

Strategic Plan
For the
DCO Education Program
2009-2017

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DCO EDUCATION PROGRAM 2009 - 2017

Purpose

1. The purpose of this document is to outline the strategic plan for the DCO Education Program from 2009 to 2017.
2. The key objectives for this strategic plan have been developed in a tiered approach cognisant of the fact that the issues surrounding education are multi faceted and require management from several perspectives.

Mission

3. DCO is to establish the conditions upon which Defence Families and the Defence Community can achieve self reliance.

Vision – 2017

4. The vision for the DCO Education Program from 2009 to 2017 is that:
 - a. Defence families are fully engaged in the education of their children;
 - b. the education community;
 - (1) values the contribution of ADF families, and
 - (2) is trained and resourced appropriately to support the needs of ADF children, and;
 - c. all educational initiatives are based on research and feedback from stakeholders, and are trialled and evaluated prior to dissemination.

DCO Strategic Goals

5. In accordance with the principles of the ADF Family Covenant DCO will develop the following strategies to support ADF families:
 - a. highly developed formal and informal family networks,
 - b. highly developed communication and access channels for specialist services,
 - c. high quality specialist support services, and
 - d. understanding and acceptance of the obligations and opportunities for Defence families in being self reliant.
- 6.. The DCO Education Program is to establish the conditions upon which Defence families and Education systems support the educational, emotional and social needs of mobile ADF students in order to:
 - a. Reduce the effects of dislocation experienced by changing schools by assisting children to integrate into new school / community as smoothly and quickly as possible;

- b. Reduce the effects and impact of absence from home;
- c. Improve the self reliance of ADF children within the school system; and
- d. Improve the long-term educational outcomes for ADF children.

Strategic Goals

7. Goal 1 - Reduce the effects of dislocation experienced by changing schools by assisting children to integrate into new school / community as smoothly and quickly as possible:

a. Strategy 1 - DSTA Program activities:

(1) Actions:

- (a) Develop and promote welcoming and farewelling rituals for Defence students at schools.
- (b) Celebrate days of military significance such as Anzac and Remembrance Days.
- (c) Development of booklet of ideas for schools on celebrating days of military significance.

b. Strategy 2 - Development of resources:

(2) Actions:

- (a) Develop Teacher Resource Books with DVDs.
- (b) Develop students' books.
- (c) REDLO and MEPSN present awareness raising workshops on the impact of mobility and absence from home.
- (d) Celebrating Defence Kids Month – May 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2017.
- (e) Create research partnerships to ensure initiatives on reducing potential negative effect on children's educational progress are evidenced based.

c. Strategy 3 - Develop research options:

(3) Actions:

- (a) Contribute to the development of questions for inclusion in the Defence Family Survey and Defence Census.
- (b) Engage in research with QUT.
- (c) Identify and develop partnerships with universities/centres with whom to undertake research.

(d) MEPSN and REDLOs conduct informal research.

8. **Goal 2 - Reduce the effects and impact of absence from home:**

a. **Strategy 1 - Develop and deliver programs:**

(1) **Actions:**

- (a) Produce and deliver 'On the Road Again' workshops for students and parents to support youth to manage challenges of mobility.
- (b) Produce and conduct MEDALS (Managing Emotions during Absence and Learning Skills) program for students and parents.
- (c) Develop absence from home resources specifically for students and parents.

b. **Strategy 2 - Develop strategies to assist in the management of observable changes in students' academic performance and behaviour during member's absence from home:**

(2) **Actions:**

- (a) Undertake research.
- (b) Work with OzChild or other appropriate agencies to determine appropriate workshops for parents and students.
- (c) DTMs develop ways of assisting young people to link to community organisations /groups.

c. **Strategy 3 - Early childhood initiatives are developed focussing on coping with absence from home and mobility.**

(3) **Actions:**

- (a) 'Going Solo' DVD is disseminated.
- (b) Production of Absence from Home Bears.
- (c) 'Parenting Home and Away' is disseminated.

d. **Strategy 4 - Adolescent initiatives are developed focussing on coping with absence from home and mobility.**

(3) **Actions:**

- (a) DVD to support absence from home is developed.
- (b) DP Builder to support mobility.
- (c) Develop web-based communication.

(d) Promote Travelling Teens.

9. **Goal 3 - Improve the self reliance of ADF children within the school system:**

a. **Strategy 1-** Information is managed effectively.

