

Friday 14 June, 2019

Education Council  
Level 3, 15-31 Pelham Street  
Carlton South VIC 3053

Dear Sir / Madam

**Submission to the review of the Melbourne Declaration**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Committee for Melbourne (Committee) is an apolitical, not-for-profit, member-based entity that brings together over 140 organisations from Greater Melbourne's business, academic and civic sectors whose common purpose is to shape a better future for Melbourne.

As an independent organisation we represent no single interest group or political position, but seek to challenge conventional thinking and to develop innovative ideas to continue to enhance Melbourne's position as an economically prosperous and highly liveable global city.

In September 2016, the Committee launched *Melbourne 4.0*, a major project designed to explore how Greater Melbourne can prepare for the accelerating speed of innovation and disruption that has catapulted us to the early stages of the *Fourth Industrial Revolution*.

One of the strategic needs that emerged from Melbourne 4.0 was *Future skills*. Our capacity to benefit from the range of economic opportunities that avail themselves, and our pursuit of an egalitarian society underpinned by a robust democracy, depends on our capacity to develop local people with the necessary skills to navigate various challenges. Given the nature of our work to date, the Committee was eager to make a submission towards the review of The Melbourne Declaration (Declaration).

In developing this submission, the Committee invited individuals within our membership base, and key stakeholders, to attend a workshop. Those that participated represent some of Melbourne's

leading schools, tertiary institutions, and representative bodies. The content of this submission reflects the discussion and observations made by the workshop participants.

This submission will address five questions that were included in your discussion paper. High level responses have been provided, which detail what our members, and key stakeholders, felt were the most pressing issues.

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

We are at the early stages of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This globally disruptive phenomenon will see the convergence of physical, digital, and biological systems; a fusion of technologies that will completely change our economy and societal fabric in ways that were previously unimaginable.

Automation, artificial intelligence, and other rapid technological advancements, will fundamentally change the nature of work over the coming decades. The impact that these developments are having on the skills required by employees is already considerable. While technical skills remain important, critical thinking abilities, combined with a range of other *soft skills*, including interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, creativity, and enterprise skills, are increasing in demand.

Currently, our system does not place a premium on nurturing these soft skills. Good assessment is a critical precursor to good teaching, and the mechanisms designed to measure and value these attributes requires improvement. While the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills remain critical, the development of their soft skills must be developed concurrently, and measured. The creation of a 'Learner Profile', which records and describes students' soft skills, and which has the support of the education sector and industry, is one tool which should be considered by authorities.

Furthermore, given the technological and economic changes afoot, we cannot predict the type of jobs that current students will be required to undertake over the next 20 to 50 years. Therefore, we must teach our students to be flexible and think strategically to adapt to the changing

demands of the labour market. While this skill is not easy to develop and measure, a sustained effort should be made.

From a social perspective, Australia's system is not as equitable as what we should aspire for it to be. According to UNICEF, we are ranked 30 out of 38 high-income and middle-income countries in terms of possessing an equitable education system. Providing all Australian students with a high-quality education, regardless of their socio-economic background, is fundamentally important to ensuring we retain a socially-cohesive and relatively equitable society. The issue of equity will be addressed in greater detail in question three of this submission.

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

With the nature of work set for continuous change over the coming decades, there is the need to not only educate our community about the need for lifelong learning, but to provide an environment that enables its implementation.

A revised Declaration should emphasise the need to educate school administrators, teachers, career councillors, students, and their parents, on the need for lifelong learning. For many of these people, they are simply not aware of the changes upon us, the changing nature of work, and *why* they will need to engage in lifelong learning.

In terms of implementation, a progressive and robust engagement plan with the above-mentioned stakeholders, throughout the entirety of students' secondary school years, is required. Furthermore, the development and recognition of micro-credentials, which complement our existing educational framework, will be essential to facilitating lifelong learning throughout students' lifetimes.

Lifelong learning will be just as important for students that do not complete their formal schooling, as for students that do. Good learning involves theoretical and applied learning. Both are critical, but traditionally, more emphasis has been placed on the theoretical aspect. The revised Declaration should emphasise the need to provide people with both aspects and work to break down the privileging of theory and abstraction over application and practice.

In addition, a revised Declaration should reframe the discussion about changing jobs and careers to emphasize the opportunities available. It should counter the negative public discussion focusing on the fear of widespread job losses, and focus on the excitement of different career opportunities. Change is inevitable. It is how we choose to engage with it which will be critical in shaping our success and our shared future.

### **3. 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?**

The issue of equity remains as pertinent today as when the Declaration was released in 2008. Results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), over many years, continue to reveal persistent inequalities in outcomes between students from different backgrounds and regions.

