Social Ventures Australia
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Response to the Productivity Commission Draft Report on the inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base

Social Ventures Australia

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Executive Summary

Despite increasing investment in education, the outcomes for Australian students have not improved commensurately on international measures.

There are schools which require additional investment as well as students who need greater support in order to be successful, but Australia also needs a more effective system to generate and use evidence in education to ensure we do more of what works and less of what doesn't.

As the Productivity Commission Draft Report on the inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base has highlighted, Australia needs better policies, systems and institutions to collect the correct data, analyse it to generate evidence of what works and why; share this knowledge across school systems and governments; and translate it into tools that are appropriate for the classroom. Supporting and empowering school leaders and teachers to embrace and engage with evidence to better inform their decision making is also crucial.

SVA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the draft report and strongly supports the majority of the Commission's draft recommendations. We have provided specific comments on draft recommendations 3.1; 7.2; 8.1; and also responded to the information request in section 8.1.

Draft recommendation 3.1

SVA supports the criteria identified for assessing investments to improve data quality and collection with some caveats.

In order to know what works in education, there is a need to improve the quality of data, particularly through the use of randomised controlled trials in education research. The improvement in data quality also needs to be supported by changes to how data is collected, accessed, linked to other data sources and processed, in order to translate high quality data to build an effective and sustainable evidence ecosystem.

Draft recommendation 7.2

SVA agrees that it is essential to have a national policy approach to the generation, sharing and use of evidence including agreed research standards and benchmarks but suggests that a national set of 'common research priorities' should complement state based and school system level research. We have addressed each of the five activities identified in the draft recommendation in detail in the submission.

Given the division of responsibility for education across different levels of Australian governments, we believe the development of an evidence base needs to be considerate of the different drivers and strategic education priorities of each jurisdiction. This complex policy landscape requires collaboration and cooperation so that all participants are contributing to research priorities; building, sharing and using evidence effectively; and developing the capabilities of researchers and the sector more broadly.

Draft Recommendation and Information Request 8.1

SVA supports the recommendation that the Australian education system needs a 'bottom-up' evidence capability, with an assigned institution having responsibility and accountability for the creation, translation and demand stimulation for evidence across the education sector in order to drive better educational outcomes.

We have provided detailed comments on the mechanism by which the institution should be established and what we view as the critical features for its success. It is these characteristics that will enable a sustainable and effective national education evidence ecosystem. The institution should retain independence but have reliance on the comprehensive data generated by a national data monitor ('top-down capability').

High-value data analysis is already being undertaken within some existing national and state government institutions to generate and use evidence of learning outcomes. However, it is our view based on the work that Evidence for Learning has already undertaken, that, on balance, a new education evidence institution at arms-length to government is likely to be the most effective structure.

The Commission's draft report provides Australia with a unique opportunity to strengthen the education system through the creation of a national education evidence base. A robust evidence base, delivered effectively, will support and enable the sector to improve educational outcomes for students as well as increase the learning productivity in schools across the country.

Introduction

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) welcomes the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on its inquiry into the National Education Evidence Base. In education we have a vision for Australia where there is an equal opportunity to access high quality education and to develop the skills to participate fully in society, regardless of background. With this vision in mind, SVA agrees that the development of a national educational evidence base that supports the sector to improve educational outcomes is critical.

Australia has had clear objectives for educational outcomes for a considerable length of time, including the Melbourne Declaration Goals that have been in place since 2008.[1] These goals have been supported by investment in a national education architecture to establish a national curriculum and national standards for teachers and principals, impending reforms to initial teacher education, combined with increased 'real-terms' funding for schools. In addition, Australia has instituted a 'top-down' program of national testing of school students, complemented by international testing, to provide consistent measures of academic performance which can be benchmarked and monitored for changes over time.

As the Commission notes in its draft report, despite monitoring, performance benchmarking and reporting against national standards, combined with increased funding support, the data on student outcomes suggests that Australian students' academic performance has not improved significantly.[2] The Review of Government Service Provision found there has been a 24 percent real increase in overall government recurrent expenditure on schools between 2004-05 and 2013-14 (almost 14 per cent per student across government and non-government schools).[3] Unfortunately, the additional expenditure has not achieved the desired educational gains and Australian students' performance on national and international student assessments has stalled or even declined in some cases.[4]

While the additional expenditure accounts for multiple inputs – such as wages growth, capital works, and an increasing number of students - there is an imperative to raise the educational return on our growing national investment in schooling. As the draft report states, "there is a growing consensus that increased resourcing and an accountability focus, alone, are insufficient to achieve gains in education outcomes. Adopting and applying an evidence-based approach to education policy and teaching practices is what drives a better allocation of resources and improved outcomes."[5]

SVA strongly supports this view. Australia needs to improve the 'learning productivity' in our schools through a national educational evidence base that supports the sector to deliberately improve educational outcomes.

