



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

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Submitting as a: Academic person or institution
State: Vic.

Summary

This submission focuses on the compulsory years of schooling. It focuses on system governance and structural aspects of the education industry. This submission makes a series of recommendations and outlines the rationale for each.

The areas addressed are

- educational assessment
- teacher supply related to STEM
- educational research
- educational leadership
- system governance

A key concern relates to how a focus on numerical outcomes from educational assessment programs has diminished the concern for educational content.

A related concern is a lack of leadership capacity to address the evolving relationship between education and the economy. Approaches to educational management and educational research have not evolved to address the changing nature of educational content and the increasing influence of markets.

Main submission

Thank you for providing this opportunity.

This submission focuses on the compulsory years of schooling. It focuses on system governance and structural aspects of the education industry.

Australia's decline in educational standings should not be underestimated as both performance and capability are declining. There is some irony that former Australian teachers led the initial development of PISA in the late 1990s, and Australia now finds itself struggling on PISA scales. PISA 2015 is the first cycle not internationally led by ACER. This development, along with recent calls to import a phonics check

from the United Kingdom, suggest a significant decline in Australia's once preeminent educational research capacity.

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT – a focus on educational content

Recommendations

- Stop reporting NAPLAN at the student level
- Establish a division in ACARA to provide interpretive reports on PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS and NAPLAN for the Australian context that references frameworks and curricula
- Encourage the referencing of content frameworks when reporting measurement findings
- Reduce focus on trend reporting for PISA and NAPLAN

Rationale

NAPLAN currently misleads students. Student estimates produced by NAPLAN have significant standard errors that result in an estimated 10% of students being randomly reported outside of the Band that accurately reflects their ability on the test. Given that students generally have an idea of their ability, this misreporting is likely to result in a sense incongruence between students' self-concept and individual NAPLAN reports. The long-term and short-term impact on student wellbeing caused by this misreporting has not yet been determined and may not yet be evident. There is little benefit reporting at the student level and the potential for harm is great. It should therefore be stopped.

Reporting findings from educational assessment in terms of statistics and ranks diminishes educational discourse. Educational assessment programs such as PISA, TIMSS and NAPLAN each measure with respect to different content frameworks. These content frameworks represent different approaches to education and are different to local curricula. Interpretive reports that focus on educational content and educational policy and priorities would substantially enhance the standard of educational debate. These reports would inform debate by reconciling the various assessment frameworks with prevailing Australian curriculum norms.

The focus on trends limits education's capacity to respond to the changing nature of work in the economy. Trend reporting reifies conceptions of educational content and is fraught with paradoxes. To say that Australia is declining on PISA scales, is to also assume that educational content from PISA 2015 is the same as the content for PISA 2000. During this period technology has changed the nature of science, mathematics and communication. These changes are reflected in PISA updating its frameworks for each cycle. PISA trends therefore do not compare like with like over time. Trend reporting that compares to PISA 2000 for example doesn't consider the rise of

twitter, Facebook and the cloud. A reduced focus on trends would enhance dialogue between the economy and education on relevant contemporary educational content.

Numerical uses of assessment findings have some value for system management, however education is diminished when numerical reporting overrides a focus on educational content. This can also be alienating for students, parents and teachers.

WHAT AND HOW WE TEACH – STEM and a focus on teacher supply

Recommendations

- Develop an online annual survey that requires each school to annually report on teacher supply matters
- Publish an annual report on teacher supply and demand
- Create a body (nominally AITSL) to work with Initial Teacher Education providers and related stakeholders to match teacher supply with teacher demand
- Create more robust mechanisms for matching teacher supply and demand through COAG

Rationale

Teacher capability in STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) continues to diminish. The focus on STEM is appropriate for the contemporary economy and provides a necessary 'integration' focus. However, a focus on STEM also masks a lack of 'differentiation' in the underpinning subject areas. The lack of teacher capability in the various STEM areas has resulted in Australia increasingly becoming a consumer of technology and not a producer. There is an increasing trend in STEM towards anecdotal publicity focusing on superficial artefacts such as drones, robots and 3D printers. However, these anecdotal approaches are symptomatic of a systemic undersupply of teachers with the required specialisations in science, computing, information technology, mathematics and engineering.

Governments have lost control of teacher supply. During the 1980s, teacher education in Australia gradually transferred from state controlled teacher colleges to universities. Prior to this transfer, states had some capacity to control teacher supply. Now, however, teacher supply is a function of student demand and not system demand. This results in an oversupply in some areas (e.g. primary teachers) and an under-supply in other areas particularly STEM. This leads to a significant amount of out-of-field teaching in STEM areas. States need to work with the Commonwealth to re-establish a balanced supply of teachers.

The OECD has a TALIS study, and Australia a Staff in Australian Schools study. These studies are too detailed and sporadic to provide a meaningful narrative to Australia's

teacher supply. Further, they are not amenable to informing tertiary course selection for students, or day-to-day system management.

