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Key points

This report describes the work overseen by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (DEECD) Research and Evaluation Committee in 2010–11. The work highlights a shift towards longer-term, larger-scale research work in collaborations across DEECD and in partnership with external institutions and organisations. This is designed to result in efficiencies through more coherent, high-quality research and evidence to inform policy and practice.

In 2010–11 the Department made it a priority to ‘strengthen the evidence base to support the improvement of outcomes’ (Annual Plan). The Research and Evaluation Committee has a responsibility to ensure the best evidence is available to understand the factors that influence, and measure progress towards, improving DEECD outcomes as outlined in the Outcomes Framework. The Framework was updated following the inclusion of Skills Victoria and Adult, Community and Further Education in the Department in January 2011.

The Committee governs the business processes shown in Figure 1, and reports to the Portfolio Strategy Board. More information is found in Research in DEECD 2011–12. The Appendix lists the members of the Committee.

Figure 1: Research in DEECD business processes

2010–11 Highlights

Overall, according to the Research Register, the total DEECD research and evaluation expenditure for 2010–11 was $8,892,904 (inclusive of the Research and Evaluation Partnerships). An additional $2,032,157

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2 These figures reflect research activity that has been recorded in the Department’s Research Register only. All Research Panel engagements must be recorded in the Research Register as a condition of approval. Other research projects that have been commissioned outside of the Panel process may not have been recorded in the Research Register.
was provided by external research partners (e.g. the Australian Research Council (ARC) for Linkage projects). By comparison, in 2008–09 the reported expenditure was $2,954,872, and in 2009–10 it was $12,505,052. Full comparative reporting of research and evaluation activity and expenditure by Skills Victoria and Adult, Community and Further Education is not possible for the 2010–11 financial year due to the timeframe of the machinery-of-government changes.

Other highlights for 2010–11 include:

- establishment of three Research and Evaluation Partnerships (at a value of $7.8m over three years)
- strengthening a culture of working in partnership internally and externally to build the evidence base
- governance of a coherent program of research into learning spaces
- building capacity within DEECD through a seminar series and communities of practice
- knowledge sharing activities (including conferences, publications and forums)
- integration of the review processes for applications to conduct research in schools and early childhood settings.

**Next steps for 2011–12**

In the coming year, the Committee will work on the following specific issues:

- Continue to build research and evaluation capacity across DEECD through coaching, professional learning courses and the development of resources.
- Encourage the movement towards large-scale, longer term research and evaluation projects through the Research and Evaluation Partnerships and support efforts to participate in Cooperative Research Centres.
- Increase knowledge sharing to better realise value for the Department in conducting research through further development and promotion of the Research Register.
- Realise the benefits to research of the Victorian Student Number (VSN).
- Increase Skills Victoria, and Adult, Community and Further Education research priorities in the work of the Committee and the Research and Evaluation Partnerships.
- Support an increased focus on practitioner research.
- Ensure strong governance practices to support procurement of high-quality research services, including an examination of the Research Panel, the Research Fund, and participation in the National Education Research Network.

These activities will be undertaken in view of savings which need to be made across DEECD over the next four years.
Research in DEECD: a partnership approach

In order to improve the quality of research, a partnership approach is proposed at all levels, as shown in Figure 2. This depends on collaboration within DEECD and with research partners, rather than a purely contractual relationship, and implies cultural change as we move to identifying research questions, planning investigations, providing mutual feedback and sharing findings. In addition to the Research and Evaluation Partnerships noted above, other partnerships are being developed.

Figure 2: Research in DEECD partnership approach

Future directions: The Committee will be working to support a culture change across DEECD, by communicating the partnership approach and the value proposition for large-scale partnerships, while also building the research and evaluation capabilities of staff.

1. Analysis and review

Regular reports of progress towards DEECD outcomes, and questions arising, are presented to the Portfolio Strategy Board. A comprehensive data dictionary has been produced, describing the many data sets held by the Department and available to researchers for analysis. The Data Dictionary is available in the Research Zone on eduGate.1

1.1. Research Register

The Research Register2 supports knowledge and information sharing in DEECD. It is a searchable database of information about research and evaluation, as entered by project managers. It is accessible to

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1 The Research Zone is on the Department’s intranet at: https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/knowledge/researchzone/default.aspx
Department staff and external users to monitor activity and avoid duplication.

**Future directions:** A new online Research Register, based on Sharepoint 2010, is being developed and should be in operation by January 2012. This will be available to external and internal users, and will reduce paperwork, improve tracking of projects and include an online application process for external researchers proposing to conduct research in schools, early childhood settings or using Department-owned data, as well as those seeking partnerships.