The best way to do this is to enable and support evidence informed policy and practice, so that higher impact approaches are more frequently adopted and lower impact approaches are more quickly retired. In order to achieve system-level improvements for all students, it is paramount that the focus should be directed towards practices and interventions with the highest likelihood of success.

The draft report's comprehensive review of how Australia can "create a more robust national education evidence base for effective policy and program development to meet our national education objectives and lift our national productivity"[6] demonstrates that there is a significant opportunity to identify areas for effective investment through a more streamlined, comprehensive and collaborative national approach.[7]

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[1] Ministerial Council on Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2008, 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians', MCEETYA.

[2] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Draft Report, pp.3.

[3] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Draft Report, pp.30.

[4] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Draft Report, pp.3.

[5] Ibid

[6] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Issues Paper, pp.iii.

[7] Ibid

SVA strongly supports the recommendation that a bottom-up national body with rigorous governance processes will be well-placed to ensure evidence is mobilised effectively and that educational outcomes improve as a result.

In order to address the barriers to evidence-informed practice, SVA incubated a new social enterprise, Evidence for Learning.[8]

With a model based on the UK's Education Endowment Foundation but adapted for Australia's federation, Evidence for Learning is now established and working collaboratively with governments, agencies, professional associations, networks and schools. We hope that Evidence for Learning's activities and experience are useful for informing the desirable features of this bottom-up national body.

Evidence for Learning is actively sharing evidence about effective approaches by providing free, online summaries of global evidence through the Teaching & Learning Toolkit.[9] Evidence for Learning supports the creation of new rigorous evidence via randomised controlled trials on programs in schools through its Learning Impact Fund.[10] Evidence for Learning is also assisting schools to use evidence to inform their professional decision-making in order improve learning outcomes through the Evidence Informed Educator Network and events like the Evidence Exchange.[11]

Based on this experience, Social Ventures Australia supports the draft findings and recommendations put forward by the Productivity Commission, with some specific caveats relating to draft recommendations 3.1, 7.2 and 8.1 outlined below. We have also responded to information request 8.1.

Specifically, we have articulated what we view as the critical features of the 'bottom-up' institution and how these might work best in an Australian context, relying on datasets collected and controlled by government agencies used effectively to build, share and encourage the use of evidence.

Our comments include considerations of the necessary governance and institutional arrangements for this model and the benefits to be derived from this, namely greater use of what works well in education to deliver better outcomes.

[8] http://evidenceforlearning.org.au/

[9] http://evidenceforlearning.org.au/the-toolkit/

[10] http://evidenceforlearning.org.au/lif/

[11] http://evidenceforlearning.org.au/evidence-exchange-2016/

Detailed Response to Sections of the Draft Report

Draft Recommendation 3.1

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 3.1

In assessing whether to improve the quality of existing education data, governments should examine whether:

- there is a need to improve the quality of the data so it is fit for purpose
- data quality improvements are feasible given the context of data collection
- other options are available
- the benefits of improving data quality exceed the costs.

SVA supports the criteria identified for assessing investments in improving data quality and collection with some caveats.

The Commission's Draft Report identifies a need "to invest, particularly in randomised controlled trials (RCTs), to build the Australian evidence base on what works best to improve education outcomes."[12]

We support that conclusion and point out that addressing this need has implications for assessing the quality of data to determine whether it is fit for the purpose of running RCTs.

As the Australian Government Behavioural Economics Team (BETA) have written recently, 'While RCTs may utilise the collection of novel data, such trials typically take longer and are more expensive. There are many important outcomes measured in existing datasets across government agencies in Australia. Focusing on those outcomes already measured will reduce the cost of a trial, increase the viability of delivering the trial, and allow resources to be focused on other elements of the project.'[13]

Over the last six months, Evidence for Learning has commissioned three randomised controlled trials on Australian educational programs, with two focused on numeracy and one on literacy. Our experience in this work supports the point made by BETA above.

Having nationally comparable and large-scale data sets such as those generated from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Australian Council for Educational Research's (ACER) Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) has made designing trials easier, in terms of both data for selection prior to randomising, and relevant post-intervention measures. This has also resulted in cheaper individual trials, as the trials can utilise data on numeracy and literacy outcomes that have already been collected.

