

2015 NCCD Continuous Quality Improvement Project

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*Australian Government
Department of
Education and
Training on behalf of
the Joint Working
Group to Provide
Advice on Reform for
Students with
Disability*

Quality Assurance Summary Report

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CQIP	Continuous Quality Improvement Project
DDA	<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992</i>
DSE	Disability Standards for Education 2005
EA	education authority
ESA	Education Services Australia NCCD website
FTE	full time equivalent staff member
JWG	Joint Working Group to Provide Advice on Reform for Students with Disability
NCCD	Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia
QDTP	Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice
SRS	Schooling Resource Standard

Executive summary

On 10 May 2013, Education Ministers endorsed the model for a Nationally Consistent Collection of Data for School Students with Disability (NCCD). The NCCD has been designed:

- as a nationally consistent process for collecting data to build an evidence base that will provide teachers, schools and sectors with information regarding students with disability and the level of educational adjustment that is being provided to them
- to reinforce effective practice under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*
- to inform policy development and future planning to better equip schools and education authorities to support students with disability with additional learning needs.

The NCCD provides an opportunity to recognise all students with disability who are being provided with an adjustment to participate in education on the same basis as other students, whether or not they receive targeted funding or support.

All Australian Government, Catholic and independent education authorities (EAs) have progressively implemented the NCCD across schools in Australia from 2013 to 2015 with 2015 marking the first year that all schools participated in the NCCD. It was therefore an opportune time to reflect on the most recent collection and identify areas to further improve the quality and consistency of the NCCD. This is important in informing future policy decisions for students with disability.

On behalf of the Joint Working Group to Provide Advice on Reform for Students with Disability (JWG), the Australian Government Department of Education and Training (the Department) engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (PwC) to undertake the 2015 NCCD Continuous Quality Improvement Project (2015 NCCD CQIP). A core component of the project was to review the quality and consistency of data collected through the 2015 NCCD.

Quality Assurance

There were 407 schools nationally that participated in Quality Assurance of the 2015 NCCD CQIP. This involved the PwC interview team visiting each school and engaging in discussion with nominated staff members to understand:

- how the schools completed the NCCD
- how well the schools understood and applied the NCCD
- what support and training materials were accessed
- what underlying processes were in place to support students with disability.

The majority (**69 per cent**) of participating schools found the NCCD was a positive experience with schools reporting that it acted as a means to acknowledge the support provided to students and helped staff to reflect on the individual needs of the students.

Support and training

All schools were found to have accessed at least one form of support or training resource either prior to or during the completion of the NCCD. The resources that were used most frequently were factsheets/resources provided by the relevant EA, with **80 per cent** of all participating schools accessing this form of support and **76 per cent** of schools rating this resource as useful or very useful. The second most useful form of support was a hotline or key contact available at the EA level. These findings show that schools were seen to rely primarily on resources made available from their EA rather than nationally developed

resources. This emphasises the importance of ensuring that these sector/jurisdiction developed materials are consistent in terms of type and depth of content and further ensuring that EA provided hotlines and support contacts are offering consistent advice.

There was a positive correlation between whether a school understood and applied the NCCD model correctly² and whether they had accessed training and support. For example, those schools that accessed the Education Services Australia NCCD website (ESA website), the University of Canberra Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)/Disability Standards for Education (DSE) modules (or other DDA/DSE training) and face to face training from their respective EA were found to be more confident in their understanding and application of the NCCD model.

The breadth of training, measured by the number of staff members involved in the NCCD who had undergone training specific to both the NCCD and the DDA and DSE, was also found to be positively correlated to a school's overall understanding and application of the model. Those schools that had all staff members attend training were more likely to have been confident in their understanding. These results emphasise the importance of ensuring that all staff members involved in the collection of data and completion of the NCCD have undertaken training specific to the NCCD and the DDA/DSE.

Application of the model

At a national level, we found that a third (**33 per cent**) of participating schools were completely confident in their understanding and application of the NCCD model, with **55 per cent** having some understanding of the model. Only **12 per cent** of all participating schools were assessed to have a limited understanding.

