

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Paul Ramsay Foundation (PRF) welcomes the opportunity by the Productivity Commission to provide views on the interim report for the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA).

Our mission is to end cycles of disadvantage in Australia, so all people and communities can thrive. We are Australia's largest philanthropic foundation and grant approximately \$150m each year. Since our establishment in 2016, we have granted \$160m to partners collaborating with school-aged children and schools to ensure children are engaging, learning and achieving. Our engagement with the NSRA review is through the lens of disrupting cycles of disadvantage over generations. Socio-educational inequities have powerful ripple effects throughout the life of a young person, affecting their engagement with tertiary education and employment.

We are encouraged by the Commission's findings of how State and Territory Governments can work together to improve the outcomes of priority equity cohorts, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. We agree that the conflation of Indigeneity and poor learning outcomes is harmful and incorrect. We also believe direct comparisons between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers obscure the distinct educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly the importance of being strong in culture. Governments must partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, educators and students to place their perspectives, values and aspirations at the heart of government priorities.

PRF promotes evidence-based education practices in Australia to narrow the achievement gap between students from high and low-income families. The diffusion of evidence throughout the education system can be achieved by investing in programs which are reshaping current teacher practice through causal evidence and commissioning a future pipeline of educational research. There is an opportunity for philanthropy and Government to jointly fund research at the scale that is required to reshape education policy and practice.

The concentration of disadvantage in Australian schools perpetuates a 'double disadvantage' for students who already experience the cycle of poverty. This concentration has grown and is exacerbated because of current funding agreements that provide significant funding to non-government schools whilst many public schools are funded below the Schooling Resource Standard. Urgent reform of these funding arrangements, though complex and politically challenging, is essential if we are to improve educational outcomes generally, and for children most disadvantaged. Governments need the right data to address these structural problems. The first step is to expand the National School Measurement Framework of the next NSRA to publicly report on the concentration of disadvantage in schools. This will create an evidence base to inform the fair redistribution of resources across public and private sectors.

PRF welcomes the opportunity to engage with the Productivity Commission in the context of the NSRA consultation process and further elaborate on the points below.

Kristy Muir
Chief Executive Office

1. Lift outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by elevating their unique voice, leadership and agency.

In response to Information Request 3.5:

1. What specifically could be done to embed the views of priority equity cohorts in national education policies and institutions, including outcomes, targets and policy initiatives in the next intergovernmental agreement on school education?
3. Does the current education and research evidence base capture a representative range of cultural and community perspectives, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, teachers and researchers? If not, what actions could be taken to support this?

Key Recommendation:

1. The Commission should directly engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations, including those below, as it considers how to design and embed Indigenous-led solutions that will meaningfully address equity in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The adoption of similar principles to those outlined below would assist in embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views in national education policies and institutions.

Addressing equity in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires effective intergovernmental collaboration across departments and agencies, but most importantly with community and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Our Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture Program is an example of collaboration which places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and agency at the centre of program design, and fosters place-based initiatives across diverse cultural contexts in various Aboriginal nations. PRF has partnered with six organisations in NSW: the Aurora Education Foundation, Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC), the Gujaga Foundation, the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC), the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), and UNSW's Culturally Nourishing Schooling Program (CNS). The program centres Indigenous-led education practices to address systemic barriers impacting the academic success and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Each project is unique, but all are centred around the same ethos: enabling more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow strong in their culture and reach their academic potential.

The collaboration is governed by five core principles which could inform the approach of Government and non-Indigenous organisations to embedding the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities in national education policies and institutions:

1. Put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and agency at the centre
2. Put people & relationships first
3. Show respect with mutual, high expectations
4. Demonstrate humility and build cultural understanding
5. Embrace strength and diversity of culture and community

For further information on the Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture program, we point the Committee to Attachment 1 in this document.

2. Support teachers through building the pipeline of causal evidence and sharpening its application in the classroom.

In response to Draft Finding 5.1: Improving teacher effectiveness is associated with large lifetime economic benefits for students.

Key recommendations:

1. The Commission should advise Federal, State and Territory Governments to:
 - a. Invest in a future pipeline of educational research through the Australian Research Council (ARC).
 - b. Invest in current initiatives which build the capacity of teachers and principals to apply evidence-based teaching with the objective to shift educational outcomes for priority equity cohorts
2. Governments should partner with the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and Australian philanthropy to grow the domestic evidence base on education programs (including ed tech), strengthen regulatory mechanisms and create conditions for wider uptake.