At a national level, this would also be true in science (PAT), but not any other cognitive or non-cognitive outcomes, as far as we are aware. Of course, this speaks not to the quality of existing data but to its comprehensiveness, addressed in Draft Finding 3.1. Nevertheless, when considering whether to invest in making data collections more comprehensive, the value of reducing costs in trials on other cognitive and non-cognitive skills should be one factor.

When considering if the benefit of improved data quality (or investment in research) exceeds the costs to generate it, is important to consider the substantial costs that can be avoided due to causal research

[12] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Draft Report, p. 16.

[13] Ames & Hiscox 2016, 'Guide to developing behavioural interventions for randomised controlled trials: Nine guiding questions,' Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government, retrieved from: http://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/BETA-Guide-developing-behavioural-interventions-randomised-controlled-trials_1.pdf p. 6.

findings that show what doesn't work. For example, a recent Western Australian trial published in *The Lancet*[14] found that electronic baby simulators actually increased the risk of teen pregnancy instead of reducing it. The baby simulator program was stopped on the basis of this study, saving all the downstream costs that accrue when children are born to teen mothers. Thus, when considering the value and benefits of better (and more comprehensive) data in relation to RCTs, governments should consider not only the value of reduction in individual trial costs but also the value of better efficiency in program spending as a result of the trials.

Draft Recommendation 7.2

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 7.2

The Australian, state and territory governments should pursue a national policy effort to develop a high quality and relevant Australian evidence base about what works best to improve school and early childhood education outcomes. In particular, five activities need to be supported:

- development of research priorities
- commissioning of high quality education research
- adoption of rigorous research quality control processes
- dissemination of high quality evidence
- development of researcher capacity.

SVA agrees with the Productivity Commission's recommendation that governments should pursue a national policy agenda to develop an Australia-wide evidence base about what works best to improve school and early childhood educational outcomes.

However, given the division of responsibility for education between the states and territories and the federal government, we believe the development of a "high quality and relevant Australian evidence base" needs to be reflective of, and responsive to, the sometimes different strategic education priorities of each jurisdiction.

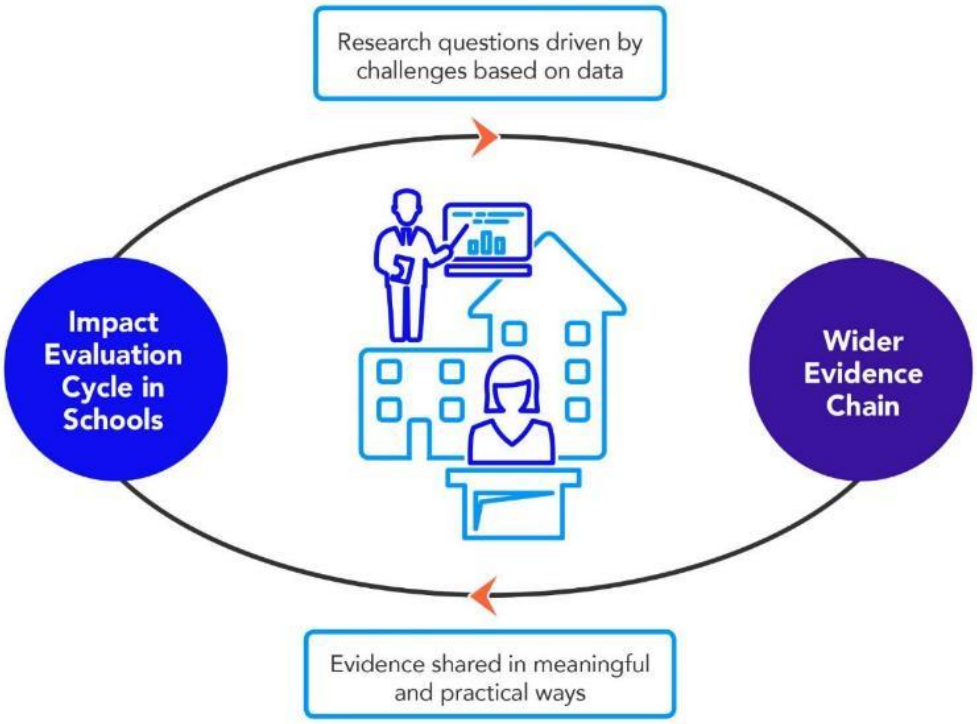
This general position underpins our comments on the five activities identified in the draft recommendation.

Development of Research Priorities

A high quality and relevant Australian evidence base requires research priorities that are appropriately identified and pursued. Our conception of a healthy evidence ecosystem is one where all participants are investing in finding out 'what works, for whom and under what conditions' and are also sharing that learning with others in the ecosystem.

