

B1 Community engagement

The Department undertakes a range of community engagement activities through community consultation processes, stakeholder relations and community partnership programs. The Department's community engagement activities are aligned with the ACT Government's Community Engagement initiative.

Core strategies for community consultation and engagement

Government and non-government schools education councils

Ongoing community consultation concerning public and non-government school education is provided through the operation of two school education councils. Membership on both councils consists of community and education members representing significant stakeholder groups. Each council prepares an annual report for the Minister, which is annexed to this report.

As required under the *Education Act 2004*, the Non-government Education Section of the Department publishes a notice in a daily newspaper of all applications from non-government schools to register a school, an additional educational level or an additional campus. The community is invited to provide written comment to the proposal.

School boards

Each public school has a school board made up of parents and citizens, departmentally appointed and board appointed members, principals, students and staff. The role of school boards includes establishing the strategic direction and priorities for the school and developing relationships between the school and the community.

In response to stakeholder feedback the Department trialled online school board elections in 2009. Results from the trial suggested that the online election process reduced the administrative burden for the schools and enhanced transparency. Online school board elections are an optional alternative for all schools from 2010.

Key stakeholder groups

The Chief Executive and other senior departmental staff meet on a regular basis with the executive of the ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations (P&C Associations), the Australian Education Union, the Catholic Education Office, the Association of Independent Schools and the ACT Principals' Association to discuss key issues and progress on major initiatives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Body

In June 2009, the appointment of nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the newly structured ACT Indigenous Education Consultative Body (IECB) was confirmed, with the first official meeting held in July 2009. The IECB consisted of three community members and six parents. The Department provided secretariat support for the IECB.

In September 2009, the IECB changed its name to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Group. The consultative group met on a monthly basis, since their appointment, to begin the process of developing a plan

for the period 2010 to 2013 coinciding with Council of Australian Government's planning cycles and to establish a consultation strategy plan.

ACT Safe Schools Taskforce

Department, Australian Education Union, P&C Associations, ACT Principals' Association, ACT Policing, Canberra Preschool Society and the Youth Advisory Council. During the reporting period representatives of the Catholic Education Office, the Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools, and the Association of Independent Schools joined the Taskforce.

Key achievements of the Taskforce included strengthening links with ACT Policing, advising on the nature of school safety audits, and reviewing policies that provide guidance and direction to schools in promoting safe school environments.

A working party was established in December 2009 to develop an approach to increasing awareness about cyber bullying and internet safety. A number of proposals are being considered by the Taskforce to support initiatives already underway in schools.

Major community consultations

A number of specific community consultations were undertaken in this reporting period. Of most significance was consultation on:

- the Australian Early Development Index
- the Review of Special Education Provision in the ACT
- proposals to change the school leaving age
- design of new schools and projects funded under the Australian Government's Building the Education Revolution program
- a range of vocational education and training initiatives.

Australian Early Development Index

The Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments as a national progress measure of early childhood development.

In the ACT, a coordinator was funded by the Commonwealth to assist with the data collection throughout 2009. Data was released in December 2009, and informed communities about children's development in local areas. Following the publication of the data, the coordinator assisted with the dissemination of information and community engagement with the data.

The ACT AEDI coordinator completed the first round of community meetings in February and March 2010. Most key stakeholders in each ACT region participated and engagement around the AEDI results was high. Discussions enabled links to be made across representatives of different networks. Some participants indicated they would use the AEDI results to further existing or planned initiatives. Many of the participants offered to be AEDI Champions for children and take active roles in the next phase of community engagement and action.

The knowledge of people working in each of the regions contributed to a greater appreciation of what the AEDI results might mean and augured well for more targeted examination of the results in workshops planned for the second half of 2010 by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). The AEDI was transferred from the Department to DHCS on 24 May 2010. This transfer will allow DHCS to progress the initiative to engage communities in relation to the AEDI data and the recruitment of local champions to work with

regional community groups and service providers in supporting early childhood initiatives.

Line area	Project	Consultation process	Group and individuals consulted	Approximate numbers consulted	Outcome
Learning and Teaching Branch	Australian Early Development Index	Community information meetings with key stakeholders	Non-government agencies; Principals, staff and teachers; AEDI committee	64	Workshops to be planned for the second half of 2010 for targeted examination of results Participants offering to be AEDI Champions for children

Review of special education provision

The Department conducted a review of special education provision, initially for public schools and extended, in June 2009, to include non-government schools. The objective was to review leading practice in curriculum and pedagogy for the range of students with disabilities. The review team was chaired by Professor Tony Shaddock (University of Canberra) and included Dr Loretta Giorcelli, Dr Michael Arthur Kelly, Ms Julie Hook and Ms Nancy MacDonald.

