

Updating the Melbourne declaration of educational goals for young Australians, 2008 – Innovative Research Universities

The Melbourne declaration of educational goals for young Australians is the third statement from the Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers to guide schools' policy over the following decade.

In responding to the development of a fourth statement the Innovative Research Universities focus at the intersection of the schooling system and the tertiary post school systems. We address:

1. whether the schools statement should be broadened to include education following school, to conclude that the schools statement should remain schools focused but that there is scope for a distinct whole of education framework statement; and
2. how the schools statement should require school systems to be more explicit about the learning outcomes and capabilities of students at the end of schooling to provide a stronger basis for the transition to subsequent tertiary study and training.

Innovative Research Universities (IRU) is a coalition of seven comprehensive universities committed to inclusive excellence in teaching, learning and research in Australia. Through its members working collectively, the IRU seeks to be at the constructive centre of Australian university policy making, influencing political developments beyond individual university capacities to do so. Our membership is Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Griffith University, James Cook University, La Trobe University, Murdoch University and Western Sydney University.

A schools statement or a whole of education statement?

At the 22 February 2019 Forum in Melbourne to discuss the Statement and the successor the link of school outcomes to subsequent tertiary education needs was one important issue. The Forum considered whether a future declaration should:

- remain focused at schools,
- extend to cover early childhood education,
- extend to cover 'young people' through to 25, or
- extend to cover the whole of education through life.

Australia needs to construct [a tertiary system for the future](#). In the IRU's tertiary futures statement we argue that universities are clearly part of an education system, which requires effective means for each person to move from schooling to subsequent education and training. Doing so is now essential for each Australian.

An overarching Government statement that sets out the expectations across all elements of education could be a useful frame. However, taking an existing schools focused document as the

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base would have downsides for both schools and tertiary education. The importance of the school statements for how schooling develops would be weakened in a broader document while such a document would struggle to contribute to the challenge ahead to ensure effective tertiary education system.

There is scope for two different documents:

- a broad whole of education statement that provides a commitment to support an education system across all levels that all Australians can access across their lives.

It would sketch the development from the whole of mind, body and social skill development characteristic of early childhood education and schools, through to the year 12 certificates that set out specific achievement by subjects and skill sets, to tertiary education's focus on acquiring depth of knowledge and capabilities in particular areas of interest or need, with strong emphasis on effective functioning in the workforce.

How specific it should be and to what implementation end would be crucial discussion questions; and

- a statement for each education segment, where needed. This would allow the update to the Melbourne declaration, as the fourth schools statement. The update should include a stronger sense of the linkage to tertiary education opportunities but not attempt to define how those are met.

A parallel tertiary declaration could fit here, when the Commonwealth and States are ready to engage with the clear need to reform the tertiary system to meet future needs.

Schools: preparing for subsequent education and training

For a country wanting to ensure the successful flow of all individuals from school to later education and training, the school outcomes should be more clearly evident to allow providers across the tertiary systems to decide the readiness of each person for entry to a particular course.

By 'tertiary' the IRU means education that is not schooling. It is a practical approach to let schools do their best with school certificates and define tertiary as what happens afterwards. For the most Australians this will mean completing Year 12, for others it will mean leaving school without a senior secondary certificate. For all, it is then important to acquire a tertiary qualification as the basis for secure employment.

How well students emerge from schools is important. When students reach essential thresholds of knowledge and capability they are better positioned for university and other tertiary providers to build on those foundations.

The current review of the Australian Qualifications Framework proposes that it show better relationships between the school system, with its various exit points and broad range of student achievement, and the tertiary qualifications. It is that knowledge and level of achievement that matters most for subsequent education. However, the tertiary system must work with all Australian following their schooling including those who did not complete a year 12 certificate and those who completed no school level qualification.

Once challenge for an effective transition from schooling to later tertiary education and training is understanding the level of achievement at school. It is the strange reality that there are regular assessments of students' learning levels throughout schooling but, in most states, there is none at the end of year 12.

Among other tools, the NAPLAN process provides a guide to the individual and collective capabilities in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. The senior secondary outcomes are, with the major exception of NSW, adjusted and normalized results which inform about the relative standing of each student to another but do not as such explicate the actual level of capability. We do not know whether there is any change to year 12 outcomes over time.

This is in part due to previous periods of limited university places, an era we are about to re-enter. With limited places the relative standing of the applicants can matter more than their actual capability. However, as NSW shows, it is possible to assess and publish the learning outcome of the individual subject by subject and allow a follow on ranking of individuals based on those results.

The next schools statement should include a goal of each state and territory providing a clear criterion based statement of the learning outcomes of each student as part of the senior secondary certificates.

IRU positions

1. The revised national schools statement should remain schools focused.
2. The Commonwealth and State and Territory Ministers should consider the value from a distinct whole of education framework statement
3. The revised national schools statement should require school systems to be explicit about the learning outcomes and capabilities of students at the end of schooling to provide a stronger basis for the transition to subsequent tertiary study and training.

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