The focus of an education evidence ecosystem should be to enable and support better decision making by school leaders, leading to better teaching practices in classrooms, ultimately improving the learning impact for students. We conceive this ecosystem as having two important cycles intimately connected and reinforcing as shown in the following diagram.

[14] Brinkman et al 2016, 'Efficacy of infant simulator programmes to prevent teenage pregnancy: a school-based cluster randomised controlled trial in Western Australia', *The Lancet*, retrieved from: http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)30384-1/abstract



Research questions need to be driven by the needs and gaps identified in existing data from schools across Australia. To generate relevant research questions, differences in the type and nature of challenges between schools, between sectors and between jurisdictions need to be acknowledged and accommodated.

It is important that a policy agenda to develop an Australian evidence base reflects and responds to the diversity of the Australian education system. Government, independent and catholic schools are delivered and funded through shared responsibility across federal, state, territory and local governments as well as the non-government sector, families and individuals. Education policy is developed and implemented under the auspices of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Education Council.[15]

This complexity creates different starting points and challenges across the jurisdictions and between the different types of schools. If research priorities are to be informed by the data of current performance and challenges, then specific research priorities should be tailored for specific collections of schools or cohorts.

There will be commonality across sectors and jurisdictions, but insistence on a single set of national research priorities would unnecessarily limit the scope of research, making the wider evidence chain less responsive than it should be to the variety of circumstances within the Australian education system. This in turn means it may be seen as less relevant to policy makers from individual jurisdictions or to frontline professionals who will then be less likely to use it to inform their choices and decisions.

We also note the good policy work on evidence in education that is already being undertaken by state and territory governments, with some states establishing their own evaluation and dissemination capabilities. We submit the national policy agenda should recognise and build on this work rather than seek to replace it. It is understandable that states and territories may be reluctant to divert their research and evaluation funds into a national pool that is less responsive to their local needs. Research evidence is much more likely to have an impact on practice if it is aligned to the strategic priorities already being pursued within a jurisdiction or sector authority.

[15] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Draft Report, p. 32.

On the basis of the above, we submit that the national research priorities should rather be viewed as 'common' research priorities that are created through:

1. States, territories or sectors leveraging national support to answer research questions they are prepared to invest in;
2. Encouraging a common standard of rigour for evaluations; and
3. Allowing synthesis and sharing of mutually beneficial work across jurisdiction and sector lines.

Commissioning of high quality education research

We agree that more high-quality education research should be commissioned. As the Draft Report notes, "the type of research that delivers high-quality evidence on what works best is rare."[16]

This fact stands in contrast to the millions of dollars spent every year on educational programs in schools. As noted above, we support the draft report's focus on the need for more randomised controlled trials in education. The quality and relevance of these studies, though, will be determined not solely by their statistical power in measuring causal influence of a program on student academic achievement, but also by their robustness in measuring secondary outcomes and in qualitative analysis, and by their ability to accurately measure the costs of the intervention.

High quality trials should be able to answer three key questions:

