

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

- 1 High quality educational research will be a critical component of the Australian Government's efforts to deliver of the best possible education system leading to a well-prepared, socially and economically engaged community.
- 2 The significance of educational research, however, extends well beyond the formal education system. For example, the National Reform Agenda endorsed by COAG in February 2006, has a strong focus on building human capital and increasing workforce participation through Education and Health. The significance of educational research in the first of these is clear, but any sensible reading of the agenda as described for Health would suggest that the greatest achievements are to be gained through educating rather than medicating! For example:

Risk factors such as poor diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol misuse and excess weight contribute to chronic disease. COAG agreed that health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies and investment are required to reduce the incidence of chronic disease, and improve overall health outcomes.
(<http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm#reform>)

- 3 Faculties and Schools of Education produce the majority of educational research and scholarship on educational issues in Australia. Australia produces 5.2% of all the educational research publications created around the world — almost double the proportion of research publications produced by Australia generally. This places Education second only to Plant & Animal Sciences as a world leader in research output.
- 4 The bipartisan report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher Education, *Top of the Class* (2007) commented, however, that:

The committee is concerned that neither current funding levels nor mechanisms for research and research distribution are sufficient to ensure that teacher education, teaching and policy development are as evidence-based as they should be. (p xxiii)

- 5 In relation to ensuring that teacher education is evidence-based, the ACDE has proposed the setting up of a national longitudinal data repository directed at quality improvement and efficiency in teacher education. The goal is for systematically managed data and information related to teacher education that can be efficiently and effectively interrogated, using a research oriented data model. The ACDE has applied for and been awarded a grant from the Carrick Institute to undertake a scoping study. In the longer term it anticipates seeking Commonwealth support for such a data repository. Further details are provided in Briefing Paper 6.
- 6 In recognition of the particular significance of a coherent approach to the development of educational research more generally, *Top of the Class* recommended the setting up of a specific fund for educational research.

The committee recommends that the Australian Government establishes a specific Educational Research Fund to be distributed on a similar model to the National Health and Medical Research Council.

This recommendation has so far received no acknowledgment and no such fund is available to educational researchers.

- 7 In the context of all of the above, the ACDE is concerned that the Higher Education Endowment Fund (HEEF) set up by the previous Australian Government will largely support research in the science (including health), engineering and technology (SET) disciplines because of its focus on 'capital expenditure and research facilities' (HEEF Consultation paper, October 2007, p 2). It will offer no such long term investment in research in the humanities, social science and education disciplines, although the latter have at least as much potential to enhance economic and social outcomes for the Australian community. In the case of Educational Research in particular, systematic investment in people is

needed more than in bricks and mortar. Increasing budgetary constraints faced by Education faculties and schools over recent years have severely restricted the time that academics are able to dedicate to basic curiosity driven research and there are very few sources of funds that will support academic research through time release.

- 8 Also in the context of the above, we are concerned that the latest revisions to the RFCD codes designed by the ABS, will negatively impact the coherence, organization and critical mass of educational researchers and educational research and lead to fragmentation of the educational research enterprise in Australia. This would be damaging to the field of research, to the field of education and to Australia's reputation as a home for serious educational research.

It is important that the constituent disciplines of educational research are not (re)distributed across other divisions in ways that run counter to international practice and that would make it impossible to make international comparisons and lead to a dilution of our research reputation in the field. It would also make it impossible to document the extent of expenditure on educational research, a matter increasingly regarded as of some importance.

Your Government has made an 'Education Revolution' a priority. The new proposals for RFCD codes run counter to this agenda. Not only do they downgrade and de-emphasise Educational Research, they also reduce the capacity to monitor its resourcing and outcomes in a coherent way and we believe run contrary to policy directions in Australia and internationally.

Recommendation

That the Australian Government accepts the Recommendation of the bipartisan report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Teacher education (2007) to establish a specific Educational Research Fund to be distributed on a similar model to the National Health and Medical Research Council. The fund would:

- support research on the diverse aspects of educational policies and practices across the life-span
- provide a specific incentive for researchers from different disciplines and fields of scholarship to focus on educational issues
- provide the evidence-base for the development of an education system that fosters a highly engaged citizenry, a skilled workforce and an equitable social fabric.

That, consistent with this, and the Australian Government's commitment to the Education Revolution,

- the Deputy Prime Minister request the ABS to ensure that RFCD codes are adopted that enable a coherent Educational Research framework, in line with international practices
- the goals of the HEEF be broadened to include the long term investment in research in the social sectors, including Education, necessary for the future well being of Australia.