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Response to Education Council Discussion Paper on the Review of the Melbourne Declaration

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Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) is pleased to provide a submission to the Education Council's review of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 306 Catholic schools that educate more than 149,000 students in Queensland.

Background

Over the past decade, the Melbourne Declaration has played a key role in shaping reform and defining foundational knowledge, skills and values, general capabilities and curriculum learning areas for Australia's school system. It has helped provide the focal point for a joint commitment from all governments to work collaboratively.

On 14 December 2018, Education Council Ministers agreed to undertake a review of the Melbourne Declaration and held an initial forum in February 2019 to consult with key stakeholders and experts. The National Catholic Education Commission attended this forum and QCEC provided a submission to inform these preliminary discussions.

At this initial forum it was suggested that a full rewrite was not required. On this basis, the intent of a contemporary declaration will remain the same. Considering the feedback from this forum, the Education Council released a discussion paper to help inform public submissions that will assist with the development of a new iteration of the declaration.

Feedback provided in this submission has been gathered from Catholic School Authorities and through consultation with the QCEC Education Reference Group. This response is organised under the headings and relevant questions as provided by the Education Council's, *Review of the Melbourne Declaration Discussion paper*.

Executive Summary

The underpinning principles of the work of Catholic Education in Queensland *is the education of young people to be resilient individuals, respectful of all others, able to shape their own futures, build meaningful life and contribute to their communities, wherever they might be in Queensland*¹.

Therefore, QCEC would strongly support a revised Melbourne Declaration that enables and enhances these principles.

QCEC is confident that these principles are reflected in the OECD Learning Framework 2030. This Framework offers a vision and underpinning principles for the future of education systems. QCEC is committed to the OECD's position *of helping every learner develop as a whole person, fulfil his or her potential and help shape a shared future built on the well-being of individuals, communities and the planet*.²

THE REVIEW OF THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION

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

A national aspirational declaration needs to excite and engage educators, students, parents and carers and the broader community. It needs to outline a clear vision for school education in Australia and how that vision will be realised. It is critical that the document reflect a lifelong approach to learning and adequately reflects the importance of early childhood education and post-school pathways, as well as schooling. In a federated system, it also needs to be clear on responsibilities and the role that both the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments must play.

A national aspirational declaration on education should reflect both the importance of depth of knowledge and the development of contemporary skills and capabilities, known as the 'General Capabilities' in our Australian Curriculum. The declaration needs to address both current and future demands of Australia's schooling system and be representative of the diversity in the broader community. The declaration should articulate a vision of schooling that enables all Australians to be equipped with a range of skills and capabilities with which to thrive and contribute to the broader community and economy, as active and engaged citizens.³

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

A national declaration regarding school education should inspire and guide educators, students, parents, governments, policy makers, industry and the broader community. It is critical that parents, as first educators are considered as primary stakeholders in the refresh of the declaration. It needs to reflect the importance of both depth of knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge in new and untested circumstances. It needs to adequately reflect the important foundations provided by early childhood education and the varied and evolving pathways of schooling, tertiary and vocational education and training.

It also needs to reflect the growing and changing nature of education evidenced through the growth in micro-credentials and the use of learning progressions to ensure that learning is indeed being achieved. A national declaration needs to reflect the non-linear nature of true learning that enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and wellbeing, but also self-sustainability and employability.

QCEC acknowledges and supports the focus of the Melbourne Declaration on school student education, on the impact of early childhood education on school outcomes, and on the need to support successful transitions to further study and work. All stakeholders involved in the education

of students from early childhood education through to students transitioning from school to study and/or work should be guided by this declaration including decision makers, policy writers and the government.

A national declaration needs to reflect a vision for all Australians therefore consideration should be given to a new name for the declaration – *National Declaration*.

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

The Melbourne Declaration has impacted and influenced all Queensland Catholic School Authorities as it is a requirement under the *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation 2017*, for all schools to have an educational program that is consistent with the Melbourne Declaration. It has also assisted in clearly articulating national education priorities and helped to establish clear expectations of Queensland Catholic School Authorities.

The Melbourne Declaration has informed learning and teaching practices, policies, programs and goals, and has been crucial in determining QCEC's current and future direction. The declaration has also provided a touchstone for strategic planning, review and improvement. It speaks to shared values across all education sectors and aligns and promotes the values of Queensland Catholic schooling.

QCEC supports the declaration's commitment to developing stronger partnerships with parents, carers and families to ensure students are provided with an inclusive, supportive learning environment. QCEC applauds the declaration's acknowledgement that parents are the first and foremost influence in a child's life, instilling the attitudes and values that will support young people to participate in broader local and global communities.

