

Submission to the Review of Funding for Schooling

Paper on Commissioned Research

Access Innovation Media Pty Limited (Ai-Media)

Assessment of current process for targeting of schools funding to disadvantaged students – Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

1. Comments on ACER's "Assessment of current process for targeting of schools funding to disadvantaged students" research report

The ACER research paper is a major contribution to the sector. Ai-Media congratulates the Panel for commissioning the research, and ACER for its report.

Ai-Media regards the overall research methodology and logic as sound and comprehensive – particularly in light of the lack of consistency of definitions across educational authorities which will necessarily impede any comparative or integrated analysis.

The three research questions considered are critical to reform of funding for schooling:

1. How do existing programs seeking to address educational disadvantage in schools work?
2. Are existing programs effective in reducing the impact of educational disadvantage on educational outcomes?
3. What alternative funding approaches should be considered?

Ai-Media concurs with the statement that (xv): "A significant problem for systems or sectors is dealing with the abrupt changes in level of some targeted expenditures at the school level". This is also referred to as "lumpiness" in funding – especially for students with disabilities. The tradeoff in para 321 highlights the issue: "the right balance needs to be struck between getting funds down to the school level and building specialist sectoral expertise". For example, Ai-Media provides live classroom captioning services through our Ai-Live service. The cost of captioning one classroom is the same, regardless of the number of students using the textual output generated by the captioner.

Effectiveness of Existing Programs

ACER Review states (xvi): "There were insufficient data available to establish to what extent existing programs are effective in reducing the impact of disadvantage on educational outcomes because few have been evaluated, and fewer still have been evaluated with student outcomes as a focus." Clearly, this must change. Ai-Media supports the thrust of the recommendations to establish a level of funding for students with disabilities based on (1) eligibility through a clinical assessment; and (2) funding through assessment of additional educational need (para 311). Ai-Media supports all measures to improve the measurement of the effectiveness of programs, including individual education plans, and academic excellence targets as appropriate. Funding should be directed to those programs that deliver the best outcomes per unit of input.

Funding approaches

For students with disabilities the report proposed the establishment of a standard disabilities entitlement to frame a minimum funding standard for students with disabilities. Ai-Media supports this approach which would reduce the residualisation burden on the government school system by

funding all sectors for the additional costs of catering for students with disabilities. The entitlement should be qualified by the “lumpiness” issue identified above which may necessitate pooling of funds into regional centres of excellence. The quantum of the entitlement should be based on the “additional education need”. Changes in technology mean that this entitlement will need regular review.

Assessing existing funding models for schooling in Australia – Deloitte Access Economics

2. Comments on Deloitte Access Economics’ “Assessing existing funding models for schooling in Australia” research report

Ai-Media supports the contention that “inadequately prescribed lines of demarcation and poor coordination of different streams of funding lead to potentially inefficient overlap of funding and the potential compromise of funding model objectives” (p ii). Nationally consistent funding should be a priority for the Review to permit whole-of-system improvements and a national approach. Similar priorities have been identified in relation to the establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Feasibility of a national schooling recurrent resource standard – The Allen Consulting Group

3. Comments on The Allen Consulting Group’s “Feasibility of a national schooling recurrent resource standard” research report

Ai-Media supports the “base plus” model of NSRRS, rather than an average cost model. It is clear from the research that characteristics of systems, schools and students generate differences in costs for students to reach common educational outcome standards. Schools taking on students with additional needs should be funded accordingly to avoid the residualisation effect of higher cost students being forced into the government sector.

It is noted that the report does not include loadings for students with disability due to “known data limitations” (p8). These must be resolved as a matter of priority.

The report notes on p52 that “costs associated with students with disability are largely driven by severity of a student’s disability”. Ai-Media prefers the approach adopted by ACER which focuses on “additional education need” rather than clinical assessment of disability. While it is true that “there is a need to identify the range of educational supports, and their cost, for students with disability” it is important that the focus not be on the disability per se, but what additional supports are required to deliver effective access to education. Clarity is required about whether the marginal costs accrue at a school level (such as wheelchair ramp), classroom level (such as captioning), or individual student level (such as hearing aid provision). Decisions around pooling of resources will be critical to efficiency.

Ai-Media agrees with a 10% materiality threshold on the NSRRS for the reasons the authors propose (p 67).

Schooling challenges and opportunities– The Nous Group

4. Comments on The Nous Group’s “Schooling challenges and opportunities” research report

Ai-Media supports the conclusion that “the key to improving Australia’s education system is not doing a lot of new things, but rather it is applying what we know works in a comprehensive, integrated and sustainable manner.” That said, there must always be room for innovation in the sector – but successful innovations must be diffused more widely, more quickly.

As expressed in our submission of March 2011 to the Panel, Ai-Media recommends that a permanent innovation fund be a part of any new funding framework.

Supplementary comments

5. Other comments on the Review of Funding for Schooling commissioned research

Ai-Media congratulates the Panel for commissioning this research, and thanks the Panel for the opportunity to comment.