

Capital Ideas - Gonski 2.0 Review: What the Commonwealth should do (and not do) to drive improvement in school education**Canberra, 20 February 2018**

The Commonwealth's Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (known as the 'Gonski 2.0 Review') is a serious opportunity for a new nation-wide conversation on school education.

The outcomes of the Review will influence the Commonwealth's next steps in national schools policy. A key step will be the negotiations with the states later this year, as the Commonwealth strives to ensure that its contributions to school funding are spent wisely.

The review comes at a critical time. Australia's educational performance is declining internationally, we face new challenges in preparing students for their future lives and jobs, and equity gaps are too wide. But this does not mean that the Commonwealth should have a much bigger role in schooling than it does today.

In this *Capital Ideas* event, Dr Peter Goss, Grattan Institute School Education Program Director, hosted a panel of leading policy thinkers to explore:

- What is needed to lift educational outcomes at scale?
- What are the benefits, challenges and risks of Commonwealth interventions?
- Where should the Commonwealth focus its efforts, and why?

Moderator: Dr Peter Goss, School Education Program Director, Grattan Institute

Speakers: The Honourable Adrian Piccoli, Director, UNSW Gonski Institute for Education
David de Carvalho, CEO, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)
Lisa Rogers, CEO, Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)

STUART BAINES: Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the National Library of Australia. I'm Stuart Baines, Assistant Director of Community Outreach at the Library. As we begin, I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land. I thank their elders past and present for caring for this land we are now privileged to call home.

Tonight is our third event with the Grattan Institute. Since its launch in 2008, the Grattan Institute has established a profile as a leader of independent analysis of Australian domestic public policy, aiming to influence both public discussion and senior decision makers. Tonight the Grattan Institute turns its attention to the issues of national schools policy. The Commonwealth Government's Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, more commonly known as the Gonski 2.0 Review, has been commissioned to examine evidence and make recommendations on how school funding should be used to improve school performance and student outcomes. The final review will be released in March. Our expert panel tonight will look at how Australia's education performance is declining internationally, what needs to be done to lift educational outcomes, and what are the benefits and challenges of Commonwealth interventions? Our speakers tonight are the Honourable Adrian Piccoli, Director of the University of New South Wales' Gonski Institute for Education, David de Carvalho, CEO of the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA), and Lisa Rogers, CEO of the

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). This panel will be moderated by Dr Peter Goss, School Education Program Director of the Grattan Institute. Please join me in welcoming our panel.

PETER GOSS: Thank you Stuart. I'm Peter Goss and welcome to all of you for joining us on this beautiful Canberra evening to hear this fabulous panel - and I will describe what roles they might play shortly - to talk about what the Commonwealth should or should not do to drive improvement in school education. Thank you to the Library for partnering with us on this event, it's great to be able to bring these ideas to an audience, and also thank you to Grattan's affiliates who allow us to keep doing the work that we do: genuinely independent research that is rigorous and, we trust, practical. I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Teachers and teaching have a central role in Indigenous culture, is what I'm told by an elder named Willie Gordon who works just outside Cooktown and is the traditional story keeper of the Nugal-warra people near Cooktown. I always think of him saying that Indigenous language, at least of his mob, doesn't have a word for "prince" or "king" but does have a word for "teacher". The way the event will run is I'll provide a brief introduction, we'll have a moderated panel discussion, and then I'll save about 25 minutes for audience questions - there are always lots of them, so start thinking early - and I'll get you out of here by 7.15pm.

In terms of setting the context, 2018 is a pivotal year for school education in Australia. While 2017 was dominated by the debate about the dollars, how much and where they should go, we now have the space to switch our focus to students and learning. We need to have a new national conversation, we think, about school education, one where the arguments about funding don't suck the political air out of the room. If we get this discussion right we'll look back on 2018 as a very positive year, maybe even a new beginning. If we get it wrong 2018 will be relegated to the long list of missed opportunities. Why am I painting this picture so starkly, so black and white, as it were? It's because there are some big forces at play and some genuine conundrums over how to move forward. None are bigger than the Commonwealth's desire, and a very legitimate desire as well as a political reality, to want more bang from the extra bucks that it's putting into school education. Meanwhile, the states and territories want to retain control of their own education strategies, and education commentators and others, like the Grattan Institute, have cautioned about the risk of federal government overreach, particularly if it imposes new conditions on how the states spend their money. Our report, which is available on the Grattan website, focuses on some of those issues. I won't talk about that, but in the interests of helping me meet my key performance metrics, please download early and often - we all have those performance metrics and that's one of mine. The goal of that report and of this discussion tonight is to try to nudge the national conversation in that positive direction that I mentioned earlier by adding some colour and nuance to the stark black and white picture of what the Commonwealth should do: should it stay hands off or should it dive in?

Without further ado then, let me talk about my three panel members, painters even, who will help bring this picture to life. Firstly, we have Adrian Piccoli. You've heard and read about his background. As an ex-Education Minister he sat in the hot seat at the discussions but is now released from those duties to talk more freely, is what I'm hoping. He's been a strong champion of needs-based funding and what does it take to support the most disadvantaged amongst our students. I've seen personally in visits to remote schools with Adrian that after seeing the song and dance, he would've been the first person to

say, "That's all very lovely, but what did the students learn?" Next we have Lisa Rogers who runs one of the federal agencies, the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). She has worked in different places under different types of settings in New Zealand and Australia and can bring a fresh perspective to the role of the federation and how the different parts play together, as well as working day to day to say how do you influence teachers and teaching from a central role. That's a job that requires persistence. I learnt just before that Lisa is also a marathon runner, so in terms of non-cognitive skills and capabilities that we might get to, persistence is high among them. The third on our panel, David de Carvalho, has seen both sides of this debate. He currently runs the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA), which is a very important body in New South Wales. It has a more prominent role there possibly than some of its counterparts in other states in aiming to keep the standards high, school and teacher registration, and, increasingly, the improvement focus. He's also uniquely well-placed to talk about this topic because the federation white paper process, which happened a few years ago, was led by Prime Minister and Cabinet and, indeed, by David when he was at Prime Minister and Cabinet. I hope all of you will have got your pre-reading. We were joking before that the rest of us just get to speak, while David has the collateral that he can call on.

