ISQ Submission: Review of the Melbourne Declaration into the Educational Goals of Young Australians
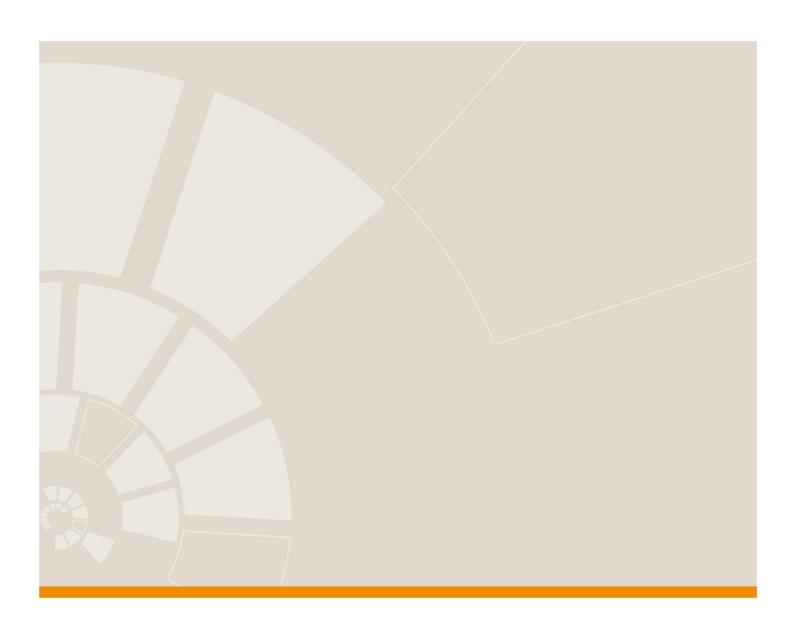
About Queensland Independent Schools

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with more than 120,000 students enrolled in 208 independent schools across Queensland. These schools educate approximately 15 percent of the state's total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

The strength of the independent schooling sector lies in the rich mix of education choices and opportunities Queensland independent schools provide families. Independent schools are as diverse as the students and parents who make up their close-knit communities. Of Queensland's 208 independent schools: 184 educate children with disability; 110 cater for students for whom English is a second language or dialect; 194 enrol Indigenous students; 75 offer international education programs; 33 provide boarding services; and 18 cater specifically for students who have disengaged from mainstream education.

Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and wellbeing of students.

Over the past ten years enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by 21 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child's schooling.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body representing Queensland's independent schooling sector. Independent Schools Queensland represents the interests of its 213 member schools, fosters choice in education and protects the autonomy of independent schools. ISQ is a not-for-profit organisation and membership to ISQ is voluntary.

Summary of Key Points

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) in comprising this submission, has sought input from the ISQ Board, school leaders of independent schools, and other educational leaders from the independent schooling sector in Queensland. Individual and group submissions formed the basis of ISQ's responses to the Education Council's request to respond to ten questions about the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (Melbourne Declaration or the Declaration).

In summary:

- ISQ recognises the importance and status of the Melbourne Declaration in guiding policy and frameworks at a Federal and State level in Australia
- ISQ believes an update of the Melbourne Declaration, based on input from various sectors and organisations, will continue to position the Declaration as a peak policy document for Australian education systems and schools
- ISQ believes much of the Melbourne Declaration's intent and wording, as published in 2008, is still relevant in the foreseeable future. However economic, social and technological considerations may shape the emphasis of a future declaration, along with the need for greater focus on collaborative and ethical governance to ensure a socially cohesive and sustainable future and greater alignment with professional standards frameworks for teachers and leaders
- ISQ believes all areas but one (Enhance middle years development) in the Melbourne Declaration are still relevant; however, some may need a change in emphasis including:
  - the insertion of The Arts in STEM education
  - a shift in focus from middle years to all school transitions
  - increased acknowledgement of the VET pathways to employment
  - increased focus on localised curriculum, assessment and reporting design including Indigenous-led curriculum design
  - enable both progression or aged-based milestone curriculum, assessment and reporting design supported by localised formative assessment to understand student growth, particularly in primary years.
  - acknowledge the challenges of education delivery in regional, rural and remote Australia
- A future declaration should include an increased focus on student and teacher wellbeing and child safety, including strategies to support emotional, social and physical resilience, adaptiveness and engagement
- A future declaration should value and support localised and autonomous school improvement practices
- Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at all stages of its development
- ISQ would value a future Declaration that specifies milestones towards achievement with regards to the implementation of national goals in schooling.

Submission Questions

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

ISQ seeks an aspirational declaration on Australian education that is an inclusive, overarching policy statement that can guide educational strategies and initiatives nationally. It must prioritise improved educational outcomes for all students through contextualised strategies for school improvement.

The Declaration should encourage a relentless focus on developing students who are highly literate and numerate individuals, capable and confident of solving real-world problems; to be effective communicators, and to make valuable contributions regardless of educational, geographical, or social contexts. It should emphasise the importance of collaboration, creativity and intercultural engagement as strategies for personal and community success.

