistance of expert panels. Smaller grants are determined by individual institutions, acting as agents of the Council, from block grants allocated to eligible institutions. Support is also provided for research in designated priority areas, including research involving international collaboration.

In addition to the general research grants support is also provided for research in designated priority areas. Priority areas identified by the Council for 1996 grants are as follows:

- biology of sustainability;
- citizenship;
- exploration geophysics;

- food science and technology;
- minerals processing science and technology;
- optics; and
- technological change.

Priority is also given to research involving international collaboration.

The Collaborative Research Grants Program provides funds on a matching basis with industry funding in any field of research other than clinical medicine or dentistry. The program aims to develop cooperative links between higher education institutions, industry and public sector users of research, and to develop greater understanding within higher education institutions of industry's needs.

Infrastructure

The Research Infrastructure (Equipment and Facilities) Program provides direct support to higher education institutions to develop and maintain research infrastructure. The program funds mainly collaborative proposals from two or more institutions for large items of equipment and facilities.

The Commonwealth also provides support direct to universities through the Research Infrastructure Block Grant.

Awards and Fellowships

Australian Postgraduate Awards (with stipend) are competitive awards for higher degree studies, allocated by individual institutions in accordance with government guidelines. Postgraduate Awards are also available for students with projects supported by industry. The Australian Research Fellowships Program provides fellowships for postdoctoral researchers through to senior researchers at professional level.

Research Centres

The Special Research Centres are centres of research concentration built around chief investigators of outstanding quality, supported by high quality academic and research staff. Criteria for selection may include national priority considerations. In 1994–95 eighteen Centres were funded at levels ranging from \$450 000 to over \$950 000. Key Centres of Teaching and Research are established in higher education institutions to concentrate high level teaching activity supported by an active research program. The majority

of the existing twenty-five centres funded in 1994–95 have strong links with industry and/or government departments.

Research Evaluation Program

The Evaluation Program, with a budget of \$625 000 in 1994–95, assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of the research and research training schemes for which funding is provided on the advice of the Council.

Reviews of Grant Outcomes Program

The Reviews of Grant Outcomes program assesses the efficiency and effectiveness of research support through the Large Grants Scheme. Twenty reviews of grant outcomes have been carried out since 1991. During 1994–95 reviews of grant outcomes were carried out in the fields of Inorganic Chemistry; Astronomy and Astrophysics; Sedimentology, Stratigraphy and Palaeontology; Computer Sciences; and Experimental Physics. Reviews of Plant Physiology; Marine Biology; Atmospheric and Ocean Sciences; and Education are expected to be completed in 1995–96.

Discipline Strategies

Discipline Strategies enable the stakeholders within a particular discipline to predict where research in the discipline should be in ten to fifteen years' time and to propose strategies to reach that target. Discipline Strategies recently published or due to be published before June 1996 are Astronomy, Mathematics, Psychology, Language and Literacy, Management, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

The report, *Australian Astronomy: Beyond 2000*, identified the need to develop infrastructure to enable researchers to access national and international facilities and promote Australian astronomical education and research.

Published in January 1996 the report, *Mathematical Sciences: Adding to Australia*, recognised the need to encourage the development of, and access to, computers and electronic operations such as the World Wide Web to promote research activities in the mathematical sciences and to develop and promote access to higher degrees which meet the needs of industry.

Program Evaluations

Evaluation of the ARC Fellowships Program has been completed, while evaluations of Australian Postgraduate Research Awards and Overseas Postgraduate Research Scholarships schemes are in progress.

International Links

Developing and strengthening international links has been a strategic objective of several of the Council research programs, including the Special Research Centres, International Fellowships and Research Grants Programs. The Council now has reciprocal fellowship agreements with agencies in France, Germany and Korea.

Through the signing of formal Memoranda of Understanding with agencies in China, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Austria, the Council promotes the development of research cooperation through the exchange of information and support for joint research projects. Negotiations are in progress with agencies in Japan, Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy and the USA, and with Earthwatch.

Employment and Skills Council

Role and Responsibilities

The Employment and Skills Council has a legislative responsibility to provide advice and information to the National Board on employment and vocational education and training including:

- employment policies, programs and services;
- the general development of vocational education and training;
- adult and community education to the extent that such education relates to vocational education and training;
- the establishment of the priorities to be given to the provision and delivery of vocational education and training; and
- the granting of financial assistance by the Commonwealth for vocational education and training.

The Council may also initiate research and policy advice consistent with its charter.

Membership of the Council is drawn from business, industry, public and private education and training providers including TAFE, the trade union movement and the community services sector.

Strategic Priorities in 1994 and 1995

Shaping the Australian Workforce

The Council's advice to the Minister in 1994 and 1995 was aimed at achieving a more highly skilled, flexible and adaptable workforce, a more equitable and efficient labour market and equitable and effective labour market policies and programs. The Council's advice was developed within the context of social justice and equity, workplace reform, structural adjustment and technological change.