(1) **Actions:**

- (a) REDLOs provide advice and guidance.
- (b) State/Territory education books are constantly updated.
- (c) Information brochures are constantly updated.
- (d) Web pages are up to date.
- (e) Education information workshops are conducted around Australia.
- (f) Publications are produced as required.

b. **Strategy 2 -** Development of an ongoing communication strategy:

(2) **Actions:**

- (a) Focus on managing the expectations of ADF families with regard to the national educational changes and the limitations.
- (b) Update command and families on national changes in education.
- (c) Engage key stakeholders (DFA, DSNSG, ADF families) to contribute to educational debate.
- (d) Develop ministerial briefs on ongoing educational changes.

c. **Strategy 3 -** Work with government agencies and State/Territory governments

(3) **Actions:**

- (a) Continue ongoing discussions with ACARA and DEEWR on National Curriculum.
- (b) Respond to requests from ACARA for evaluation of curriculum documents.
- (c) Write to State/Territory Education Ministers regarding educational challenges experienced by Defence children for Minister's signature.

10. **Goal 4 – Improve the long term educational outcomes for ADF children:**

a. **Strategy 1 -** Develop research options:

(1) **Actions:**

- (a) Contribute to the development of questions for inclusion in the Defence Family Survey and Defence Census.

- (b) Engage in research with QUT.
 - (c) Identify and develop partnerships with universities/centres with whom to undertake research.
 - (d) MEPSN and REDLOs conduct informal research.
- b. **Strategy 2** - Work with government agencies and State/Territory governments
- (2) **Actions:**
 - (a) Continue ongoing discussions with ACARA and DEEWR on National Curriculum.
 - (b) Respond to requests from ACARA for evaluation of curriculum documents.
 - (c) Write to State/Territory Education Ministers regarding educational challenges experienced by Defence children for Minister's signature.
- c. **Strategy 3** - Development of an ongoing communication strategy:
- (3) **Actions:**
 - (a) Focus on managing the expectations of ADF families with regard to the national educational changes and the limitations.
 - (b) Update command and families on national changes in education.
 - (c) Engage key stakeholders (DFA, DSNSG, ADF families) to contribute to educational debate.
 - (d) Develop ministerial briefs on ongoing educational changes.

Current Environment

10. Given the complexity and working of the Education Program within DCO, background and/or operational level information is provided in several annexes to this strategic plan. Annex A provides detail of the working of the current Education Program within DCO. Annex B provides background information about the Education Program. Annex C identifies key issues confronting Defence families in relation to implementation of a national curriculum and Annex D is a roadmap and Education Timeline 2009-2017.

Conclusion

11. For the period 2009 – 2017, there is no need for any dramatic change to the direction of educational support for ADF families. The actions identified should meet the assumptions outlined in the plan as detailed in annex A.

Annexes:

- A. Current Education Program
- B. Background to education in Defence
- C. Key Education Issues
- D. Education Timeline 2009-2017

Approved/not approved



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Director General Defence Community Organisation

1 13/2010.

CURRENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

1. The **Manager Education Policy and Special Needs (MEPSN)** within DCO contributes to educational debates and forums within the national education arena in relation to educational mobility and, in consultation with **Regional Education Liaison Officers (REDLOs)** actively responds to any proposed educational changes occurring within the States / Territories through Ministerial briefs, organisation updates and written articles in a number of forums.

2. The role of MEPSN or REDLO is not duplicated in any of the educational forums, thereby providing a vital national as well as regional perspective on educational issues, which aligns with the national strategic view of Defence.

3. The REDLOs assist ADF families by -
 - Providing information and advice to enable families to make informed decisions
 - Linking families and students with new communities through school involvement
 - Advocating on behalf of students and their families
 - Assisting families to develop self advocacy skills
 - Encouraging schools to focus on the needs of mobile students
 - Raising the unique requirements of Defence mobile students with District Offices and non-government school systems e.g. funding for special needs students
 - Elevating the issues facing mobile students to state education departments
 - Participating in relevant meetings and working parties e.g. ACARA
 - Supporting the MEPSN role in policy and resource matters
 - Supporting the DSTA/DTM Program
 - Assisting non DSTA/DTM schools with dissemination of relevant resources
 - Supporting Command in matters relating to education
 - Supporting the DCO mission to assist Defence families to achieve self reliance
 - Conduct education (mobility and absence from home) workshops to education departments and non-government systems