The Declaration needs to respect and value school-based autonomy whereby school leaders, teachers, parents/carers and education systems are the key decision makers in implementing meaningful learning within their context.

The Declaration should continue to set clear goals and explicit expectations regarding national commitment to sustained improvement for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and express the value of nurturing cultural and linguistic diversity in our society and schools, regardless of economic or cultural background.

The Declaration should describe achievement as including artistic, enterprising, sporting and community endeavours as well as traditional discipline knowledges. It should continue to acknowledge wellbeing and emphasise schools' role in developing emotionally, socially and physically resilient young people with the adaptive skills that will enable successful engagement in diverse and inclusive schooling, workplaces and communities.

A future declaration should specify how goals will be measured and describe milestones towards national goals.

2. Who should the national declaration inspire and/or guide?

A future national declaration should inspire and guide the Federal and State governments to work collaboratively with systems, sectors and school leaders in developing relevant, localised school improvement strategies and educational initiatives.

Additionally, the Declaration should guide various education sector bodies such as the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), school leaders and their governing bodies and parent/community associations.

Australia's young people require high-quality teachers and leaders, guided and supported by associated professional standards and high quality continuous professional learning. The link to professional standards and frameworks for quality professional learning should be made explicitly in the Declaration.

The Declaration should recognise that some schools, curriculum and policy developers may seek to design learning and assessment using a range of progressions, supported by suitable online formative assessment systems, as a viable alternative to age or year-based approaches to

curriculum, assessment and reporting design. Both approaches should be valued and determined by the relevant jurisdiction or school.

A future declaration should enable and encourage localised curriculum interpretation and assessment design, reflecting the knowledge and expertise of teachers and leaders within systems and communities to design learning most suitable for their students.

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

ISQ plays an important role in contributing to improving the educational outcomes of Queensland students. Therefore, ISQ values the Melbourne Declaration because it has supported school improvement driven through quality teaching and school leadership.

ISQ contributes to discussions around Federal and State education policy development and implementation, schools funding and resourcing, early-childhood education, quality teaching and school leadership, curriculum and assessment, community partnerships, Indigenous and youth education, and governance and accountability systems. ISQ looks to the Declaration to support the autonomous, localised and innovative approaches that independent schools take when meeting the needs of Australian students.

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

Predicting future change is problematic due to variables such as social change, globalisation, migration and environmental change etc. However, ISQ has indicated what it considers to be medium-term considerations that may shape a revised declaration.

Technology

1. Information and digital technology will continue to advance exponentially, influencing how future students, teachers and leaders access knowledge; how they learn, and where they learn. Technological change will be a major consideration for the independent schools affecting pedagogy, student workforce pathways, teaching and school leadership capacity, community partnerships and relationships with parents/carers and associated infrastructure for managing educational data and school business processes. It is anticipated that a digital future will enable greater personalised learning and collaboration for schools, teachers and students.

2. STEAM subjects will likely continue to be an important consideration for schools in terms of offering curriculum and learning solutions and pathways to better prepare students for a future requiring highly adaptive civil and cultural leadership. STEAM subjects will need to be delivered with intentional inclusion of ethical, environmental and cultural considerations alongside the development and application of new industrial and digital technologies.

3. Artificial Intelligence and associated automation are viewed as potentially disruptive and possibly reformative in education, particularly in blended, student-directed learning and assessment.

Social

1. In an increasingly boundaryless, socially networked and globalised world in which social inequity is also increasing for some communities a key challenge to Australia's increasing population will be the maintenance and improvement of effective and efficient participatory democracy.

2. Students will need the ethical and social frameworks that support and celebrate the benefits of a diverse and multi-cultural and multi-faith society. They will need support to engage in highly networked private and public digital environments while maintaining a commitment to systems that care for socially excluded and disadvantaged.

3. Schools will need support to be teaching students to lead and contribute to inclusive and collaborative national, state and local governance. They will need to be able to demonstrate effective and ethical communication. Approaches to establishing ethical and profitable global and local enterprise will be essential skills.

4. Students will need a scientific and rational awareness of sustainability, combined with an appreciation and engagement in cultural, spiritual and creative endeavours that create social harmony and cohesion.

5. There will be an increased focus on the consideration of young people and their teachers' and school leaders' wellbeing. Children's mental health, safety and sense of belonging in protective environments should also be more clearly foregrounded.

Economic

1. Equitable funding to students based on need should be transparent and sector blind.

2. Increasing and changing global enterprise and the demand for sustainable local enterprise will require the development of knowledge and skills associated with leadership, project management, collaboration, intercultural and inclusive sensitivity, environmental awareness and creativity.

3. The globalised economy will have an increasingly volatile impact on the Australian economy and students will need an understanding about the systems, processes and politics of this dynamic economic environment.

4. Increasing challenges to economic security faced by regional, rural and remote Australian communities and the impact this may have on equitable educational delivery further disenfranchisement of these communities.