There are a range of trends that help determine student achievement. Geography is one factor, with students from metropolitan locations outperforming their peers from the regions, or very remote communities. Another factor is parental education. Students with parents that have a Bachelor degree perform better on average than those whose parents do not have a degree. Further support is needed to ensure access to a quality education is equal for all Australian students, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic background. Every effort must be made to reduce the barriers that prevent students the opportunity to achieve successful outcomes.

The concept of *excellence*, while difficult to define, is an important attribute which students and teachers should aspire for. It should remain a part of a revised Declaration. To encourage and facilitate student excellence, a focus on teaching excellence must be prioritized. Teachers require guidance, parameters, and the confidence that they can teach what they are being asked to teach. Part of this challenge will be providing them with the tools and confidence to integrate new technologies into teaching practices.

Greater support for teachers is required. This could be in the form of teaching resources, whether it be additional training programs, or to encourage schools to employ people from outside the teaching industry, to complement the skills of teachers. It can be extremely difficult for teachers to teach the vast array of skills that are increasingly required, especially ones that they do not innately possess, or which require significant professional development to be able to teach well. More could be done to make it easier for individuals with significant industry experience, but without teaching qualifications, to become involved in the education system.

The NAPLAN test has been beneficial for some schools. For those that have benefitted, it has provided them with greater awareness of their shortcomings, and consequently, their results have improved. Furthermore, it has allowed schools to compare their results to other *like* schools, and better-understand the factors contributing to their performance. At the same time, it was argued, the NAPLAN test acts as an impediment to the pursuit of excellence. For many schools obtaining underwhelming results, the publication of NAPLAN results is placing extreme pressure on them. In many instances these schools are being *forced* to direct their activities and practices towards obtaining better NAPLAN results, often neglecting other areas of the curriculum, and at the expense of student well-being, and teacher motivation. The revised Declaration could convey the need for broad measures that determine excellence within the system.

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

The digital media revolution, including the emergence of social media, has made it more important than ever for students to develop their capacity to think critically.

Since 2008, social media platforms have proliferated. Students are now inundated with information, much of which is skewed, biased, misguided, or at worst, fake. The development of students' critical thinking skills will help them understand how news stories aim to compel, deceive, and persuade. It will help them form balanced judgements.

In addition, supporting students as they transition between institutions should be prioritised. While the common discourse focuses on the need for students to be ready for the next phase of their educational experience, there must be some onus on the institutions to be ready for the

students they are about to welcome. There is an opportunity to be bolder in terms of human-centred design for education transitions and institutions.

Another priority should be to review the ATAR system. It creates an enormous amount of stress for students and teachers as they strive towards obtaining the highest possible score.

Furthermore, it exacerbates the inequity within the system by favouring high socio-economic students; something we want to eradicate.

### **5. How can we ensure the education sector works together to achieve the goals of the Declaration?**

It is critical that the education sector works together to achieve the goals of the Declaration. Competition is the antithesis of collaboration, and it is competition between schools which is doing more harm than good.

Over the past two decades, Federal Government policy has encouraged – either directly or indirectly - choice and competition between schools, believing that it would create incentives for underperforming schools to improve their performance and results. Little has been done to encourage true collaboration.

PISA international test data show that more competition has failed to improve student results, with competition for students showing no correlation with greater performance. Our results are static, and segregation between schools is increasing. Greater collaboration between schools would help spread best practice teaching and learning; improving processes and results.

There must be an equitable distribution of funds and resources to ensure all schools are equipped to provide their students with a quality education. A strong public education system will ensure all students receive this quality education regardless of how much their parents earn, or where they live.

For the Declaration to achieve these aspirational goals, it must address this issue of competition. Only through the equitable distribution of funding and resources, combined with a model that encourages collaboration, will the goals be achieved.

## **Conclusion**

Committee for Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission towards the review of the Melbourne Declaration.

It is a critical document underpinning Australia's education system. The aspirational goals remain as relevant today as they did in 2008. Given the complexity of our world, which is being transformed in a myriad of ways, it is vital that we continue to try to achieve these goals to help maintain our social cohesion, and economic dynamism.

The Committee trusts that you will consider each of the points made in our submission, and remain hopeful that the revised Declaration reflects these sentiments. We wish you well as you conduct your review.

Please contact Committee for Melbourne Policy and Research Officer, Brett Van Duppen, at [bvanduppen@melbourne.org.au](mailto:bvanduppen@melbourne.org.au) or (03) 9667 8140, should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



Martine Letts | CEO