Thank you for letting me set the scene. We propose there are three reasons the Commonwealth should get involved, three tests. First, it has to be a good idea; second, it has to be something that governments at any level can do; and, third, Commonwealth intervention specifically should help not hurt. We'll work through those roughly in that order, so I'm going to toss over to the panel on the first of them. What are the good ideas? What is needed to lift education outcomes at scale? Adrian?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Lots of specific things, but I'd say two general things. Those two general things - and these apply to anything, not just education - are trust and good systems. Again, if you look at the evidence around the world where systems have improved in terms of student outcomes and other measures, it's been where policymakers and the profession have worked in a non-combative, co-operative and trusting relationship. I think that's really important. I used to say in my previous role that we and government departments and systems could put out all kinds of press releases and glossy brochures, but if the profession don't trust you, if the people doing the doing in the classroom don't trust you and don't think what you're doing is right, then nothing is going to change. I could change everything I liked and it wouldn't change a single thing that would happen in the classroom. You need to bring the profession with you. I think that trust aspect is really important, so anything the Commonwealth might do we would hope it's going to be backed by the profession. I've got great confidence that what the Gonski Report comes out with will indeed be the kinds of things the profession has been talking about for quite some time. Now, how the Commonwealth responds to that is then a question to them.

The second thing is around good systems, good systems of implementation and, again, systems that people trust. So the role of AITSL, for example, around teacher standards and principal standards: if there are good systems and effective systems and the people who are subject to some of these standards requirements have confidence that it's actually building their capacity and building their professionalism, then it will be effective in actually improving outcomes. I saw it, again, in my previous role. It's about making sure that we've got good systems of accountability, getting that right balance of accountability. Where you get that right then people trust you and that's when you see systemic improvements across entire education systems. So I would think it's those two things. There are specific

things indeed that I would hope are going to be part of the recommendations out of the Gonski Report, but maybe we'll get into those a little bit later.

PETER GOSS: Indeed. Thank you. Lisa?

LISA ROGERS: I couldn't agree more. When I first came to Australia people said to me that federation politics would drive me completely up the wall. It has its moments and you do have to be persistent, but the benefits of it are the fact that it isn't particularly agile. What that means is you just actually have to work really, really hard in terms of negotiation, negotiation, negotiation. In that builds trust and also credibility and there's something about that. I'm not the kind of person normally that would say we don't need agility. We do, but there are some things that this country has done so well and we need to continue to do that to realise the benefits. One of those things has been to build the trust with the profession. Again, if you look at AITSL, we've got 30,000 teachers looking at the Illustrations of Practice every single month and 1.6 million teachers have used our website in the last 16 months. So teachers are accessing Commonwealth-supported resources that have been signed off at Education Council in order to help them in their practice. I think that's phenomenal. So we've got to retain that, regardless of the politics though. To be perfectly honest, the politics doesn't matter a jot. The things that really make a difference are the things that teachers are doing in classrooms. It's those moment by moment decisions and actions that actually will change student achievement and I think we need to get very, very real about that. It needs to go from the Cabinet right to the teacher's desk, and what teachers do matters.

In that, though, we have to look at the profession. I'm a firm believer that we've got to get the right people in the profession. We need great teachers in the profession, they need to be inducted well, and we need to be able to support those teachers to command and practice in an excellent way. Again, the Commonwealth has been able to support a shared network of practice and they've been able to, through the AITSL resources, identify great practice, whether it be in the NT or the ACT, and deliver and share that across the nation. So I think in terms of policy reform, we have to make sure we've got the right teachers in the classroom, support them through career pathways and actually enable them to access excellent resources.

PETER GOSS: David?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: Thanks Peter and thanks Adrian. I should point out that Adrian appointed me as the CEO of NESAI. I'm also a little bit freer to speak than I would've been a little while ago and, of course, I've had lots of interactions with Lisa and we've been comparing notes about the fact that a national body is being run by a person who came from New Zealand and, before that, England and the experience with federated governance is, well, we're doing our best, aren't we, to try and bring you up to speed on how things happen here. One of the questions that Peter asked, the way he initially framed the question was what needs to be done to lift education outcomes at scale? There's an assumption built into that that we know what educational outcomes we should be lifting. When you look at our public debate around this we zero in on NAPLAN and we zero in on PISA, so we focus on a very narrow range of educational outcomes that are informing the debate.

Now, they're very important outcomes, literacy and numeracy are basic and fundamental, but the whole of the education debate seems to be around they are the outcomes that we need to lift. When you look

at PISA it's also literacy and numeracy, but they have a wider, more interesting approach around how they assess literacy and numeracy and it's going into different things, like critical thinking skills and problem solving. Our NAPLAN results across the country are generally not changing, they're pretty much flat-lining on the whole - there have been some recent upticks in certain areas - but our PISA results are diving. That's a really interesting question because arguably PISA is the assessment that's testing what we are referring to as the 21st century skills around critical thinking and problem solving that we need. So my first challenge to the question is, are the assumptions underpinning the question the right ones? Are we actually looking at the right education outcomes? I would argue that, in addition to literacy and numeracy or mathematics and English, we should be looking at ways of how do we get a read on how we're going in terms of science and how we're going in terms of history? Mostly we tend to think about education outcomes in a fairly utilitarian fashion; that we need to give kids the skills that they need. So we think about what do you need in order to get to the next level of understanding, but there are also some things, particularly in the space of history and social studies etc. which we, as a community, should be saying are the things we want our kids to know and understand. So part one of my response is to say let's broaden the understanding of what are the educational outcomes that we think we should be assessing, measuring.