Central to the Council's work were the skills, attributes and knowledge individuals need in order to gain employment or successfully become self-employed, for innovation and for exploiting new employment opportunities.

Also of concern was the implications of the increasingly rapid convergence of communications and computer technologies for skill requirements in the workforce, the nature of work, work organisation and employment.

During 1994 and 1995 the Council developed advice on:

- the need for and the development of middle level skills in the Australian workforce;
- small business employment growth and skills formation;
- strategies for improving the employment opportunities and prospects for older workers and for workers in regions of high unemployment;
- development of effective labour market programs to the year 2000; and
- the impact of the convergence of communications and computer technologies on employment and vocational education and training.

Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce

The Council's report, *Raising the Standard: Middle Level Skills in the Australian Workforce*, responds to a Ministerial reference. It argues the need for a new skills profile in the Australian workforce. The report identifies training and skills needs at the middle level of the Australia Standards Framework (levels 4, 5 and 6), discusses general approaches to meet those needs and recommends a framework on which an operational plan can be built.

The Council concludes that while the demand for, and the supply of, middle level skills in the Australian workforce are increasing slowly, the increase will not be sufficient to meet the needs of the economy and that action is needed to achieve a more rapid and qualitative growth in both supply and demand.

The emergence of increasing self-employment and the growth of high value export industries means that new skills are of increasing significance to Australia. This growth is manifest in small to medium-sized companies and it is here that the presence of middle level skills is critical.

The Council recommended that the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) be asked to develop an operational plan for increasing the quality and quantity of middle level skills in the Australian workforce. ANTA and the Australian Ministers for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs have acknowledged the importance of middle level skills by including reference to them in the *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training*.

Small Business Employment Skills and Growth

The Council's report, *The Shape of Things to Come: Small Business Employment and Skills*, is based on a number of principles. One of these was that any sustainable long-term strategy for small business employment growth must be based on small business growth. In other words growth in demand and growth in small business activity must come before sustainable small business employment growth.

The Council concluded that the prognosis for continued growth in small to medium enterprises is good, particularly for niche market, high value-added exporting enterprises. Opportunities for export have increased as reductions in transport and communications costs and ready access to information technology have made it easier for these enterprises to enter international markets.

New technologies are creating the capacity for small and medium-sized enterprises to deliver competitively priced customised products. Small and medium-sized enterprises are now able to compete in markets previously dominated by larger enterprises which had the capacity to mass produce. Small enterprises are gaining from the increasing trend for larger firms to confine their operations to their core business and to outsource the supply of goods and services that are not part of their core business.

The objective of a number of the Council's recommendations in *The Shape of Things to Come* was to create a policy environment that supports small business—a policy environment that recognises the diversity of small business goals, motivations and operating modes. The Council also addressed the issue of skills development and its relationship to productivity, arguing that national and international experience has demonstrated the direct connection between high skill levels and high productivity. The recommendations also aimed to improve skill levels in small business as a direct means of achieving high performance and growth.

The report was well received by the Government and small business interest groups. It was considered by the Government during the preparation of *Working Nation*, with a number of the ideas being taken up in the Small Business Employment and Training Strategy. A number of recommendations were also taken up in *Enterprising Nation* (the Karpin report).

The Council produced three supplementary reports to *The Shape of Things to Come*. *More than Able: People with a Disability and Small Business* argued that, with small business making an increasing contribution to overall employment growth, it is important, both economically and socially, that people with a disability have an equitable share in that growth.

Making it Work: Women and Small Business recognised that women are establishing their own businesses at a faster rate than men and that small businesses operated by women have significantly higher survival rates due to better preparation prior to start-up.

Cultivating the Human Factor: Employment and Skills in Australia's Rural Industries identified management skills as being of particular and increasing importance in rural industries and made recommendations aimed at improving the overall levels of skills and knowledge held by people in rural industries.

Employment and Training

In its report, *Making the Future Work*, the Council argued that the solution to long-term unemployment lies in fundamental systemic changes requiring medium to long-term policies and strategies. The Council rejected 'quick-fix' solutions that merely recycle long-term unemployed people through labour market programs and short, tenuous job placements. The Council argued that a real and lasting reduction in the numbers of long-term unemployed could only be achieved by economic growth accompanied by more effective labour market programs.

The Council recommended that the level of labour market program spending not only be maintained but be increased in certain areas, and that radical changes be made to make labour market programs more effective. This included changes to the way that programs are developed, administered and delivered.

The report also examined the labour market experiences of mature and older-aged workers and proposed measures to assist those who are prematurely and involuntarily unemployed back into the workforce.