The NSRA should promote evidence-based teaching practice as a lever to lift educational outcomes for students from priority equity cohorts. Improving causal evidence and its use in education has been a sustained focus of PRF work in school-age learning and partnerships with the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre on Quality Teaching Rounds (University of Newcastle) and The Monash Q Project (Monash University). Four RCTs we have supported on Quality Teaching Rounds are indicative of the kind of work needed to generate powerful evidence of Australian programs that improve student outcomes. Students and teachers participating in two of the four RCTs - those that were not affected by pandemic disruptions - benefited from the QTR model:

1. Students of teachers in the QTR group demonstrated an additional 2-month growth in mathematics (2019 trial) and reading (2021 digital trial).
2. Teachers reported improved morale associated to delivery of better-quality teaching

There is no clear intergovernmental commitment to funding educational research at the scale which is required to reshape education policy and practice. The renegotiation of the NSRA provides an opportunity to remedy this and support initiatives that ameliorate the perceived 'costs' of promoting quality teaching and support its effective translation in the classroom. We welcome the opportunity to partner with Government and AERO and join up efforts to build a robust national evidence base with the aim of improving outcomes for students.

For further information on our partnerships with QTR and The Q Project, we point the Committee to Attachments 2 & 3.

3. Expand the National Measurement Framework to measure the increasing concentration of disadvantage in Australian schools.

Extending scope of Draft Recommendation 7.1: The performance reporting framework of the next agreement

Key Recommendations:

1. The Commission should require annual reporting on trends in the concentration of disadvantage in schools by jurisdiction, geo-location and schooling sector as a lead indicator of outcomes for students experiencing disadvantage.
2. This data should inform new allocations of state and territory funding based on need and with the intention to support high-quality public education in Australia.

The concentration of disadvantage in Australian schools affects a sizeable proportion of Australian students and reflects a larger crisis of socio-educational diversity in Australia. Nous analysis commissioned by PRF in 2019 determined 12% of Australian students attend a school with a high concentration of socio-educational disadvantage (defined as a school in which more than 50% of students are in the bottom national quartile of the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) (Nous & PRF 2019). These students face a distinct double disadvantage if they are concentrated in schools with a lack of socio-economic diversity. According to a 2018 OECD analysis, “On average across OECD countries, disadvantaged students attending advantaged schools score 78 points higher than those attending disadvantaged schools” (OECD 2018, pg. 14). In the same study, these students reported a suppressed sense of ‘belonging’ to their school and demonstrated lower levels of emotional resilience. Most Australian schools with high concentrations of disadvantage increased in their concentration from 2011 to 2017 (Nous & PRF 2019). This increase was most apparent in NSW and in inner and outer regional schools.

The acceleration of this trend is genuinely concerning and speaks to the consequences of a national school system which does not sufficiently promote equity in education. The National Measurement Framework of the next NSRA must include leading indicators of educational disadvantage within schools to equip education policymakers with the right data to redirect education funding based on greatest need.

Appendix

1. Professor Jenny Gore, Dr Drew Miller, A. Prof Jess Harris & Mr Steve Hannan (2020), “Building Capacity for Quality Teaching in Australian Schools” (Annual Report to the Paul Ramsay Foundation)
2. Nous Group (2019), “Concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage in Australia” Report for the Paul Ramsay Foundation (available to share with the Commission upon request)
3. OECD (2018), Equity in Education: Breaking Down Barriers to Social Mobility, PISA, OECD Publishing <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264073234-en>.
4. Nous Group (2019), “Concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage in Australia” Report for the Paul Ramsay Foundation (available to share with the Commission upon request)

Attachments

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the following partnerships in deeper detail with the Productivity Commission.

1. Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture Program

In making recommendations on the design of the next NSRA, the Commission should consider existing models for Aboriginal-led education initiatives that place Indigenous perspectives on wellbeing and success in education at the centre of their approach. Examples include the six organisations in PRF's Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture (LLSIC) program, which was launched in March 2022: the Aurora Education Foundation, Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation (BMNAC), the Gujaga Foundation, the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC), the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), and UNSW's Culturally Nourishing Schooling Program (CNS). While some of these partner organisations operate nationally or across jurisdictions, the program is primarily NSW-focused, although the principles underpinning the program are relevant to and transferable across jurisdictions.

Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture has been designed with PRF's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led partner organisations to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice, leadership and agency in education. These organisations work in diverse ways to disseminate and build on the existing base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led education practice and research to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The program centres Indigenous-led education practices in a dynamic approach to address systemic barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' academic success and wellbeing. Each project is unique, but all are centred around the same ethos: enabling more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to grow strong in their culture and reach their academic potential.

