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Improve school student outcomes with the best available tools and resources

What (if anything) needs to be done to improve the use of edtech tools (including GenAI) in schools?

We welcome the Albanese Government's commitment to increasing productivity, its decision to task the Productivity Commission (PC) with conducting inquiries to inform its agenda, and the decision by the PC to survey educators about the productivity of schooling and improving student outcomes.

Our purpose in providing this brief response to this survey is to express constructive criticism of the focus of the survey questions on the use of edtech tools (including GenAI) in schools.

It would be very ill advised, in our view, for the Productivity Commission to make the above question the focus of its current inquiries on identifying ways to materially boost Australia's productivity.

There is clearly a case for consideration to be given to the use of edtech tools in schools. But the PC has an opportunity and a responsibility, in our view, to use this Inquiry to focus the attention of the Government at this time on the vital role schools play in shaping the nation's current and future productivity.

This Review is taking place at a time in our history where there is accumulating evidence that the architecture and engineering of the school system are geared towards producing residualisation which, in turn, undermines its overall productivity. Structural change is needed to avoid the situation where promised increases in public funding will be wasted.

The Improving Outcomes for All: The Report of the Independent Expert Panel's Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (2023), brings together evidence that Australia has one of the highest concentrations in the OECD of students in schools from socio-educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (p.76-80) and that these concentrations of disadvantage have been worsening over time and at a higher rate in Australia than in most other OECD countries.

The following factors contribute to entrenching and growing these concentrations:

- Dysfunctional problems such as vertical fiscal imbalance in Australia's federal system of government combine with the irrational division of responsibilities for schooling between the Commonwealth and states, leading to a flimsy legal and regulatory framework for the operation of schools, in which there is a reliance on the public sector to do the major share of the 'heavy lifting' without a commensurate share of the resources.
- A funding system where public funding is provided to non-government schools according to their Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) through provisions in the Australian Education Act. Through a reliance on proxy measures for assessing 'need', however, the bulk of these schools

are able to operate well above their SRS from the combination of public funding provided by governments and their level of private funding from parental fees and other private sources – with the effect of locking in inequality between the public and private sectors.

- Inadequate support from governments for the advancement of the teaching profession through developing a coherent national strategy for the recruitment, initial and ongoing education and training of teachers; and for ensuring the supply and equitable distribution of the teaching force among schools.
- The tendency of governments for setting worthy goals for schooling, without creating the structures and processes which are necessary to achieving these goals; gathering and analysis of relevant data; public transparency and reporting; monitoring and accountability.

There is a great temptation for governments in Australia to avoid asking the questions that are needed to inform decisions about the future of our school system, arising from the longstanding political tensions generated by schools funding policies in a hybrid system of public and private schools.

There is a very real risk in a question that suggests that productivity in relation to schooling can be reduced to an issue of edtech tools (including GenAI). This has the potential to provide yet another distraction from the major threat to the productivity of our country's school system – inequity and inequality.

This Inquiry should provide an opportunity to inform the Government and the general public about how productivity can best be defined in relation to schooling, where there are long-term, inter-generational effects which are difficult to measure but which need to be taken into account. Before the productivity of schooling and student outcomes can be improved, there is a need for a broader public and political consensus about the essential purpose of schooling in achieving an open, just and knowledge-based democracy. This is necessary to provide a rational basis for setting goals and for building and measuring productivity against these goals.

What more (if anything) needs to be done to improve awareness and access to high quality lesson planning and curriculum materials in schools?

All students in all schools are reliant on having a sufficient amount and quality of teaching to access the full benefits of the curriculum.

Commonwealth recurrent funding for private schools now exceeds the full costs of staffing for that sector overall. What this means is that all the nation's teachers are now on the public payroll, directly or indirectly (except for some of the teachers in the highest-fee private schools) and that this entails a stronger policy for ensuring the supply and equitable distribution of the teaching force among schools.

