

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

25 October 2019

Dear Sir / Madam

Submission on the exposure draft of the Declaration on Education Goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the exposure draft of the Declaration on Education Goals.

This submission will reiterate some key messages that were articulated in Committee for Melbourne's (the Committee's) submission to the Review of the Melbourne Declaration dated 14 June 2019, (Attachment A) and provide suggestions on ways in which we believe these themes could be captured in this exposure draft (draft).

Our original submission (Attachment A) highlighted some general themes that should be captured in the Melbourne Declaration. These included valuing 'soft skills' like innovation, problem solving, creativity and flexibility in the education system. It included incorporating recognition of lifelong learning and how this might be facilitated. The Committee also believes in ensuring equality of access to education and resources. The Committee welcomes the draft Declaration's recognition of these issues.

Soft skills

With technological advancements set to fundamentally change the nature of work over the coming years, critical thinking abilities, combined with a range of other *soft skills*, including interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, creativity, and enterprise skills, will become increasingly important.

Currently, our education system does not place a premium on nurturing these soft skills.

The Committee welcomes Goal 2 of the draft, which encourages the nurturing of resilient, and creative individuals that show initiative and are enterprising.

Equity and excellence

The pursuit of an education system that is equitable for all young Australians is very important. National assessment results indicate persistent inequalities between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, students from metropolitan locations regularly outperform their peers from the regions, or very remote communities.

There must be a determined effort to reduce the barriers that prevent opportunities for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, or those residing in regional or remote areas, to learn and succeed.

The concept of *excellence*, while difficult to define, is an important attribute which students and teachers should aspire for, and should be prioritised as part of a revised Declaration.

The Committee welcomes Goal 1, in which excellence and equity are pursued simultaneously. We cannot afford to pursue excellence at the expense of equity, or equity at the expense of excellence. There must be a balance. The need to focus on regional and rural disadvantage might be stated more explicitly in the goals linked to equity.

Lifelong learning

With the nature of work set for continuous change over the coming decades, it will be important to educate young Australians about the need for lifelong learning, and provide an environment that enables its implementation.

The Committee welcomes the draft's repeated references to the need for lifelong learning, and to engage with key stakeholders throughout the entirety of students' school lives, so they are aware of its importance.

Lifelong learning will be just as important for students that do not complete their formal schooling. We would welcome the revised Declaration acknowledge these students, and the need to ensure that they are aware of the importance of lifelong learning, and opportunities for lifelong learning remain open to them.

The recent findings from the Australian Qualifications Framework Review emphasise the importance of lifelong learning, with accredited micro-credentials identified as a potential enabler. Accredited micro-credentials could be used as a pathway to other learning streams, or for individuals looking to enter the workforce. The revised Declaration could draw attention to the benefits of micro-credentials for graduates, and early school leavers.

The Committee has already welcomed Goal 2, which aspires for students to be resilient and adapt to, and manage, change. In this context, we note that the issue of change and disruption is fundamentally linked to the need for lifelong learning. It is important that *change* is framed in a positive way, and that job and career changes are viewed as opportunities to learn and grow.

Teachers

Given the increasing breadth and complexity of the skills which must be taught to students, greater support for teachers is required, whether in the form of teaching resources, or training programs. Teachers require guidance, parameters, and the confidence that they can teach what they are being asked to teach, with part of the challenge to provide them with the tools and confidence to integrate new technologies into teaching practices.

The Committee welcomes the draft Declaration's ten interrelated areas for action, particularly the section 'Supporting quality teaching and leadership', which highlights the importance of supporting teachers with professional learning opportunities, and providing high-quality evidence, and data, to improve learning outcomes.

Assessment

As a means of student assessment, the ATAR system has its advantages. It is efficient, relatively transparent, and offers a guide about student competencies. However, it does not recognise other types of skills that may need to be measured and may therefore be too simplistic, and not truly reflect students' overall capabilities.

In pursuit of the highest possible ATAR, students attempt to obtain a thorough understanding of the set curriculum, and apply their knowledge accordingly. This structure means that students and teachers may be less inclined to experiment with ideas, to explore their creative side, and to adequately develop their soft skills - all critical skills for the twenty-first century.

The Committee would welcome the inclusion of text regarding the need to ensure that final year assessment adequately captures and measures students' full capabilities, including their soft skills.

The need to collaborate

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.

PISA international test data show that more competition may not have improved student results or correlated with greater performance. Australia’s PISA results appear to have plateaued, and segregation between schools is increasing. Greater collaboration between schools may help spread best practice teaching and learning; improving processes and results.

The Committee welcomes the draft’s text about the need to develop stronger partnerships amongst key stakeholders. Furthermore, we would welcome some more specific text how closer collaboration between schools could occur, to help spread best practice teaching and learning, improving processes and results.

Conclusion

Committee for Melbourne thanks the Education Council for the opportunity to provide further input into the revised Declaration on Education Goals. We wish you well as you finalise the Declaration.

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

Yours sincerely,



Martine Letts | CEO