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

The Declaration currently states that developing a 'world-class curriculum' is a key goal. Evidence-based policy and practices must underpin Australian education. ISQ still supports the notion of 'world-class', and it also sees the Declaration as benefitting from greater consideration of evidence-based and locally developed policy and practices in Australian schools.

Schools need to continue to provide multiple pathways to post-school success and post-school learning. Continuation of such statements and wording is required in any future iteration of the Declaration.

The current Declaration emphasises deep curriculum or discipline foundations that provide continuity and expertise. These statements should be elaborated upon with the importance of adaptive and ethical knowledge, and skills to enable students to manage the uncertainty of future employment.

A future Declaration should highlight the relationship between deep-discipline knowledge and the skills that will enable all Australians to contribute positively to a democracy that is increasingly inclusive and diverse. Alongside discipline depth, the Declaration should reinforce the need to develop agile and adaptive mindsets for lifelong learning, upskilling and training.

The General Capabilities framework is a crucial document to reflect life-long learning. ISQ supports a closer relationship between this framework to promote cross-discipline and cross-subject expertise and intellectual flexibility.

While the term '21st-Century skills' may be redundant in a future declaration, skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity, effective communication and intercultural engagement will remain essential.

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?

ISQ supports the current wording in Goal 1 – "Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence" as still being relevant. A future declaration may go further in defining equity and excellence in the context of schooling.

The National STEM (STEAM) strategy 2016-2026, not in existence when the Melbourne Declaration was written, is an important strategy that contains more contemporary attributes. This strategy should inform a revision of the Declaration.

Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools highlighted the importance of 'one-years' growth every year during their time in school. National educational data indicates this is not yet the current reality in Australia. It is recommended a future declaration focus on specific strategies to achieve this growth for every student.

ISQ Response to the Discussion Paper for the Melbourne Declaration
Independent Schools Queensland

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

ISQ regards the eight areas of action as still being relevant, with one exception. The following table clarifies this comment in relation to the eight areas of action.

TABLE 1: EIGHT AREAS OF ACTION IN THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION

AREA OF ACTION	CONTEMPORARY & ADDRESSING THE GOAL	COMMENT (AS RELEVANT)
1. Developing stronger partnerships	Yes	
2. Supporting quality teaching and school leadership	Yes	Link more closely to strategic school improvement
3. Strengthening early childhood education	Yes	
4. Enhance middle years development	No	ISQ believes it is more important to focus on successful transitions across schooling at every level
5. Supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions	Yes	Increased acknowledgement of Vocational Educational and Training (VET) as a significant pathway to employment
6. Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment	Yes	Evidence-based and evaluated strategies for impact on student achievement. Consider the Arts separately and include within the consideration of STEM subjects in curriculum design. Enable schools to create more relevant curriculum programs by decluttering learning areas by separating the 'must' teach components with the 'might' teach elements. Enable schools to choose to organise curriculum and report progress along continuums or aged-based milestones to achieve more personalised and inclusive learning. Focus on skills required to engage in a participatory democracy in a diverse and inclusive society.
7. Under improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds	Yes	Increased focus on Indigenous-led curriculum design and pedagogy and school leadership that enables authentic community partnerships. Recognise the specific challenges of regional, rural and remote education delivery.
8. Strengthening accountability and transparency	Yes	Enabling local autonomy within an accountability framework

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

As per Table 1, ISQ concedes all goals, bar one may still be relevant but could be enhanced with the consideration for the areas noted in the table.

9. Are there better ways to measure and share progress toward achieving the Declaration's goals?

Contextualised evaluative practices at a system and school level should be supported and encouraged in a future declaration.

In seeking input into this submission, some ISQ members reported they were unaware of how existing measures and progress are reported and indeed what goals had been achieved. It is suggested that future iterations of the Declaration specify how progress and milestones will be measured and reported.

Sharing and measuring progress should be respectful of school autonomy and flexibility and focus on student growth in the context of school improvement.

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

The development of a future declaration needs to value and recognise diversity of educational delivery in Australia and seek to bring together all schools, systems, school leaders and teachers in a common national endeavour to ensure that the nation is providing equitable, innovative and future focused educational opportunities for every child in every context.

Embracing the opportunities of educating citizens in an inclusive and diverse nation should be the spirit of the Declaration, highlighting priorities as achieving student growth, respecting and supporting teachers' and school leaders' depth of expertise, enabling autonomy in curriculum, assessment and reporting delivery and aligning with professional standards and school improvement.

Developing a future declaration should involve and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at all stages of its development, particularly in evaluating and measuring progress and achievement toward existing goals and using this as the basis for seeking input into future goals.

Finally, a future declaration should respect and value school autonomy at local levels within a context of evidence-based school improvement practices focused on achieving and celebrating student academic growth, resilience and wellbeing, and ability to engage effectively in a globalised, networked and diverse democracy.