

Productivity Commission Inquiry into the *National Education Evidence Base* 2016

The City of Boroondara

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Date: May 2016

1. Introduction

The City of Boroondara welcomes the Productivity Commission Inquiry (PCI) into the national collection and use of data for early childhood education and care services and schools and understands that the overall aim of the inquiry is to establish a national education evidence base to improve educational outcomes.

2. Boroondara Profile

The City of Boroondara is located in Metropolitan Melbourne, 8 Kilometres east of the City and includes the suburbs of Ashburton (3147), Balwyn (3103), Balwyn North (3104), Camberwell (3124), Canterbury (3126), Hawthorn (3122), Hawthorn East (3123), Kew (3101) and Kew East (3102), and parts of the suburbs of Glen Iris (3146) and Surrey Hills (3127). Boroondara has an estimated residential population of 174, 787 people (.id consulting, Boroondara community profile, 2015).

The municipality is home to a range of educational institutions including: 31 long day care centres, 28 kindergartens, 12 independent early learning centres, 17 occasional care centres, 6 family day care schemes, 20 state primary schools, 24 independent primary schools, 8 state secondary schools, 14 independent secondary schools, 4 special education schools and Swinburne University.

The City of Boroondara acknowledges the valuable role of all education services and providers, regardless of their management model and supports a “mixed-economy” of service provision for the critical role it plays in meeting and supporting the divergent needs and aspirations of families living, working and studying in Boroondara.

Further, Council supports the provision of high quality early childhood services for its community through:

- The provision of land and maintained buildings that house community-managed long day care, kindergarten and occasional care services to voluntary committees of management for a peppercorn rent
- Professional Support for the inclusion of children with Additional Needs into state funded kindergarten programs through the state funded Preschool Field Officer (PSFO) program.
- Administration of a kindergarten central enrolment scheme for community-managed kindergartens
- Information provision, professional development, policy and strategic advice to all service providers operating within the City of Boroondara regardless of their management model
- Facilitation of sector networks, resources and support for long day care centres, stand-alone kindergartens, OCC, OSHC and vacation care services
- Information, support and referral for families
- Support and advice for voluntary committees of management
- Provision of the Victorian Maternal and Child Health program.

This response to the issues paper has been provided by the City of Boroondara within the context of Council’s role in local planning and investment in supporting and facilitating Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).

3. Council's education data collection and analysis

The City of Boroondara currently engages all ECEC services and schools operating in the municipality in annual data collection. The data is collected through a mix of online and paper based surveys. Where necessary this is facilitated by phone conversations to collect relevant information. At a minimum, data currently collected includes:

Early Childhood Education and Care

1. ECEC Utilisation data (Kindergarten, LDC and Occasional care licensed places, enrolments and vacancies)
2. ECEC program information (hours, fees)
3. ECEC workforce data (number of staff with each ECEC pre-service qualification)
4. ECEC professional development needs (topics inform development of council subsidized training calendar and provision of annual ECEC and biennial youth conference)
5. ECEC sector issues (topics inform council's role in advocacy)
6. Service level social profile information (number of families from Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) backgrounds- families are not individually identified)
7. Service level subsidy usage (number of families using a Health Care Card, number of children accessing Early Start Kindergarten Funding, number of children accessing Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS), number of children using Kindergarten Inclusion Support Subsidy (KISS) and Inclusion Support Subsidy (ISS) funding)

Primary School and Secondary school

In 2010, the Community Planning and Development Department sent a survey to all state and independent primary schools in the municipality. In 2012 and 2014, the survey was sent to all state and independent primary, secondary and combined schools, including special schools. Response rates have dropped with each successive survey.

In the 2014 survey questions were asked about:

- enrolments by gender
- postcode of residence for students
- number of international students
- top country of origin of international students
- number of students (excluding international students) who speak a language other than English at home
- top languages (other than English) spoken
- student health and wellbeing activities delivered in the school
- transport-related activities promoted by the school (e.g. car-pooling)
- best aspects about living in Boroondara for children/young people and their families
- biggest issues facing children/young people in Boroondara
- biggest challenges for young people once they leave school (secondary schools only)
- how can the City of Boroondara best support the healthy development, education and wellbeing of young children, young people and their families.

Ad hoc data collection is also undertaken as needed via online survey tools, emails and calls for submissions in response to Productivity Commission or Senate Inquiries relevant to the ECEC and schools sectors.

The above data is used by the City of Boroondara for a range of descriptive and correlational research and strategic planning purposes including the three main purposes outlined in the issues paper (p.9):

1. **Monitoring progress** i.e. towards timely achievement of national reforms-universal access to 15 hours, national regulations regarding changes to ECEC ratios, as well as the impact of such reforms on the affordability, accessibility and availability of services
2. **Evaluating policies and programs** i.e. annual evaluation of the PSFO program

3. **Informing decision making** i.e. ECEC utilisation (places, enrolment and vacancy data) is used alongside other data sets (Australian Early Development Census, ABS population and demographic data) to inform decision making regarding infrastructure re-development, collocation/integration of services and strategic planning. Ad hoc data collection and analysis also supports submissions and responses to state and national inquiries for example, Council of Australian Government reform, policy and legislation changes, and PCI and senate inquiries.

