

Comments on the draft *Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025-36*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft *Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025-36*. This is an important initiative for the Australian education research sector. The collegiately, strategic thinking and strong use of publicly available data evident in the draft make for encouraging and engaging reading.

Comments are provided below on various aspects of the draft:

Introduction

“The *Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025–36* will be the first of its kind for Australian education research and is being developed in collaboration with the Academy, AARE, Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), Australian Council for Education Research (ACER), Early Childhood Australia, Australian Teacher Education Association (ATEA), Australian Education Union (AEU), Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Deakin University Centre for Research for Educational Impact (REDI), and Griffith Institute for Education Research

It would be helpful to give some background to how these organisations came to the decision to develop the plan, and their collegial remit or authority to develop a plan that may well come to speak for the research activities of many people involved in education research.

Aims

1. Proactive responses to sector challenges, such as inequity in the education system, and a better understanding of workforce needs and capabilities to ensure strong education outcomes
2. A shared vision for the direction for Australian education research
3. Coordinated sectoral arrangements for a more connected and impactful national educational research capability
4. A pathway for growing investment in Australian education research.

Aims 1, 3 and 4 suggest capacity building in the education research sector in a manner that provides traction for multiple viewpoints, experiences and avenues for innovation. Perhaps Aim 2 could be reflected on to the extent to which a shared vision for the direction for Australian education research is feasible given diverse lived experiences, methodologies, access to resources amongst the education research community etc. What will happen to researchers who are not comfortable or in agreeance with the shared vision if the shared vision comes to be used in Category 1 grant applications, in policy, publication opportunities or connected to HDR funding?

National Education Workforce Crisis -ECEC

This is one of the best summaries of the current legislative, national and cross-border challenges facing ECEC in terms of policy, workforce, ITE, retention and curriculum I have ever read. The authorship of the draft is not indicated, but whoever wrote this has done an outstanding job. However, the complexities of this sector imply more than education research alone can address. For example, in relation to Aim 1 of the draft plan, inequities in the system and better understanding of workforce needs and capabilities rely on improved funding, reduced differentiation across states and policy advancements. Research can and already does point to these issues. An issue for ECEC research has been that such research has been conducted for several decades but has not had strong traction within policy making and/or as responsive to a neoliberal and capitalist economy. ECEC has consequently become segmented across provider types with varying implications for quality and safety manifesting in the current safety and workforce crisis. The research need is not into the complexities of the inequity or workforce needs per se as in the interface of research advocacy that interfaces with national and state policy design and implementation. In the next ten years, the current push towards child safety through mandatory training, and addressing safety through installing CCTV and banning educator personal devices will likely further segment the sector through a conceptual misalignment between concepts and assumed practices of safety and those of quality indicated via the National Quality Framework, and the forthcoming Preschool Outcomes Measure. There is an urgent need to identify the conceptual trajectories that begin the work of integrating safety with quality within the current ECEC educator workforce, with currently enrolled ITE students, within ITE courses offerings, and the current ECEC academic workforce. Research could focus on two broad themes in the next decade: 1) Implementation science whereby ECEC research focuses on establishing pathways to policy impact within a complex neoliberal, capitalist, and highly digitised society; 2) Interdisciplinary knowledge exchange between the fields of child safety/protection and concepts of [process and structural] quality in ECEC.

Higher Education – The current and future workforce

This sector provides a compelling overview the pipeline issues with the workforce in education research. Many of these issues appear endemic to those identified and described as for the ECEC, schooling and VET sectors – e.g., inadequate funding, insecure work, high workloads. It would be helpful to have a sense of how the draft plan considers that education research itself can fix or advance the problems of education research as a sector. Identifying research priorities for this sector for the next decade is probably relatively easy (e.g., barriers and enablers to research; approaches to scaling up research). Yet such research may serve to re-entrench the extent of the problem rather than offering traction on how system level changes may be advanced in the face of likely societal change over the next decade – especially attending to AI and how these technologies will mediate the need or otherwise for new or different types of teacher education in an evolving digital climate. Social cohesion is increasingly challenged by

emergent technologies and suggests that Aim 3 of the draft (Coordinated sectoral arrangements for a more connected and impactful national educational research capability) requires actionable principles for interdisciplinary work. Research could focus on two main themes in the coming decade: 1) Interpreting AI technologies in social ecologies and how these mediate the current and future requirements of the education research workforce; 2) Identifying the position occupied by education research as contributor to social cohesion via improved interdisciplinary work in action.