### 1.2. Research in schools, early childhood settings and using Department-owned data

At its September 2010 meeting, the Committee endorsed recommendations arising from a review of governance arrangements for research activity involving external researchers. In February 2011, the management of applications for research in early childhood settings was transferred to the Research Branch. From 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011, 397 applications were processed and of these 340 were approved, two were not approved and the remainder were closed, withdrawn or are pending approval.

In line with the increasing numbers of practitioners researching their own practice, and greater school autonomy, responsibility for approving applications from Masters in School Leadership students researching in their own school has been devolved to the Principal or Regional Network Leader.

**Future directions:** As highlighted in the governance review of 2010, periodic review of governance arrangements around research in schools and early childhood settings and in using Department-owned data will be undertaken. Issues arising include the increase in applications seeking passive consent; potentially intrusive procedures, and privacy issues, including use of the Victorian Student Number.

DEECD will actively engage with the National Education Research Support Network, which is working towards improving the research approval process to deliver greater national consistency and address issues such as capacity building; knowledge management and dissemination; privacy and legal issues; and access to and use of data.

### 2. Setting priorities

Research and evaluation must support the Department’s current and future directions, and enable us to understand the progress towards outcomes. Research priorities are developed in light of DEECD outcomes, current data analysis, the focus of major projects and national and international environmental scans.

The Research and Evaluation Committee has two Working Groups addressing high priority areas: Research and Evaluation Partnerships, and Learning Spaces.
2.1. Research and Evaluation Partnerships

In late 2010 and early 2011, the Department entered into three Research and Evaluation Partnerships to carry out agreed programs of research, evaluation and capacity building under a three-year partnership funding agreement, with extension possible for a further two years. The Partnerships are with the following organisations:

- Melbourne Graduate School of Education (The University of Melbourne)
- Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (The University of Melbourne)
- Melbourne Graduate School of Population Health (The University of Melbourne)

These Partnerships were designed to work in three broad areas: 1) data analysis, to understand patterns and variations in outcomes and factors affecting these; 2) evaluation of DEECD and national initiatives to determine how they have contributed to DEECD outcomes; 3) development and use of evidence about ‘what works’ to improve outcomes so we can implement effective interventions.

Future directions: The Partnerships will assist in building capacity of DEECD staff to work in closer partnership arrangements with researchers and encourage a cultural change in research and evaluation activities in DEECD.

2.2. Learning Spaces research program

The enormous investment in new learning spaces in Victoria, including the Commonwealth’s BER program, provides a unique opportunity to conduct research into the interactions of people and space, and its effect on learning. In 2010 the Committee asked the Research Branch to coordinate a Department-wide program of research around learning spaces, guided by the following question: *What are the benefits, challenges and unintended consequences of new learning space design in relation to pedagogy, school organisation and student learning outcomes?*

As the governing body, the Committee has overseen this program of research and publications, and leveraged the Department’s involvement in related OECD programs. Highlights include:

- 12 case studies of innovative learning environments in Victorian schools
- A literature review: *Research into the connection between built learning spaces and student outcomes*¹

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a joint publication for Infrastructure Division to distribute to schools: *Making the most of your flexible learning spaces* (DVD and print)\(^1\)

a joint conference on 24 June 2011 with Deakin University featuring input from the OECD, Catholic Education Office Parramatta, academic researchers and architects to encourage partnerships and identify next steps

contributions by DEECD staff at events such as OECD Innovative Learning Environments Conference in Heidelberg, Germany in December and The University of Melbourne’s Talking Spaces in November

an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage proposal submitted in conjunction with Deakin University and the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education, based on the DEECD overarching research question.

**Future directions:** The Learning Spaces research program has positioned Victoria as a potential international leader in this research. DEECD will continue to influence the directions of future research and work to grow the market in this area.

### 3. Investment decisions

Research investment decisions are expected to reflect DEECD priorities, based on the Outcomes Framework. The Committee makes recommendations on the funding of key research and evaluation activity for endorsement by the Portfolio Strategy Board, and monitors and maintains the Research Fund.

#### 3.1. Research Fund

The Research Fund was topped up to $10m at the beginning of the 2010–11 financial year. Grants from the Fund were suspended in late 2010 in anticipation of the Research and Evaluation Partnerships.