But to come more pointedly to your question, Peter, about what can be done to lift education outcomes at scale, I would go back to both Adrian and Lisa and pick up a theme there. I think professional learning is crucial. We have a lot of teachers coming into the system, a lot of them have been there for a long time, and we have new teachers coming through all the time, but once they graduate often their access to high quality professional learning once they're in the school is not as great as it should be and we don't have a culture of persistent ongoing deep and sustainable professional learning and development across the country. It's quite patchy. I would suggest that we should be looking at models of really effective professional learning. I think we should be looking at models that have master teachers, highly accomplished or lead teachers delivering high quality training in evidence-based pedagogy in the school. Not taking the teachers out of the school for an afternoon, for half a day to another venue, but actually having sustained professional leaders working with small groups of teachers over long periods of time. I think if we can systematise that approach - to use Adrian's term - that is something which I think will make a difference.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Could I just add one thing? It's what happens outside the school gate. We always talk about what happens inside the school but, having seen the data over the last six years about PISA performance and NAPLAN, the performance, whether it's going up or down, is pretty consistent across sectors and between states which, to me, says there's something going on outside the school gate. Whether it's a cultural thing, I was talking earlier to somebody about whether 25 years of interrupted economic growth has made Australia culturally a bit complacent, you know, you can just go to school and you're more likely to get a job, it's not that pull factor from "I need to do well at school because I want to get a good job". I was talking to the Chief Scientist about universities not requiring pre-requisites. Quite a big percentage of students get accepted into a university before they've even done their exams at the end of Year 12, at least in New South Wales. Now, some of these other pull factors are having an influence, but I think we have a cultural issue in Australia, maybe on the basis of how lucky we are as a country, because, again, I think - and I don't have the data to hand - the performance of students from a non-English speaking background outperform students from an English speaking background. I

don't have the evidence in front of me to say that's exactly what it is, but it seems to be a pointer of perhaps some broader cultural things.

PETER GOSS: And one of the things that we do know and that there's very strong evidence behind is that having high expectations that your students can learn is vital. It's actually a bit untestable. Can every student learn? That's an untestable thing, but we do know that when teachers have high expectations of their students the students tend to learn more than they would do otherwise, so it's kind of a Pascal's Wager. You might as well believe it because it works. It's also encouraging. To your point Adrian, I think that in some schools we seem to have lost what those high expectations look like. I was talking to a colleague from Western Australia who was saying that even students who did relatively well in NAPLAN, that got to Band 8, which is, for those that aren't as familiar with NAPLAN, a pretty solid standard that should be setting you up to complete Year 12, in more disadvantaged schools it wasn't enough. Those students, even though they had the foundations, only a few of them were doing well enough in Year 12 to go onto university, whereas the kids who were getting the same level in NAPLAN in a school where the expectations were higher, nearly all of them were. So there are some things going on here and this is partly why it's so hard to change at scale and the reason I started here there aren't easy answers. We know many of the things that need to be done. I think the point about systems is very much right there. Lisa?

LISA ROGERS: Can I just make a point about that? When you look at PISA the thing that you often hear from the PISA data is the key variables that make the biggest difference are effective teaching and teachers teaching the whole curriculum. One of the problems that we find in the PISA data is often students haven't been exposed to particular items and basically they just haven't been taught the concepts to be able to do well on the PISA test, and that's one of the major variables that determines achievement on a PISA test. The other major variable which has the same size of impact is attendance. It basically says students have to turn up every single day, stay in education for as long as they possibly can and be on time every day. That attendance variable is as impactful in terms of achievement as the teaching variable, but we don't often talk about it. The attendance variable is all about expectations, just keeping going at school and keeping being there. It's quite an important point that people miss.

The thing around achievement at a particular score point in NAPLAN, again, one of the things that I think we're missing in the system is this notion of compound disadvantage. We get lots of kids that come in, they start school in different places in terms of their achievement trajectory and the kids that are successful continue to experience success, but actually the kids that are struggling, by the time they get to about Year 4 you start to see them slip off the achievement curve in terms of curriculum. All that's happening there is compound disadvantage, so we basically see them getting poorer in terms of what they know, at which point they start to disengage. So I think the system also needs to think and understand students' trajectories longitudinally rather than cross-sectionally, but the data don't allow us to understand students' trajectories longitudinally because it's all cut cross-sectionally.

PETER GOSS: And Lisa should know this because in New Zealand they did put that data together and I understand that you were very involved in that, so very much agree. Through that introduction you will have heard themes about some things that need to be done at scale, other things that are very, very local, like what does it take to drive attendance in a remote community? That brings us to the next part of the discussion, the benefits, the challenges and the risks of the Commonwealth getting involved. Some of the things that need to happen are not obviously Commonwealth-led, but they have an interest

in making sure that the extra money going into schooling makes a difference. David, I'm going to start with you this time, thinking back to that Federation white paper process, what did you learn about the benefits, challenges and risks and how to mitigate them?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: I guess it's not surprising that when I was first asked to do this job and was speaking to my friends and colleagues in the Commonwealth public service and I said, "Oh, I've got this job of running the white paper taskforce on reforming the Federation" nine times out of ten the not-altogether-joking response was, "That's easy, just abolish the states". And I'm sure there are plenty of you in the audience who still harbour that sort of totalitarian mentality because that's the sort of town Canberra is, we live in our nationalist bubble as opposed to a federalist arrangement. I think what I learnt through the process itself was we were able to get out six discussion papers, which were negotiated over very many months by senior people across all nine jurisdictions with every word in those papers agreed. I've provided to you some of the flavour of that in the handout and you'll see almost in every paragraph, if not in every sentence, there's kind of an on the one hand/on the other hand flavour, there's a sense in which we had to strike a balance between things like the very important principle of subsidiarity on the one hand, which is that, in terms of governance, functions should be carried out by that level of society which is most capable of doing it, at the lowest level most capable. So rather than simply start with everything at the top and then delegate down according to the will of the body at the top, functions should be delegated up by the lower levels of organisations when they feel that they need support or someone else needs to do them.

