



**Queensland University of
Technology**
Kelvin Grove Campus
Victoria Park Road
Kelvin Grove Qld 4059 Australia
Phone +61 7 3138 2000
www.qut.edu.au

Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology
Kelvin Grove Qld 4059
CRICOS No. 00213J

The Education Council
PO Box 202
Carlton South Vic 3053
Phone: (03) 9639 0588
Email: declaration@education.gov.au

14th June 2019

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: QUT response to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration

The Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is pleased to submit to the Education Council our response to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians. Our submission draws together the collective views of teacher educators with diverse expertise and research interests in the field of Education. We thank the Education Council for the opportunity to provide input and would be delighted to provide further information on any of the points raised should this be required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Carol Nicoll'.

Professor Carol Nicoll
Executive Dean, Faculty of Education, QUT
Phone: 07 3138 3211
Email: c.nicoll@qut.edu.au

Review of the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians

Submission from the Faculty of Education Queensland University of Technology (QUT)

June 2019



The Queensland University of Technology (QUT) acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara as the First Nations owners of the lands where QUT now stands. We pay respect to their Elders, lores, customs and creation spirits. We recognise that these lands have always been places of teaching, research and learning. QUT acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play within the QUT community, CRICOS NO. 00213J

Executive Summary

The Faculty of Education at QUT welcomes the opportunity to speak to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians ('the Melbourne Declaration')¹.

1. We affirm the Melbourne Declaration as a landmark framework for the development of education policy and provision in Australia and we commend the Education Council on the consultative nature of the review.
2. We affirm that education spans birth to 18 years and beyond, and we call on all State and Territory Governments in Australia to commit to lifelong learning and educational provision from the early years through the lifespan. To this end, we support the recommendation of the *Lifting our Game* Report ², commissioned by all Governments to embed the early years of learning as well as school learning into the Melbourne Declaration.
3. In achieving educational goals for all young Australians, we stress the importance of having the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Islander students, families and communities heard, and of ensuring that cultural and linguistic diversity is seen as a strength of Australia's nation building.
4. We acknowledge that the Melbourne Declaration was published in the same year as Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)³ and note its legally binding obligation (Article 24) to the right to an *inclusive* education. It is, therefore, timely that Inclusive Education be addressed explicitly in the Declaration.

¹ Education Council (2019). *Review of the Melbourne Declaration. Discussion Paper*. Canberra: Education Council.

² Pascoe, S., & Brennan, D. (2017). *Lifting Our Game. Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*. Creative Commons Attribution. 4.0., p.74

³ United Nations (2008). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. New York: United Nations.

REVIEW OF THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION

1. What are your expectations of a national aspirational declaration on Australian education?

A national aspirational statement is one informed by the past and present, and with a view to the future. We call for a declaration that supports a cohesive, culturally and linguistically diverse society, one that values young Australians as informed and active citizens who are willing and able to engage respectfully with others within and beyond the nation, now and into the future. We support initiatives to promote:

- a. knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the custodians of the land and sea and we commend learning that values and respects Indigenous knowledges, histories and cultures;
- b. education that values stewardship capabilities to manage the air, water, land, flora, fauna and life forms in environmentally sustainable ways;
- c. skills to consult and engage with local community members;
- d. capacities for culturally informed global citizenship in the Asia Pacific and beyond;
- e. personal and social capabilities for making ethically informed decisions in changing social and environmental contexts;
- f. current and future generations of engaged citizens with capacity to engage critically with diverse digital communication platforms; and
- g. critical and creative thinking capabilities of 21st century learners.

Recommendation 1: We recommend a national aspirational declaration on Australian education that addresses the education continuum, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) through the compulsory years of school, and with reference to post schooling options - cognizant of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity and changing social, economic and political contexts.

Recommendation 2: We recommend a declaration that reasserts the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those from low socio-economic backgrounds as well as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. We would hope that recognition is given to the meagre progress with the least advantaged groups and the reality that disadvantage is likely to grow as technological development advances.

Recommendation 3: An explicit statement of the roles that sciences, technologies, mathematics and engineering (STEM) will increasingly make in our lives and jobs is timely. Recognition of the need for a strong level of scientific literacy in education is paramount, with greater attention to the early years of learning and the post-compulsory years, which supply the nation with future STEM workers. Inadequate reforms to senior schooling in STEM disciplines and little recognition of the growing need for scientific literacy (alongside literacy in information communication technologies) need to be redressed. Notwithstanding these concerns, a focus on STEM need not be to the detriment of other disciplines and subject areas. Indeed, promoting well-balanced knowledge across the spectrum of education should be a principal goal of education and nation building.