The current distribution of the Australian teacher workforce corresponds closely to enrolments in each of the public, Catholic and independent sectors. The large majority of students with more intensive learning needs, however, attend public schools. This includes the large majority of students from low socio-educational advantage (SEA). In 2023, 81% of all low SEA students attended public schools and 91% of all schools with over 50% of their students in the lowest SEA quartile were public schools. Nearly one-third of all students in public schools are from low SEA families. Other data drawn from the My Schools data set show that public schools enrol 82% of Indigenous students, 79% of remote area students and 87% of very remote area students.

<https://saveourschools.com.au/funding/government-funding-increases-entrench-private-school-resource-advantage/#more-5717>

These figures indicate a serious maldistribution of teachers among schools, particularly between the public and the independent sectors, to the detriment of the capacity of public schools to cater for the students they enrol. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13384-025-00833-5>

A key strategy for improving awareness and access to high quality lesson planning and curriculum materials in schools is to provide schools with a greater allowance of time, in addition to time for face-to-face teaching, for teachers to engage in professional learning, curriculum and lesson planning, mentoring, research, assessment and reporting.

Is there anything more you would like to say about edtech, GenAI or lesson planning and curriculum materials?

There is a widespread recognition that AI will have significant effects on many aspects of society. The focus on this issue in this questionnaire runs the risk of creating an expectation that AI can and will deliver benefits to schools either by making it possible for governments to maintain the current outcomes from schools while reducing the cost OR to achieve increased outcomes without increasing investment.

The PC would be unwise to encourage the idea of AI as some kind of 'silver bullet'. Based on past experience of the effects of 'edtech tools' in schools and classrooms, there is a likelihood that AI will bring a confusing mix of benefits and detriments to teaching and learning; and that it will not be possible to predict what these will turn out to be.

What is certain is that the advent of AI makes it all the more important that all students have the kind of schooling which will equip them to participate in collective decision-making about the uses and abuses of AI as well as to make decisions affecting their own individual lives and interests.

Which of the following best describes you?

Retirees from long careers in education (including teaching, policy development and administration) at state and national level.

Are you currently using any edtech tools (including learning games and GenAI) to support teaching and learning in the classroom?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Are there things you would like to do with GenAI or edtech tools that you can't do currently? What's stopping you from doing these things?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using any edtech tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Do you access lesson planning and curriculum materials online?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using online lesson planning and curriculum materials?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Support the workforce through a flexible post-secondary education and training sector

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

In your experience, how well does the credit transfer and recognition of prior learning system operate in Australia? Does it adequately support students to move between courses or have their work experience recognised as part of a qualification? Are there ways it could be improved?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

In the past 3 years, have you applied for credit recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what was your experience in applying for credit recognition or RPL like?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on why you didn't apply?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Work related training

What are the main reasons individuals and/or businesses do or do not participate in work-related training?

The participant did not respond to this question.

What role, if any, should businesses be playing to address any barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

What, if anything, could government do to address barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers and sole traders, how many employees do you have?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For employees/individuals, have you participated in any work-related training in the last 12 months that did not relate to general compliance (such as WHS)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to undertake work-related training?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers or sole traders, have you provided or supported your employees to participate in work-related training in the past 12 months?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you or your employees received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Can you describe whether you accessed any government assistance, what type, and the amount received? If you didn't access any financial assistance, please tell us the reasons why.

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to provide or support your employees to undertake work-related training, such as the time or cost, availability of relevant or high-quality courses, and level of interest from your employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Balance service availability and quality through fit-for-purpose occupational entry regulations

What are the effects of occupational entry regulations? Please describe your experience and name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Do you believe current occupational entry regulations are proportionate to the level of risk associated with different professions? Why or why not? If not, do you have any suggested improvements to regulations to better reflect risks? Please name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes your connection to occupational entry regulations? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which state or territory are you predominantly based in?

The participant did not respond to this question.