A school was assessed to be confident in the NCCD model if the PwC interview team assessed that they included all students that met the model (and these students only), and if their selection of adjustment levels was deemed in line with the NCCD model's definitions.

Schools that completed the NCCD in 2013 and/or 2014 as well as 2015 were more likely to have a stronger understanding of the model compared to schools that completed the NCCD for the first time in 2015. For those schools that had previously completed the NCCD, **90 per cent** were found to be either confident or have some understanding of the model, compared to **79 per cent** for first time NCCD participants.

There were 1,007 student case studies discussed across all participating schools, with up to five discussed at any one school. The students discussed were selected by the schools, with schools asked to consider a mix of students across various adjustment levels. A student case study consisted of the school describing the student's condition and what support was being provided to that student, and why they chose to classify the student at the selected level of adjustment. The discussion of these case studies informed an assessment by PwC interview team as to whether the school correctly identified the student for inclusion, the appropriate level of adjustment and category of disability, and further whether there was sufficient evidence to include the student. Key findings were:

- Schools were comfortable deciding whether or not to include a student, with the PwC interview team agreeing with the student's inclusion in **94 per cent** of case studies discussed.
- Schools were comfortable classifying the category of disability, with the PwC interview team agreeing with the category of disability selected by the school in **93 per cent** of case studies discussed.

² Schools' understanding and application of the NCCD model was assessed by PwC interview team based on a face-to-face interview with the key individual(s) responsible for completing the NCCD in 2015. The assessment took into account of whether the school correctly identified all students that met the model (and these students only) and the levels of adjustment.

- The evidence provided by schools in **over 79 per cent** of case studies discussed, strongly demonstrated that the adjustment level chosen by the school was appropriate in assessing the individual needs of the student, that it was provided to the student to address their disability, that there was ongoing monitoring and review, that there was consultation/ collaboration with parents/carers and that the adjustment was provided for a minimum of ten weeks or one school term.
- The most difficult part of applying the NCCD model from a school's perspective was determining the adjustment level. The most variance between PwC interview team's assessment of adjustment level versus the schools' occurred at the Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice (QDTP) level of adjustment (**23 per cent** of cases assessed by PwC interview team to be at a higher level of adjustment) and extensive levels of adjustment (**21 per cent** of cases assessed by PwC interview team to be at a lower level of adjustment). There was slightly less variance in adjustment level selected for schools that had previously participated in the NCCD, with variance in **16 per cent** of cases overall compared to **20 per cent** of cases for first year participants.

In the majority of cases, we were able to assess whether, based on discussion with the school, they understood and applied the QDTP level of adjustment correctly. At a national level, it was found that **35 per cent** of schools had a good understanding of QDTP and applied this level of adjustment correctly. However, **28 per cent** of schools were found to have misunderstood the QDTP level of adjustment.

School practices underpinning the NCCD

Key findings around the underlying practices followed at participating schools in terms of communication, collaboration and review are detailed below:

- The school newsletter was the most common means used to communicate the NCCD to the school community (used by **53 per cent** of schools). An opt out/universal opt out (e.g. newsletter) approach to consent was largely used across all participating schools.
- In the process of notifying parents and/or carers, **17 per cent** (71 schools) had instances where parents opted out, leading to these students not being included in the 2015 NCCD despite meeting the model requirements. Overall, a total of **294** students at participating schools were excluded due to a lack of consent, with the largest proportion of students excluded in the independent sector.
- **Over 50 per cent** of participating schools had between one and five staff members involved in the NCCD in 2015. The staff types primarily involved in the NCCD were the principal and disability support coordinator (or equivalent) (in 93 per cent of schools) and classroom teachers (in 89 per cent of schools).
- Only 26 participating schools (**6 per cent**) did not have any review processes in place. The most common forms of review were internal moderation meetings (used by **77 per cent** or 314 schools) and principal review (used by **74 per cent** or 300 schools).

Recommendations from the Quality Assurance

The following recommendations have been developed based on the Quality Assurance findings and are to be implemented where possible. We note that in implementing these recommendations, sectors may require additional support.

Further, should future Quality Assurance process take place, it is recommended it occur immediately after the NCCD to assess the quality of the data, without placing undue burden on schools. This is to maximise the opportunity to interview key school staff involved in the NCCD and their recollection of the NCCD process to further improve the data collected in future years.