**Table 1: Research Projects funded through the Research Fund, 2010–11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research and Evaluation Partnerships</td>
<td>Research and Evaluation Committee</td>
<td>$2,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister School Relationships</td>
<td>International Division, Office for Policy, Research and Innovation</td>
<td>$94,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueprint for School Improvement</td>
<td>Western Metropolitan Region, Office for Government School Education</td>
<td>$147,750</td>
</tr>
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Breastfeeding in Victoria  
Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing, Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination  
$580,000  

Total Research Fund commitment 2010–11  $3,421,750

The following previously-funded projects presented interim reports to the Committee:

- Blue Sky: Shifting Children’s Developmental Trajectory (granted $300,000 in 2008–09)
- ABLES: The Abilities Index (granted $625,021 in 2008–09)
- Regional Network Model Evaluation (granted $1,000,000 in 2008–09)
- Ultranet Research and Evaluation (granted $700,000 in 2009–10).

Future directions: The Committee will review the operation of the Fund late in 2012 in light of quality and findings from the Partnerships and other research.

3.2. Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs)

Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs), funded principally by the Commonwealth, comprise major, long-term research projects, developed in conjunction with numerous partners and end-users. The Research and Evaluation Committee is the governing body for CRC bids. For a relatively small investment in cash, and in-kind support, DEECD can be involved in significant research programs with budgets of $5 to $7 million per annum over a seven to ten year lifespan. CRC proposals should be considered as corporate priorities and eligible for funds from the Research Fund.

In 2010, the Department supported three bids, none of which were successful:

- CRC for Young Australians
- CRC for Learning and Teaching
- CRC for Social Inclusion

The latter two bids have been redeveloped and their leaders are currently in discussion with DEECD regarding levels of support.

Future directions: To reap the benefits of CRC projects, the Department needs to be involved early and at a high level to influence the shaping of proposals. The Committee will develop clear processes by which bid teams can approach the Department, as well as guidelines as to how investment decisions are to be made.

3.3. Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Projects

These Commonwealth-funded projects, led by universities, enable the Department to invest in valuable research as a Partner Organisation. DEECD is currently engaged in 27 ARC Linkage Projects. Six projects were funded in the 2010–11 financial year, with a total DEECD contribution of $363,000 leveraging $2,032,157 of overall research activity. Figure 3 shows the proportion of DEECD contribution compared to ARC funding in 2009–10 and 2010–11.
Table 2 outlines the funding for individual projects.

**Table 2: Funded ARC Linkage Projects in 2010-11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>ARC funding</th>
<th>DEECD funding</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peopling educational policy: realising the new Australian English and mathematics curricula</td>
<td>$654,022</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moments in time: investigating a national history curriculum in early childhood settings and primary class rooms</td>
<td>$123,500</td>
<td>$33,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigating the effectiveness of teacher education for early career teachers in diverse settings: a longitudinal study</td>
<td>$293,000</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved student outcomes through positive classroom management</td>
<td>$202,551</td>
<td>in-kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary certification: meeting the national agenda?</td>
<td>$354,008</td>
<td>in-kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving regional secondary students’ learning and wellbeing</td>
<td>$405,076</td>
<td>in-kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total funding</strong></td>
<td><strong>$2,032,157</strong></td>
<td><strong>$363,000</strong></td>
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**Future directions:** Five new ARC Linkage Projects were announced in May 2011, with funding to commence in July 2011. Six Linkage proposals have been submitted for decision in the next round of funding which will be announced in November 2011. Research Branch is hosting and developing a network of experienced and prospective DEECD ARC Linkage partners with the aim of information sharing and maximising the benefits of project outcomes to DEECD.

**3.4. Practitioner-led research**

No practitioner-led projects were funded by the Education Policy and Research Division in 2010–11. In 2010, four practitioner-led projects from 2008–09 were presented by practitioners and their academic partners at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference.
Future directions: New ways to support practitioner-led research will be developed in 2011–12 in light of the trend towards increasing research into practice as a means of professional learning.

3.5. Commissioned research

Based on reports from divisions, the indicative total of DEECD commissioned research commenced in the 2010-11 financial year was $4,867,891. At present the majority of commissioned research activity is under $100,000 in value.

![Figure 4: Value of research projects](image)

Future directions: The Committee will continue to communicate the Department’s partnership approach and the value proposition for large-scale, longitudinal research partnerships.

3.6. Research Panel

The current Research Panel, established in 2009 to end in 2014, enables the Department to purchase high-quality research services from 49 providers with ease and speed. The Panel began with a cap of $9m, which was increased in 2011 to $10m to cater for demand. Since the inception of this Panel, the University of Melbourne was the panellist most often used, while more than half of the panellists were not selected for any projects. The guidelines for Panel use have been revised to increase oversight, strengthen procedures and to enhance value for money by clarifying the definition of research (with a focus on research intensity not program development), and requiring the approval of the General Manager, Education Policy and Research before selecting panellists.