The main period for community and stakeholder consultation occurred in 2008-09. Consultation on the draft report continued in 2009-10 with the Department's Disability Education Reference Group. Membership of the reference group included representatives of the P&C Associations, the University of Canberra, the Australian Association of Special Education and specific disability groups.

The review was completed on time, with the report being provided to the Minister in October 2009. The report was included in the ACT Government's submission to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs Inquiry into the Needs of Students with a Disability.

A draft Disability Education Strategic Plan is currently being developed

Line area	Project	Consultation process	Group and individuals consulted	Approximate numbers consulted	Outcome
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Student Support Branch	Review of Special Education Services	Two meetings with the Disability Education Reference Group were held during the reporting period	Disability Education Reference Group	10	Report provided to the Minister in October 2009

Engaging young people in education and training options

The ACT has committed to three key reforms under the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions:

- introducing an ACT Youth Commitment initiative
- reviewing structured workplace learning to ensure it is embedded in school practices
- enabling the implementation of vocational education and training-based learning in alternative programs such as CCCares and the Connect10 program.

The design of these reforms and the ACT Implementation Plan for the National Partnership was informed by a reference group of key stakeholders involved directly in education and also those associated with the support of young people in the ACT.

The Department conducted broader consultation with key stakeholders in the development of the Youth Commitment initiative. A major stakeholder forum, held on 29 October 2009, was an opportunity for the Department to seek meaningful feedback and engage in genuine consultation around the development of the Youth Commitment. In 2010 the Department established the Youth Commitment Steering Group to continue to guide the initiative's implementation.

The ACT Youth Commitment will establish a new set of expectations for ACT schools and the community regarding young people's experience in schooling and transitions onto further education, training and work.

Line area	Project	Consultation process	Groups/individuals consulted	Approximate number consulted	Outcome
Training and Tertiary Education Branch	Engaging Young People in Education and Training Options	Stakeholder forum	Young people; parents and carers; education providers; principals; teachers; counsellors and career advisers; employers; registered training organisations; Canberra Institute of Technology	31 consultations were held with varying attendance at each	Informed the design and planning of the ACT Youth Commitment

Vocational and education training (VET) community consultation

The Department continues to consult broadly on VET with business, industry and the community in the ACT.

The Department facilitated consultation to gather comprehensive data and advice on VET in the ACT. These consultations will inform the development of an ACT Annual VET Priorities 2010, which will be published later in 2010. The publication will detail the VET priority industries, occupations and qualifications identified by the Department.

Line area	Project	Consultation process	Groups/ individuals consulted	Approximate number consulted	Outcome
Training and Tertiary Education Branch	VET industry, stakeholder and community consultation	Let's Talk VET Professional Development Forum held 21 to 22 April 2010	ACT and interstate Registered Training Organisations; Group Training Organisations; Australian Apprenticeship Centres; Employers; ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry; National Industry Skills Councils; Australian Council of Private Education and Training; ACT Association of Providers of Training Services; Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations	200	Session discussions integrated into strategic planning and policy development in the tertiary education sector. Professional development provided in e-learning, workforce planning, job pathways and accessing ACT and Australian Government skills initiatives

Urambi primary school

Consultation on the future of Urambi Primary School closed on 7 August 2009 and was undertaken in accordance with the Education Act 2004. The outcome of the consultation was considered by Cabinet on 26 October 2009. The Minister announced the Government's decision to close Urambi Primary School at the end of the 2010 school year.

School capital works

In the reporting period, consultation continued with stakeholders on the designs for a number of new schools and on the projects funded under the Australian Government's Building the Education Revolution (BER) program.

Consultation on the design of the new P-10 school in Kambah was concluded, although consultations continued with the Urambi Primary School community on the design for the new environmental centre funded under the BER initiative, including a master plan review and approvals for the preliminary and final sketch plans. On 29 October 2009 the Minister for Education turned the first sod to officially commence construction of the state of the art P-10 school in Kambah.

Discussions on specific school capital improvement projects and repairs and maintenance tasks also occurred to determine the preferences of school communities and options to resolve any identified problems. Discussions with local residents occurred where concerns with a project were raised.

Area	Project	Consultation process	Groups/individuals consulted	Approximate number consulted	Outcome
Schools Capital Works Branch	P-10 school in Kambah	Meetings and community presentations	Urambi School community; prospective students and their families; Cabinet in the Community	Varied between meetings and presentation sessions	Presentation of school designs
	Harrison Secondary School	Meetings and community presentations	Design Working Group (representatives from education community, union special interest groups); Gungahlin Community Council; Harrison School community; Cabinet in the Community	22 members in Design Working Group numbers varied between meetings and presentation sessions	Finalisation of secondary school designs on 22 July 2009
	Gungahlin College	Meetings and community presentations	Gungahlin Community Council; Cabinet in the Community	Numbers varied between meetings and presentation sessions	Consultation concluded with presentation of the college designs
	Building the Education Revolution	Meetings	School communities; school principals and staff; school boards; P&C Associations; Cabinet in the Community	All ACT public schools	Designs for 84 National School Pride projects and 68 Primary Schools for the 21st Century projects

Community partnership programs

School – community partnerships

Community-based partnerships are important for the social and economic sustainability of the ACT. Partnerships between schools and community groups

and businesses help schools to respond effectively to the educational needs of, and opportunities presented by, school communities.

