

SACE Strategic Plan Feedback - SAASSO

Part A – Comment on Strategic Plan

Please provide any general comments or feedback about the Strategic Plan:

The priorities of the Strategic Plan are admirable and ambitious.

In particular, the plan addresses challenges identified by the recent OECD report on the assessment and evaluation of Australia's education system. The Strategic Plan includes key areas of concern such as teacher assessment skills and alignment of SACE and the new national curriculum.

The 'innovation and relevance' and 'professional capacity' sections are particularly appropriate.

Please provide any feedback on specific elements of the plan:

"Defining clear and rigorous assessment standards" – much parent (and community) feedback centres on concerns of SACE being 'dumbed-down'. These concerns have been expressed for several years and to date, parents feel the response from the government and education authorities has been to dismiss their concerns. This has also been supported by student claims of weak aspects to the new SACE.

The concept of the new SACE – to provide a more flexible system is laudable, but it is vital our key assessment measure does not allow our children (especially those at risk) to slip through without attaining the minimum standards necessary for work and life.

Please comment if there are gaps and/or strategic considerations that should be strengthened further:

Community Engagement: The Strategic Plan focuses significant attention on building and strengthening relationships within the education sector – the school sectors, universities, training providers, the federal education authorities and international communities – however, there is scant mention of employers and no mention of parents.

Community confidence is listed as a 'success indicator' – there is growing community sentiment, questioning the standards of the new SACE, yet there is little in the Strategic Plan to address this problem. Eroding confidence will hurt those students who do not continue to further study, instead seeking to enter the workforce. What do our small business owners think of the new SACE and what standards are they looking for?

Parent Engagement: There is no mention of developing relationships with parents. Feedback to SAASSO is that there is little consultation with parents following the sign-off of the original SACE plan. Parents are concerned at the lack of review of whether their children are on the right pathway.

Pathway Guidance: There is concern of a skill gap in pathway counselling for students. This is not necessarily an area a physics, history or art teacher would be expert in, yet it is falling to them to provide this assistance. It is not appropriate to simply place another level of responsibility on to teachers. All schools need dedicated specialists in this area to work with students and parents.

Basic Skills: NAPLAN and international studies reveal a continued slide in South Australia's basic skill standards. Even universities express concern about this problem in their students. This is an across-the-board issue, requiring action from all levels; including the SACE Board. Given the dramatic impact of basic skills on a child's potential (particularly those most at risk), more must be done by SACE to ensure all students meet minimum skill levels.

Students have suggested dropping the 'research project', or making it optional in favour of an additional subject. There is merit in this. Parents have suggested dropping or scaling back this 'project' in favour of a basic skill program.

Please comment here if there are strategic considerations that have been given too much emphasis in the draft plan:

There is strong emphasis on 'engaging' the education sector, while only 'providing' information to parents and the rest of the community; risking the development of an insular perspective. Currently, the most common comments about the SACE involve it being dumbed-down and student criticism of projects.

Less internal focus in favour of increased community engagement will improve the Board's understanding of community concerns and generate community confidence.

Part B – Priorities for 2012

What should be the top priorities for the SACE and/or the SACE Board over the next year (i.e. what should we be focussing on in 2012)?

1. How to ensure basic skill levels in students – particularly those most at risk.
2. Improved understanding of parent concerns. SAASSO suggests a face-to-face forum with the SACE Board and parents, to hear concerns and perhaps confusion about the new SACE. SAASSO would be keen to work with the Board to facilitate this forum.
3. The Board interact with employers missed by existing consultation channels. Community concerns of a 'dumbed-down' SACE ultimately impacts on those children most at-risk when they seek employment. There are strong links within the education sector and traditional stakeholders, but our children require the wider community to have faith in their school certificate.