To maximise engagement with any revised or new declaration, consideration should be given to a well-considered communication and engagement strategy to ensure that it is widely owned and known in the broader community as a commitment by Australia to supporting young Australians to experience personal growth, achievement and wellbeing.

CHANGES SINCE THE MELBOURNE DECLARATION WAS AGREED

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

There have been significant economic, social and technological changes since the Melbourne Declaration was released in 2008. Some of these key changes include the explosion and growing acceptance of technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics in the delivery and engagement with education and learning; the impact of climate change; and the need to discern the capabilities of technology balanced against what is ethically and morally aligned to our Catholic mission.

Economic changes

Key economic changes shaping the future of education include:

- Globalisation of all sectors of the economy including education, service delivery reflected in the changing nature of work and the emerging economies and opportunities for self-employment and exploitation
- Increasing national wealth but also an increasing gap between the haves and have-nots, reflected in the increasing number of Australians living in poverty

- Continuing tension between short-term economic gain and environmental degradation and subsequent costs of climate change that impact on species and quality of life

Social changes

Key social changes shaping the future of education include:

- Socio-demographic changes such as increases in migration; increasing number of school age children; aging population; falling birth rates; and urban development
- Increased awareness of the importance of good mental health as well as physical wellbeing and the impacts on the broader community but especially children and young people

Technological changes

Key technological changes shaping the future of education include:

- Development of new resources and technologies to assist in and enhance pedagogy balanced against the changing nature and views around privacy
- Advances in science and technology to support greater access to improved health and education outcomes, often (but not always) assisted by improved and cheaper access to technology
- Connectivity through social media platforms giving rise to issues of privacy, personal and social identity, learning and relationships.

All of these economic, social and technological developments, in addition to many others, have and continue to impact on education and learning; including those who can access it, those who can afford it, those who have the ability but not the opportunity. While a national declaration needs to be mindful of these tensions, it is important that it be a positive and aspirational document setting out a clear vision for schools and the promotion of lifelong learning.

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

A national declaration needs to ensure that it retains its widespread applicability and relevance to contemporary and future education. It is important to consider the changing and increasing modes of delivery of school education, reflecting that an individual's learning journey is not linear, it is a lifelong process where people enter in and out at various points of their learning journey.

It needs to reflect the importance of developing and acquiring just-in-time skills which is evidenced by the growing utilisation and preference for micro-credentials to deliver the just-in-time skills and knowledge required to successfully participate, lead and innovate in today's fast-paced and dynamic economy.

Any future iteration of the declaration needs to excite and inspire our students to be critical and creative thinkers to enable them to successfully participate as active and engaged citizens in the broader community and economy.

It is important to acknowledge that learning is not synonymous with schooling, it is a process that occurs before, during and after compulsory education. It is important that any future iteration of the declaration includes recognition of the importance of student voice and agency, and the importance of schooling as a platform to encourage and promote lifelong learning.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

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?

The concepts of equity, excellence and the attributes for young Australians set out in the Melbourne Declaration remain relevant however the review of the declaration provides an opportunity to ensure that these are future-focussed and inclusive of all learners.

Equity

Equity remains a key concern for many Australians, particularly for those who are marginalised or disadvantaged. In particular, the recent *Closing the Gap*⁴ report highlights the significant difference in terms of access and educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared to non-Indigenous Australians. The low participation rates in early childhood education, the difference between schooling outcomes and the participation rates in employment and post-school pathways highlight the challenges we continue to face to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to successfully transition to school, excel at school and pursue further learning through post-school pathways.

Excellence

The concept of excellence needs to refer to both the excellence in the provision of education and learning opportunities, and the excellence of teaching and the need to support educators in all areas of learning with the opportunity to access and benefit from proven, evidence-informed teaching strategies and resources. There is an opportunity for a national evidence institute to play a key role in equipping teachers with high quality evidence-informed resources and strategies to continually improve and refine their pedagogical practice. A national declaration also needs to reflect the goal that all students receive at least one year's growth in learning for each year they participate in formal school education, as recommended in *Through Growth to Achievement*⁵.

Attributes

The current list of attributes should be expanded to include "connected and responsive". Being able to connect relationally as well as technologically, and being able to respond to contemporary, individual and global challenges is fundamental to ensuring that Australians can successfully participate in an increasingly globalised and competitive world. Consideration could also be given to including the importance of wellbeing, resilience, engagement, motivation and self-efficacy. Furthermore, these attributes are not only relevant to young Australians. These attributes align with the approach and values of Queensland Catholic schooling and a revised declaration should articulate that these attributes apply to all learners.

