

Draft Declaration on education goals: IRU comment

The [Innovative Research Universities Submission](#) to the review of the Melbourne Declaration argued:

- that the next statement remains essentially a schools focused document
- for the 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”.

The Draft Declaration on education goals to replace the Melbourne Declaration is well written for its purpose. It retains a focus on early childhood and school education, which gives a good shape to the document, and engages with the transition from schooling to tertiary education opportunities across both vocational and higher education.

It is naturally pitched at the high level required to sustain action over a decade and to be supported by all nine Commonwealth State and Territory Governments. Its emphasis is to set out the main themes for work, not the specifics of action.

IRU position

The IRU encourages those responsible for the school systems to keep central to their operations the importance of good learning outcomes from school as crucial to each person’s subsequent capacity to engage with tertiary-level learning.

The Draft Declaration has a strong focus on assisting each person to prepare for following stages of education but gives less attention to improving and explicating the learning each acquires at each stage.

An effective transition from schooling to tertiary education and training requires understanding the level of achievement at school. It is the strange reality that there are regular statements of students’ learning levels throughout schooling but, in most states, there is none at the end of year 12.

The senior secondary outcomes are, with the major exception of NSW, adjusted and normalised 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 what change there is to year 12 outcomes over time.

Universities and other tertiary education institutions are hampered in providing a smooth transition from school to tertiary learning.

In implementing the next statement of Education Goals, each state and territory should provide a clear criterion-based statement of the learning outcomes of each student as part of the senior secondary certificates.

Proposed actions of the Declaration

The draft proposes ten areas for action:

1. Developing stronger partnerships
2. Supporting quality teaching and leadership
3. Strengthening early childhood education
4. Enhancing middle years development
5. Supporting senior years of schooling
6. Embedding pathways for learning throughout life and supporting effective transitions
7. Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
8. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to reach their full potential
9. Supporting young Australians at risk of educational disadvantage
10. Strengthening accountability and transparency via ongoing measurement and tracking.

In contrast to the IRU position set out above:

- the two actions on middle years and senior years (actions 4 and 5 above) emphasise the personal development and understanding of students more than the learning itself;
- action 6 is about the challenge of transitions more than knowledge and skills being acquired from one to the next;
- action 7 states the learning to be acquired, not so much whether it is in fact acquired
- action 10 sets the objective of good clear information about learning outcomes. It is now the challenge for the education systems to deliver that information as students exit to ensure a smooth transition to tertiary learning and skills.

About Innovative Research Universities (IRU)

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.

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