



AU



THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

29 August 2012, 6.05am AEST

Six steps the government needs to take on Gonski

AUTHOR



Kevin Gould

Researcher in Economics of Education at Central Queensland University

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Kevin Gould receives funding from CQUniversity. He is affiliated with CQUniversity.

Central Queensland University does not contribute to the cost of running The Conversation. [Find out more.](#)



The government needs to respond to the Gonski report on schools funding and start improving student outcomes. Schools image from www.shutterstock.com

It's been six long months since the Gonski panel made its **recommendations** on schools funding, but in the next few weeks the federal government will finally respond and release the details of its school funding plan.

Much of the commentary so far has focused on the increased funding to schools but there's much more to the reforms. If handled right they could mean a great deal for educational outcomes in Australia.

So what should the government decide?

I suggest the following six strategies to form part of the government's plan to help improve student performance.

1. Set clear performance goals

The Gonski panel was ambiguous on this, with its recommendation for funding based on a minimum NAPLAN performance. The government should make it clear that its responsibility is to ensure that all students obtain a minimum education that enables them to effectively participate in employment, further study and leisure over their lifetime.

Performance objectives for schools and school sectors should not only include minimum NAPLAN performance, but also minimum year 12 graduation rates – an issue overlooked by the Gonski panel.

2. Treat senior secondary separately

Senior secondary provision was ignored by the Gonski panel, even though this is the bridge between a common general curriculum and employment or further study. It is also an area of schooling which is more complex because of its association with vocational education and training (VET).

Senior secondary schools need to be treated differently because of this complexity. Indeed, providers of VET Certificate III courses should be included in considerations and their students receive similar funding, given the suggested equivalence of Certificate III and year 12 certificates.

And, as senior secondary qualifications are vital for future opportunities, every student's progress through the senior secondary programs should be monitored. Those falling through the cracks can be quickly identified and provided with support and second chances to graduate.

3. Endorse local decision making

The Gonski panel recommended that all decisions be made as close to the local level as possible, also known as the principle of subsidiarity. This principle, in effect, means the federal government coordinates the funding to the states, who in turn coordinate the funding of school sectors and their schools.

Such a process ensures that there is maximum local participation of those close to the action in the decision making. Canberra should not be dealing directly with individual schools.

Similarly, states with large public systems should split these into autonomous regions whose funding is coordinated by a state body dealing with all school sectors.

The principle of subsidiarity should be fully endorsed by the government.

4. Base funding on the need for teachers

The Gonski panel's recommendation to throw money at schools should be rejected. This would simply repeat the failings of the large money injection in the 1970s after the Karmel report.

This approach assumes a connection between extra dollars and improved student performance. But money is the means to acquiring resources (such as teachers) and any performance improvement will depend on which resource is acquired and on its quality.

As most spending at a school is on teachers, the federal government should estimate a sector's need for the teachers necessary for all students to achieve performance standards as well as a sector's capacity to raise finance privately. Then it can determine recurrent funding per student on that basis.

This approach will also have the benefit of knowing the number of future teachers required and whether they will be available or not.

5. Negotiate state funding on the basis of sector reports

The federal government should negotiate funding based on a state's reports of its school sectors. Such reporting should show progress towards achievement of student performance objectives including problems encountered as well as forward estimates of teacher need.

State coordinating authorities would also need to contain school finance equity research groups.

6. Accountability through reporting

School sectors and states should be accountable for the funds that they receive and their distribution. Public reporting would ensure transparency in the use of funds to improve student performance.

The federal government should also be accountable for its distribution of funds to the states.

Data would need to be easily accessible for this to happen, unlike the difficulty in obtaining comprehensive MySchool data or the unavailability of Gonski modelling details or the restricted use of consultant reports to the Gonski panel.

All such data and information is publicly funded and should be freely and easily accessed by the public.

These six strategies are what's needed now to give students a real opportunity to achieve a better standard of education, and to help them be effective citizens in their lifetime.



RELATED ARTICLES

16 June 2014

[Explainer: how do free schools allocate places?](#)

11 June 2014

[Problem behaviour in children is not always a mental disorder](#)

9 June 2014

[Is education better off in state or federal hands?](#)

7 June 2014

[Faith schools are part of the answer, not the problem](#)

29 May 2014

[Heaping on pressure won't attract more school governors](#)

Want to follow The Conversation?

Sign up to our **free daily newsletter**.

☒ Australia

☐ United Kingdom

Copyright © 2010–2014
The Conversation Media Group