2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?
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A national declaration stands to inspire and guide stakeholders such as parents, education providers, industry representatives and education leaders from the early childhood, school and tertiary education sectors. For over a decade, the Melbourne Declaration afforded the nation a shared vision for education that guided significant changes in policy and practice. One example is the Declaration's inclusion of early childhood education and care (ECEC), the decision by Ministers to expand their remit to include ECEC, which at the time was typically located in Child and Family Services. Recognition of the role of ECEC, in turn, promoted early learning and successful transition to school and provided the foundation for a raft of ECEC reforms (such as the National Quality Framework for ECEC) that have had a significant positive impact on Australia

education. With ECEC now located in the Education portfolio nationally, and in most States and Territories, there is opportunity to strengthen further this connection.

Recommendation 4: A national declaration should adopt a long-term vision that raises aspirations of learners and enables time for meaningful and sustainable learning within a context of ubiquitous change; and embraces the full spectrum of education sectors, from early childhood settings to secondary schools and tertiary sectors.

3. How has the *Melbourne Declaration* impacted or influenced you?

The Melbourne Declaration is an influential framework for the many facets involved in the design and implementation of teacher education, curriculum development and education research.

CHANGES SINCE THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION WAS AGREED

4. What do you consider are the **three most important** economic, social and technological changes that will shape the future of education in Australia?

Among the raft of significant economic, social and technological changes that will shape the future of education in Australia is the agenda for:

- a. connectivity, participation and civil engagement in education in light of cultural diversity, globalisation, labour market polarisation and population movements within global digital worlds;
- b. addressing significant social problems such as childhood trauma, youth suicide, anxiety conditions, family poverty and domestic violence, and ameliorating their impact on learners and education settings; and
- c. tackling environmental challenges and the need to better educate young Australians for sustainable futures.

Recommendation 5: Consideration of the shifting nature of international relations between countries that trade with Australia is appropriate at this time in a world in which education is so significantly internationalised. In relation to population movements and the challenges of disadvantage and poverty, consideration needs to be given to the implications of mass migration for education. The changing terrain poses contradictions and challenges for our models of international relations and a well-grounded international focus would encourage Australian education to look beyond its borders.

5. How can a national declaration best reflect that Australians need to continue to participate in learning throughout their lifetime?

A national declaration that supports learning across the lifespan (lifelong learning) operates as a framework for reform, innovation and improvement. Establishing a broader definition of 'education' enables consideration of strategies and resources to support successful transition between education contexts that adhere to the principles of diversity and inclusion.

Recommendation 6: An updated declaration can promote the importance and benefits of lifelong learning for individuals and the nation, acknowledging that learning begins at birth; that ECEC is the foundation of a contemporary effective education system; and that learning occurs in a wide range of contexts, supported by families and communities. This includes recognition and celebration of learning that occurs outside of the school system (e.g., sports, recreational activities, cultural activities), as well as post-school education and training.

Recommendation 7: With respect to diversity and inclusion, we recommend that the declaration reflects Australia's obligations under the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) to demonstrate genuine commitment and intent to provide a guiding framework to support progressive realisation of the right to inclusive education, across sectors nationally. *General Comment 4(GC4)* defines inclusive education as distinct from *segregation* (where students with disability are educated in

separate special schools and classes) and *integration* (where students with disability are enrolled in unreconstructed mainstream schools). GC4 explicitly specifies the steps that State Parties are to undertake to ensure progressive realisation of the right to inclusive education. *General Comment 6* (2017) states that segregated settings are discriminatory. We, therefore, recommend that such segregation ceases.

Recommendation 8: We seek a less crowded curriculum in order to support lifelong learning and a focus on learning *how* to learn. This would require curriculum reform and a decluttering of the curriculum, a focus on learning big ideas central to achieving foundational school subjects and disciplines. Given the predicted changes to future workforce needs, citizens with strong metacognitive capabilities and self-awareness are likely to thrive in a world that may require frequent job changes. Australian curricula are modelled on the 19th century industry workforce needs and are unlikely to serve our children or nation well for the degrees of uncertainty we are likely to encounter in the future. Curriculum that can accommodate cross-disciplinary ways of working is now of utmost importance. A key goal is to achieve a balance between disciplinary knowledge and the need to work across disciplines.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

6. How could the concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in the *Melbourne Declaration* be updated to ensure they are still contemporary over the next decade?

Equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians are long-term goals and remain relevant. These are narrowly defined in the Melbourne Declaration's focus on schooling, and they should be equally applicable to ECEC. As it stands, the Review focuses on equity in terms of narrow measures of performance in areas such as literacy and numeracy (e.g., NAPLAN & PISA). Moreover, it pre-empts how a 'high-income' country such as Australia might respond to increasing levels of poverty and difficulty of access to,

and participation in, public education and care by drawing attention to *how* money is spent rather than *how much* is spent.