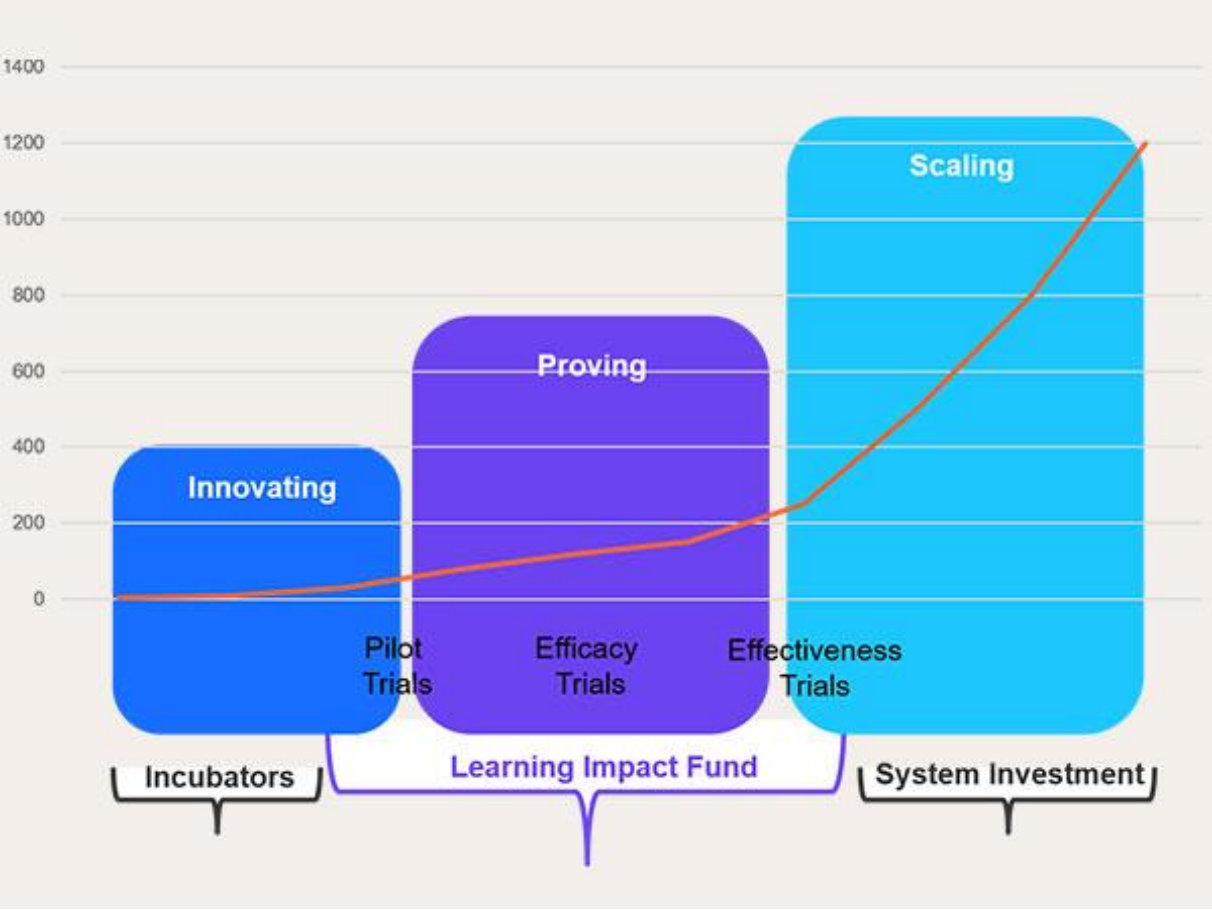
1. Does the intervention work?
2. For whom and in what circumstances? and
3. At what cost?

It is important to appreciate that high quality education research also means evaluation that is appropriate to the stage and maturity of the program or approach being assessed.

Gold standard randomised control trials at scale across population groups only make sense with well-documented programs that already have evidence of impact in smaller scale evaluations. Subjecting innovative practices to the rigor of a 'causal study' before its proponents' have codified the key elements may kill an approach that could have great promise.

Evidence for Learning approaches this challenge through placing programs in one of three phases of innovation, proving or scaling as shown in the diagram below. The measure of 'high quality evidence' will be different at each stage, although Evidence for Learning recommends that quantitative measures are used at every stage.

[16] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Draft Report, p. 168.



Adoption of rigorous research quality control processes

We support the need for rigorous quality control processes for research.

Evidence for Learning has adopted most of the Education Endowment Foundation's approach in this regard. Three features of this approach which may be of interest:

1. Evidence for Learning has specified the level of quality that studies are expected to meet, but evaluators are free to design the study in a way that best suits the intervention and meets the quality standard.

2. Having a pool of evaluators competing for single evaluations with different designs means that Evidence for Learning is able to select high-quality study designs on a value-for-money basis, thus driving efficiency in its funding choices.

3. Transparency is critical in maintaining quality control. Publication of every trial report allows the public to examine the quality of the studies undertaken and provide critical comment. This provides a strong incentive for Evidence for Learning to ensure study designs remain rigorous, at the risk of a diminishing reputation otherwise.

Dissemination of high quality evidence

If a better evidence base is to lead to improved student outcomes, it is critical that communication and use of evidence is considered, and we commend this focus throughout the draft report.

However, conceptualising communication and use narrowly as 'dissemination' may limit the effectiveness of this crucial stage in the evidence adoption process. We submit that it is better to consider strengthening the demand for high-quality evidence and building infrastructure to support educators to use evidence well. As per our previous submission (pp. 31-33), we note that there is much new research being undertaken into research use, including under the broad banners of implementation science and improvement science.

Further to that submission, we note that in 2015 the Bridgespan Group released a study on the 'market' for effective education evidence. The report diagnoses the problems with getting evidence into practice across K-12 education and child welfare in America.[17] The report identified six gaps in the market that prevent the supply of evidence from effectively meeting the requirements of demand, namely comprehensiveness; implementation; guidance; synthesis; usability; and awareness.