4. In 2000, Defence and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) conducted a joint national research program to identify the impact of mobility on educational outcomes. As a result of the preliminary findings of this research, DCO developed and implemented the Defence School Transition Aide Program in 2001. The program was initially developed to focus on the period of transition into and out of a school. However the program has since developed to include absence from home support to both spouses and children through the facilitation of ongoing activities and celebrations that enhance pride in the military and understanding of the military lifestyle

5. **The DSTA program** is designed to provide on the ground face to face support in:
 - Assisting the child and family to integrate into the school and local community
 - Developing self reliance within schools through the DSTA Program and resources developed
 - Mitigating the impact of mobility on learning outcomes

- Assisting with the social and emotional transition to a new school or departing from a school
- Supporting the emotional needs of dependants when a member is absent from home for service reasons
- Assisting the child and family to manage the challenges of mobility through the development of strategies and ideas

Assumptions

6. It is assumed that beyond 2017, the DSTA Program will have been evaluated extensively and based on the outcomes of this evaluation some amendments may be required to reflect the changing demographics both within the Defence environment and the ongoing educational reforms occurring.
7. All educational initiatives are evidence based using extensive research, pilot trials and evaluation prior to any program being produced for use by all.
8. There is no evidence for any dramatic change of direction for educational support.

BACKGROUND TO EDUCATION IN DEFENCE

1 As education is not core business for Defence, ongoing partnerships with relevant agencies ensure that the voice of ADF families is heard, and reinforces the significant impact of mobility and parental absence from home. Significant established ongoing partnerships include:

- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
- Early Childhood Australia (ECA)
- State /Territory Education systems
- Primary and Secondary Principals
- Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA)
- Primary and Secondary Principals' Associations

2. Defence maintains ongoing links with these groups through continually raising the profile of the needs of mobile students. The knowledge base in Defence is recognised and valued by these groups and this is demonstrated by ongoing invitations and requests to participate in research and evaluation opportunities. Defence also provides resource materials that empower schools to become self reliant in the management of mobile students.

Current demographics

3. The ADF census conducted in 2007 identified that 13,354 (40%) of dependants of ADF members were primary school age and 6,546 (19.3%) were in secondary schools.

Future demographics

4 The Defence Personnel Environmental Scan 2025 outlines the key personnel issues facing Australia in general and the implications of these for Defence. Two issues of particular significance within the education area are the under-achieving of boys educationally and the changes to the compulsory school leaving age.

5. Defence families (with boys) often have a male parent away for long periods and the support of extended family networks is of particular relevance to the upbringing of boys. This situation for Defence families can be exacerbated and may result in observable changes in behaviour, decline in academic performance or in some cases anxiety or depression due to a sense of loss or in some cases grieving for the absent parent.

6. As part of the national educational revolution the compulsory school leaving age is expected to rise to 18 years. It is anticipated that the raising of the compulsory school leaving age is likely to place additional pressure on mobile families in relation to educational decision making.

7. Many of the key issues within the education arena are dependent on Commonwealth / State /Territory educational change being effected. These issues are not core business for Defence; however, there are some issues that can be mitigated by maintaining ongoing networks and partnerships with other key stakeholders that provide leverage for Defence in bringing about long term educational change.

KEY EDUCATION ISSUES

1. The current Commonwealth Government has begun what has become known as the 'Education Revolution' that has involved engaging with the State /Territory education systems in a long term change process that involves the development of a National Curriculum. A national curriculum will not resolve the challenges faced by mobile families, therefore urgent attention is required to address the issues detailed below.

Structural non-alignment between State and Territory education systems

2. Structural differences between State and Territory education systems create difficulties for Defence families as their children are required to adjust to different education systems. This issue is complex as a result of varying school starting ages, different transition points into and between primary and secondary school and different names for the early years of education. There are variations in the pre-school and first year of school arrangements across States and Territories as well as the mix of early childhood education and childcare.

Inconsistent age of entry into schooling

3. The inconsistent age of entry into schooling is the cause for many problems when children are relocating across the States and Territories. Many of the families who move frequently may have the experience of their child being placed using the age appropriate criteria with no consideration for the number of years of formal schooling or the academic standard already achieved. Age is frequently the main criterion used to determine the year level placement for the student. This approach is used because some education systems have a policy that students are best placed with peers of the same age.

Differences in the Preparatory year curriculum

4. Queensland and Western Australia follow a play based curriculum for the year of schooling prior to Year 1. Queensland has changed the starting age to 30 June to be more in line with many of the other States but there is still a huge discrepancy compared to other States/Territories in the curriculum being taught. As the first three years of schooling form the foundations for learning, disruption during this time can mean gaps in the child's learning that may not become evident immediately and, in some instances, is not identified until the middle years of school.