Negotiation developed a great deal of trust across the board and obviously I left the role in mid-2015, just as I felt it was in a good shape. Some colleagues in one of the jurisdictions unfortunately decided to leak the draft green paper, so the trust went out of the window at that point in time but, nevertheless, it was up until that point in time a really productive process. Around that there was increasing recognition of the importance of the jurisdictions, the importance of the principle of subsidiarity and of trust, and the dangers of Commonwealth overreach, the dangers of tying conditions to funding, because inevitably that has a backlash. Even if the idea is a good one, if the Commonwealth comes out for political reasons to say, "We're going to make the states do this, we're going to make the funding conditional to do this" they completely underestimate the ability of state bureaucracies and governments to appear to be meeting the conditions while going along their merry way. It just doesn't engender trust and goodwill. So I would say that there is a risk of Commonwealth overreach not just on the politician side, but also on the bureaucratic side. I think it's a great pity that the spirit of the Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations (IGAFFR), which was introduced in 2008, was not followed through. It was honoured much more in the breach and the observance. The idea was that we would get rid of over 140 or thereabouts - I don't know the exact numbers - national partnership agreements and reduce them to half a dozen special purpose agreements or national agreements and only have a very, very small number of targeted funding agreements for special initiatives.

But within a couple of years those implementation plans, those national partnership agreements, it's like they say watching grass grow is boring, well it wasn't because the IGAFFR tried to come and cut down that forest of NPPs and then they sprung up again within a couple of years. And that was a habit of mind, to a large extent, that exists in Canberra that we can't trust the states, we've got to write down in detail in these implementation plans before we hand the money over, and I think there's a real unlearning here that needs to be undertaken. So I would urge that the Commonwealth exercise

restraint. That is not to say, of course, that the Commonwealth hasn't got a very important role. It does and I think its most important role is bringing the states together to try and get a shared vision and a shared set of flexible targets, a shared aspiration that everybody can sign up to, but it's got to be flexible enough to allow state differences. Also, there's a very important role for the Commonwealth in data collection and dissemination and getting nationally consistent data. That way I think there is real strength in the publication of performance data. The publication of performance data by how states are going allows the people of those jurisdictions, the people of those polities, to hold those parliaments accountable. So much of the accountability talk in FFR is the Commonwealth holding the states' accountable for how they use our money. It's all the people's money. So there's got to be a change of language, a change of mindset that says how does the Commonwealth help the people hold state parliaments accountable?

PETER GOSS: Thank you for foreshadowing my next report, which is going to be how do we use the data that we have available, limited as it is, to compare how well states are doing once you control for some of the other factors, because I don't think we do enough of that. That fine balance that you talk about of having a broader vision, being able to bring things together, but not being so prescriptive that it triggers a kneejerk response, Lisa, that seems to be something that you live with on a day to day basis?

LISA ROGERS: Yes.

PETER GOSS: So I'm keen to learn how you use that role and what you found works and then where you have to be very cautious about saying that the shared view doesn't automatically flow easily to where it might be most valuable.

LISA ROGERS: I think there's a very privileged position in terms of having federation politics and that is that you get bipartisan agreement on some things. I've never worked in a system before actually where there tends to be bipartisan agreement on a lot of aspects of teaching and school leadership and I think in part - and you'll be able to advise me, David - it's because in the previous systems I've worked, in the UK and New Zealand, there is only one government and if the government happens to say something then everybody just rallies against it. That's just the way it is, regardless of whether it's a good idea, whereas things here are so complex that actually a lot of the work gets done and a lot of the work is a shared value and vision across multiple governments. Now, that takes a lot of work to do and some of the downside is it takes a long time and you need to be really persistent. There are moments where you kind of struggle to get up in the morning sometimes, you think, "Really? Can we just get on with this?" but actually the endurance of that and the bipartisan support for many things in terms of teaching and learning is an incredible asset in terms of the politics. We can't lose that. I think it's so important.

PETER GOSS: So just let me tease that out. Is the counterfactual, let's say, in the UK where if you have a Conservative government that says, "We are going to go down to focusing on phonics back to basics" in a sense they can shift that much quicker -

LISA ROGERS: That's right.

PETER GOSS: And then trigger the response against that as well?

LISA ROGERS: Yes.

PETER GOSS: So that has value, but any big move like that, you're saying that this is protective actually against that?

LISA ROGERS: Very much so. Yes.

PETER GOSS: That's not how I thought about it before.

LISA ROGERS: When AITSL walks out of Education Council and has its instruction, it's instructed across all of those governments, so that's what we do. The other thing that struck me was the voice of the profession in the politics. Again, because of the way things run, actually you are able to amplify the voice of the profession and the profession's voice is able to be enduring because somebody somewhere, regardless of the politics, will be holding onto that voice and that voice will be right in the middle of Education Council and that's critically important. The other thing is I see it benefits the less well-off states. So the NTs of the world, actually there's a benefit for them in terms of the Commonwealth, but also a less seen benefit is the fact that we're able to understand what great practice looks like across the nation, share it and exemplify it. So it's not just the big states that can hold the flag in terms of "we've got great standards, we've got great practice". Actually, we can see it nationally in terms of where we stand from the Commonwealth's perspective and that's critically important. Again, we've got the opportunity to share that practice across the nation and share professional collaboration across the nation. So you get this sense of kind of an honest broker.