These gaps are similar to those identified in the draft report, and thus Bridgespan's recommendations may be applicable in Australia, with appropriate contextualisation. In order to respond to these gaps in the ecosystem, particularly those regarding dissemination, Bridgespan proposes to:

1. Strengthen the supply of evidence (parallel to commissioning high-quality evidence above),
2. Build the demand for evidence; and
3. Develop the infrastructure that supports the interaction between supply and demand.[18]

With this in mind, we suggest that the Commission should strengthen its recommendation by replacing the 'dissemination' function with two others: (1) stimulating demand for evidence among key stakeholders; and (2) building infrastructure to support evidence-informed practice. We make further comment on how to do this in response to recommendation 8.1 below.

Development of researcher capacity

We agree that researcher capacity must continue to be developed to support the ongoing strengthening of the evidence base, and we think it is critical that this capacity be created right across Australia's research sector.

In establishing the panel of evaluators for its Learning Impact Fund, Evidence for Learning received expressions of interest from 15 research groups in universities and non-profit organisations across Australia. Of these, eight have been accepted onto the panel, having demonstrated capacity and experience in running randomised controlled trials in education settings. The other groups all demonstrated significant expertise in education research and policy plus a willingness to undertake randomised controlled trials.

All panel members have expressed a keen interest in learning from each other and advancing the theory and practice of evaluation. This shows that there is capacity among Australian researchers to undertake rigorous evaluative research and a willingness among others to develop their capacity to do so.

The experience of Evidence for Learning shows the value in developing researcher capacity across research institutions so as to avoid a concentration and over-reliance on a single institution. Each project that Evidence for Learning has tendered to its panel has solicited multiple study designs at multiple budget points, which allows Evidence for Learning to choose the one with the best value for money, driving overall efficiency across the evaluations.

[17] Results for America, 2015, 'The What Works Marketplace: Helping leaders use evidence to make smarter choices', retrieved from: http://www.results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WhatWorksMarketplace-vF.pdf (accessed 30 September 2016)

[18] Ibid pg 7.

The competition between research groups and the feedback this process offers to groups that do not win individual bids, strengthens their capacity to design trials that are both rigorous and practical.

Draft Recommendation 8.1

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 8.1

The Australian, state and territory governments should task the COAG Education Council to provide explicit policy direction through a new Education Agreement, which would build on prior agreements and define the:

- objectives
- nature of the research to be undertaken in the bottom up evaluation of what works
- evidentiary standards or frameworks to be applied, including assessment of cost effectiveness
- requirement for translation of evidence into guidelines accessible by schools, early childhood education and care services and teachers.

They should also request the Education Council to:

- assign an institution to be responsible and accountable for implementation of the functions set out above and in Draft Recommendation 7.2
- specify the assigned institution's governance arrangements, functions and operations
  - including a responsibility for promoting a culture of using the evidence base by policy makers and educators.

SVA agrees with the need for an explicit policy direction to support the development of a bottom-up evidence capability but we have not formed a view regarding the appropriate COAG mechanism to embed this policy.

We agree that an assigned institution should be responsible and accountable for the functions identified. We comment below on the mechanism by which the institution should be established and what we view as features or characteristics that are critical for success.

Mechanism to establish a national institution

The draft report states that the 'Australian, state and territory governments should take a shared and co-operative approach to policy leadership in order to achieve the greatest benefits possible from the implementation of a framework for a national education evidence base, focussing on what works.'[19] Whilst we agree that building a strong evidence base needs a policy framework and that such a framework could come out of a COAG process, there may be other ways to arrive at an effective policy framework.

Instead of specifying the mechanism by which a bottom-up capability should come into being, our comments below focus on what we see as the key features of that capability, based on the experience of Evidence for Learning to date and on our reading of the strengths and weaknesses in other countries' approaches to creating similar institutions.

[19] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Draft Report, pp.194.

Critical design features for the institution

We believe the following are critical features of any institution that is to successfully deliver a national evidence capability:

1. **Independent** – must be independent of governments so there is no actual or perceived influence over the choice or conduct of evaluations and release of reports. This means its work can be relied upon and used by policy makers and educators in different jurisdictions and sectors. It must be able to choose the programs to evaluate within its governance structure. Independence is critical to the evidence being adopted by educators and leaders having confidence in the findings.

2. **Transparent** – must publish every finding in free and open forms for scrutiny; disclosure of results that show what hasn't worked are as important as results that show what has to create an active discussion of failures. It must also show the funding behind the research, the trial design and methods and the data underpinning any findings. This encourages confidence in the institution and valuable review and critique of the work.

3. **High Quality** – must have an evidence standard that is rigorous to ensure credibility and effective guidance. This includes features of relevance to developmental stage, appropriate quantitative measures and a 'causation focus' with an appropriate control or comparison group.