5. The learning experiences in a Queensland Preparatory class help children to develop early literacy and numeracy skills. This curriculum then makes it difficult for students who transfer to other States, for example, where the students have been taught to read and write in Kindergarten in New South Wales. Mobile students are then faced with a six month gap either they have covered the work or not – this is the dilemma faced by principals when determining the correct placement.

Inconsistent terminology

6. Different States and Territories use different terminology when referring to early childhood education and to their four and five year old education programs. Five different terms are used – preschool, preparatory, kindergarten, transition and reception. This can be very confusing for parents who do not have an understanding of the different meanings for each of these terms adopted by the States and Territories.

Disconnect in transition points between primary and secondary school

7. The lack of consistency between the transition points from primary to secondary school across the States and Territories affects students who move either in Year 6 or 7. In four States of Australia, Year 7 is in the primary school and in the other remaining States /Territories Year 7 is located in the secondary school. The difficulty of determining the correct placement of a student who completed Year 7 in Queensland (last year of primary school) and moves to NSW where Year 8 is the second year of high school.

Mathematics curriculum

8. The non alignment of the mathematics curriculum and the pedagogy underpinning this may result in many mobile students experiencing gaps in mathematical concepts that may not become evident until the student has moved into secondary school.

Non-acceptance of handwriting styles from other States/Territory

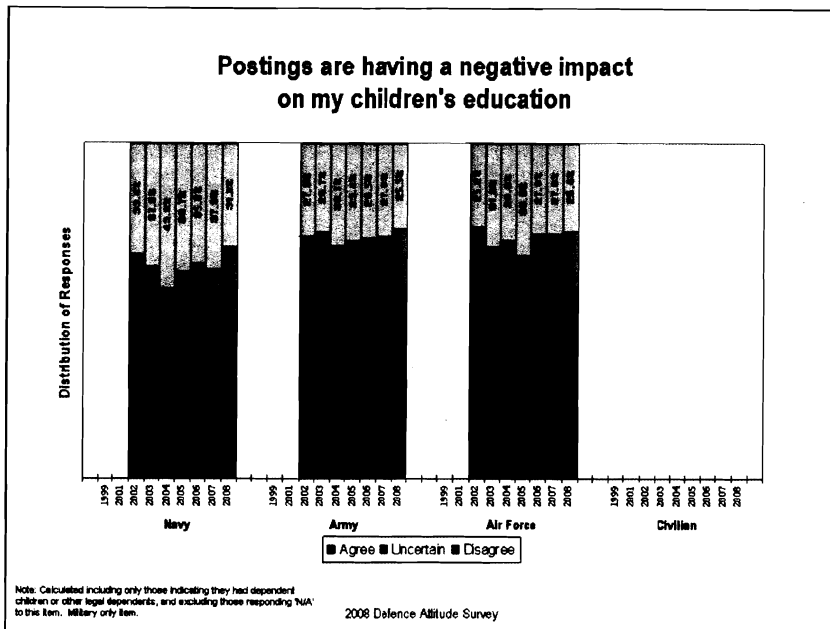
9. In 1989, the Australian Education Council recommended that education systems accept the differences in handwriting for students transferring across borders. This issue is still prevalent across some of the States and Territories as schools insist on students, mainly primary school aged, changing their handwriting style to the one taught in that State even though the student has an established handwriting style. A common handwriting style needs to be included as part of the adoption of a national curriculum.

Subject availability and expectations

10. At Year 12 level, e.g., English can be a compulsory subject which can add 12 months to a student's study if they are required to move at a critical stage. Non-availability of particular subjects is an issue across the states/territories.

Postings have negative impact on children's education

11. The 2008 Defence Attitude Survey (DAS) reports the following: 47% of Navy families reported a negative impact on their children's education; 55% of Army families and 55% of Air Force families also reported a negative impact.



The 2001 DEEWR / Defence research identified that the cumulative effect of moving had been the cause of a negative impact on education.

Children's behaviour when member is absent from home

12. The Families Survey conducted in 2008 sought information from respondents about a number of topics that were pertinent when identifying the observable changes displayed by children when the member is absent from home for service reasons for more than six weeks.

13. One thousand and twenty eight respondents (26.5%) reported a decline in the child's performance at school. Another two hundred and twenty five (6.6%) reported an improvement in school performance.

14. Other issues that were causing additional stress for some families was an increase in the child's refusal to attend school (431 respondents = 11.1%) whilst a further 10.5% (407) reported an increase in violence in some children.