The Government considered the Council's advice during the preparation of *Working Nation* and a number of the White Paper initiatives are consistent with that advice. These include improvements to post-program monitoring arrangements, the extension of individual case management, the adoption of duration of unemployment and risk of long-term unemployment as eligibility criteria for labour market program assistance, and a marked move towards labour market programs providing competency based and accredited training.

Converging Communications and Computer Technology

In setting the context for its report, *Converging Technology, Work and Learning*, the Council noted that the unique character of converging computer and communications technologies lies in the unprecedented degree of interactivity which they foster. Interactive engagement is a central concept for learning and innovation. It enables the learner to self-direct research,

respond, question, interrogate and collaborate instantly over long distances. Multimedia applications have great potential for extending these learning opportunities.

In its report the Council put forward a number of propositions. First, it argues that the application of converging technology and best practice based on consultation, participation, teamwork, accountability and constant learning are closely interdependent. This interdependence is critical for increasing innovation, productivity and quality assurance outcomes.

Second, in relation to the knowledge, skills and attributes required within the workforce and the community to take advantage of and drive further technological development, it argues that Australia should become a learning society based on lifelong learners.

On the question of the ability of the education and training systems to equip the workforce and the community with appropriate skills, the Council observed that the intensity of labour inputs to education and training will change as converging technologies are applied to the learning process. Although the link between learning theory and the new technologies has not yet developed, the Council saw strong potential for enhancing human interaction and improving access to information and knowledge.

The Council proposed that a national strategic framework be developed to achieve adequate technology, workforce capability and high quality education and training materials. The strategy assumes a five-year timeline. This allows a reasonable time for Education Network Australia (EdNA) to be developed, for the various systems and institutions to do their own planning and implementation, and for the workforce in all sectors of education and training to improve their competence.

Work in Progress

Quality and Relevance of Training Provided under *Working Nation* Initiatives

The Council has a Ministerial reference asking it to advise on the quality and relevance of training being provided under *Working Nation* initiatives. The Council has interpreted the reference in its broadest sense to include training provided under National Training Wage arrangements and through labour market programs.

The work that the Council undertook in preparing its report, *Making the Future Work* (see above), has provided a solid basis for pursuing this reference. The Council has supplemented that work with seven selected area

studies involving consultations, site visits and telephone surveys in those seven areas, and consultations with key national and government organisations. Over 100 written submissions have been received.

The report, expected to be completed in early May 1996, will examine the extent to which training is meeting the objectives of *Working Nation* and the needs of jobseekers and industry, and will make recommendations about adjustments that may be needed to policies and programs to improve their quality and effectiveness.

Access to Employment and Training for Mature and Older-aged Workers

The Council also has a Ministerial reference asking it to advise on issues relating to the employment, training and retraining of the mature and older-aged labour force. This reference follows on from an earlier reference relating to mature and older-aged workers which was responded to in the Council's report, *Making the Future Work*.

In pursuing the reference the Council has examined the labour market experience of mature and older-aged workers (defined as 45+ years old), including employment and unemployment patterns, access to all forms of vocational education and training, including entry level training, and to labour market programs.

The Council's report is expected to be completed in early March 1996.

Higher Education Council

Role and Responsibilities

The Higher Education Council has a legislative responsibility to provide advice to the National Board on the general development of higher education in Australia and on a range of specific issues including:

- setting priorities on the needs of higher education institutions, especially in relation to buildings, equipment, staff and other facilities;
- the planning, funding and implementation of programs to meet the needs of higher education institutions; and
- the granting of Commonwealth financial assistance for higher education institutions.

In addition, major specific functions of the Higher Education Council are:

- to inquire into, and provide annual reports through the National Board to Parliament with respect to the operation of
 - Section 14 of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988*, including the role of educational profiles in supporting Commonwealth priorities in higher education, and
 - the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), including its effects on access to higher education, and the level and quality of postgraduate research; and
- to consult with institutions on the preparation of educational profiles and variations to these profiles for the purposes of Section 14 of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988*.

The Higher Education Council gives consideration to:

- the need to increase opportunities for participation in higher education, especially for those traditionally under-represented among higher education students; and
- the need to ensure that the quality, relevance and flexibility of higher education meets national requirements.

In preparing its advice the Higher Education Council consults with interest groups, including representatives of institutions, staff and student associations, business and industry. The Council also consults with institutions on preparing and varying educational profiles. In addition to

providing information or advice requested by the Minister or the Board, the Higher Education Council may itself initiate research and policy advice on matters consistent with its functions.

Legislative Requirements

The Council is required to report regularly on funding, educational profiles and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

Funding

The Council has an ongoing responsibility to advise on funding issues and the distribution of resources among institutions. In view of the revised Budget timetable, the Council did not have the opportunity to develop advice on funding in 1995.

Educational Profiles and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme

Under Section 25(1)(c) of the *Employment, Education and Training Act 1988* the Higher Education Council is required to report to the National Board in March each year on the effectiveness of the educational profiles process and the impact of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. The profiles process is a means of negotiating policy and related issues between the Department of Employment, Education and Training and higher education institutions.