It is timely to adopt a strong inclusive approach to promote and support realisation of educational goals. This will require minimal change to the goals. Goal 2 already speaks to learners of all ages. The focus on schooling in Goal 1 could be broadened to Australian education or, if perceived necessary, address ECEC and schooling, family, and community learning settings (i.e., Australian ECEC and schooling promote equity and excellence).

In noting changes since the Melbourne Declaration was agreed, the Review document lists national reforms that may well address excellence (e.g., the Australian Curriculum, the National Quality Framework for ECEC, and the APSTs and Standard for Principals [Review Doc, p. 3]), but does not explicitly address equity. Such reforms represent an increase in the standardisation and regulation of education and care rather than the promotion of principles of equity, fairness and social justice. Equity involves making structural adjustments so that all young Australians have access to and participation in education, regardless of their backgrounds and physical, emotional and cognitive capabilities/needs. Moreover, excellence in education is indicative of the best levels of attainment.

Equity also relates to health and wellbeing initiatives, either enhancing or detracting from learning capacities and, indeed, as essential educational goals. Importantly, Point 36 of the Review acknowledges that “As the world and society evolve, education will have a continuing role in developing a student’s health and wellbeing. Helping students develop a balanced set of cognitive, social and emotional skills will help them prepare for life as productive community members and embrace opportunities”. Currently, the descriptors of confident and creative individuals found in the Declaration denote health and wellbeing as important consequences, and antecedents of learning. This should remain and be strengthened.

Recommendation 9: A revised declaration should give *equity* a higher profile than is currently the case, enacted through authentic and substantive commitment to practising and resourcing equity in Australian schooling and care for all disadvantaged groups of children and young people in Australia.

Recommendation 10: The current goals remain relevant and become more inclusive through acknowledging the contribution of quality ECEC to equity and excellence in Australian education. National achievements in ECEC over the past decade (i.e., Early Years Learning Framework) should be acknowledged and new aspirations set for a national system of quality ECEC services. Promoting and supporting equity and excellence in education could include a commitment to work towards two years of preschool education in Australia and investment in the ECEC workforce. A national focus and commitment to the professional work of early childhood teachers and other educators in ECEC requires a national focus on supporting the development of a professional, qualified and valued ECEC workforce and a commitment to a new national early years workforce strategy.

Recommendation 11: We recommend that acknowledgements of the link between health, wellbeing, learning, productivity, and social cohesion are maintained and strengthened within the document. This includes explicit acknowledgement of the contribution of educational settings to these areas as a pre-requisite for higher level and lifelong learning. Given that the Review acknowledges that the future will see 40% of learning occurring later in life, it is essential that education in the early years and school have a focus on social-emotional development and relational skills as the foundation for higher order thinking and productivity. It is important for the Declaration, as a national document, to lead the way in breaking down traditional Health and Education silos to address this area.

AREAS FOR ACTION

7. Are the eight areas for action in the *Melbourne Declaration* still contemporary and how well do they address the goals?

While the areas for action remain contemporary, there should be greater emphasis on improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged, homeless and incarcerated young people and Indigenous youth given their high incidence of school expulsion and suspension related to emotional and behavioural problems. So too, it requires increased emphasis on the importance of literacy and numeracy given the significance of these capabilities in daily life. Of the numerous important areas for action, Inclusive Education, Early Childhood Education and Care and Secondary Education warrant closer attention.

Inclusive Education

Addressing Inclusive Education and the Disability Standards for Education 2005, educators' obligations are to: (i) provide reasonable adjustments to curriculum, instruction and assessment to enable access and participation of students with disability on the same basis as their peers; (ii) consult with students with disability, and parents/carers, in the design and implementation of these adjustments; (iii) and provide positive, safe and accessible learning environments.

The Declaration states that "Australian governments and all school sectors must provide all students with access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination based on ... disability". However, neither quality nor the model of education provision are defined and the lack of an explicit reference to inclusive education leaves both open to interpretation. Segregation and integration, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) are the dominant models of provision that exist in Australia today. We call for Australian education systems to adhere to their legal obligations under the CRPD.