4. Response to issues and questions raised in the issues paper

4.1 Scope of the Inquiry

Should the scope of evidence base include data on children younger than 4 years old? If so why, and should it cover all children or only those attending early childhood education and care?

The City of Boroondara currently uses Australian Early Development Census (AEDC), Victorian Children and Adolescent Monitoring (VCAMS) to monitor early childhood health, development and wellbeing indicators and inform strategic planning relating to children (for example, for the development of our Health and Wellbeing Plan and recent Children and Young People's Strategy).

Access to timely Local Government Area data about the health, wellbeing and development of children under 4 years (whether they attend early childhood services or not) is imperative as council does not collect this information itself. Currently the VCAMS portal only allows users to drill down to a Local Government Area for some indicators-which makes some of this data less useful for strategic planning purposes.

Should the evidence base include data on young people who have left school before completing year 12, or who do not attend school for other reasons?

Council currently uses VCAMS and On Track destination data to monitor health, development and wellbeing indicators and inform strategic planning in relation to young people (for example, for the development of our Health and Wellbeing Plan and recent Children and Young People's Strategy). Council provides a range of youth services for young people whether currently engaged in formal schooling or not. Access to data about young people who have left school prior to completion ensures that the needs of these young people are able to be included in council's strategic planning responses.

4.2 What data are needed?

Which education outcomes should be included?

The City of Boroondara takes a life course approach to strategic planning for example the children and young people's strategy covers children from birth to twenty five years. In the existing national data collection, the AEDC includes data on non-cognitive domains (social skills, communication) however this is not available for children in primary and/or secondary. It would be helpful to collect this data for life-course comparison and planning. Similarly the AEDC does not measure early/pre literacy/numeracy skills for children in the year prior to school entry which would be useful for the same reason.

Data on other education inputs

As outlined in section 3 the City of Boroondara collects information on other domains that impact educational outcomes (utilisation, funding, workforce information and sector issues) and external determinants (cultural and language backgrounds, health care card status). This data is necessary for the role that council plays in providing early childhood infrastructure, professional support and development and broader strategic planning purposes.

4.3 How can existing collections be improved?

National annual data collection that can be analysed by service, suburb and municipality would be most useful to the City of Boroondara. In order to provide a substantial benefit to council (by reducing our need to undertake independent data collection and reducing the burden on services providing data to us) national data collection would need- at a minimum- to be able to reliably provide the data outlined previously in section 3 for the current service year. The lag times on AEDC, VCAMS and On Track data

(six months to one year minimum) suggests that national data collection is unlikely to completely replace local data collection currently undertaken by council.

The VCAMS portal is a particularly user friendly interface for quickly finding local area statistics on some key health and wellbeing indicators. The need to build tables to access the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NCECC) and Longitudinal Survey of Australian Children (LSAC) and Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) and Longitudinal Study of Australian youth (LSAY) make these data sets less user friendly.

Provision of ECEC workforce data through the existing Australian Children's Education and Care Authority's (ACECQA) national register would be useful. This web based register could also be used to provide data that is helpful for local infrastructure planning such as:

- How many of the licensed LDC places are currently under three year olds and how many are over three year olds
- The service's current utilisation rate
- Which of the sessions listed (for kindergartens) are 3 year old groups and which are 4 year old groups.

In addition, being able to search online databases by LGA would be useful. For example, the My School website allows you to search by suburb, but you can still only look at one school at a time, rather than being able to bring up a summary table per LGA.

We would also welcome the development of the ABS Australian Longitudinal Learning Database (ALLD), and the ability to extract small area information from this resource.

4.4 What data characteristics are desirable?

1. Current year data (data that relates to the current year of service operation/utilisation)
2. Education datasets that can be analysed by service name, aggregated to suburbs and municipalities would be most useful to council.

Data on the following areas where there are currently gaps in information on the Boroondara student population would be desirable:

- the number of students that travel into Boroondara to attend secondary school and where they travel from
- international student numbers and the Culturally And Linguistically Diverse (CALD) population in secondary schools
- Sustainable transport use across the City.

Details about specific aspects of the school population such as where students are travelling from to attend school are traditionally not picked up in other community information sources (e.g. the ABS Census and The Schools Information Booklet). Having access to this data would enable Council and relevant local stakeholders to make decisions and plan more confidently.

4.5 Issues and opportunities

The City of Boroondara currently collects and utilizes service level data only, so individual personal privacy is currently not an issue. For ECEC and schools, moving to a national system of data collection (that could be shared between local, state and national jurisdictions) may pose some challenges. For example, the response rate to local surveys is currently fairly good- would this response rate to national surveys be the same? Would participation be mandated? If data was collected at a national level would schools and services feel they were not able to represent themselves independently for grant and funding requests?

Streamlining data collection would presumably provide some benefits and reduce duplication of effort for services and schools and all levels of government if the data were timely and consistent (available for local analysis). However, consultation would need to be undertaken to ensure that services and schools were happy to share data between different levels of government as each has different levels of involvement and responsibility for infrastructure, funding and grants etc.