



# **Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025-36**

University of Tasmania submission

**1 March 2026**

## **Introduction**

Despite decades of substantial public investment in educational provision and sustained research effort, Australia's educational outcomes have remained largely static, with student performance now lagging behind many comparable international systems. This stagnation is not evenly distributed: low educational attainment – from early childhood, through schools and into post-compulsory education – continues to entrench social and economic inequality, with consequences that compound across generations.

Persistent gaps in participation, attainment and post school transitions reflect structural, intergenerational and place-based factors that cannot be addressed through isolated or short-term interventions. These challenges are acute in Tasmania, as well as many other jurisdictions across Australia, due to the scale, depth and geographic dispersion of disadvantage.

Research has a critical role in enabling equitable system transformation across early childhood, schooling, vocational and higher education. However, Australia now requires a decisive shift in how education research is conceived, funded and translated into practice. The next decade must prioritise strategic and connected research that delivers measurable, system wide improvement.

Australia no longer has the luxury of small-scale experimentation disconnected from system reform. The coming decade must focus on research intentionally designed for adoption, implementation and sustained use, research that strengthens decision confidence, aligns policy and practice, activates community agency, and supports improvement at pace and at scale.

The University of Tasmania strongly supports the development of a Decadal Plan that provides long term direction for Australian education research, with clear settings for coherence, equity and impact. The Australian Universities Accord heightens both the urgency and opportunity: as systems adapt to ambitions for participation, quality and national capability, research must supply the evidence, implementation pathways and decision tools that enable reform.

This submission proposes a decadal agenda grounded in outcomes rather than activity, built on two complementary priorities:

- research that drives equitable system wide reform at scale; and
- research that strengthens community capability, agency and empowerment as the foundation for sustained improvement.

To achieve this, we outline key areas for future research and recommended steps and mechanisms to achieve scaled-up impact. Our response focuses on the overarching questions set out in the consultation document.

## **A. Key Areas for Future Research**

### **1. Research for Equitable System Transformation**

Australia's education research enterprise has generated valuable knowledge but insufficient system level change. Too often, findings remain confined to publications; promising pilots fail to scale; and implementation is under-resourced.

Under the Universities Accord, where equity, participation and quality are central, research must be designed for use from inception. The Decadal Plan should require projects to:

- specify pathways to population-level adoption;
- identify policy, workforce, data and resource preconditions for scale;
- incorporate implementation and de implementation strategies;
- strengthen leadership and system stewardship capability; and
- prioritise measurable gains in learning, engagement and equity.

Transformation requires both strong system leadership and sustained local capability. System settings, funding models, accountability frameworks, data systems and workforce policies, shape what is possible in practice, while communities, educators and local leaders determine what is enacted and sustained. The Decadal Plan should therefore fund research that tests how these settings can be designed to support consistent uptake of effective practice, including through embedded implementation support, aligned incentives and long-term partnerships with local communities.

### **2. Futures Readiness and Societal Alignment**

Preparing learners for emerging challenges in climate adaptation, health, productivity and social cohesion requires stronger alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and real-world problem solving. Research should focus on:

- interdisciplinary and applied learning models;
- pathways connecting education, work, citizenship and wellbeing; and
- partnerships that embed innovation within system structures.

All major initiatives should include explicit policy and implementation partners to ensure that effective models move from sites of excellence to systems of excellence. Research in this area should also foreground the voices and expertise of children and young people themselves. The Decadal Plan should explicitly encourage participatory and co-research approaches that position learners as active contributors to inquiry, design and evaluation. Supporting children and young people as co researchers strengthens relevance, deepens insight into emerging challenges, and builds the civic, analytical and leadership capabilities that future readiness requires.

