

## Opposition to NAPLAN Online and robot marking grows

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Federation is successfully implementing the 2017 Annual Conference decision to campaign to replace NAPLAN as it is currently formulated, with authentic assessment of student learning from courses endorsed by the NSW Educational Standards Authority (NESA).

Federation's opposition to NAPLAN Online and robot marking of student writing has attracted support from parents, teachers and principals and generated extensive media coverage.

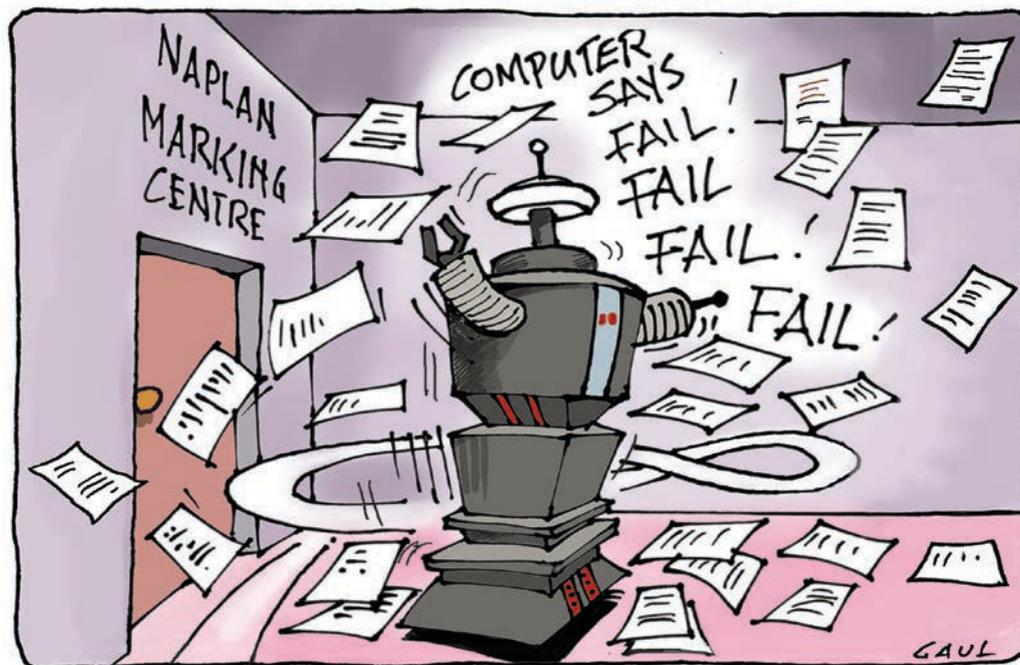
Gleaned from responses to the NAPLAN Hotline, Federation's report *2017 NAPLAN Online Readiness Trial: The Response of the Teaching Profession* (visit [bit.ly/NSWTFNAPLAN](http://bit.ly/NSWTFNAPLAN)) provides extensive documentation of the deficiencies and inequities inherent in the attempt by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to impose NAPLAN Online.

When faced with such reports, the Department has gone into denial. At one meeting on the topic, the Department denied that students' unequal access to computers at home is a problem. Similarly, concerns about the inequities between schools in the supply, efficiency and maintenance of computer technology were dismissed.

### Robot marking of student writing is limited

ACARA recently distributed a report it prepared in 2015 to propose robot marking of student writing.

This paper has been carefully examined by one of the world leaders in assessment and writing from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr Les Perelman.



He describes the ACARA report as, "so methodologically flawed and so massively incomplete that it cannot justify any use of AES [automated essay scoring] in scoring the NAPLAN essays". Dr Perelman's report can be found at [https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/automated\\_essay\\_scoring\\_and\\_naplan.pdf](https://www.nswtf.org.au/files/automated_essay_scoring_and_naplan.pdf).

Dr Perelman also reveals that:

- robots can only detect low-grade attributes of writing
- robots cannot detect "the most important elements of a text"
- the ACARA report uses evidence and data selectively and poorly
- ACARA ignores any authority critical of robot marking
- robots and humans should not be used in conjunction in marking
- even robots as grammar checkers are seriously flawed
- overseas evidence shows robot marking discriminating against some social groups
- introducing robots will encourage regressive teaching practices.

Concerns about robot marking are

reflected in *The Sydney Morning Herald* editorial of 13 October 2017: "Education is fundamentally a social transaction between humans ... A system that removes assessment from human agency and hands it over to a machine shows disrespect to both teacher and pupil. Both are diminished by it, and with them the assessment, and education itself"

### The way forward

Ministers and state education leaders must reject ACARA's plan to bring robots into the marking of extended pieces of children's work in NAPLAN.

ACARA must withdraw its discredited "research" paper that purports to justify their Brave New World visions.

Extensive and unhurried consultations must take place with parents and teachers before any substantial or radical changes to the marking of NAPLAN are even contemplated.

ACARA must reveal the

contractual arrangements around NAPLAN testing and marking to indicate all private arrangements that have been entered into that so vitally affect the futures of our young.

Federation is working with the Australian Education Union to lobby all state and territory Education Ministers to defer the implementation of NAPLAN Online until 2020 and to reject the use of robot marking of student writing. This is the position that all Ministers will be asked to support at the next Education Council meeting in Hobart on December 8.

### Build understanding

Members are urged to discuss these serious educational matters with parents and community members. This will help develop greater understanding about the need to replace NAPLAN with authentic assessment, as we move into the 2018 school year and continue to build the campaign.