Underachievement of boys

15. Current research has identified that boys nationally underachieve academically. Anecdotally boys in Defence families often struggle both academically and socially. The male being absent from home for lengthy periods of time is a significant factor in the support mechanisms available to boys.

Future direction

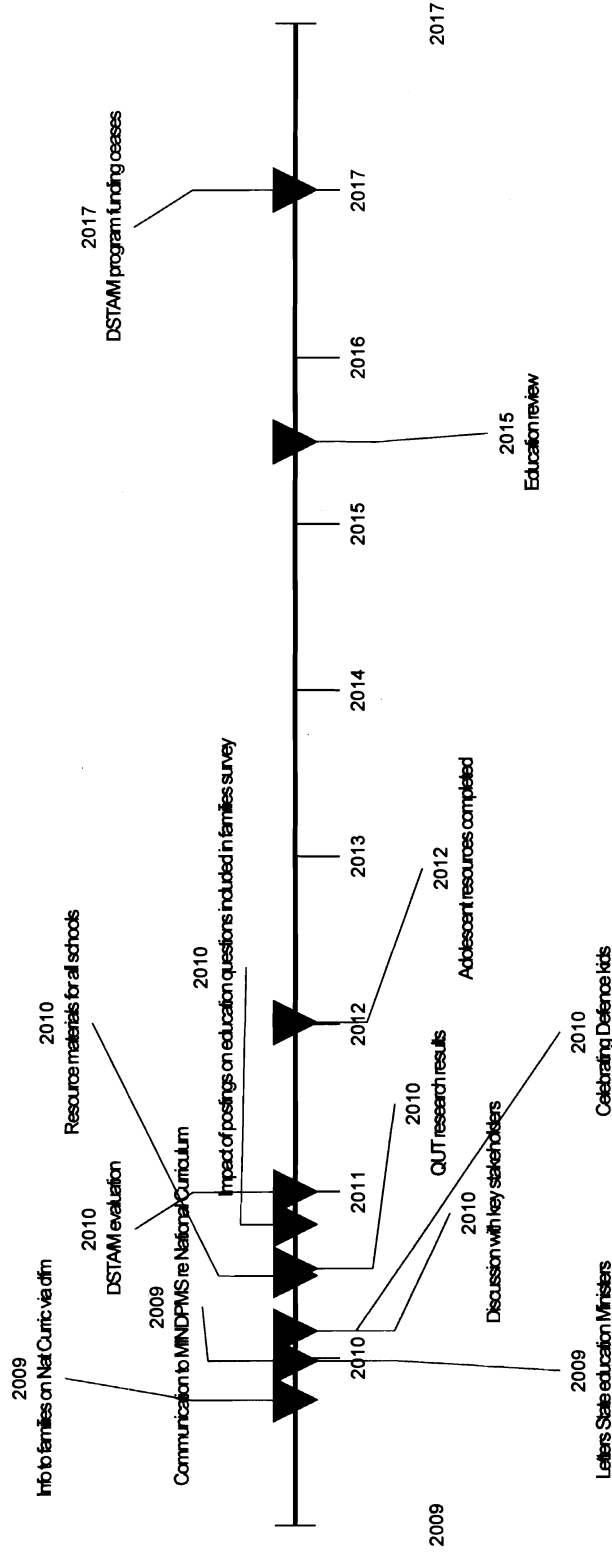
16. Within the context of the 'educational revolution' state and territory governments retain responsibility for their individual education acts. The complexity of education funding across the two jurisdictions continues to impact on mobile Defence families. In addition, ongoing curriculum change and mandatory requirements in post primary education continue to evolve.

17. The education program recognises the challenges of a mobile lifestyle and appreciates that to have significant influence strong partnerships with Government and Non Government agencies – internal and external must be nurtured. This will ensure a credible and strong platform for ongoing discussion is maintained and strengthened.

18. The following key issues represent critical areas that require urgent consideration prior to the introduction of a national curriculum. They are integral to the positive impact of the National Curriculum for all mobile students but particularly for Defence mobile students.

- Structural non alignment
- Inconsistent age and timing of entry into schooling
- Differences in the Preparatory year curriculum
- Inconsistent terminology
- Disconnect in transition points between primary and secondary school
- Mathematics curriculum
- Non-acceptance of handwriting styles from other States/Territory
- Differences in compulsory subjects at senior level

Education Timeline 2009 - 2017



“Human connectedness is the key to resilience, authentic happiness and a sense of well being”.