Report on the Minister for School Education
Peter Garrett’s meeting with
AATE representatives

Guy Bayly-Jones

In *English in Australia* Volume 46 Number 1 2011 we published a letter from the President of AATE to Peter Garrett, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. In response to this letter the Minister invited a group from AATE to meet with him in Canberra on Wednesday 15 June 2011.

Three members of AATE Council met with Minister Garrett: Guy Bayly-Jones, President, Cal Durrant, Commissioning Editor, and Michelle Morthorpe, President of ACTATE and a delegate on council.

At the meeting we presented the Minister with the following key points:

- We believe that we have the ability, although not necessarily the capacity to support the Australian Government to deliver a truly national curriculum and will describe three proposals to this end.
- These proposals would each require resourcing from either Education Services Australia (ESA) or the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)
- We are strongly in favour of professional standards for teachers and will support AITSL to the best of our ability to implement the new national standards. It would help us if timelines were more reasonable.
- We are concerned about the proposed teacher bonus scheme and its potentially negative impact on the professionalism of teachers.
- We remain opposed to the use of NAPLAN for comparing schools and seek some clarification with regard to the purpose of these tests.
- We invite the Minister to the AATE National Conference in Melbourne in December.

Minister Garrett gave us a fair hearing. Our meeting with him lasted almost 40 minutes. He listened attentively and appeared interested in what we had to say. He said that he would attend the 2011 National Conference in Melbourne if he could and that funds would be made available to support the conference.

He encouraged us to approach ESA with our proposals and seemed particularly interested in Cal’s notion of a competition for video stories. He asked to be kept informed about the progress of our submission to ESA.

He noted our concerns about AITSL and their somewhat unrealistic expectations of professional associations. I believe that he excused them and ACARA as fledgling organisations which are finding their way in the world. However, his adviser did indicate that he would be following up with AITSL, which may prove useful if we need to seek additional time to complete the proposals we have been invited to submit.

He also noted the concerns we raised about NAPLAN and although he believes the problems are dissipating he did acknowledge that some were putting themselves under undue pressure and that ACARA would be asked to look into the issues we raised.

With regard to the teacher bonus scheme, he noted our concerns but pointed out that it was an election promise and as such the money set aside for this purpose could not be used for something else. He acknowledged that were concerns with some such schemes elsewhere in the world, but believed that we have learned from these and that these would not occur in Australia. He gave an undertaking that professional associations would be consulted about the scheme in the future. We remembered too late that ‘no carbon tax’ was also an election promise …

Since our meeting we have forwarded our speaking notes to the Minister and will keep him updated on the progress of two proposals we intend to put to Education Services Australia.