### **3. Outcomes-Focused Research and Evaluation**

Success must be defined through outcomes that matter to learners, families, communities and systems, and tracked in ways that enable place responsive adaptation. The Plan should prioritise research focused on:

- improved access, attendance, engagement and attainment;
- reduced disparities by region, background and identity;
- stronger decision confidence among leaders and practitioners;
- continuity of learning during disruption; and
- longitudinal impacts of implementing evidence-based strategies, such as explicit literacy instruction, across learning, wellbeing and equity indicators over time.

Evaluation must address both effectiveness and scalability, including cost curves, workforce implications, data requirements and adaptability. Critically, evaluation should report on adoption and sustained use, not only trial results.

### **4. Emerging Technologies for System Reform and Equity**

Rapid technological change, including the development of artificial intelligence and other emerging digital tools, will continue to reshape education over the life of the Decadal Plan. Research must therefore focus not only on current technologies, but on building system capability to evaluate, adapt and govern new tools as they emerge. If deployed deliberately, ethically and at system scale, emerging technologies can support system transformation by strengthening early identification of learning barriers, improving resource allocation, enhancing monitoring and enabling more timely and targeted intervention.

Research priorities should include:

- understanding how emerging technologies can enhance learning, wellbeing and equity outcomes;
- reducing administrative burden to release educator time for high impact work;
- strengthening decision support systems for leaders and system stewards;
- enabling earlier, more precise and more coordinated intervention; and
- ensuring universal, safe and equitable access to digital tools and infrastructure.

Technology initiatives must embed strong ethical, cultural and community governance and be assessed on their contribution to educational improvement, system capability and sustained adoption. Research should prioritise integration into everyday practice, alignment with policy settings and long-term workforce development, so that technological innovation narrows rather than widens existing inequities.

## **B. Steps and Mechanisms for Impact**

### **National Network of Reform Demonstrators**

Australia should establish a coordinated network of state and territory demonstrators linking universities, governments, education sectors and communities to design, test and scale reform under real world conditions. While the Consultation Paper outlines priorities for impact, equity and connectivity, achieving these goals requires structures that link evidence generation to real world implementation. These demonstrators would provide that bridge by integrating research, policy, workforce development and community engagement.

These demonstrators should:

- be mission driven;
- carry shared accountability for outcomes;
- produce open tools and playbooks; and
- operate with transparent evaluation.

Tasmania offers particular value within this framework: a single-university jurisdiction with a compact, interconnected education system enables rapid testing, coherent pathways and visibility of population-level effects. The value lies in transferability, not exceptionalism.

### **Place Responsive, Community Led Research**

Sustained improvement depends on trust, relationality and community agency. Traditional funding rarely supports the long-term partnerships required to co design, interpret and implement research, particularly in regional, rural and remote communities.

The Plan should therefore prioritise models that:

- support multiyear partnerships between universities, services, schools, families and community organisations;
- resource community leadership, cultural brokerage and local coordination roles;
- embed co-design and shared governance in research programs;
- recognise relational work as core research infrastructure, not optional activity; and
- enable continuity of engagement across policy cycles and leadership changes.

Place responsive research should be linked to system level decision making so that local insight informs state and national reform. Climate resilience, digital access and service integration should be routinely incorporated into research design, recognising their growing influence on participation, wellbeing and attainment.

Communities must be co-creators of inquiry, interpretation and implementation to ensure relevance, legitimacy and durable adoption. Within this approach, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives must be central. Research addressing educational outcomes, wellbeing and participation for Indigenous learners should be led by Indigenous researchers and communities, grounded in self-determination, cultural authority and community priorities. The Decadal Plan should embed capacity building for Indigenous research leadership within funding structures, including support for workforce development, governance capability and long-term community-based research infrastructure.

### **International Learning with Australian Design**

International comparison provides valuable insight into how high performing systems convert investment into sustained improvement. Many comparable countries achieve stronger outcomes and higher rates of evidence adoption through coherent governance, disciplined scaling and embedded implementation support.

The Plan should invest in comparative research that examines:

- how funding, accountability and workforce systems enable consistent uptake of effective practice;
- how implementation capability is built and sustained at scale; and
- how equity objectives are embedded within system design.