I agree with David, I really do think that there's a role in terms of exemplifying the standard, whatever that might be, or exemplifying the principle or agreement on the principle, and then actually letting the jurisdictions get on and implement it or think about what it looks like in their particular state or territory, because there is absolutely no way the Commonwealth can possibly have a view from the Cabinet to the kitchen table in terms of particular states and what it looks like at a local level. So there is a risk of overreach, but there are also incredible benefits.

PETER GOSS: But with that, presumably you also do have to close the loop? If you set an overarching approach and then each state and territory chooses to do it slightly differently, we're not going to learn from each other if that work then just happens in isolation and doesn't get brought back together, so one way to make sure it gets brought back together is to put some conditions on it. There are other ways potentially to say how do we learn from that. Is that where some of the fine nuances - so it's coming together, going apart, coming together again a little bit?

LISA ROGERS: I think you're absolutely right. A good example would be, say, your phonics example. So if you take the professional standards, for example, I don't necessarily believe that professional practice looks particularly different across states and territories.

PETER GOSS: Okay.

LISA ROGERS: I think that you can have eight different ways of teaching handwriting. I think you can have 50 different ways of teaching handwriting and, quite frankly, we shouldn't get involved in that, that's the business of the classroom teacher. But actually in terms of setting what the professional

standard looks like, whether that be for teachers, for principals, for initial teacher education, I think we can agree as a nation, as a country, what that looks like. Then how that is enacted at a local level really should be left at the local level.

PETER GOSS: So that's a very positive nuanced and optimistic view I think and a realistic one comparing across different systems. Adrian, you're the one who's sat at the top table, been involved in some of these discussions, and then had to go back to New South Wales and find a way to implement it. I'm interested in hearing a bit about that perspective and also when you have something that seems like a pretty good idea, what makes the difference between that good idea paying off or going haywire?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Some of my most memorable moments as a Minister were in those Ministerial Council meetings, usually dealing with federal colleagues and other state colleagues. It was always interesting. There's always this tension about centralised/decentralised and where we've got to in Australia and it's a work in progress. Some things are best done nationally, like teaching standards, national curriculum. I think an additional one is entry standards into university, who we take in. There are other things we can do at a national level, but there is value in competitive federalism. There is value in saying each state should have the ability to do things slightly differently so that we do learn from each other - we in New South Wales have copied successes from other states - and then, of course, at a school level we allow schools to do different things. Where the Commonwealth gets in trouble is when they seek to intervene too closely into the way that schools operate, because the Commonwealth doesn't operate any schools, doesn't employ any staff and when they start getting into the operational thing is where they start getting into trouble. An example in my state was the independent public schools.

PETER GOSS: Yes.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: That was a Commonwealth policy.

PETER GOSS: Adrian, just a second. For those that wouldn't be so sure, although I'm sure most of you would know, they would be government schools saying you get much more freedom to run with autonomy, or in New South Wales you would call it authority?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Yes.

PETER GOSS: So they stay within the government system, but get treated as though they were not in some respects?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Yes. Some of the things that the Commonwealth seeks to impose or make a condition for states are not necessarily bad ideas, certainly in the time I was Minister under four Federal Ministers. They just weren't particularly well-managed because you take an example like that, not even Western Australia signed up to it and they have independent public schools. They just weren't particularly well-managed and, I've got to say, all the talk about a Year 1 phonics check test, that's just not being particularly well-managed. I'm not saying it's a good or a bad idea, I just don't think they're on the right path to getting all the states to agree if that's what they want, because I just don't think it's being particularly well-managed.



DAVID DE CARVALHO: I actually agree with that, Adrian. New South Wales has already a phonics check of a kind, so rather than coming in and saying, "We're going to make the states do a Year 1 phonics check" - I'm not saying that's what they are saying, but they might be tempted to say that - they can say, "Let's have a look at what the states are already doing well in this space and try and spread that good practice, encourage that good practice nationally". You used an example before, the Australian Professional Standards of Teaching, and what the Commonwealth did there - and I had nothing to do with it, but I can say they were the New South Wales' Professional Standards for teaching that were basically the prototype for the Australian standards. So you can take good practice that is emerging from the states and elevate it to a national level, and if you do it sensibly you will get the buy-in.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Yes.

PETER GOSS: How much is this driven do you think by, in a sense, that political need to say if we put in a phonics check, running with that example, then we will be able to ensure that every child learns to read properly and that way we'll know we're getting the value that we want? Or is it some other reason? Why does that play out more than once?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: I go back to the thing I said right at the very beginning: it's trust. I don't think that's a reform driven by the professional, and I could be wrong here, but I haven't come across many teachers who necessarily think that it's a great idea to have a Year 1 phonics test beyond what we already do with five-weekly assessments of phonics and phonemic awareness as part of the progressions that we use, certainly in New South Wales. I think you're going to have trouble getting things like that up when it's not supported by the profession. What I used to do as Minister - and Geoff Newcombe's here from the AIS (Association of Independent Schools) - before we had Ministerial Council meetings, before we met with AITSL and ACARA and all the other Commonwealth entities and the other states, I got together with the stakeholders in New South Wales to ask, "What do you think about this? What do you think about history? Are you okay with the history curriculum, ticking it off? Are you happy with whatever AITSL was putting up?" I would make sure it was actually supported by the profession. It was always the most empowering thing you could do, to know you had the profession behind you, because no-one can argue against it then.

LISA ROGERS: Yes.

