

A collaboration between:



# MONASH Q PROJECT

**Submission to  
Productivity  
Commission**

**Interim Report -  
National School  
Reform Agreement**

*October 2022*

# Interim Report - National School Reform Agreement

## SUBMISSION

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### 1. OVERVIEW

This submission has been prepared in response to the Productivity Commission's Interim Report – Review of the National School Reform Agreement. The aim of this submission is to draw the attention of the Productivity Commission to the work of the Monash Q Project, and what it has found about **using research well in education**, and the **use of research in Australian schools**.

We provide a brief overview of the Monash Q Project, an outline of our key findings in relation to the Commission's work (in relation to this report and the Productivity Commission's Interim report number 5 – September 2022), and a summary of our overall recommendations.

### 2. ABOUT THE MONASH Q PROJECT

The Monash Q Project is a five-year study to understand and **improve the use of research in Australian schools**. A partnership between Monash University and the Paul Ramsay Foundation, it involves close collaboration with teachers, school leaders, policy makers, researchers, research brokers and other key stakeholders across Australia. In particular, our research has benefited from collaboration with organisations such as Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) and Evidence for Learning that are cited in the Interim report. We have also recently contributed a chapter to the OECD's [\*'Who cares about using education research in policy and practice?: Strengthening research engagement'\*](#) (Rickinson et al., 2022).

**During the last four years, our research and improvement activities have included:**

- a systematic review and narrative synthesis of relevant literature in health, social care, policy and education in order to develop a conceptual framework of quality use of research evidence;
- surveys (n=1725) and interviews (n=29) with Australian teachers and school leaders in order to explore educators' perspectives on using research and using research well in Australian schools; and
- co-designing and trialling interventions (such as a 'using research well' professional learning program and self-assessment tool) to improve research use within schools and systems.

Taken together, the Q Project's work has **generated insights in two main areas that have relevance to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA)**. These concern:

- findings about using research well in education - what quality research use means and what it involves in practice; and
- findings about research use in Australian schools - whether and how research evidence is used and its enablers and barriers.

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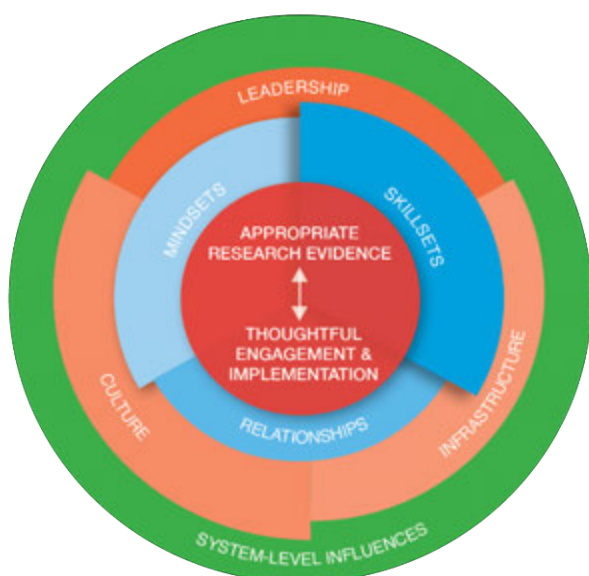
### 3. Q PROJECT FINDINGS ABOUT USING RESEARCH WELL IN EDUCATION

#### The Quality Use of Research Evidence (QURE) Framework

Our cross-sector review of the international literature made clear that while there has been wide-ranging debate about what counts as quality evidence, there has been very little dialogue about what counts as quality use (Rickinson et al., 2021a). In response, the Q Project has developed a [Quality Use of Research Evidence \(QURE\) Framework](#) to define and elaborate what using research well means in education (Figure 1). It defines quality use of research as *'thoughtful engagement with and implementation of appropriate research evidence, supported by a blend of individual and organisational enabling components and system-level influences'* (Rickinson et al., 2020, p. 6). This framework makes clear that using research well is sophisticated, professional work that requires skilled educators, supportive schools and supportive systems.

The QURE Framework could provide a way of better understanding the quality use of evidence-based practices within and across schools.

