

Submission to the Productivity Commission

The Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the *Building a skilled and adaptable workforce* interim report.

AARE is the premier professional association for educational researchers in Australia. Established in 1970, the Association supports educational researchers from Australian universities and other higher education providers, government bodies, schools, and independent research agencies. The Association aims to: support and strengthen research and scholarship in education; enhance understanding of educational processes, policy and practice; and improve quality and equity in education in Australia. The Association's overall mission is the development and promotion of high-quality educational research to enhance the public good.

The following comments and recommendations reflect the remit of AARE as a national member-driven association for educational researchers. We focus on Draft Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2, while also providing additional suggestions based on the issues raised in Chapter 1.

Feedback on the Draft Recommendations

Draft Recommendation 1.1 Invest in a single national platform for all teachers to access lesson planning materials

We welcome the Productivity Commission's concern with teacher workforce pressures. As identified in the Productivity report and in AITSL data, teachers consistently report high workload, stress, and lack of work-life balance as contributing factors in their intention to leave the profession. Recent research from UNSW and the Black Dog Institute shows that mental health distress is more than three times higher among teachers than among other adults: notably, 90.7% of teachers experience high stress, 68.9% experience elevated anxiety symptoms, and 70.5% experience elevated depressive symptoms (Granziera et al., 2025). These are systemic issues that require system-wide solutions.

The provision of a national platform hosting lesson planning materials has the potential, if implemented well, to benefit teachers who are looking for externally developed resources. As noted by the Productivity Commission, teachers must be permitted to adapt these materials to their own teaching contexts in order to meet the learning needs of their students. Nevertheless, the potential to generate major improvements is limited because:

1. This approach is already in use. While a single platform approach is in use in both Queensland and South Australia, evidence has not been presented that supports major improvements arising from this approach for either student outcomes or teacher workload;
2. Teachers themselves often cite centralised administrative requirements and data collection burdens as more problematic workload concerns (Windle et al., 2022). A single national platform contributes to centralisation and may aggravate loss of professional autonomy as a matter of workplace satisfaction;
3. Centralised curriculum and pedagogy have historically preferred the experiences, tastes and worldviews of a socially and culturally narrow range of students (Teese, 2013). They thus risk exacerbating inequalities, whereby the burden of adaptation falls hardest on the teachers of low socioeconomic status and culturally diverse students, including Indigenous students (Burgess et al., 2023; Guenther et al., 2013);
4. The proposed centralised role for the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) in defining quality for the proposed platform will likely excessively and unnecessarily narrow the approaches available to teachers, given AERO's firm commitment to explicit instruction despite concerns about its representation of research findings to suit this commitment (Sawyer & Hattam, 2025).

AARE Suggestions

- a. The resources should provide examples of adaptations as a central design element, plus make clear how teachers can create their own;
- b. There should be a range of resources, reflecting diverse approaches and relevant to different groups of students, ideally co-created with diverse teachers/students, for each aspect of curriculum;
- c. There is some form of feedback system to which teachers can contribute;
- d. The system promotes school-led innovation and recognises the unique position of schools in determining what is relevant to their own students;
- e. That research undertaken in a broad range of Australian schools and incorporating broad expertise is part of the development and evaluation process for resources.

Draft Recommendation 1.2 Lead national efforts to ensure equitable access to educational technology (edtech) and artificial intelligence (AI)

It is clear that leadership and expertise are needed to address the pressing challenges of technological advances that are already affecting education. We are concerned that Recommendation 1.2 unnecessarily limits the breadth of experience, expertise and leadership available for this task. We note the following concerns:

1. This recommendation relies on the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) to define “alignment with evidence-based practices.” As with Draft Recommendation 1.1, this proposal is similarly vulnerable to the ideological commitments of a single organisation that is at odds with the views of many other peak educational bodies in Australia;
2. As with Draft Recommendation 1.1, the proposal is for top-down change whereby schools, principals, teachers, teacher educators, unions, students and communities merely implement a single and problematic version of “evidence-based practice” (Sawyer & Hattam, 2025).

AARE Suggestions

- a. National efforts promote and support school-led innovation, recognising the unique position of schools in determining what is relevant to their own students;
- b. That research undertaken in a broad range of Australian schools and incorporating broad expertise is part of the development and evaluation process for nationally-coordinated efforts;
- c. Stake-holder consultation and participation in decision-making are part of any new structures.

Feedback on Chapter 1 and additional suggestions

The discussions underpinning *Draft Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2* could usefully be extended to consider major drivers of performance and equity in Australian education. We draw attention to the following matters:

1. Significant innovations in Australian schooling historically have been school-led, not centrally led. For example, the Disadvantaged Schools Program was a Federal initiative that successfully encouraged school-driven innovation (Connell, 1992). The Commission’s recommendations should seek to fully leverage the creative potential of schools themselves;

2. There is a need to broaden measures of educational quality to incorporate wellbeing, cultural responsiveness, and social contribution. Australian governments have adopted an increasingly narrow view of what constitutes educational quality—overlooking important aspects of schooling and ignoring international insights into system performance;
3. There is a need for more equitable school funding. Socioeconomic status remains the most significant factor influencing student outcomes, even more so than teacher (or teaching) quality and to a greater extent than in similar systems (Perry & McConney, 2023). Policies that leave schools serving disadvantaged communities chronically underfunded and short-staffed, and that isolate these students from peers in better-resourced settings, must be addressed if productivity is to improve, as highlighted in the Productivity Commission's own 2023 *Review of the National School Reform Agreement* and more recent *Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System*;
4. There is a need to promote and respect teacher autonomy. International evidence, including that from the OECD, demonstrates that teacher autonomy is a core driver of educational quality and job satisfaction. There is no teaching strategy or curriculum resource that can universally improve or equalise student performance;
5. Drawing conclusions about causal relationships between centrally-available curriculum resources and system performance by referencing Singapore is not valid. There are low performing systems with centrally-provided resources and centralised curricula, just as there are high-performing systems that are not highly centralised;
6. For equity, and for transition to work and further education, diverse pathways, pedagogy, and curriculum models are needed. While the Productivity Commission encourages varied educational and training pathways as a solution to occupational barriers, it recommends a uniform approach for school education. Diversity of provision should be encouraged in school education;
7. The Commission incorrectly equates differences in student performance with differences in ability, when research consistently shows that socioeconomic status is a far more powerful determinant. The challenge of accommodating a "wide range of abilities" in classrooms is not as universal as stated; social segregation across schools means wide variation in disadvantaged schools and narrower ranges in elite schools;
8. Figure 1.4 presents "education bodies" in Australia's national schooling architecture. The figure highlights a lack of connection to stakeholders and expertise beyond AERO. There is a need for mechanisms to include the perspectives, experience and expertise of school systems, universities, principal associations, teacher unions, and parent and community organisations. The Productivity Commission presents the problems of Australian education as "not uniform enough", but this Figure highlights the risk of excessive uniformity and the danger of an "echo-chamber" relationship among its parts.

We again thank the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to provide feedback and remain available to provide any further information that may be of use.

Yours sincerely,



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