DAVID DE CARVALHO: Mmmm.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: I know I didn't always manage things particularly well, but I think sometimes the Commonwealth manages some of these things poorly. So you're talking about the risks of Commonwealth intervention, it's sometimes not that they're bad ideas but they're not particularly well-articulated or that they've got the support of the profession. And can I say, I think one of the worst thing that a Minister has ever done is say that 10% of teachers should be sacked, because if you want to ruin trust right from the get-go you could cure a major disease and people won't remember you for that, you'll have completely ruined the trust. So managing issues and managing from the Commonwealth, because everybody's sceptical, all the states are sceptical about Commonwealth intervention, it had better be a good idea managed very well.

DAVID DE CARVALHO: And I do think a phonics check is a great example because when you actually look at the proposal, it's not about a Year 1 test. It is about a phonics check, diagnostic, yet the way it's been managed in the public domain has elicited this response from the profession and the states, which didn't have to be the case at all.

PETER GOSS: I'm going to wrap up this discussion and then throw to audience questions very shortly. A brief response, when I talk to some of the education bureaucrats and to some of the political staff at the state level about what might happen this year and the extra conditions that might come with the funding agreements that will need to happen by the end of this year, I've detected anger. That doesn't necessarily surprise me, funding is always a complex thing that elicits strong responses, but I've also detected a degree of fear that choices that get made could really send things off badly. So I'm interested in your response about is there fear as to what might happen through this process, even let's assume with good intentions, but that it may go wrong? Who wants to jump in?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: I'll go first. The debate about additional funding is at the margins. I'll take a state like New South Wales, we spend \$13 billion a year in school funding and even the Gonski increases are marginal compared to the \$13 billion that we already spend. I hope that the Commonwealth Review focuses on how you can get better value for the \$13 billion, rather than all our attention being focused on the extra \$200 million a year that's going to be spent, which is where all the debate ends up being, what are you going to spend the extra money on?

PETER GOSS: Which is about 3% nationally.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: What about the \$13 billion? You know, you get 5% more effectiveness out of your teaching profession for which taxpayers spend \$10 billion in the public system, add another couple of billion for the non-government. If you get a 5% improvement there, that swamps whatever additionality we might get in a particular year. So if we're looking at measures like that, how do you give teachers more time to do some of the in-school professional development that we know is the most effective thing that schools can do? How do we know that we can do more of that, the team teaching and all of those things that teachers want to do and have the time to do? I hope that the recommendations go towards those kinds of things, the sharpening the saw things that teachers want to do, rather than us become entranced by this extra little slither of cash and what are the extra things we're going to do with it. If it's \$12 billion in New South Wales and we're a third of the country, it's \$36 billion. How do we get more effectiveness out of that \$36 billion?

LISA ROGERS: I'm totally with you. One of the things that I'm continually frustrated by is the conversation about dollars. Actually, I want a conversation about the return on that investment, so where are you going to put your dollar in order to maximise that return, whatever the return is in terms of our measure? We need to get much smarter about how we are spending our money. I'm probably going to say something that's slightly controversial, but this country is incredibly wealthy, incredibly wealthy, and there is so much expertise in this country. I don't think this country has experienced the shock it needs in order to think very, very seriously about the investment it's making and actually what we're getting from that investment. You see countries that soar, countries that are flying have some form of shock and they've had to think very deeply about their investment. So things like, Adrian, you were saying, around collaboration; we need to be able to buy teachers' time in order to collaborate. *The* most powerful form of professional learning is moderation.

PETER GOSS: Moderation being?

LISA ROGERS: So basically teachers talking together on the basis of the data that they have in terms of named students in regard to the curriculum and how they might affect change. Now, I'm struggling to count the number of dollars that are spent in professional learning. I got to \$500 million and it's still a wobbly figure. In Australia, if we're spending \$500 million on professional learning a year, why on earth is it not going into moderation, because that's the kind of stuff that will enable teachers to understand classroom practice better, they'll be able to share practice, they'll be able to understand the curriculum better, and actually they need the data to be able to moderate on. So the thing around Year 1 phonics, it's a check. What frustrates me is the fact we have thousands and thousands of assessment items in this country and there is no reason why we can't pool those assessment items so teachers can access them nationally. Similarly with curriculum objects: we've got curriculum resources, but we've got no sense actually of how effective they are, what their relative weighting is. Again, why can't all teachers access all curriculum resources and actually know how effective they are? It is inexcusable and this is something that nationally we can do.

PETER GOSS: And that is a scale game.

LISA ROGERS: Yes.

PETER GOSS: I'm going to wrap up the panel discussion there and throw over to audience questions to make sure that we get enough.

AUDIENCE: You talk about trust and perhaps I'm the only teacher in this room that may not be feeling the trust. It's been 20 years, two decades, funding has increased but performance has declined and, from my experience and what I'm seeing in schools, the decline will continue regardless of your talk about funding. I envisage that in ten years' time there'll be another expert panel sitting here talking about funding, so why should I trust you? The other reason I lack the trust is that you do not recognise my profession. That is my feeling. You provide funding to doctors, scientists, engineers, but not teachers. Teachers are not encouraged to do study, to do research to improve the system. When you talk about the difference in Commonwealth and state, that divide would disappear if you had teachers researching, finding best practice, teachers come from different states. The doctors are not divided by state, nor are the scientists. You divide us by state and I think if you look at the best education systems, they are driven by the teacher profession. The teachers do the research. How many experts have spent time in the classroom? You talk about retention and how that is a good thing.

PETER GOSS: Could I ask you to get to a question? These are powerful comments.

AUDIENCE: Okay. I would like to see the government consider more support of teacher research, to put money there, because I think that could lead to better practice in schools.

PETER GOSS: Thank you for the question. I'm not from the government, so I don't have that \$40 billion to direct. I would often start my conversations with ministers saying it's not about that teachers should trust the experts, the bureaucrats and the politicians. The trust should go the other way, I think was the point. Teachers should be trusted, but also teachers, when they take on professional responsibility, when they know where their students are at and are building the teaching from that, are in by far the

best position to actually take control of that work. I think some of the work Lisa was talking about would reflect in there. I think the current situation is a long way from what you're describing it needs to be in terms of that dynamic. So, a brief reflection from me. Other comments on how we change what is obviously a long-felt tide flowing the wrong way, if I might summarise very simply?

