

14th June 2016

National Education Evidence Base
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East PO
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Submission – School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University
Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base

Introduction

This submission provides responses to each of the sections of the *Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base Issues Paper* (April 2016).

School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University

The School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University is among the world's leading education schools, ranked in the top 100 worldwide. Building on a 40 year history of teacher preparation, the School brings this experience into a dynamic unit that operates across three campuses at the Gold Coast, Logan and Mt Gravatt.

1. What has the Commission been asked to do?

In relation to the three questions asked on page 3, we suggest that:

- The interpretation of the scope of the terms of reference accord with our understanding that the Commission will report on and make recommendations in relation to the four key points stated on page 1 of the Issues Paper, and in relation to the data availability and use inquiry as outlined on page 3.
- The scope of the evidence base should include data on children younger than 4 years old and all children, rather than excluding young children who are not attending early childhood education and care programs outside the home. The rationale for supporting this is that there is considerable research evidence which suggests that the years from 0-8 are critically important years for learning. For this reason, the nature and type of data collected and how it might be collected would need further careful investigation to ensure that it was relevant to informing improved educational outcomes during the early years.
- The evidence base should include data on young people who have left school before completing Year 12, or who do not attend school for other reasons. The rationale for this is that the pathways and destinations of those young people can present important information in relation to their education outcomes.

2. Objectives and framework

This section outlined Australia's national education objectives, Education outcomes and Determinants of education outcomes, Framework for a national education evidence base, and asked important questions - What data are needed? What data characteristics are desirable? What are the associated costs and benefits?

We make the general statement that we agree that the three key documents listed on page 4 should inform the inquiry; namely, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australian*, *National Education Agreement*, and the *Early Years Learning Framework*. In addition, the way in which these find expression through *The Australian Curriculum* need to be key documents in relation to the national education evidence base. There is an inherent risk that a focus on measurable data might mitigate against the realisation of the desirable education outcomes expressed in these important documents. To illustrate, there is alignment between the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and *The Australian Curriculum* in aiming for our young Australians to be successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

We have noted that the framing of the information and questions presented in the *National Education Evidence Base Productivity Commission Issues Paper* (April 2016) in this section reflects:

1. A reductive approach in many instances through its orientation to measurable data sets which are readily available and currently in use – such as standardised tests and surveys.
2. Assumptions that policy and procedural decisions relating to the education evidence base might be made, enacted and governed by people who do not enable the voice of educators, parents/caregivers and students. There is a clear lack of parent/caregiver voice and student voice in shaping what education outcomes should form the national education evidence base.

In relation to the five questions on page 7, we suggest that:

- While we understand the three considerations, issues and questions outlined as being critical to inform future improvements to the national education evidence base, the third question presented is the major challenge here. That is, “education objectives in non-cognitive domains such as creativity and interpersonal skills may be seen as just as important as those in traditional academic areas”. What data are collected shapes the behaviour of those involved in teaching, learning and schooling as it assigns value to the educational activities being assessed. The education data, research datasets and the national education evidence base makes an appropriate distinction between research datasets used for research questions, and administrative records used for management and administration purposes and not in a state available for research purposes. However, there is an implication that ‘research sets’ might privilege quantitative research over qualitative data. There need to be recognition of both forms of data. There also needs to be an understanding of the complex relationships between education policy, education research and practice. There are examples of effective research, such as the Queensland Schools Reform Longitudinal Study, which provide a model of longitudinal studies which can influence and inform policy and improvements in practice.
- The objective should be to improve education outcomes. To achieve this, further strategic planning and actions are needed to adequately address instances where needs for improvement are identified. This requires policy to shift significantly towards an equity orientation, rather than use data on education outcomes in a competitive, ranking approach. For example, we suggest that the My School website which promotes completion and choice might be renamed to become Our Schools website which promotes equity and excellence.
- The outcomes should be aligned with The Australian Curriculum in terms of all learning areas, general capabilities assessed within those learning areas in context, and cross

curricula priorities. The current approach to literacy and numeracy testing has been an example where NAPLAN was implemented with no alignment with curriculum.

- There should be no education outcomes relating to children and young people which are defined as being beyond the scope of this inquiry. We highlight here the importance of social and emotional wellbeing of our nation's young people as a key consideration.
- The approach taken to account for outcomes that may be difficult to measure is to recognise, nurture and value teacher professionalism in design learning experiences, implementing the curriculum, and making judgments in assessing student learning outcomes. Teacher trust, agency and autonomy is at the heart of improving education outcomes in all learning areas, general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities. This can enable the design of authentic assessment which enables students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do with what they know.

