



## **Response to Productivity Commission's *Draft Report - National Education Evidence Base***

**Submission from the Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology**

### **General comments**

We strongly support the Productivity Commission's recognition of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and school education as (i) impacting the wellbeing and quality of life of young Australians; and (ii) shaping the capabilities and productivity of Australia's future labour force. In turn, we strongly support the design of a national education evidence base that will inform the provision of quality education and care that predispose individuals and communities to optimal learning, growth and development. We argue that the evidence base should draw significantly on and be appropriate for the Australian context whilst affording linkages to comparable international evidence bases.

Our response follows an earlier submission to the Productivity Commission's *Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base* (submission lodged 24 May 2016). Here we respond to specific Draft Recommendations and Information Requests identified in the *Overview and Draft Recommendations* (released September 2016). We commend the Productivity Commission's recognition of the burden of compliance and the need to generate benefits in excess of the costs incurred in data collection, processing and sharing. We commend the commitment to identify current gaps in data holdings and to re-imagine their affordances for improved outcomes for individuals and communities.

### **Response to Draft Recommendations and Requests for Information**

We endorse the focus on improved national decision making and governance arrangements and on national evidence creation and use. By the same token, we are mindful of the challenges of the federated system and jurisdictional differences in service delivery and data collection that can limit the effective use and benefit of national

evidence. In response to specific Draft Recommendations (DRs) and Information Requests (IRs), we endorse:

- a) consideration of a body or institution to manage the creation and use of a national evidence base and to promote a culture of evidence production and dissemination amongst educators and policy makers (DR8.1);
- b) measures to ensure the veracity of research that can be used to inform the decisions of educators and policy makers (DR2.1). There is a need to not only ask what works, but also where it works. Evaluating why it works underlines the need for a wide range of data sources, perspectives and research methodologies depending upon context, the questions being investigated and the skillsets available.
- c) measures to ensure that the quality of data is fit-for-purpose, a key example being the veracity and versatility of the Australian Early Development Census in monitoring achievement in line with national ECEC outcomes (DR3.1; IR3.1);
- d) consideration of a national individual identifier (DR4.1, IR4.1), within relevant privacy legislation and policy requirements; an individual identifier, as children transition through the ECEC and school system (and outside formal systems), would allow monitoring of child outcomes over time, in different contexts and under different conditions, and would complement current system-level data;
- e) new cohorts for longitudinal studies (Longitudinal Study of Australian Children [LSAC] and Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children [LSIC]) in light of significant changes to the ECEC and school systems (e.g., National Quality Framework for ECEC and universal access to preschool) since the inception of LSAC (DR3.2);
- f) a national repository and register of data sets/metadata and a national data dictionary, with protocols for ethical use of linked datasets by trusted users. Data access arrangements could allow trusted users to upload research to a publicly available central repository, and allow translation to policy and public domains;

- g) policy leadership and cooperation with data custodians and ethics committees and the need for strong leadership and cooperation between the Commonwealth, states and territories; and
- h) the need for teacher workforce data and school improvement data (in the ECEC and school sectors) (relates to DR7.2, DR8.1) to ensure triangulation with individual and system level data.

We offer the following cautions to the Productivity Commission in response to specific Draft Recommendations (DRs) and Information Requests (IRs):

- a) Australia should learn from the ways in which other education systems have established research databases (for example, 'What Works Clearinghouses') and the various impacts, and lack of impact, that these initiatives have had on classroom practice. Collecting more and better data centrally must be married with a focus on improving the inferences and decisions made on the basis of that data (validity). Developing protocols that suggest how to use data in valid ways on a case-by-case basis is critical work that should be undertaken.
- b) Great care should be taken with advocating for value-added models to understand education performance. At the individual, class and school level these have shown a propensity to be unreliable, liable to distortion and can act as an impediment to improved school achievement.

Thank you for your consideration of the matters raised in this submission.

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