Figure 1: Quality Use of Research Evidence (QURE) Framework

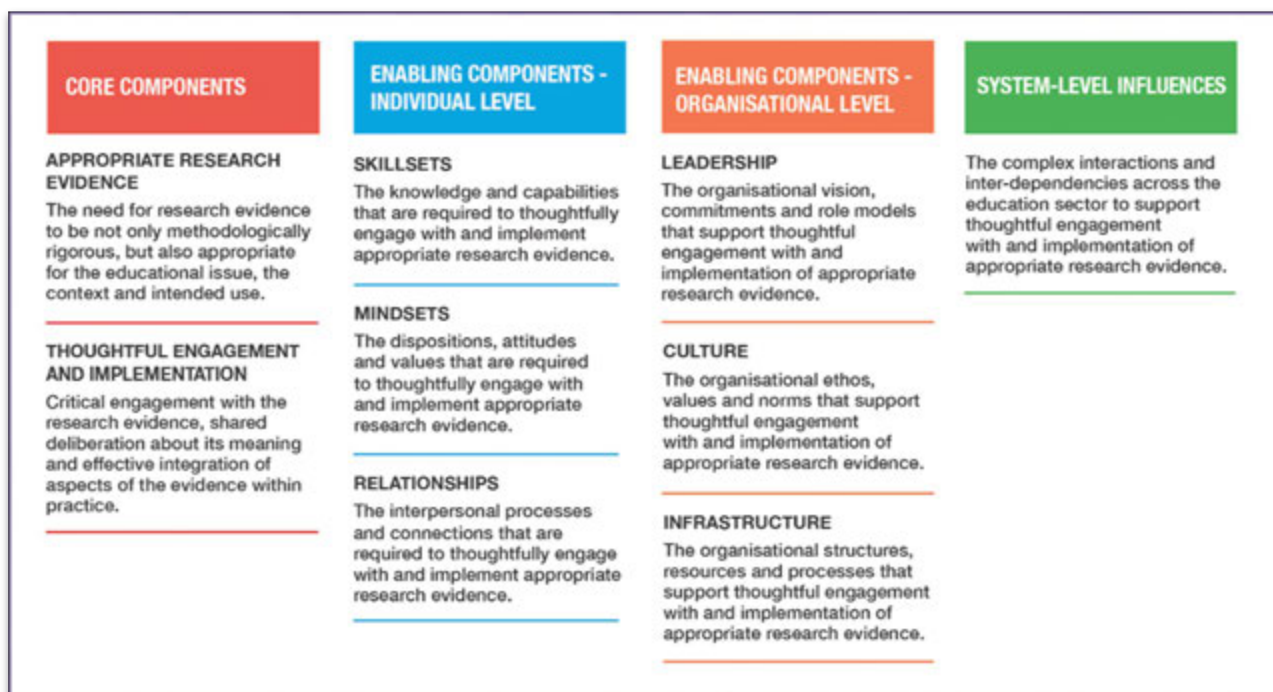


Quality use of research evidence in education is defined as:

*the thoughtful engagement with and implementation of appropriate research evidence, supported by a blend of individual and organisational enabling components within a complex system.*

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**Source:** Rickinson et al., 2020, p. 8

### Characteristics of quality research use in practice

Our interviews and surveys with Australian educators highlighted six key characteristics of using research well in practice (Rickinson et al., 2021b). For educators, quality research use needs to be: purposeful, embedded, connected to teacher professionalism, collective, time and effort-dependent, and curiosity-driven (Table 1).

In light of broader needs to improve student outcomes, student wellbeing and system capacity to adapt to change, these six characteristics are a powerful reminder of the conditions that are required for the effective implementation of evidence-based improvement. As well as investment in a strong national education evidence base, we also need support for quality implementation within schools and systems.

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**Table 1: Key characteristics of quality research use from educators' responses in interviews and surveys**

Quality research use characteristics	Educator quote examples
<b>Purposeful</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is purpose in both research use intent and individuals' behaviours.</li> <li>There is direction about intended practice change, with clear and transparent rationale for both the research itself and its use. Research use decisions and actions are shaped by the context of the practice, students or the school environment.</li> </ul>	<p>"It starts at the top...and that's our decision for the whole school. And it's transparent and we make sure that all staff have an understanding of what's expected [when using research]".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Government Primary School</i></p>
<b>Embedded</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is an intrinsic part of the school's culture or environment.</li> <li>It is embedded in practice, school processes and schedules, such as planning and review cycles, informal and formal discussions, and decision-making.</li> </ul>	<p>"Using research well means it's intrinsic in your approach...we talk research all the time".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Government Primary School</i></p>
<b>Connected to teacher professionalism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research use is seen as a professional expectation.</li> <li>It is associated with improvements in teaching practice and student outcomes, educators' own teaching skills, confidence and knowledge, and school performance and credibility.</li> </ul>	<p>"For me, to feel like I'm doing my job well, I have to do that professional reading [of research] that informs my practice, so I know that practice deeply and I know that what I'm doing is the right thing to do".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Government Primary School</i></p>
<b>Collective</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is collective engagement in the use of research.</li> <li>This involves staff consultation and buy-in to research use-related decisions and processes, group discussions, debate and reflection about research use and outcomes, and a research use school culture that is collaborative and trustworthy.</li> </ul>	<p>"It's not about me [the school leader]. It's about the collective and empowering staff to get on board with the research".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Catholic Secondary School</i></p>
<b>Time and effort dependent</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time and effort are dedicated and taken within school hours to use research.</li> <li>Taking the time to engage with research deeply and carefully, experimenting with research, and evaluating different practice approaches and outcomes is valued within the school culture.</li> </ul>	<p>"Because we live in this fast-paced way that we work and schooling ... I think that the concept of slowing down to then help you speed up is something that we might need to do".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Government Primary School</i></p>
<b>Curiosity-driven</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being curious and inquisitive involves individuals having a growth mindset and being open-minded to new knowledge through research use.</li> <li>There is a school culture of questioning practice and looking to improve teaching and outcomes through research use.</li> </ul>	<p>"Number one disposition is being curious. I keep using the word 'inquiry'...having the willingness to go forward with inquiry-oriented action into exploring what that research is".</p> <p><i>Senior Leader, Government Primary School</i></p>