Table 1: Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

EAs should distribute fact sheets and resources that are consistent with the nationally available resources and encourage schools to access the national ESA website as the primary source of support in completing the NCCD.

It cannot be guaranteed that tailored fact sheets and resources developed at the sector/jurisdiction level for the 2015 NCCD were consistent in terms of the depth and type of content included. In order to achieve consistency in a national data collection of this kind, it is recommended that schools receive common advice and materials. Given the ESA website has been developed as the national portal of resources, it is recommended that EAs refer schools to this site as the principal form of support.

Recommendation 2

The JWG should develop additional case studies to include as part of the national package of resources to be distributed to schools in hard copies.

In line with schools' recommended areas for improvement to support materials and findings specifically around the QDTP level of adjustment, these additional case studies should be targeted at the following areas:

- more examples of students across year levels
- distinguishing between QDTP and supplementary levels of adjustment using examples of different categories of disability other than physical category of disability
- more case studies about more complex cases, particularly targeting the difference between a learning disability and a learning difficulty and complex social/emotional examples.

Recommendation 3

EAs should provide greater feedback to schools after the completion of the NCCD as to whether or not they have understood and applied the model correctly.

A common point of feedback provided by schools, in particular those that completed the NCCD for the first time in 2015, was that they were unsure if they applied the model correctly and would have welcomed feedback/moderation to consolidate their knowledge and better prepare them for subsequent collections.

It is therefore recommended that all schools receive some form of feedback (which may be formal or informal), informing them as to whether they have understood and applied the NCCD correctly.

Recommendation 4

The support materials provided at the national and EA level should include additional detail on how the data will be used.

Schools requested more information as to whether or not there would be any outcomes associated to the NCCD, and highlighted that there is greater need to better communicate this if there is to be continued engagement with the NCCD.

Recommendation 5

EAs should, where possible require training at the beginning of the school year regarding the NCCD, the DDA and the DSE for the staff member(s) nominated to lead the NCCD.

Training should be required prior to completing the NCCD. As there is a direct correlation between the level of training accessed and a school's understanding and application of the NCCD. This could be delivered, for example, through an e-learning module which is uploaded into the same system schools are using to submit the NCCD, whereby the school is not able to progress to submit their data prior to undertaking the e-learn. Alternatively training could be delivered in a face-to-face workshop setting. It is also recommended that refresher courses/materials be available for schools to account for potential loss of knowledge between years (e.g. due to staff turnover).

Recommendation 6

EAs should encourage schools to undertake internal, cluster and regional training sessions and on both the NCCD and the DDA/DSE which are attended by all staff.

EAs should encourage schools to undertake internal training sessions, given the direct correlation between the breadth of training across staff and the assessment of the school's understanding and application of the model. This would allow for the broader school team to be trained in the fundamentals of the NCCD and the DDA/DSE, and would better position the school in completing the NCCD. It is expected that the broader school team (i.e. principal and classroom teachers are consulted with and involved in the collection of data that feeds into the NCCD).

Recommendation 7

The JWG should provide greater guidance on the purpose of the QDTP level of adjustment and what constitutes 'quality differentiated' teaching.

There is a need to clearly articulate the purpose of the lowest level of adjustment to schools and why it is important to capture students at this level. This will minimise the number of schools under or over counting the number of students at this level. Further, with the change in terminology of the lowest level of adjustment, it is recommended that more guidance be provided on the definition itself – in terms of what constitutes quality differentiated teaching. This is in response to many schools noting that 'quality differentiated' is context specific and open to interpretation.

Recommendation 8

All systems, printed handouts and resources at the sector/jurisdictional level be updated to include 'Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice' as opposed to the old wording of 'no adjustment' and that schools that participated in 2013 and 2014 are made aware of this change.

Across all sectors and at least four states, the old wording of 'no adjustment' was observed on printed materials and online systems schools were using throughout the NCCD. In order for the lowest level of adjustment to be applied consistently and correctly, it is imperative that resources and systems are updated accordingly. Hence, EAs should communicate directly with those schools that have participated in prior years to make sure they are aware of the change in terminology.

