



Deakin University School of Education

Response to Productivity Commission's Study of the Education Workforce Draft Research Report

Deakin University's School of Education welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Productivity Commission's Draft Research Report on the Schools Workforce. Our response should be read in conjunction with the more extended submission made by Deakin University's School of Education last year [Submission 24, submitted 22/08/2011], which was referenced extensively in the Productivity Commission's Draft Research Report. Building on that submission and in response to the Productivity Commission's more recent draft research report, the point we stress in this submission is that schools and the schooling workforce are productive of both social and economic rates of return within their communities. In particular, our position is that the discussion paper produced by the Productivity Commission does not sufficiently address or consider *the social rates of return* produced by the schools workforce.

Investments in education contribute not only to the ultimate economic productivity of Australia but also to its social and cultural cohesion. In addition, investments in education address disadvantages and provide opportunities and outcomes to students in a variety of circumstances. The schools workforce produces these social returns whilst facing specific, multiple and cumulative challenges in specific locations and contexts. These challenges are related to the challenge of meeting increasing sets of responsibilities and expectations demanded of the schools workforce, as illustrated through the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). They are also related to the provision of education to an increased diversity of student populations with differing and specific disadvantages. Such disadvantages are sometimes lost in statistical measures due to the aggregation of data. Moreover, the responsibility for providing services to relatively disadvantaged communities is not evenly spread throughout the different education systems, with public schools in particular being responsible for service provision to student populations that are seldom shared by non-government schools.

Correspondingly we argue that the kinds of support offered to specific schools, and the incentives offered to the workforce should be flexible enough to acknowledge specific and differing forms of local disadvantages. However, we caution that individualising the responsibility for dealing with these local disadvantages to the budgetary discretion of each school may exacerbate what is a systemic issue facing many networks of schools. There is great importance in acknowledging the potential collection of support offered by networks in which learning across the network is facilitated.

Rewards and Remuneration

In order to deal with both the social and economic rates of return of investments in education the issue of remuneration should to be considered in two ways. First, the remuneration of the teaching workforce should to be gauged relative to other professions in order that a sufficient and sufficiently competent workforce can be maintained. The attractiveness of teaching as a profession requires an understanding of this kind of comparison, and of its position relative to other professions over time. Second, the remuneration of the teaching workforce should be considered internally relative to the collective nature of the enterprise. We emphasise that the

work carried out in schools consists of the products of networks of people working in concert to develop the capabilities and capacities of a diverse range of students. As such remuneration should reflect and emphasise the collective impact of the school workforce in general and in specific circumstances rather than treating each teacher, counsellor, educational leader or teachers' aide in isolation.

On a related point, we believe that the discussion paper leaves open some important questions about the nature of research into the schools workforce. Specifically, research into 'disadvantage' and 'difference' should not aggregate data into sets that obscure significant differences in disadvantage faced by particular communities and their schools. Disadvantage is a relational concept defined in specific contexts. As an allied point, questions of educational disadvantage relative to the teaching workforce should not be viewed in isolation from other disadvantage within the communities and localities within which schools form an important part of social and economic life. Tony Vinson (2007) has demonstrated this point most powerfully in his research on the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, which now informs the work of the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

In sum, to treat the productivity of schools in isolation is to diminish a sufficient account of the social and economic returns to the community offered by the schooling workforce in concert with the networks of departmental and regional support.

Concluding note

This submission elaborates individual points that were raised in our original submission. We acknowledge that aspects of this original submission were considered in the Productivity Commission's Draft Research Report. In particular we strongly support the need for longitudinal research in relation to the Schooling Workforce, and of the effect of different education programs, as outlined in section 5.3 of the Report. Deakin University's School of Education is currently completing research related specifically to the development of such datasets. We would stress, however, that the utility of such research is contingent on a continuity of support over time and across States and Territories.

References

Deakin University, School of Education (2011). Submission 24 to Productivity Commission's commissioned study of the Education and Training Workforce: Schools. Retrieved from http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/111904/sub024.pdf

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Vinson, T. (2007). *Dropping off the edge: The distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Richmond, Vic.: Jesuit Social Services.