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Well, everybody has responsibility to improve the system. Not every teacher is a fantastic teacher and there is a lot of resistance to change in schools and in classrooms. I heard a teacher say they weren't going to do one of the new requirements of the Board of Studies. I mean, an accountant would never say, "I'm not going to use the latest accounting standards, I'm going to use the 1974 ones that I was trained under". It would never happen. I sense some of that preamble was directed to me. My job as an Education Minister - and now in my new role, but particularly in my previous role - was a facilitator. Yes, to provide funds, you need funds to do things, but then we did put things in place, I think substantial things, to enhance the status of the teaching profession and allow them to do those kinds of things that you're talking about in your schools. Yes, allowing teachers to do more research, I certainly agree, but that goes to the point again that nothing happens unless you have the trust and support of the teaching profession. People in the teaching profession generally know what works in the classroom, so I agree with your sentiment at the end, but everybody has a role to play here from ministers, to secretaries, to schoolteachers, to the admin staff at the front office and parents. Parents are often the ones we leave out of this equation.

PETER GOSS: And from wherever it is, as a profession and a professional there should be, I think, always an expectation of how do we each improve? Improvement can't be done to the profession, it needs to be driven from within and that is a complex process.

AUDIENCE: I'm asking this question in the interests of trying to follow-up on the maximisation of the return on the money that we're spending already and the previous question raised about non-improving standards. It goes to a topic that hasn't been touched on at all tonight, and that's the different interests of the Commonwealth and the states in funding education where the Commonwealth, historically and increasingly over recent decades, is making sure that the non-government sector is at least fully resourced in terms of the schools resource standard. Many of the state governments have been falling behind - and I think Mr Piccoli's term of office was a shining example to the contrary - in their responsibilities of ensuring that funding goes to that part of the school population who would benefit most from increased funding, and that is the kids suffering the compound disadvantage that was identified before. Do any of the members of the panel see any solution to this imbalance in funding where those kids who need it most in recent years have been least likely to get increased funding?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: Well, I'm not going to talk about the funding debate, because I've got no remit at all to speak about it.

LISA ROGERS: How tricky is this issue? I looked at the data for the ACT when I came here today and what I found out was there are about 70,000 kids in the system, about 6,000 kids in any one year and 1,161 kids that are classed as vulnerable. So 1,161 kids in any one year across 80-odd primary schools and I worked that out to be around 14 kids per primary school. I imagine many of you probably dropped your children off at school today or many of you are teachers, many of you will have walked into the school gate and I bet now you can personally see in your mind and name one of those 14 children. Now, I think in part the discussion around funding has lost the sense of the names of the kids and



actually the specificity of the kids that we know from the moment they walk into school are destined for failure. It doesn't take necessarily more money for those kids. What it takes is a system to wrap around those kids to identify them very, very early and to continue to intervene. This, again, was my point around the compound risk. Those 14 kids go from Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 and they're handed from teacher to teacher to teacher. Often the only people that experience their trajectory in schooling are their parents and them themselves, and teachers year on year are playing catch-up in terms of actually, what does this child know?

So I'm less convinced about more money and the dollar value which will deliver outcomes. I actually think we need to think differently about the dollars that we're spending. I know that has not answered your question, but I think we need to think differently about it. The Commonwealth doesn't need to name those kids, but my point is at new entrants we know the names of those kids. Target them then and don't leave them alone until you know they have got past Year 9, Year 10, crunch point, and they're on a good trajectory.

PETER GOSS: I think that's a really important point. One of the reasons why I've argued very publically that Australia needs to end the funding war is so that we can move the discussion on, but I've also argued that the only way that we can do that is if the funding system is good enough. We can't say it is what it is, let's just leave it there. There are schools that do have deep disadvantage. The international research from PISA gets misquoted. Kevin Donnelly talks about it and says Australia is the most generous in the OECD to our most disadvantaged students. He's misreading a sentence. We are the least generous in the OECD to our most disadvantaged students. More money makes a difference to the most disadvantaged schools. We don't know if schools in Australia have too little, but David Gonski, when he did the panel, said he saw some that were. So still the biggest thing is going to be how can we raise the expectations across the board and how can we change things, but in the end in terms of spending money there are two parts to that debate. As a nation we say it's about how you spend the money and, of course, it is, it's how you spend the money in anything in life, but step one in that is send it to the places where it's going to make the most difference in a needs-based fashion. Step two is that those places need to spend it as well as they can. So Lisa's point was to step two, yours was to step two.

There is this big divide. The previous system was allowing buck-passing. The Commonwealth has put its marker down and said, "We're going to fund in an 80/20 fashion" - 80% of the funding that is needed, that varies by school, for non-government schools and 20% for government schools. One of the proudest things I've done in my professional career was to help encourage passage of the legislation that said that states would also need to come to the party. I proposed a way that might make that more affordable because, given that we have a mixed system, we're not going to be able to move past into this richer debate of how does the money get spent within every school unless schools are funded broadly on their best estimate of need. It's been a messy, bloody process over many, many years, but we do have the opportunity to settle in and say we have a model that could be stable, but we can only get there if there are a number of other things that happen to flow that model through and that does include more money from the states. Adrian has been leading that charge in New South Wales for a long time and they're much closer. I'm from Victoria and if there are any Victorians in the room, Victorian Treasury is probably not sending me a Christmas card because it needs to happen.



LISA ROGERS: Well I think they might because if education succeeds then you'll reduce the long term forward fiscal liability for the rest of the government. So they might send you a Christmas card in the end.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: It has to succeed in Victoria because it says it on the numberplate.