There is an urgent need to focus on the teacher supply in STEM, associated developments in curriculum are also required.

INFORMING TEACHERS AND SYSTEMS - Reforming educational research

Recommendations

- Create a research climate that focuses on the evolving needs of students, teachers and systems. Suggestions include
 - research centres from across Australia competing to have small survey batteries included in ACARA led sample surveys to inform smaller studies
 - Research grants more directly focused on contemporary and local education issues
 - Government sponsored academic journal with practicing principals and bureaucrats on academic board in addition to academics
 - greater engagement with subject associations

Rationale

Much of contemporary educational research is speculative and esoteric. This research is not directly relevant to debates around practices in the compulsory years of education. This too is a result of Initial Teacher Education transferring to universities, where speculative and marginal research is more valued than practical research into the best ways to teach and issues faced by education systems.

Contemporary educational research is often in the form of avant-garde totalising critiques that seek to escape the rules and practices of systems. However, these critiques are often a pale derivative of the subjects of critique. For example, PISA was designed and implemented by former Australian teachers as researchers. The programme involves high-level approaches to survey design such as sampling, content frameworks, item development, psychometrics, governance, stakeholder engagement, and administration. Most Australian critiques of PISA only focus on surface outcomes, and do not address nor reflect a comprehension of the technical aspects. While some speculative research is appropriate, there needs to be a greater emphasis on more technical and practical matters.

The focus on totalising critiques and meta-analyses disengages educational research from contemporary notions of educational content. The meta-analyses of Hattie diminish concerns for content suited to specific year and ability levels.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP – a Masters of Educational Administration

Recommendations

- A refocus on educational leadership, and not strategic leadership, at the system level
- Consider a Masters of Educational Administration in the style of an MBA

Rationale

Capacity in educational management has not matched education's transition into a market-based commodity, nor matched education's role as a productivity input in the knowledge economy. Educational coursework at the Masters and PhD levels often focuses on esoteric areas of knowledge, totalising critiques, or on motivational styles of leadership. Further, current system leadership focusses on strategic management that seeks to separate central planning and central offices from school level operations and concerns. Strategic management has resulted in central offices transferring accountability – using assessment regimes such as PISA and NAPLAN – programmatically to schools without interpretation. This has stagnated developments in curriculum and how it matches the emerging needs of the economy.

The focus on totalising critiques, meta-analyses of research findings, and motivational leadership has led to a 'conference circuit' in education. This conference circuit extracts a significant cost on Australia's educational expenditure with little return. The conference circuit is associated with the rise of teacher entrepreneurs who are often backed by commercial entities. The focus on high level narratives, anecdotal evidence, costly motivational keynote addresses, and superficial uses of drones, robots and 3D printers are not able to inform universal classroom practice. Instead of providing task focus to the system, the conference circuit simply creates further apprehension and trepidation.

A standard Masters of Educational Administration (MEA), in the coursework style of an MBA, would greatly enhance Australia's leadership capacity. In addition to covering topics such as accounting, finance, ethics, law, economics ethics and operations, there would be an emphasis on managing and reconciling a plurality of educational approaches, with the aim of increasing the task focus in education in a market environment.

SYSTEM GOVERNANCE – eliminate conflicting interest

Recommendations

- Separate the commercial delivery of educational services from governance on matters related to teaching, curriculum, assessment and resourcing
- Ensure that discourse around educational content and educational values is impartially led through public services principles

- Eliminate commercial sector influence from government boards and working parties
- Reduce or eliminate multiple board memberships
- Make AITSL a statutory authority with an independent chair

Rationale

Australia's education system governance has not sufficiently evolved to reflect the marketisation of education. Where inter-organisational cooperation at the leadership level might once have been appropriate, in a market-based context this can seem like collusion and creates opacity. Markets in education are inevitable and delivery contracts have inherent commercial-in-confidence provisions. However, what counts as education in terms of content and values in the compulsory years of schooling needs to be blisteringly transparent and universally understood. This can only be achieved through good system governance.

That the AITSL chair is also a leader at an Initial Teacher Education provider, while promoting a valid but particular line of research, and all while being significantly involved in commercial activities, is inappropriate. A high degree of impartiality and integrity is required to bring complex sets of stakeholders together around teacher standards, and around teacher supply and demand. These stakeholders include researchers, research institutes, think tanks, Initial Teacher Educational providers, the Commonwealth, and the States and Territories.

With education increasingly considered a key input into economic growth, the governance for institutions addressing teaching (AITSL), curriculum and assessment (ACARA), and resourcing (NSRB) need to be at similar standard of governance to that of Australia's Reserve Bank. Decisions, judgements and advice need to be well considered, authoritative, and publicly justified.

Thank you

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