The Higher Education Council has reported at least annually on the operation of Section 14 of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988* and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme since the beginning of 1989. Discussions during the 1995 profiles visits included performance against load targets, the profiles structure for 1996–98, capital issues, equity, research and fee-paying arrangements for postgraduate courses, enterprise bargaining and support for indigenous higher education students.

In the most recent report, *Ninth Report on the Operation of Section 14 of the Higher Education Funding Act 1988 and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme*, the Council reported that the Scheme was working well and meeting the objectives for which it was implemented. The report provided analysis of the data provided by the Department of Employment, Education and Training on rates of growth, the gender and age of students, participation rates, the

number of Aboriginal students enrolled in higher education courses, the changes in numbers of postgraduate students, changes in enrolments across fields of study, and receipts from up-front HECS payments. As the Council has noted in the past, it is not possible to draw valid conclusions relating to the impact of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme on enrolments from those data because demand has fluctuated over time and enrolments are influenced by factors other than the Scheme.

However, the Council noted the potential for conflict with equity objectives and credit transfer policies where universities are required to meet school leaver targets at the expense of other groups seeking entry, such as mature-aged and TAFE graduates. The Council believes that the effect of school-leaver entry targets was to constrain opportunities for other groups and to reduce overall entry standards. To address this issue the Council recommended the redesignation of the term 'school leaver' to encompass those 'new to higher education'. This recommendation has been accepted and will be implemented for 1996. The Council expects to report again on the operation of Section 14 of the *Higher Education Funding Act 1988* in March 1996.

Work Program

Lifelong Learning

In January 1992 the National Board was asked to examine how undergraduate curriculum could form the foundation for lifelong learning. To assist in developing the advice the Council commissioned Professor Philip Candy of the Queensland University of Technology to undertake a study of the ways in which undergraduate education enables and encourages graduates to participate in formal and informal learning throughout life.

The resulting report, *Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education*, formed the basis of the Council's advice, *The Enabling Characteristics of Undergraduate Education*, which argues that the development of lifelong learning skills and attitudes by graduates should be a central objective of all undergraduate programs in the higher education system. The report highlights the importance of the development of lifelong learning skills and of staff development and recommends a review of course content and structure and recognition of formal and informal education.

Institutional Autonomy

In January 1992 the Higher Education Council was formally requested to adopt a watching brief on matters affecting institutional autonomy and to report each year, at the same time as it reports on educational profiles and

the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. The Council plans to comment again on this issue in its tenth report on the Higher Education Contribution Scheme and profiles.

Distance Education

In November 1994 distance education became the focus of advice to the Minister. In its advice, *Increasing the Learning Options*, the Council indicates that it believes that the opportunity and potential now exist for universities to make more effective use of distance education materials, methodologies and technologies to enhance student on-campus learning environments. Two commissioned reports informed this advice—the first, *A Study of the Academic Results of On- and Off-Campus Students* concluding that there was no evidence suggesting a difference in performance by either on- or off-campus students and the second, *Costs and Quality in Resource-based Learning On- and Off-Campus*, indicating that the service provided to students could be improved by a more effective use of resource-based learning.

The Council followed up issues raised by these studies at a conference on resource-based learning in October 1995 and plans to seek a formal reference on quality standards for resource-based learning during 1996.

Equity

Students with a Disability

In August 1994 the needs of disabled people in higher education were examined in two reports commissioned by the Council—*Guidelines for Disability Services in Higher Education* and *Resource Implications of the Introduction of Good Strategies in Higher Education for Disadvantaged Students*. The first report recommended that there should be alternative assessment policies to meet the individual requirements of students with disabilities and that different types of disability require different assessment strategies.

Advancing the National Framework for Equity in Higher Education

The Council, through its Equity Working Party, has continued to develop strategies to assist in identifying and targeting disadvantaged groups in order to raise their level of participation in higher education and to promote equity as a way of life in higher education institutions.

As a result of consultations held in September 1994 the Council identified the need to review the system's progress in meeting equity objectives, to update the national framework for equity in higher education and to address the staff development needs of equity officers. As a direct consequence of these consultations, the Council and the Department of Employment, Education and Training initiated a joint project, which was formalised by the Minister as a reference to the National Board.

In May 1995 the Minister asked the National Board to assess progress towards meeting the equity objectives set in the White Paper of 1988 and the report, *A Fair Chance for All*, and provide advice on the appropriate principles, national policy objectives and means of monitoring achievements of the system in meeting these equity objectives over the next five years. The Council expects to report in early 1996.

Intellectual Property

During 1994–95 the Council was asked, in conjunction with the Australian Research Council, for ways to raise awareness of intellectual property in higher education institutions. Further details on the background to this reference are provided in the chapter on the Australian Research Council.