PETER GOSS: We're the education state. Thank you for that.

AUDIENCE: I've heard quite a lot that makes me ask the question - and I'll ask for anyone to address it - what can you tell us tonight about partnerships between universities and bureaucrats? David referred to it in a general way when he spoke about people coming into the schools to work out what's best practice and working with the teachers themselves. Lisa spoke about it when she talked about supporting practice. So the question is, please talk about your thoughts on bureaucratic and university partnerships, because what John Hattie is doing is exactly what you're talking about. How are the universities being brought into this to share the research?

PETER GOSS: Thank you. How can we tap into that expertise?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: I think that's a good question and I think I should give credit to Peter for obviously what's been a very effective piece of advocacy by Grattan, which has extracted from one of the major parties at the federal level a sizeable commitment around a research institute that I imagine in its incarnation, if it ever comes about, will bring together university academics, researchers and practitioners to deliver findings and insights into what is best practice. I do think that is a really important initiative. I think we do need the equivalent of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare who puts out every couple of years reports on Australia's health, Australia's welfare. We need something like the Australian Institute of Education which puts out every couple of years a report on Australia's education which doesn't just deal with schools, but looks at early childhood education in particular, which I think doesn't get its fair share of attention, as well as schooling and also school to work pathways, whether that be through the vocational education and training sector and universities. I think if we could get something like that up and running it would be great. It would be bringing together academics and practitioners in a really unique way and I think it would also be a good way of holding state jurisdictions accountable in the public domain for their performance, which I think is a key role that the Commonwealth should play.

PETER GOSS: So it's not about you lose the money, it's you have to stand up and explain?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: Yes, you've got to stand up and explain.

PETER GOSS: Okay. Final question please.

AUDIENCE: My question is based on a comment from Lisa, but all of you might want to think about an answer. Lisa, you were talking about under our federated system there's an advantage that you end up with bipartisan results because you have to negotiate to some conclusion across the states and Commonwealth and you start with a mix of state governments from both sides of government. My concern is, and I think I see the evidence of it, that might lead to a drive towards the lowest common denominator, rather than best practice, and lowers our aspirations. You might see that in terms of the

testing patterns we do, the way we've let ATAR slip or the fact that yes, AITSL has recommendations for professional learning, but they're not compulsory and they're left to the states and are not at the level that you would expect in other professions. Teachers are professionals. Engineers don't have a choice if they're a professional engineer about the kinds of qualification standards they have to meet, neither do doctors, neither do vets, neither do pharmacists, yet we don't have those higher aspirations across the system.

PETER GOSS: Does it lead to a lowest common denominator?

LISA ROGERS: Can I say, sometimes yes. The eight national frameworks that you're talking about, they have been unevenly implemented. So across states and territories we've got excellent examples of where those particular frameworks have been fully adopted, fully implemented and benefits are being realised. That is not happening nationally. With that what we also need to ensure is that there are some things we leave the benefits to realise their potential, implement those frameworks and actually enable the benefits to come to fruition, so don't turn it around really quickly. But I agree; there are some instances where it is a race to the bottom.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: I'll give you an example, the minimum entry standards to get into university. There was agreement at the Ministerial Council that there should be one, but that's it. I don't know if you'd started by then, Lisa?

LISA ROGERS: Yes, just. I think it was my first meeting.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: We'd set one, a bit of a blunt instrument in New South Wales, and we were trying to get some consensus on what it should be. What the agreement ended up being was that there should be one. Everyone agreed there should be one, but what is it? I'm still waiting for an answer to that.

DAVID DE CARVALHO: But I think also at the other end there is emerging consensus about minimum standards for exit, which is arguably more important. Lisa and I have been doing some work on that as well and we now have, as a result of a Commonwealth-sponsored advisory group, going back a few years, an exit standard for students in terms of literacy and numeracy. You have to pass a literacy and numeracy test at a certain level to be able to practice as a teacher.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: Yes, but I'm going to pick up a point there. I found as Minister it was very hard to get a good idea of how difficult that test was out of ACR, I think it was who ran that, because it's proprietary whatever. As a member of that Ministerial Council, I found it very difficult. I don't even think we could get a sample test to have a look at to see whether it actually met a sufficiently high standard. So even in its application, some things tend to get watered down, so yes.

DAVID DE CARVALHO: And sometimes you've got to start at a certain point before you ratchet it up.

PETER GOSS: Ladies and gentlemen, you've been very patient. We're here in Canberra asking what should the Commonwealth do and we've been aiming to be constructive. One thought on how do we make 2018 the best year it can be. Lisa?

LISA ROGERS: Implement those national frameworks, actually. Implement those national frameworks, make sure there's an honest broker in the system, and hold people to account.

PETER GOSS: David?

DAVID DE CARVALHO: I've already swung in behind you on the National Research Institute, but I would counsel the Commonwealth be brave in terms of setting overall vision and strategy, but leave it to the states to implement and hold them to account for their outcomes.

LISA ROGERS: Yes.

ADRIAN PICCOLI: And I would say to the politicians set the standards high and defend them. You can't be beaten if universities want to go to war with you because you're setting the standards too high. You will have every single parent behind you.

PETER GOSS: I will leave with my last thought, which is that we've talked quite a bit about the national data because that's something we can do analysis on, but what helps teaching is having the information in your classroom about your own students, having that be robust across different teachers. Doing that is not an easy job. It requires time tools, training and teamwork, and I think we should have a national investment to provide support and tools to help teachers do that day to day job of understanding where each student is at so that they can help them take the next step, because if we're going to lift at scale, in the end it's going to be one student at a time across all 4 million of them. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your time, thank you to the panel and thank you to the Library.

END OF RECORDING