**Source:** Rickinson et al., 2022, p. 190



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### 4. Q PROJECT FINDINGS ABOUT RESEARCH USE IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

#### How research is used in practice in Australian Schools

To realise the full potential of evidence-based research, our work (Walsh et al., 2022) shows that:

- **Research is not used often in practice.** 36.7% regularly used university research and 29.7% regularly used university guidance.
- **Research is valued less than other evidence types.** Educators are more likely to select student data (76.5%) and professional observations (69.8%) as high quality evidence, compared with quantitative research (56.8%), qualitative research (47.7%) and randomised controlled trials (17.5%).
- **Leaders use research more often than other staff.** Those in school leadership positions used research significantly more regularly (57.3%) compared with teachers (33.1%,  $p < .001$ ).

#### The kinds of research and evidence that educators want

Our findings indicate that:

- **Educators want research and evidence to be 'usable'.** Usability comprises several components that were highly endorsed by educators, including practicality (65.0%), convenience to read (63.7%), alignment with practice (63.2%) and credibility (62.6%).
- **Educators have a preference for research sources that are interactive and relational.** This includes: Professional Development courses (selected by 62.9%), in-person talks (58.6%) and informal chats (47.3%)
- **There are also preferences for short, original research.** Both limiting the length (e.g., ≤4-page reports), and presenting the research or evidence in its original form (e.g., original findings, methods and context) are valued.
- **Concerns about a lack of practicality and convenience can influence educators to use research less often in practice.** 47.8% of educators believed that using research was not worthwhile when it does not have a clear purpose, while 36.0% felt that research was not worthwhile when it was difficult to understand.

#### Educators' professional learning needs

Our work shows that:

- **Educators see engaging with research as a deeply professional activity.** For instance, 80% see engaging with research as increasing their professionalism, 76.8% believe that using research empowers them and their practice, and 73.7% see research use as critical to being a good educator.
- **Professional learning is seen as an important improvement mechanism.** 81.2% believe that research-focused professional learning will have a positive impact on their research use, with 61.8% seeing it as important to select this professional learning themselves.
- **Educators indicate that skills to assess the credibility and usability of research are critical development needs,** such as 'assessing research quality' (28.0% ranked in top 3 needs), 'assessing research usability' (27.8%), and 'assessing contextual relevance' (25.8%).

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### When teachers use research

As the report suggests, teacher workloads are high and increasing, which shapes when and how they use research. Our work shows that:

- **Educators have significant concerns about having sufficient time to use research.** 76.2% felt that they did not have adequate time to engage with research, while 76.0% found it difficult to keep up with research. These concerns were more prevalent among teachers, compared with leaders.
- **Educators report using their personal time to engage with research.** For example, 81.4% use research during school, 58.7% also indicated using after school at home and 69.3% at home on the weekends.
- **Access to research is another pressing issue for educators.** While 64.3% of educators believe that access to research databases is important for supporting their use of research, only 36.7% indicated having such access. For 67.7%, their access to research was insufficient.

### The role of collaboration in research use

Our work shows that:

- **Research and evidence are often used in collaborative ways.** Most commonly, research is used in a collaborative manner (e.g., to discuss best practice, 76.0%) or for personal development (e.g., to improve knowledge, 72.2%; to reflect on practice, 67.1%).
- **Educators have trust in research sourced via colleagues.** They indicated greater trust in research coming from colleagues (78.5% agreed/strongly agreed), professional learning networks (73.2%) and school leaders (69.6%), compared to other sources such as academics (59.7%), educational research organisations (58.9%), and government education departments (54.1%).
- **Collaboration is an important avenue for improvement.** 67.9% saw participating in collaborative learning as important for supporting their improved use of research.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

### QURE Framework as a way to better understand the quality use of evidence-based practices

- In relation to the Commission's interest in "*gleaning a better understanding of [...] the extent to which evidence-based practices are adopted*", the Quality Use of Research Evidence (QURE) Framework could provide a way of better understanding the quality use of evidence-based practices within and across schools. The six characteristics of quality use in practice (i.e., purposeful, embedded, connected to teacher professionalism, collective, time and effort-dependent, and curiosity-driven) highlight the qualities that are required for the effective implementation of evidence-based improvement.

### Respond to educators' current challenges, whilst system-level approaches must be contextualised for education.

- In relation to the Commission's information request 2.1, "*realising the full potential of evidence-based research*" for more equitable educational improvement, it is critical to recognise that using research well is complex, skilled work. Efforts to increase and improve the use of research need to respond to educators' current challenges (limited use, insufficient time, poor access) and leverage potential enablers (leaders, professional learning, collaboration). While



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system-level approaches can be drawn from other sectors such as health, it is critical that they are carefully contextualised for education.

### **Engaging with research is a deeply professional activity and fundamental to educators' practice.**

- It is important to recognise that educators see engaging with research as a deeply professional activity that is fundamental to them doing a good job, as well as being an open-minded and innovative professional.

## **6. REFERENCES**

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