International evidence should be used to inform Australian design rather than prescribe solutions. Research should focus on adapting underlying principles to Australia's federal, diverse and place differentiated context, ensuring reforms are culturally appropriate, politically feasible and systemically coherent. This approach will strengthen domestic capability while avoiding short term policy borrowing that lacks long-term impact.

### **National Data Infrastructure for Reform**

High quality, timely and connected data is essential for research driven system improvement. Fragmented, delayed and inconsistent datasets currently limit Australia's capacity to understand learner pathways, evaluate reform and target support effectively.

The Plan should establish national data infrastructure that enables responsible, improvement focused research, including:

- privacy preserving linkage across education, health, disability, employment and social services datasets;
- harmonised indicators, definitions and metadata to support comparability;

- timely access arrangements for accredited researchers and system partners;
- regional and small jurisdiction visibility to support place responsive reform; and
- community level feedback mechanisms that strengthen local stewardship.

Data systems should be designed for learning and improvement, not compliance alone. Strong ethical governance, transparency and community trust are essential to ensure that expanded data use supports equity, accountability and public confidence.

### **Implementation by Design**

Research will only drive sustained system improvement if it culminates in practical, decision ready outputs and is accompanied by the supports required for adoption. Over the coming decade, Australia must build national capability to translate evidence into practice at pace and at scale.

This requires the Decadal Plan to prioritise:

- the establishment of Implementation Labs that convert research findings into operational guidance for departments, school leaders and educators, including costed options, workforce implications and risk and mitigation strategies;
- clear and differentiated pathways from research to action, including immediate classroom practices, medium-term organisational levers and long-term system reforms;
- the embedding of implementation science, knowledge translation and change management expertise from project inception;
- timelines and budgets that reflect realistic adoption cycles and support sustained use;
- funded synthesis and translation products, including toolkits, professional learning resources, data protocols, communications materials and policy briefs; and
- structured approaches to de implementation, identifying practices to retire in order to free time, resources and attention for proven approaches.

The central principle is that research should reduce complexity for decision makers, strengthen professional confidence and materially increase the probability of consistent, high-quality adoption across diverse contexts.

### **Funding and Governance for System Impact**

A redesigned funding and governance architecture is essential if education research is to translate reliably into system reform. Current arrangements often reward short-term activity, fragmented projects and publication outputs rather than sustained adoption and population level impact.

The Decadal Plan should therefore establish:

- mission aligned, multi-year research portfolios that integrate discovery, implementation trials and scale up within coherent reform agendas;
- staged funding models with clear go- and no-go gates tied to evidence of adoption, effectiveness and equity impact;
- joint accountability arrangements across universities, governments, education authorities and communities for both outcomes and uptake;
- explicit resourcing for relational and place-based partnership work as a prerequisite for scale, particularly in regional, rural and remote contexts;
- integrated data and reporting systems designed for continuous improvement, ethical governance and public trust; and
- workforce capability development as a core deliverable, including leadership development, educator professional learning and system change expertise aligned to each portfolio.

Governance structures should promote stability, coherence and long-term commitment across political and administrative cycles. Funding settings must incentivise collaboration, sustained engagement and disciplined scaling, ensuring that high-quality research is consistently converted into improved practice and outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Australia faces a decisive moment. Too much education research remains stranded, valuable on paper but inert in practice. The Decadal Plan provides an opportunity to reset the system by commissioning research for adoption, resourcing implementation and relationality, building national infrastructure, and aligning incentives with outcomes at scale. In line with the Universities Accord and against a backdrop of widening inequity, the next decade must shift from research that informs in principle to research that transforms in practice.

As Tasmania's sole university, deeply embedded across early childhood, schooling, VET and higher education, the University of Tasmania stands ready to contribute whole-of-system capability, place-based insight and implementation experience to a national research ecosystem capable of lifting outcomes for every learner, in every community, across Australia.