The Department has a number of specific partnership programs with ACT community groups and leaders in support of public education. These include ACT Children's Week, the Returned and Services League of Australia (Woden Valley Sub-Branch Incorporated), the United Nations, School Volunteer Program ACT Incorporated and the Australian Business Community Network.

An important initiative in the reporting year was the inauguration of the national Schools First Awards. The program, sponsored by National Australia Bank in collaboration with the Foundation for Young Australians and Australian Council for Educational Research, encourages schools to partner with the community. Two ACT public schools, Black Mountain School and Canberra College, received \$50,000 Local Impact Awards recognising outstanding community contributions. Canberra College was also awarded the first Schools First National Impact Award of \$750,000 for their CCCares program.

The Department also enters into community sponsorship. Refer to section C15 of this report for more details.

Social media

In mid-2009, the Department established a Facebook page, ACT Public Schools, to provide an additional access point for community information. Engagement with the Department's Facebook page enables interested members of the public to join the group and therefore receive regular updates on public school programs, services and initiatives. Interest in the Facebook page has been increasing both from interstate and the ACT community. Since its inception, 363 people nominated the ACT Public Schools Facebook page as part of their social network.

VET partnership programs

The Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership, signed between the Australian Government and all states and territories in July 2009, challenges the ACT to maximise engagement, attainment and successful transitions, and to implement reforms in the areas of multiple learning pathways, career development and mentoring. To achieve these goals, partnerships (with employers and business, with the community sector and parents, and across all sectors of education) will be important to maximise outcomes.

Vocational learning is a key part of the strategy to engage and retain young people in education and training. ACT schools work positively with other registered training organisations, the Canberra Institute of Technology, and with ACT business and industry to provide the range of authentic learning opportunities that young people need to identify the relevance of educational programs and establish meaningful pathways through school and onto further education, training and employment.

Partnership brokers

Two new programs supporting the Youth and Transitions National Partnership were tendered by the Australian Government in 2009: Youth Connections, and School Business Community Partnership Brokers.

The preferred tenders were announced in December 2009. The preferred tender for the School Business Community Partnership Brokers in the ACT is the ACT and

Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the preferred tender for the Youth Connections program is Anglicare.

The School Business Community Partnership Brokers (Partnership Brokers) program will improve community and business engagement with schools to extend learning beyond the classroom, increase student engagement, deepen learning experiences, lift attainment and improve educational outcomes.

Youth Connections will provide an improved safety net for youth at risk through the provision of tailored case management and support to help young people reconnect with education or training and build resilience, skills and attributes that promote positive choices and wellbeing.

Canberra Careers Market

During August 2009, the Canberra Careers Market was convened with over 8,000 young people and career changers attending.

The Canberra Careers Market has been in operation for over 20 years and is led by a strong partnership between the Department and the Rotary Club of Canberra City.

Complaints resolution

The Department is committed to fostering positive stakeholder relationships and outcomes. This is underpinned by a culture of accountability, transparency and continuous improvement in client service delivery.

Positive resolution of issues and concerns at the local level is encouraged, however, the Department acknowledges that not all concerns and complaints are able to be resolved informally.

Where a formal complaint is made it is handled under the provisions of the Complaints Resolution policy. This includes information about timeframes, processes, and a complainant's right to ask for a review of the response received if they are not satisfied.

Complaints concerning child abuse and neglect are referred to the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support within the ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

New Community Liaison Section

In April 2010, the Department established the Community Liaison Section to address complaints and concerns received from the community and to ensure a consistent approach is applied to complaints management across the Department. The Community Liaison Section has a complaints information officer and all schools and branches of the Department have a designated complaints' officer.

The Community Liaison Section collects and analyses data and makes recommendations for improvement to policies and service delivery.

The Complaints Resolution policy is available at all public schools and on the Department's website under publications and policies.

The policy will be updated and reviewed during the next reporting period.

Other complaints avenues

The Department may, under a range of administrative law provisions, receive complaints through external complaints agencies.

The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994* (see Section C3) contains provisions for reporting wrongdoing in the ACT Public Service.

Formal complaints statistics

Table B1.1: Complaints data, 2009-10

Complainant	Communication	Discrimination/harassment	Personal conduct	Policy and procedures	Service provisions	Other	Total
Parent/carer	1	5	7	7	2	2	24
Community member	0	0	1	1	0	1	3
Students	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	5	8	8	2	3	27

Source: Department of Education and Training, unpublished

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