Recommendation 12: The statement with respect to disability could be amended to: *Australian governments and all school sectors must ...provide all learners with access to high-quality **inclusive education** that is free from discrimination based on ... disability.*

The Declaration states that: “Australian governments and all school sectors must ... promote personalised learning that aims to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian”. This terminology is at odds with the terminology being used in other cross-government initiatives, such as the National School Improvement Tool (NSIT) or the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on Students with Disability (NCCD), both of which use the term ‘differentiated’ (e.g., Quality Differentiated Teaching Practice as per NCCD). The statement could be broadened to include ECEC and amended to: *Australian governments and all school sectors must ... promote **quality differentiated teaching practice and reasonable adjustments** to fulfil the diverse capabilities of each young Australian.*

Early Childhood Education and Care

Reflective of the timing of the Melbourne Declaration and responsibilities of Ministers of Education at that time, the current action areas continue the narrow focus on schooling. An updated declaration should speak to the current Education portfolio. The current areas for action remain important, with many equally relevant to ECEC. A more integrated approach can identify relevant areas for action, for example (i) strengthened partnerships between ECEC services and schools at local and systemic levels; (ii) supporting quality teaching and leadership in ECEC and schools, (iii) promoting world class curriculum, *pedagogy* and assessment in ECEC and schools; (iv) *strengthening Indigenous education*; (v) strengthening accountability and transparency in ECEC and schools. The action area of strengthening ECEC currently addresses a mix of priorities relating to quality, access and continuous improvement, is also relevant to schooling.

Recommendation 13: An updated declaration should communicate a more comprehensive and integrated approach to Australian education. Where relevant, action areas should contribute to the realisation of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians in ECEC and schools. An updated declaration should acknowledge

national achievements in ECEC over the past decade and set new aspirations for a national system of quality ECEC services. Promoting and supporting equity and excellence in education, this should include a commitment to work towards two years of preschool education in Australia and investment in the ECEC workforce.

Secondary Education

Traditional models of instruction still dominate learning and teaching in the junior and senior years of high school. In part, this mode of instruction is a response to a crowded curriculum that cannot be achieved easily by other student-focussed forms of instruction. A crowded curriculum also works against cross-disciplinary work across school subjects. New methods of assessment in the senior and junior years of schooling are therefore, needed to drive student-centred instruction and cross-disciplinary collaboration if our education system is to meet the anticipated futures in which our children will live and work.

Recommendation 14: An area for action involves the revision of curriculum and assessment nationally, such that teaching and learning can adapt to the needs of young people as they transition out of school-based education. Such reforms take place in close connection with the tertiary sector, while acknowledging projected workforce needs. Reforms to secondary education could adopt models based on research evidence for transforming curriculum and assessment. Without new models of assessment that avoid regression to standardised and external examinations, instruction as teacher-centred rather than student-centred, is unlikely to change.

8. Are new priority areas for action needed? And are there areas that should no longer be a priority?

The Melbourne Declaration outlines key skills and capabilities required for students to learn and develop to ‘compete in the global economy on knowledge and information’ (p.4). With a focus on global innovation and the ability for young people to compete in a global economy, their success and adaptability relies on their innovation and problem-

solving capabilities to effectively respond to changes, develop new products and services, and remain skilled in any industry or vocation. Practitioners in all fields will benefit from a broad understanding of the key concepts and methodologies of other forms of expertise. This applies to HASS graduates as much as to STEM graduates. In light of the increasing role STEM disciplines will play in global developments and applications of innovation and problem solving, a strong scientific literacy paired with cultural and critical competency will be of increasing relevance to children and young people's lives and work. Ensuring that science, technology and mathematics education provides scope for innovation and creative problem solving by accessing the full suite of skills and perspectives, including those developed within HASS disciplines, is key to education reform.

We argue that synergies emerge when critical and creative thinking co-exist in learning supporting innovation as one of the 21st century skills. Innovation occurs as a result of a continuous process of creation and change, through critical thinking and creative thinking. Finally, we argue that these higher order skills are vital for learners of all ages and best nurtured early with clear plans for continued development throughout the curriculum.

The Declaration acknowledges that students should 'develop a range of employability skills' (p.5) inter alia '... the ability to think flexibly, ...to develop the capacity to think creatively, innovate, solve problems' (p.5) which are key 21st century skills. It identifies creative thinking and being creative as essential employability skills, however, **there is no discussion of critical thinking** as equally important to enabling students to become employable and innovative in the global economy. Further, the Declaration does not articulate the view that both creative thinking and critical thinking are required, even though these skills together form one of the seven general capabilities in the Australian educational curriculum documents⁴. Such skills are relevant across all education contexts (e.g., early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education). While students need to acquire fundamental knowledge, particularly foundational literacy and numeracy, increasingly the mark of educational success is not the ability to reproduce content

⁴ ACARA. (2011). *Critical and creative thinking*. Canberra: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

knowledge. Rather, it is the ability to extrapolate from what we know, to analyse and apply learned knowledge and skills to complex real world issues and situations.