AREAS FOR ACTION

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

The eight areas for action identified in the Melbourne Declaration remain relevant, however they could be amended to be more future-focussed and elevate the importance of learning, not just schooling. The learnings and insights drawn from recent reports and reviews such as *Through Growth to Achievement*⁵, *Lifting our Game*⁶, and the *National Reform Agreement*⁷ provide a useful starting point in considering what are the most appropriate areas to include in a national declaration.

QCEC would like to see the eight inter-related areas reconceptualised to reflect contemporary society and to challenge educators to be future focussed through:

- a revision of each of the eight areas for action to ensure that the changing landscape of Australia, and of education, is reflected in the declaration
- an updated and stronger focus on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians
- a focus on the continuity of learning and ‘how’ to learn rather than ‘what’ to learn.

QCEC questions the future relevance of separating schooling into the stages of early childhood and middle years as noted in the Melbourne Declaration’s eight inter-related areas. Reform 1 of the *National School Reform Agreement* states that: *The development of learning progressions that describe the common development pathway along which students typically progress in their learning, regardless of age or year level*⁷. There is also increasing encouragement that is evidence based for education to focus on each student’s learning progress irrespective of the particular organisational structures or groupings used by schools. Contemporary education is no longer governed by these constructs and a new national declaration should reflect these changes and position Australia for education in future years. The focus should be more on the need to ensure continuity of learning throughout schooling, rather than the constructs of the past.

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

When reviewing the eight priority areas of action, QCEC would like the following areas included / refined in any new list of declaration priorities:

- Wellbeing
- Inclusive practices (improving educational outcomes for ALL students)
- Educational leadership (including a broader definition of ‘leadership’ recognising that leadership in a classroom, school, across a system are all critically important in supporting students to realise their full potential)
- Schooling transitions and appropriate learning pathways
- Innovative evidence-based pedagogical practices

QCEC would like to see any new priority areas aligned with the recommendations for school education outlined in the report, *Through Growth to Achievement*.⁵

- Equipping every student to grow and succeed
- Creating, supporting and valuing a profession of expert educators
- Forming and empowering school leaders
- Raising and achieving aspirations through innovation and continuous improvement

It is also important that a new declaration acknowledge the importance of the national curriculum. Whilst the Australian Curriculum is not yet fully implemented across all states/territories, considerable progress has been made in improving the consistency and comparability of school education in Australia. These gains should be recognised and built upon in a new declaration.

MECHANISMS TO ACHIEVE THE EDUCATIONAL GOALS

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

As mentioned previously, recent reports and reviews provide a useful starting point on contemporary approaches to measure and share progress towards achieving educational goals. It will be important for any new declaration to explicitly address what, how, when and why progress

will be measured and shared with stakeholders. In doing so, it is also important to celebrate achievement and highlight innovative and effective strategies that have been proven to lead towards this success.

It is acknowledged that NAPLAN, PISA, TIMSS and other standardised tests are useful, however they do not address achievement against all of the goals or the priority areas in the Melbourne Declaration. Any future measures need to be reflective of the intent of the revised declaration.

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

QCEC would like to reaffirm the importance of having a national approach to education (i.e. Australian Curriculum, National Evidence Institute, Unique Student Identifier and other school improvement resources aligned to national goals), while preserving the flexibility to respect and respond to local contexts and needs.

Lifelong learning encompasses early childhood education, school education, tertiary and vocational education and training, just-in-time learning, both formal and informal learning and a range of other post-school pathways. Given the dynamic nature of how learning and education is developed, delivered and engaged with; educators are constantly needing to reassess how they work together to meet the needs of learners. The articulation of a clear vision, goals and the roles to be played by stakeholders (e.g. government, industry, education providers, etc) will assist in ensuring that all education sectors have a common understanding and purpose to achieve the goals of the declaration.

QCEC would like to see a renewed commitment to the goals of the declaration by:

- ensuring that education sectors are reflecting and responding to current research and evidence about what works best
- utilising a range of school improvement tools and resources to measure what has been identified as a priority in the declaration and not simply reflective of what measures currently exist
- collaborating and working with all stakeholders to achieve the declaration's goals.

Conclusion

QCEC welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Review of the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians*. QCEC is pleased to discuss any of the responses further. Please contact Yvonne Ries, Director-Education by email yvonner@qcec.catholic.edu.au or phone (07) 3316 5813.



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