

**CATHOLIC
EDUCATION
MELB**

Understanding School Engagement in Research (USER) Project

High-level findings, 2017

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USER Project:

Purpose, rationale and approach

The (USER) project aimed to help Catholic Education Melbourne (CEM) better understand and meet the needs of schools in regard to their:

1. engagement in research projects (Part 1)
2. engagement with research findings and evidence (Part 2).

Rationale

Schooling jurisdictions receive hundreds of applications per year from external researchers wishing to conduct research in schools. School feedback through the USER project has enabled CEM (and other jurisdictions) to better understand what schools want and need in regard to research, and make more informed decisions that maximise the benefit of school engagement in research, and potentially improve outcomes across CEM.

The ns per year from

How much are schools engaging in research projects?

- 79% schools receive 5 or more research requests per year.
- 47% schools receive 10 or more research requests per year. BUT...
- 1 in 5 schools receive 1 or more research requests per year.
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- In 2015-16 about a quarter (23%) of respondents/schools did not agree to participate in any research projects.
- On average, schools say 'yes' to 1 in 5 research requests per year (21%).

Reasons for saying 'YES' to engaging in research projects

Three most commonly reported reasons for saying YES:

1. Identified as an area of need in school improvement plan (87.5%).
2. Topic is of interest to staff, students, and/or families (78.6%).
3. Outcomes - believe research will produce tangible outcomes (76.8%).

Number 1 reason for saying YES: Identified as an area of need in school improvement plan.

Reasons for saying 'NO' to engaging in research projects

Three most commonly reported reasons for saying NO:

1. Demand on school is too great, i.e. time, effort and coordination (92.9%).
2. Timing not right - school has other priorities/research underway (92.9%).
3. Need? Topic or research question is NOT related to school needs (85.7%).

Number 1 reason for saying NO:2.

USER Findings

Part 1: Engagement in research projects

What makes a 'good' or worthwhile research project?

- Alignment with school priorities and school improvement plan.
- Aims to improve student learning, or at least a line of sight to this.
- Research results and feedback is provided to the school, and in a way that schools can use in practice.
- Aims to improve teacher capability and effectiveness.

What contributes to a 'not-so-good' research project?

- Too much time and/or demand on school.
- Research topic is not relevant to school priorities, or even education.
- There are implementation issues, i.e. research is poorly conducted.
- School does not receive any feedback or research findings.

Research schools are interested in:

Varied responses, but the most commonly reported themes: 1. parent engagement; 2. literacy; 3. mathematics; and 4. social & emotional learning.

Research pertinent to schools:

Varied responses, but the most commonly reported questions focused on improving student engagement and motivation in learning. Other themes included parent engagement, feedback, mathematics and literacy.

Examples:

- How can we improve student engagement in their learning?*
- How can we assist parents to engage in their child's learning?*

For research that had a positive impact on schools:

- Schools reported a mixed-methods approach, with an emphasis on capacity building (i.e. the research project included a professional learning component for staff).
- Perceived and measurable impacts reported by respondents focused on improved student learning and teacher capability.

Do schools value research and evidence AND use it in practice?

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Staff access to research findings and evidence

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CEM also engaged universities in conversations about school engagement in research. We met with senior academics and research management staff from five Melbourne universities to help CEM achieve each and provide school feedback from the USER project.

Key messages from the university consultation:

- It was agreed that school engagement is critical to the effectiveness and impact of educational research, however it is not common practice in the conduct of all school research.
- Researchers and jurisdictions want to work together to better engage and meet the needs of schools as *partners* in research, not just *participants*.
- As a result of school feedback, universities indicated they would make changes to their research application and ethical review processes, and researcher training.
- Universities expressed a keen interest in continuing the conversation and relationship with CEM, and a desire to work with CEM as a formal partner and funder of future research projects.
- CEM indicated we will be more proactive with initiating research that is relevant to our schools, rather than mainly responding to partnering and funding requests from universities.
- Universities shared 349 research findings with 134 researchers (40% of total) and 40% of total research funding requests from universities.