4. **Long-term** – must have sufficient funding size and period to allow for continued focus on mission (instead of on funding protection) and to signal to all actors in the sector that the cultural change to evidence-informed practice is valued.

5. **Efficient** – must separate evaluators from the commissioning body so that it is not a monopoly (build capacity across the sector) and can be competitive and focused on the end needs of frontline professionals.

6. **Responsive** – must be aware of state, territory and national governments, Catholic and independent sector priorities and agenda to ensure research and mobilisation efforts are aligned and relevant to their strategic priorities.

7. **Useable** – must generate resources in plain English formats with easy to understand measures of impact and cost. These resources must also include specific implementation support to ensure insights can become actions in schools. The resources will benefit if they are able to integrate easily into existing jurisdictional and sector frameworks and support tools.

8. **Able to leverage** – must be able to leverage government and system investment to encourage business and philanthropy to serve the national interest of a high-performing education system through further funding and support.

9. **Global** – must be integrated with international efforts to build a global education evidence base, to contribute to and learn from global efforts in the field, including adapting promising international findings into an Australian context and sharing Australian research with the global evidence base

Later in this response we consider the relative strengths and weakness of the three identified institutional models against these design features.

Case Study – why design features matter – USA Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program

The United States' Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) program provides a good example of how design features can result in an ineffectual model. The RELs are sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education. REL contracts are awarded to bidding non-government organisations, who then work in partnership with school districts, state departments of education, and others to use data and research to improve academic outcomes for students.

Fundamentally, the mission of the RELs is to be the translators of research and to provide support for a more evidence-reliant education system.[1] This sounds good in theory. In practice, however, there were several issues with the model which hindered the original mission. Initially, the RELs were not provided with sustainable funding and this resulted in a significant portion of their activity being directed into lobbying Congress not to cut funding.[1] There were also confused lines of authority, as RELs were managed at a federal level but were tasked with delivering outcomes for regional constituencies.[1]

Reliance on, but independence from, comprehensive data from a national data monitor

The 'bottom up' body will rely on the improved data gathering and harmonisation reforms identified in other parts of the draft report. These include:

- Section 4 – Improving data collection, processing and reporting including streamlining of data collection processes and reducing duplication; the use of technology; and the introduction of a unique student identifier.
- Section 5 – Access to education data including changes to privacy regulation and other legislative restrictions; and changes to approval processes.
- Section 6 – Data linkage including the current barriers to linkage between data custodians; and investment in data linkage infrastructure.

We agree that the top-down monitoring, benchmarking and reporting functions and effective arrangements currently conducted by Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), could be expanded to include the ECEC sector[20].

This arrangement (serving as the national 'Data Monitor') would then generate the data required for the 'bottom up' institution to utilise this national database to create, translate and stimulate demand for evidence across the education sector in order to drive better educational outcomes.

Given the crucial importance and great challenges in the effective adoption of evidence illustrated from international experience, we recommend a clear institutional distinction and separation of the 'top down' national 'Data Monitor' and the 'bottom up' national 'Evidence Generator and Mobiliser'.

In addition to other functions specified in Draft Recommendation 7.2, Draft Recommendation 8.1 specifies two functions related to communicating and encouraging use of evidence:

- translation of evidence into guidelines accessible by schools, early childhood education and care services and teachers; and
- responsibility for promoting a culture of using the evidence base by policy makers and educators.

We see both these functions as valuable, but think this recommendation could be strengthened.

[20] Ibid, pp.194.

Following our comments on Draft Recommendation 7.2 above, we recommend that this function be described as a "responsibility for promoting a culture of evidence use, which includes stimulating demand for high-quality evidence and strengthening the infrastructure to support evidence-informed practice."

The specific design of these functions should look to and draw on international and Australian experience, including several we noted in our initial submission (pp. 31-33):

- the Education Endowment Foundation's campaigns;
- the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Networked Improvement Communities;
- the Centre for Evidence and Implementation's work in Australia.

Other work we which may have applications for Australia, include but are not limited to:

- the Bridgespan Group's recommendations;[21] and
- Ontario's Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, a partnership between the Ontario Ministry of Education and two Ontario universities that 'focuses on building, advancing and applying robust evidence of effective practices.' [22]

Information Request 8.1

INFORMATION REQUEST 8.1

The Commission seeks further information about the strengths and weaknesses of its proposed institutional and governance arrangements.

SVA notes the Productivity Commission outlined four existing models as examples of governance and institutional arrangements which demonstrate and support 'bottom-up' evidence creation. These examples were the UK Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), the US Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the NZ Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) program and Social Ventures Australia's Evidence for Learning.