In relation to the eight questions presented on page 13, we suggest that:

- In determining what data should be collected nationally, the tensions which exist in relation to competitive federalism mitigate against a cooperative approach to a national evidence base. There are key unresolved tensions due to education being the responsibility of the States and Territories and any national approaches to education data.
- A set of principles is developed which guides an improved, more educationally appropriate use of data to improve education outcomes by informing needs based resourcing of schools to improve both equity and excellence. Those principles should include a more inclusive set of data about education outcomes more broadly than that currently referred to in relation to 'standards'.
- There are currently important datasets within schools which support processes for monitoring progress of individual students and which should be acknowledged as part of the national education evidence base. This enables a richer, more sophisticated understanding of the national education evidence base than one of the data being centrally collected, stored and used.
- There are currently duplication of efforts in administrative datasets between States and Territories, and a centralised database governed within a national framework could inform policy development in regard to this question.
- There should be an independent, objective research and policy think tank which includes educators, academic experts, representatives to provide diversity of voice, to inform politicians and education bureaucracies to elevate thinking about a national education evidence base, its governance, and uses of data to improve education outcomes.
- The teaching profession, schools, students, parents/caregivers should be the beneficiaries of any additional activity.
- The costs are dependent on the quality and scale of the data collection. For example, administration of national standardised testing, such as NAPLAN, has significant costs, not only in terms of financial costs, but also opportunity costs for other curriculum when schools focus on NAPLAN preparation. There needs to be a balance of the costs and the benefits of collecting data. There is anecdotal evidence that some data being collected in schools detract from teaching and are used for 'data's sake' and accountability purposes, rather than informing improvements in education outcomes.
- There are potential benefits for the wider community in having a national education evidence base, through enabling ease of mobility of families and students across jurisdictions, benchmarking, sharing good/best practice, informing needs based resourcing, and strategic approaches by governments, school systems, schools, and teachers and their communities.

3. What do we have?

This section portrayed a selection of the education and training data collections, including the data custodians for the various data collections. These included DSS, DET, ABS, NCVER, ACARA and State and Territory test administration authorities. Reference was also made to a range of other collections, including NECECC, NSSC, ACER, AIHW, and AIFS which are collections within Australia. In addition to these, reference was also made to international school assessment programs, including PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS and ICILS.

These present two sides of the same coin. That is, they represent an increase in the amount and types of data collected in recent years, while not adequately providing data collection of the national education evidence base needed to adequately inform our knowledge of education outcomes against all Australian Curriculum learning areas. The caution is that often media reports and political leaders refer to ‘standards’ in terms of these more limited data. There are clearly many more education outcomes being achieved in schools, which schools, teachers, students, and parents/caregivers have knowledge about and need to have knowledge about, but are not captured in the national data collections.

4. Issues and Opportunities

Issues outlined in this section included Data sharing, Privacy, Data comparability, Data capture, processing and management, Technology, and Analytical and research capability.

This section raised serious concerns, and rather than deal with the many questions presented, we make the following suggestions:

- Governance is critically important to ensure that there is a set of principles, protocols and ethical considerations developed which guide data sharing, privacy, data comparability, and data capture, processing and management.
- The framing of the questions throughout this section reflected a tendency to provide a preference for government and the bureaucracy over the individual in relation to data. Thus, we strongly suggest that ethical protocols – for example, similar to human research ethics protocols – are established. For example, these protocols should ensure that aggregated, deidentified data only be used to ensure privacy. Similarly, permission protocols would need to be established, including providing individuals with information about the potential ownership and use of their data.
- There should be a principle in data collection of a ‘single source of truth’ – that is, once data has been entered, it does not need to be re-entered. Currently, for example, schools and teachers are being required to enter the same data multiple times.
- We suggest that investigation is conducted to determine the viability of a single ‘education identifier’ for each student throughout their years of schooling, and across jurisdictions. There are examples of this in other applications and contexts; e.g. ORCID. This investigation should also examine the viability, the costs and benefits, of linking this education identifier to other databases, including administrative records, for health.
- There needs to be an alternative narrative to the deficit discourse reflected in many of the questions raised in this section. The linguistics suggest a surveillance approach rather than an emancipatory, enabling education outcomes improvement discourse.
- Differences in jurisdictional legislation, and different policies need to be resolved to minimise the unnecessary duplication of data collection and lack of interoperability of systems and data management infrastructure.
- There is a need to ensure that the data is able to be accessed by those who provide it, and by those who will draw upon this to plan and implement programs to improve education outcomes of their students.

5. Institutions, data governance and prioritising reform

This section sought advice on the data governance arrangements which might work best, and assessing costs and benefits to prioritise reform.

In relation to the questions presented on page 32, we suggest:

- An independent coalition is recommended to provide the governance of the national education evidence base. There is considerable duplication and inconsistent requirements and processes between States and Territories.
- Governance should ensure that current national ethics frameworks being applied in other contexts – such as human research ethics - are drawn upon to inform improved governance through well-defined accountability and responsibility, transparency and oversight of the quality and availability of data, access protocols, procedures, and dispute resolution mechanisms. To illustrate, there have been recent examples where governments have sought and collected data about initial teacher education students without any ethics requirements being applied. That is, data were obtained about the students without the students being asked permission, and without being given access to the information collected about them.
- In assessing costs and benefits to prioritise reform, there should be an explicit understanding about the interrelationships between education policy, research and practice so that research evidence informed approaches to education policy advice and educational practices are enabled.
- Teacher professionalism is respected in all approaches to a national education evidence base.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.

Kind regards,

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