Published in August 1995 the resulting report, *Maximising the Benefits: Joint ARC/HEC Advice on Intellectual Property*, analyses the level of coverage of intellectual property issues in academic staff development and training for undergraduate and postgraduate students. One of the resolutions in that advice was that the two Councils would sponsor a forum to assist in clarifying the expectations of both industry and higher education institutions with respect to intellectual property. Arrangements are in place to convene the forum during 1996.

Monitoring Fee-paying Arrangements for Postgraduate Courses

In January 1995 the Committee to Review Fee-paying Arrangements for Postgraduate Courses recommended that the Council monitor and report on fees and enrolment patterns in postgraduate courses over the next two years.

In consequence, the Minister asked the Council in May 1995 to monitor:

- enrolment patterns;
- the range and levels of fees charged for postgraduate courses; and
- institutional practice with regard to the substitution of postgraduate for undergraduate courses.

To date the Council has commissioned a consultancy to monitor enrolment patterns in postgraduate courses, sought the views of institutions on issues relating to fee-paying arrangements as part of its discussions on profiles and analysed data obtained from the Department's statistical collection. The Council will provide its first report in March 1996 as part of its tenth report on the operation of the profiles process.

Professional Education

In February 1995 the Minister requested that a review be undertaken of the relationship between higher education study and entry into the professions and, in particular, the equity between the streams of entry into various professions and the extent of public subsidy. The Council will include a study of these issues in its project on the examination of the role of professional organisations in curriculum design and content, and the accreditation of graduates. The Council expects to report in mid-1996.

Quality

During 1992 the Council provided advice to the Minister on quality assurance in the higher education sector. It recommended that a committee be established to contribute, through its activities, to the maintenance and enhancement of quality in the higher education system. The Minister accepted the Council's recommendation and established the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The Committee advised the Minister, over a three-year period, on the allocation of funds to institutions to recognise effective quality assurance practices. During 1995, at the end of the three-yearly process announced by the Minister, the Council considered the future of quality assurance in the sector and provided advice to the Minister as part of its response to the reference on discretionary funding.

Discretionary Funds

Tabled in December 1995 recent advice to the Minister on the allocation of discretionary funds, *The Promotion of Quality and Innovation in Higher Education*, discusses the most appropriate use of these funds for the 1990s. The Council recommends that management of discretionary funds should

encompass a national quality assurance component, a teaching innovation and enhancement program and include a reserve fund for meeting changes in the external environment and addressing matters of national significance.

The Council's advice discusses various options for the management of a program which has the above three major funding components. It recommends the establishment of a Committee for Quality Improvement which would be responsible for a two-phase national quality audit across the system on a three-yearly cycle.

Future Activities

New References

The Council has recently received two new references from the Minister. In the first the Minister asks the Council to provide advice on viable options for improving quality control in Australian management schools through the development of a professional accreditation system. The Council has established a working party to address this reference and work is proceeding.

The second new reference asks the Council to examine existing arrangements for Commonwealth funding to higher education institutions in respect of indigenous higher education students and advise if any changes to those arrangements would be desirable.

Performance-based Funding

The Council has initiated a consultancy to provide the Council with data on the extent to which performance-based funding is being used internationally, the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach being used for general operating grant allocations, and the nature of indicators which may be appropriate for use in formula-based allocation models. The study will also examine the nature and effectiveness of performance-based allocation processes currently in use to allocate funds internally within Australian universities. It will also review models in use both in Australia and overseas and evaluate the impact such models have had on the distribution of resources between institutions or sub-units within institutions.

The Council expects the consultancy to report in mid-1996 and will decide after the completion of that stage what further work it might undertake or what advice it might provide.

Ongoing Responsibilities

During 1996 the Council will continue work on the references outlined above as well as its ongoing responsibilities. These include participation in the annual profiles process and reporting on the operation of the educational profiles as well as on the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

Schools Council

Role and Responsibilities

The Schools Council provides information and advice to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training on national issues relating to primary and secondary school education including:

- the general development of primary and secondary education;
- identification of priority needs of schools;
- the funding, planning and implementation of programs to meet these needs; and
- the granting of Commonwealth financial assistance for school systems and schools.

In carrying out its role the Schools Council gives consideration to such matters as:

- the need to improve educational opportunities for, and to raise the general levels of attainment of, students in both government and non-government schools;
- the requirements of schools serving students with various forms of social disadvantage;
- the relationship between schools and the other sectors of education, and between schools and industry; and
- the need to improve public accountability in relation to students' educational outcomes.

The Council promotes community support for school education and advises on the cost-effective application of public resources for schooling. In addition to providing information or advice as requested by the Minister or the National Board, the Schools Council may initiate research and policy advice on other matters consistent with its functions. The Council may also stimulate and encourage public and private interest in, and support for, improvements in primary and secondary education and in schools and school systems.