The Commission has proposed three options as to where the new institution may be 'housed':

1. Incorporating it into an existing institution, such as Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) or the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA);

2. Creating a separate government owned institution; or

3. Creating a new, privately run institution through a competitive tender process, similar to the way in which the UK EEF was established.[23]

[21] In order to effectively build the demand for the use of education evidence, the Bridgespan Group notes, the awareness of evidence sources needs to be increased. They propose that this could be accomplished through (1) education and training where teachers can learn the importance of using evidence and be trained on how to understand and interpret this evidence; (2) leverage the power of peer networks to encourage use of evidence; and (3) engaging and targeting intermediaries to deliver the evidence to the decision makers. The final part of building demand is to guide decision makers through the evidence selection process by providing self-guided tools and supports and connecting them to advisers who are able to provide hands-on selection and implementation supports. These are potentially useful ideas in Australia, and we note that there are some professional learning opportunities about evidence interpretation and use in Australia (for example, through the Victorian Department of Education's Bastow Institute, and a collaboration between the New South Wales Department of Education's CESE and Futures Learning Unit on evaluative thinking). We strongly endorse leveraging existing peer and professional networks for communication of and discussion about evidence. Evidence must meet educators where they are. The need for evidence intermediaries, self-guided tools, and advisers to support implementation are all worthy of consideration. Results for America 2015, 'The What Works Marketplace: Helping leaders use evidence to make smarter choices', retrieved from: http://www.results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WhatWorksMarketplace-vF.pdf (accessed 30 September 2016), pg. 40.

[22] KNAER-RECRAE 2016, 'What is the KNAER?' retrieved from http://www.knaer-recrae.ca/9-uncategorised/75-about-knaer (accessed 1 October 2016).

We have constructed a matrix (Figure 1, below) to indicate the relative strengths and weaknesses of each option against the Fundamentals for Design outlined earlier under draft recommendation 8.1. The matrix shows that the third option delivers more of the design features that we believe are critical for success.

Figure 1: Matrix of strengths and weaknesses of proposed models against the design features

	Existing Institution	**Separate government owned institution**	**New, privately run institution selected through a tender process**
Independent	Linked to government through existing structures, funding and reporting. This may impact on choice of evaluations or focus.	Linked to government, may have statutory independence but reliant on government for function, funding and reporting.	Independent of government which allows it to be objective and flexible in response to its charter.
Transparent	Remains transparent as long as all data, results and evidence is published. May be delays for publishing findings through government. May be difficulties in achieving public disclosure and active discussion of failures given other functions in the agency may not be conducted with same level of public disclosure.	Remains transparent as long as all data and evidence is published. May require specific direction and protections in the enabling instrument.	Remains transparent as long as all data and evidence is published. May require specific direction and protection in the enabling instrument.
High Quality	May be difficult to achieve as level of empirical analysis required is not the current operating standard in other parts of the agency.	Can establish its own set of rigorous standards across the supply chain	Can establish its own set of rigorous standards across the supply chain
Long-term	Not currently funded on long-term basis but rather operate on projects to meet government need. Subject to the political cycle as it is a government owned institution.	May receive long-tern funding but long-term view may still be impeded by the political cycle as it is a government owned institution.	Long-term funding and view allows it to be free from the constraints of the political cycle
Efficient	Institution could run a panel and competitive processes to promote competition amongst evaluators but this could be inconsistent with current agency processes and appointments.	Could run a panel and competitive processes but this is not how similar government owned, independent bodies operate currently (e.g. NCVER) so there is risk of poor execution	New body with new role that has this capability can manage this well if specifically directed by the enabling instrument
Responsive	Funded by governments so will be highly responsive to governments' needs but	Funded by governments, albeit independent. Level of responsiveness will be a	Not reliant on government so risk of a poor responsiveness but can be

[23] Productivity Commission 2016, 'National Education Evidence Base', Productivity Commission Draft Report, pp.198.

	may have to select from competing priorities	function of operator skill only	mitigated through funding design and operator skill
Useable	Possible to achieve but may be restricted in what is published based on constraints on other parts of the agency's work.	Possible to achieve but will need to ensure operator skill to write to educator audience and not government audiences.	New body with new role and no constraint in publishing format
Able to Leverage	No opportunity for corporate or philanthropic funding given government ownership	No opportunity for corporate or philanthropic funding given government ownership	New body which can be established so as to maximise corporate and philanthropic support
Global	Level of participation in global evidence relationships dependent on degree of independence from government, quality of research set and length of funding.	New body can be established with international links but level of participation in global relationships dependent on degree of independence from government, quality of research set and length of funding.	New body can be established with international links with key criteria of evidence quality