Recommendation 15: We recommend that a clear and explicit link to both critical and creative thinking be added to the Declaration. Greater clarity in the revised Declaration will support a strengthened focus on critical thinking and creative thinking in national curriculum (e.g., the Early Years Learning Framework, the Australian Curriculum) and supporting pedagogical frameworks and resources.

Recommendation 16: A clear statement that explicitly links the growing need for STEM literacy with critical and creative thinking is strategic and required for all students. At present, a crowded curriculum, particularly in the senior years, and standardised assessment, work against the achievement of critical and creative thinking, especially in STEM subjects.

MECHANISMS TO ACHIEVE THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS

9. Are there better ways to measure and share progress toward achieving the declaration's goals?
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We argue for greater emphasis on young Australians developing as informed and active citizens with intercultural capabilities, and for more appropriately informed narratives around Indigenous disadvantage, using a strengths-based approach.

Measures such as those used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (e.g. PISA) are currently cited for the purposes of 'measuring' progress and for international comparisons. It would be equally or perhaps more innovative and valid to use different measures. With the growing need for STEM literacy in life and work, and a high degree of student disaffection with school science, it would be remiss not to measure levels of engagement in school learning to establish the success of the education system. Moreover, STEM disciplines have a history of lower participation

rates from women, children with disabilities, low SES students and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. Improved measurement could be premised on enhanced opportunities as a consequence of the Declaration for those groups who have been traditionally and consistently marginalised. Avoiding a deficit discourse stands to provide a fresh narrative for these learners and their education settings.

Recommendation 17: We recommend that a revised Declaration adopt a lexicon that speaks to *education* rather than *business*, and methodologies that are fit-for-purpose in measuring education achievement and impact. We advocate data sharing with external bodies such as the OECD about Australia's performance, in particular focusing on Science, English/Literacy, Mathematics/Numeracy (p. 5). We advocate a stronger narrative for reporting the achievement of Indigenous students, highlighting the positive gains that have been made (e.g., increased Year 12 completions, p. 5).

Recommendation 18: Given our recommendation that education has an important role to play from birth in relation to social-emotional skills, health and wellbeing skillsets, we recommend that wellbeing and social indicators are introduced as a measure of progress. There are a number of existing well-developed measures that could be applied in a systematic way from birth across the lifespan. This would enhance the profile of education settings in relation to their role in individual and societal wellbeing and allow for the celebration of success and tracking of progress over time.

10. How can we ensure the education sector works together to achieve the goals of the Declaration?
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Reform is most effective when there is engagement of all stakeholders across early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education. There is a growing need to also incorporate non-school-based educators in this mix when developing actions from the Declaration. The ultimate audience for the Declaration - our children - should be heard and engaged in the process.

Recommendation 19: A mechanism for enhanced decision-making would include national fora to bring different stakeholders and representative organisations together for dialogue to ensure that the ‘student or learner voice’ is heard. The Review document rightly observes that ‘Students are now far more actively engaged in their own learning and our education system needs to encourage student voice and agency’ (p. 5). The Review process, as a matter of equity, might consider mechanisms by which the voices of children and young people can contribute in more concrete ways to both the review of the Declaration and to education decision-making in Australia more generally.

The review provides a valuable opportunity for active consultation, involvement and participation by children and young people as catalysts for action. The importance of learner perspectives and being actively involved in shaping their own education experience are contributors to quality, inclusion and participatory education. Student or learner *voice* and participation are emphasized in the Gonski 2.0 Report⁵ and in findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse⁶. A focus on *voice* and participation would put the emphasis on *all* learners in *all* their diversities.

Recommendation 20: In support of a collaborative approach to realisation of these goals, an updated Declaration will clearly speak to and have relevance for a broad range of stakeholders. This requires the use of inclusive language and explicit links to key policy and curriculum documents spanning the education continuum.

Recommendation 21: A revision of the language of the declaration could avoid deficit views of children as learners. A system of education that builds on the capacities that children and young people bring to the education system is likely to be stronger than a system that is premised on the assumption that children and youth are missing something that the system will add for them.

⁵ Gonski, D. (2018). *Review of achieving educational excellence in Australian schools*. Canberra: Department of Education, Australian Government

⁶ *Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*. (2018). <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

In addition, the Declaration could pay closer attention to tertiary education and its role in lifelong learning. Although the desire to compete in a knowledge economy is clearly expressed and should remain in the Declaration, specific terms relating to the role of tertiary education in achieving this goal can be made explicitly and connected to the aspirations of all levels of education, from early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary sectors.

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