Strategic Priorities during 1994 and 1995

During 1994 and 1995 the Schools Council undertook research and consultation and prepared policy advice in the following areas:

- the vocational preparation of senior secondary students;
- students' decision-making about careers and their views of Australia's economic future;
- students' educational outcomes;
- resources for primary schools;
- the impact of information and communication technology in schools; and
- science and technology.

The Vocational Preparation of Senior Secondary Students

During 1994 the Council developed advice in response to a Ministerial reference on how effectively schools are providing for the broader range of purposes now served by upper secondary education.

In preparing its advice the Schools Council commissioned:

- a report on vocational education arrangements for senior school students in a number of European countries (*Education and Training for 16–18-year-olds: Some Reflections from Europe*); and
- a report which detailed an analysis of the senior secondary curriculum and assessment and certification processes across Australia (*Post-compulsory Education and Training Arrangements in the Australian States and Territories*).

In addition, the Council prepared a discussion paper, *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students: Discussion Paper* which it used as a basis for extensive consultation with key stakeholders: schools, employers, employer organisations, State and Territory education and vocational education training authorities, academics, universities, parents' organisations, unions and TAFE personnel.

The Council's advice on *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students: Final Report* was tabled in Parliament on 8 December 1994.

The final report makes the general observation that there is a national effort being made at the school level to cater constructively for students who stay on to Year 12 and that this trend must be encouraged to ensure that overall levels of attainment in upper secondary schooling are raised. However, the Council identified a number of systemic problems which currently act as

constraints on schools. The report made the following specific recommendations to address these problems:

Structural problems relating to the vocational preparation of senior students in schools:

- the establishment in each State of a single accreditation body; and
- the establishment in each State of a single Year 12 Certificate which includes:
 - State credentials relating to general education and university entrance, and
 - national vocational qualifications.

Curriculum problems:

- the adaptation of national vocational modules for schools; and
- securing a national agreement on a reduced number of broadly defined industry contexts which could form the basis for individualised students' 'programs'.

The need to support schools:

- schools to be provided with access to Commonwealth/Australian National Training Authority funds to increase their capacity to deliver structured pathways and vocational qualifications.

The need to support students:

- Commonwealth to ensure no students denied access to vocational programs because of inability to pay for courses;
- Commonwealth to provide sufficient TAFE places for all successful Year 12 school leavers who wish to proceed; and
- grants for school-to-work literacy programs.

Monitoring progress:

- educational outcomes by social group and geographic region to be monitored in order to target groups and areas where participation rates and attainment levels need to be strengthened.

The Council prepared *Compendium of Good Practice: The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary Students* to accompany the report. The *Compendium* documents some of the encouraging developments that are occurring across Australia in schools and in their partnerships with vocational education and training providers.

Since the release of the final report the Council has presented the findings from its work on the vocational preparation of students in a wide range of

forums, including as part of the National Professional Development Program on 'Implementing Vocational Education in Schools'.

Students' Decision-making about Careers and Their Views of Australia's Economic Future

The Council developed advice in response to a Ministerial reference on student decision-making about careers and their views of Australia's economic future. The Council commissioned three projects on this issue:

- a literature review to identify factors that contribute to student decision-making about careers (report in press);
- a project to monitor young people's attitudes towards careers options, the factors influencing their decision-making and their views of Australia (report in press); and
- an overview report, *Charting a Course: Students' Views of Their Future* (October 1995) that incorporated previous work and set out recommendations for follow-up action.

The above commissioned work was used by the Council in preparing its formal advice. The advice, *Students' Attitudes towards Careers and Post-school Options for Education, Training and Employment* was forwarded to the Minister in December 1995. As the report was not able to be tabled during the last Parliamentary sitting for 1995, the Minister agreed on 19 January 1996 for its release to allow for public discussion. The report recommends that:

- the State-level statutory Boards of Studies advise on the ways in which senior secondary students could be assisted to plan their studies on the basis of coherent programs of related subjects;
- a research project be funded to identify the common elements of the curriculum that students in Years 7–10 need to maintain in order to keep their post-school educational options open;
- attention be paid to the early detection and remediation of learning difficulties among secondary school students and that specialist intervention be provided during the senior secondary years to improve student attainment levels for students in the lowest bands of performance;
- funds be provided for school–industry programs in schools that meet the requirements for delivering levels 1 to 3 of the Australian Vocational Training System; and
- an integrated program of employment preparation services be established to deliver customised advice to students on post-school employment, education and training options, as well as information about community services.

Students' Educational Outcomes

Another priority for the Council during 1994 and 1995 was the investigation of the ways in which educational outcomes can be more effectively monitored on a nationally consistent basis.