Future directions: The Committee has endorsed the terms of reference for a review of the Panel within the context of the new procurement framework. Procurement Division has commenced work with Education Policy and Research Division to address questions such as: What is the best procurement strategy for research services?

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1 These figures reflect research activity that has been recorded in the Department’s research register only. All Research Panel engagements must be recorded in the Research Register as a condition of approval. Other research projects that have been commissioned outside of the Panel process may not have been recorded in the Research Register.
To what extent is the Panel arrangement adding value and quality to DEECD’s research effort?

4. Knowledge sharing

Ensuring effective knowledge sharing and dissemination of the Department’s research and evaluation findings is crucial for informing policy decisions and practice in Victoria. The audiences for DEECD research include practitioners across the state and beyond, policy makers, professional associations, researchers and the general public. DEECD involves these different audiences through face to face and online communication.

4.1. Research and Evaluation Committee communiqué

Following each Research and Evaluation Committee meeting, a brief newsletter is sent to General Managers for distribution and discussion in their divisions.

4.2. Building research and evaluation capacity

In May 2011 the first series of a Building Research and Evaluation Capacity course was led by Dr Chris Ryan of the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. The course was designed to provide staff with the skills to operate at higher levels in understanding, undertaking and appraising effective research and evaluation. Over 100 staff applied for the first series revealing the appetite across the Department for more professional learning activities in this area.

The Research Zone site in eduGate was upgraded to provide staff with a comprehensive, single point of access to information about research in DEECD, as well as tools and resources. In addition to this, a Regional Outcomes and Evaluation Community of Practice has been established so that officers from across regional locations of the Department can come together to meet, share, support and learn from each other about how we use can best use data and evidence to support regional planning and practice. Regional officers who have a role in understanding and using data gather quarterly to discuss data that is available on DataZone to equip them and their leadership teams with information on how we are tracking against the DEECD outcomes.

**Future directions**: A second series of the Building Research and Evaluation Capacity seminars commenced in July 2011, and further professional learning and development activities are planned for 2011-12. Alumni will be encouraged to work together to share knowledge and skills. Secondments and exchanges with universities and other organisations are being explored, especially through the Research and Evaluation Partnerships.

4.3. Major forums

From August 2010 to February 2011, the Office of Policy, Research and Innovation, in collaboration with the Bastow Institute and the Catholic Education Office, hosted a series of research forums with Professor John Hattie titled *Making Learning Visible*. The first forum on
31 August was over-subscribed, and a repeat was held on 1 September. Principals and leadership teams in all sectors were then invited to a three-day workshop program in October which focused on sustained professional leadership using school data and effect size. Overall more than 740 school leaders, regional and central staff from government, Catholic and independent school sectors participated in the forums, which also provided opportunities to deepen cross-sector relationships. Figure 5 illustrates some of the positive feedback received from the evaluation survey conducted with forum attendees.

**Figure 5: Responses to the Making Learning Visible Evaluation survey**

**Question 1:** Will you promote discussion in your workplace about this forum?

**Question 2:** Will the knowledge gained from the forum help to inform decisions about policy, practice or program direction in your workplace?

![Figure 5: Responses to the Making Learning Visible Evaluation survey](image)

### 4.4. Research eLert

This online newsletter\(^1\) was distributed once a term to subscribers and made available on the DEECD website. Topics covered were digital technologies and learning platforms; improving outcomes for young Indigenous people; physical and virtual learning spaces; and teacher professionalism.

Appendix: Research and Evaluation Committee members

Membership

Chris Wardlaw – Chair  
Deputy Secretary, Office for Policy, Research and Innovation (OPRI)

Dr Sara Glover – Deputy Chair  
Data, Outcomes and Evaluation, Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination (OCPC)

Dianne Peck  
Business Owner, Ultranet, Office for Government School Education (OGSE)

Kim Little  
Strategic Projects, Skills Victoria

Erle Bourke  
Information Technology, Office for Resources and Infrastructure (ORI)

Dr David Philips  
Assessment and Reporting, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA)

Dr Elizabeth Hartnell-Young  
Education Policy and Research, OPRI

Ian Burrage  
Education Policy and Research, OPRI

Karen Weston  
Early Childhood Development, OCPC

Dr Jenny Proimos  
Principal Medical Adviser, OCPC

Support: Chris Warne  
Education Policy and Research, OPRI

Meeting dates 2010–11

Meeting 3/2010  21 July 2010
Meeting 4/2010  1 September 2010
Meeting 5/2010  29 October 2010
Meeting 1/2011  10 February 2011
Meeting 2/2011  14 April 2011