



Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

Submitter: Paul Ramsay Foundation
Submitting as a: Other (Trust)
State: NSW

Summary

A core part of a healthy education ecosystem is a pattern of consistent innovation both to deliver current priorities more effectively and to respond to emerging social and economic needs as they arise. As an innovation grows in scale it should be subject to increasingly rigorous evaluation to determine whether it works for its intended purpose, for whom and under what conditions. The results of these evaluations should be made public so that key decision-makers can know what's working and what isn't and can make decisions accordingly. Philanthropy has an important role to play in such a healthy ecosystem, as a major funding source for both innovation and evaluation.

The panel should recommend a 'bottom-up' body similar to that proposed by the Productivity Commission in its Report on the Education Evidence Base, and we recommend that body be established as an independent organisation at arm's length from government. This independence would be important to the organisation's legitimacy as an honest broker with teachers, school leaders, and philanthropy. We would further encourage that the governance arrangements be set up so that philanthropy could be an effective partner, including to fund the organisation and to actively engage in co-funding arrangements.

Main submission

The Paul Ramsay Foundation (the Foundation) welcomes the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools as a timely opportunity to shift the long-term trajectory of learning outcomes for Australian young people. The Foundation does not have a view at this point about what the 'most effective teaching and learning strategies' are or what initiatives should be deployed to make the increased Commonwealth funding more effective and efficient. We do, however, want to make a brief submission about the 'institutional and governance arrangements to ensure the ongoing identification and implementation of evidence based actions to grow and sustain improved outcomes over time.'

A core part of a healthy education ecosystem is a pattern of consistent innovation both to deliver current priorities more effectively and to respond to emerging social and economic needs as they arise. When the ecosystem is at its healthiest, this innovation will come from multiple sources: schools responding to local need; universities generating programs and practices from their research; governments generating new ideas based on insights derived from patterns in the schools they run; and the non-profit and for-profit sectors seeing new needs or opportunities they can meet. No matter where an innovation begins, as it grows in scale it should be subject to increasingly rigorous evaluation to determine whether it works for its intended purpose, for whom and under what conditions. The results of these evaluations should be made public so that key decision-makers – from teachers and school leaders to parents and students to governments and philanthropists – can know what’s working and what isn’t and can make decisions accordingly.

Philanthropy has an important role to play in such a healthy ecosystem, as a major funding source for both innovation and evaluation. As you and the panel you chair consider the ‘institutional or governance arrangements’ and the ‘transparency and accountability measures’ that will best promote improved educational outcomes in Australia, the Foundation encourages you to consider arrangements that will allow philanthropy to be more effective in advancing this important national priority.

Specifically, we encourage the panel to recommend a ‘bottom-up’ body similar to that proposed by the Productivity Commission in its Report on the Education Evidence Base, and we recommend that body be established as an independent organisation at arm’s length from government. This independence would be important to the organisation’s legitimacy as an honest broker with teachers, school leaders, and philanthropy. The organisation should also have a commitment to ensuring its evaluations are transparently reported to the public. We would further encourage that the governance arrangements be set up so that philanthropy could be an effective partner, including to fund the organisation and to actively engage in co-funding arrangements.

Such an independent organisation would better enable philanthropy to play a productive role in the education ecosystem in several ways:

1. The organisation could establish a clear framework for the innovation-to-scale cycle for different types of educational initiatives, incorporating standards of evidence, that would help philanthropy better contribute to system-wide learning;
2. The evaluations the organisation would commission would have the weight of independence, giving philanthropic funders confidence in the evaluations’ conclusions and thus helping guide philanthropy to know what to support;

3. Philanthropy could better coordinate its efforts to align to important national priorities, including by funding higher-risk new areas than governments would typically be willing to support;
4. Philanthropy would have a trusted partner with a national platform and channels to educators to ensure that any learning from its funding gets into the field as quickly as possible.

We look forward to the establishment of an independent organisation that is able to evaluate programs with the best methodology and to receive philanthropic support.

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