The following work was commissioned by the Council on educational outcomes:

- *The Elements of Successful Student Outcomes—Views from Upper Primary Classroom Teachers* (December 1995), which is based on a survey of upper primary teachers and focuses on the elements that enhance learning outcomes for students at this level. The report recognised the importance of:
 - school culture, organisation and leadership, including physical facilities and resources,
 - home and parental support and involving parents in the learning process,
 - curriculum, assessment and reporting mechanisms on student learning outcomes, and
 - ongoing professional development on teacher motivations and commitment; and
- *Where Do they Go? An Evaluation of Sources of Data Used for the Monitoring of Student Destinations and Other Educational Outcomes in Australia* (October 1995), which presents an analysis of data used for the monitoring of educational outcomes of students in Australia.

In addition, the issue of improving accountability for outcomes for Aboriginal students has been a feature of work in this area. In April 1995 the Council published *Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Students*, which concluded that schools are generally still not successfully recognising or meeting the needs of urban Aboriginal students. The Council believes that, if schools are to provide the environment, curriculum and resources to develop the sense of Aboriginal identity—a precondition for Aboriginal students' educational attainment—further research and professional development of teachers on the educational needs of indigenous students is required.

Resources for Primary Schools

A continuing priority for the Council is an examination of the adequacy of the level of recurrent and capital funding available to existing schools and the regulations relating to the funding of new schools. The Council also focused on the mechanisms for accounting for Commonwealth expenditure on schools during 1995. The Schools Council supports additional resources for primary schooling and promotes the development of national policies on monitoring school resource agreements, particularly in relation to monitoring and reporting on students' educational attainment.

As an extension of the Department of Employment, Education and Training review of the level of recurrent funding of government primary schools, the Council prepared advice to the Minister on a series of desirable models for the Commonwealth funding of primary schools. After considerable consultation, the Council produced the report *Resources and Accountability: Commonwealth Funding Scenarios for Government Primary Schools 1996–2000* (August 1995). This report outlined three scenarios, all of which assume an increase in funding to government primary schools between 1996 and 2000, accompanied by suggestions for improved accountability arrangements and literacy outcomes. The three scenarios were as follows:

- a Collaborative Funding Committee involving the Commonwealth, States and Territories through the Council of Australian Governments, to be established for allocating resources to schools to determine overall resource levels, and to design allocative mechanisms and relative funding;
- Commonwealth school resources to be transferred into Financial Assistance Grants allocated as part of the States' and Territories' block grant to improve financial accountability arrangements; and
- existing funding arrangements to be maintained with an increase in the Commonwealth's contribution.

An accompanying volume, *Review of the Level of Commonwealth Government Recurrent Funding to Government Primary Schools: Report on the Consultations*, recorded the outcomes of the consultations and reported on views expressed in the submissions.

The Impact of Information and Communication Technology in Schools

In 1995 the Schools Council initiated a project to explore the nature and extent of student access to controversial material on communications networks such as the Internet.

The Centre for International Research on Communication and Information Technologies was commissioned to prepare a report based on surveys of schools and consultations with key education stakeholders, network providers and support agencies. The report, *Management of Student Access to Controversial Material on the Internet* (in press), found that this is not yet being considered a particularly urgent issue for schools as access to communication networks themselves is not widespread at this time. The report recommended that the Council:

- continue to review the management of student access to electronic networks; and
- focus on the wider issues relating to the establishment, use and the management in schools of the networks themselves.

The Council will undertake further investigation into these issues in 1996 with a view to producing a Guide for Schools to assist school communities in the establishment, use and management of electronic networks.

Science and Technology

In response to an issue of continuing concern to educators in 1994 the Schools Council commissioned an action plan for developing closer links between schools and industry with the object of promoting the awareness of careers in science and technology-related occupations.

The report, *Action Plan to Develop Industry/Schools Partnerships in Science and Technology* (January 1996), outlined the benefits of forming school–industry links and partnerships; set out a strategy for forming school–industry links and partnerships; and listed active industry–education links in science and technology.

Future Workplan

The Future of Schools in the Knowledge Society

In August 1995 the Minister requested that the Schools Council examine the impact of new technology on schooling in the 21st century. Besides addressing issues relating to the broader role of schools in the *knowledge society* and the impact of globalisation on the structure and purpose of school education, the project seeks to determine:

- the nature and purpose of Australian education services in the *knowledge society* of the 21st century and whether schools will remain the major institutional provider of education services for young people, including a range of options for restructuring education and training;
- the impact of technological change and other external pressures on curriculum design, professional development of teachers, school organisation, teaching methods and student learning; and
- the changing role of parents, business and the wider community in the delivery of education services.

Interim advice was to be prepared by December 1995 with final advice due by December 1996.

In developing the interim advice the Schools Council commissioned six discussion papers on :

- trends in expenditure on schools;
- structure of educational provision;
- curriculum design and content;
- role of learning technology;
- structures and school organisation; and
- requirements for renewal of teachers.