The Aurora Education Foundation's Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) program builds on the success of Aurora's high school program to develop new and trusted data sets that place Indigenous perspectives, values, and aspirations at the heart of Indigenous education outcomes data. These data sets will build the evidence base for Indigenous-led cultural and academic education models, providing critical input to Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 (shared access to data and information) and an invaluable resource for informed policymaking that centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. PRF refers the Commission to Aurora's own submission in response to the interim report and recommends further direct engagement by the Commission, and state and federal governments with Aurora in the design of the next NSRA.

UNSW's Culturally Nourishing Schooling (CNS) project, led by Gubbi Gubbi man Scientia Associate Professor Kevin Lowe, works within schools and communities to agree, and embed local priorities and solutions, along with direct support to teachers to affect culturally situated teaching practices, to support Aboriginal students' cultural and academic achievement. The CNS model is grounded in the findings of the Aboriginal Voices project which utilised an Indigenous methodology to map existing research against the question: 'What are the issues affecting the underachievement of Indigenous students in Australia and how can research inform solutions to the complex and inter-related issues needing to be addressed?' The findings of the project represent another important source of evidence that

can directly inform Information Request 3.5, Question 1 in the development of the next NSRA.

Addressing equity in education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students requires effective and flexible intergovernmental collaboration across departments and agencies – but most importantly with community – to foster place-based initiatives across diverse cultural contexts in various Aboriginal nations. At the national level, NIYEC provides an important platform to support and communicate the views and aspirations of Aboriginal young people within education. In NSW specifically, the NSW AECG is the peak body representing 157 local and 20 regional consultative groups of Aboriginal people that set education priorities within their communities and advocate to schools and governments for those priorities to be acted on. PRF notes Submission 52 from the Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting (prior to the release of the interim report) and recommends the Commission's continued engagement with these and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies in the development of the new NSRA.

State and Federal education policy should also enable and elevate the leadership of local Aboriginal communities and organisations in the design and implementation of local solutions and initiatives that are tailored to community needs and aspirations. BMNAC and the Gujaga Foundation are two examples of organisations collaborating with their local communities (on Gumbaynggirr country and Dharawal country respectively) to provide cultural education opportunities within schools that flow through to self-determined language and culture revitalisation initiatives within their communities. The distinct needs and aspirations articulated by local Aboriginal organisations and groups must be heeded and supported. PRF recommends that the Commission, state, and federal governments consider the holistic educational models of organisations such as BMNAC and the Gujaga Foundation to embed local initiatives meaningfully and effectively within education systems and policies.

PRF's Learning Lives, Strengthened in Culture program design principles



PRF is not an Indigenous-led organisation. In collaborating with our partners in the Strengthened in Culture program, PRF has committed to transparently operating in line with the principles outlined in the diagram below. The program principles may be helpful to non-Indigenous organisations, including governments, as they consider an approach to embedding the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities in national education policies and institutions. Most importantly, as implied by the central principle, the six organisations listed above are best placed to provide critical insight and practical solutions to the Commission's identified need to capture and embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and priorities in the Australian education system.

2. Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (TTRC), University of Newcastle.

Since 2018, PRF has partnered with the Teachers and Teaching Research Centre (TTRC) at the University of Newcastle and the NSW Department of Education on the Building capacity for quality teaching in Australian schools project, which has the Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) approach at its heart. We have been pleased to support the work of the TTRC in supporting teachers to improve their teaching and in running the four randomised controlled trials that have generated causal evidence of the impact of Quality Teaching Rounds. A commitment by Australian governments to producing more research of this kind on education programs in Australia would contribute to supporting teachers and school leaders to make evidence-informed decisions about how to improve outcomes for their students. We encourage the Commission to note the TTRC's submission in response to the interim report and to engage directly with the TTRC and others with expertise in conducting causal research in Australian education to seek advice about how best to increase the number of causal studies in education, including through increased funding and lowering administrative barriers.

3. The Q Project, Monash University.

Simply improving the supply of causal evidence will not, on its own, improve teaching quality, and thus student outcomes, at scale. Effort must also be made to improve the use of such evidence in schools, which is sophisticated, professional work made possible by supportive conditions in schools and systems. PRF has partnered with The Q Project (Quality Use of Research Driving Quality Education) at Monash University, supporting:

- (1) the development of a framework for the quality use of research evidence in education,
- (2) empirical research in Australian schools about how evidence is by teachers and school leaders in varied school settings.
- (3) professional learning and tools to support for teachers and school leaders about how to improve their use of research evidence for the benefit of their students; and
- (4) engagement with Australian education systems and national agencies to help them create conditions that support schools and teachers to use evidence better.

We encourage the Commission to consider the Monash Q Project's submission to the interim review. The project's Quality Use of Research Evidence framework and its findings about schools' use of research evidence provide an evidence-based and empirical view of barriers and enablers of the use of evidence in Australian schools.

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