These papers formed the basis for seminars which were conducted in November 1995. Interim advice was provided to the Minister in December 1995.

As the final advice has been requested by December 1996 this reference will be the major focus of the Council's work program in 1996.

Relevant activities planned for 1996 include a national consultation process targeted especially to parents and the business community, and a conference to provide opportunities for public debate of the issues generated by the reference.

Effective School Management

During 1995 the Council instigated a project to design and conduct workshops for school principals and their leadership teams (including parents) on modern approaches to management in schools, such as Total Quality Management. The Council commissioned the Australian Principals Association Professional Development Council to manage the project and contracted the Centre for Industry Consulting at Swinburne University of

Technology to liaise with key stakeholders, examine appropriate material such as competency standards relevant to management/leadership and to develop a format for and undertake the workshops.

The Council ultimately plans to develop a management/leadership resource kit for schools that wish to embark on organisational change and that could be used in the induction of newly appointed principals.

Establishment, Use and Management of Electronic Networks in Schools

As mentioned above, following on from the project on Student Access to Controversial Material on the Internet, the Council plans to commission a consultant to investigate the establishment, use and management of electronic networks in schools. This will include an examination of issues such as the ways in which access to the Internet can support quality student learning, the professional development of teachers, ways of getting the resources to provide Internet access to schools, and ways of maximising the educational benefits arising from the use of the technology. The product from this study will be a guide for schools on the establishment, use and management of electronic networks.

Publications of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training

Advice on Commonwealth General Recurrent Funding Arrangements: The Future of Resource Agreements A report by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	November 1988
Workshop on Skills in Australian Industry (20–22 November 1988, Report of Proceedings)	December 1988
Higher Education Council First Report to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training on the Operation of Section 14 of the <i>Higher Education Funding Act 1988</i> and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme	February 1989
A Review of the Commonwealth Postgraduate Awards Scheme: A report by the Australian Research Council	April 1989
Industry Training in Australia—The Need for Change: Interim Report on Consultations by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council.	May 1989
Attachments D and F (revised)	November 1989
Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training on a Reference on Extension of University Status to Three Queensland Institutions: Advice from the Higher Education Council through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989
Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training of the Schools Council on Strengthening the Disadvantaged Schools Program: Advice on Strategies for Increasing School Retention in Disadvantaged Communities through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989
Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training of the Employment and Skills Formation Council on Proposed Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) Advisory Arrangements through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989
Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training of the Higher Education Council on Funding for the 1989–1991 Triennium through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989

Schools Council Report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training on National Goals for Schooling: Report on Consultations on the AEC Draft Statement through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989
Schools Council Response to Australian Education Council (AEC) Draft Statement on National Goals for Schooling through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	May 1989
Award Restructuring: Implications for Skill Formation and Training A report by L Carmichael for the Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	June 1989
Review of Australian Graduate Studies and Higher Degrees: Initial Report by the Higher Education Council	July 1989
Course Length and Nomenclature: A National Framework A Discussion Paper of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	August 1989
Credit Transfer: A Discussion Paper of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	August 1989
Guidelines on Women and Award Restructuring: A Report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	August 1989
New Face of TAFE: Workshop on Industry–TAFE Collaboration (9–10 October 1989, Report of Proceedings)	October 1989
Second Report of the Higher Education Council to the National Board of Employment, Education and Training on the Operation of Section 14 of the <i>Higher Education Funding Act 1988</i> and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme	October 1989
Career Progression for Outstanding Australian Researchers: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training in response to the Minister's reference on career structures for researchers	November 1989
On the Public Funding of Research: A Report by the Australian Research Council through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1989
Report of the Higher Education Council on Higher Education Planning for 1992 through the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1989
National Board of Employment, Education and Training Annual Report 1988–89	November 1989
Seminar on Teacher Quality and Career Development (Canberra, 10–11 July 1989) A Report prepared by the Schools Council	November 1989

Teacher Quality: An Issues Paper prepared by the Schools Council for the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	November 1989
Public Responses to the Issues on Teacher Quality: A Report Prepared by the Schools Council for the National Board of Employment, Education and Training	January 1990
A Fair Chance for All: National and Institutional Planning for Equity in Higher Education (released jointly with the Department of Employment, Education and Training)	February 1990
Getting It Right: Schools Serving Disadvantaged Communities (Commissioned Report No. 2): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Schools Council	February 1990
The Recognition of Vocational Training and Learning (Commissioned Report No. 1): A report of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation	February 1990
Advices of the Higher Education Council and the Australian Research Council July 1988–December 1989	March 1990
Advices of the Schools Council July 1988–December 1989	March 1990
Seminar on Credit Transfer, Course Length and Nomenclature and Postgraduate Studies: Summary of Proceedings prepared by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Higher Education Council	March 1990
Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) Advisory Committee Arrangements at State/Local Level: Advice of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training and its Employment and Skills Formation Council	May 1990
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