

Submission to the Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2026–2035

Indigenous Outcomes

Australia cannot achieve justice, quality or excellence in education without structural transformation in Indigenous education research, policy and practice. While Indigenous learners are frequently referenced within national reform agendas and research investment, governance authority and evaluation frameworks remain largely non-Indigenous in design and control. The Decadal Plan presents an opportunity to shift from research about Indigenous peoples to research led by, with and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Future research priorities must move beyond documenting deficit indicators toward understanding the structural conditions that produce inequity. Persistent gaps in attendance, retention, Year 12 completion and tertiary participation are well documented. The next decade must prioritise research into the systemic drivers of these disparities, including funding inequities, workforce representation, disciplinary policies, curriculum design, data governance and institutional racism. Research must examine how policy settings reproduce or disrupt these inequities across early childhood, schooling, VET and higher education.

Embedding Indigenous perspectives and practices requires more than curriculum inclusion. It requires structural reform across governance, workforce development and knowledge production. Research should prioritise community-led models of schooling, culturally grounded pedagogies, Indigenous language revitalisation in education, Indigenous-led teacher education pathways and culturally responsive disciplinary frameworks. Effective models already exist in community-controlled education, place-based learning, Indigenous teacher mentoring programs and Indigenous research partnerships. These approaches should be rigorously

evaluated and scaled through sustained investment. Research should respond to how Indigenous peoples see themselves positioned into the future, understanding the challenges and opportunities in achieving this positionality.

Data reform is critical. Current national datasets inadequately capture cultural identity, workforce diversity, community engagement and Indigenous-defined measures of success. The Decadal Plan should support Indigenous data sovereignty principles, ensuring Indigenous peoples have authority over data collection, interpretation and use. Linked, longitudinal datasets that incorporate wellbeing, cultural strength and community engagement indicators would provide a more accurate understanding of educational outcomes than narrow standardised metrics. Alongside Indigenous data sovereignty, the plan should embed protections for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), ensuring Indigenous communities retain control over the use, interpretation, publication and benefit derived from Indigenous knowledges and cultural materials used in education research.

Workforce development is central to long-term change. Increasing the number of Indigenous educators, leaders and researchers across all sectors must be a priority research and policy focus. This includes evaluating pathways into initial teacher education, improving retention of Indigenous educators, and strengthening Indigenous higher degree by research pipelines. Research investment must also address culturally empowering workplace environments and leadership development to ensure Indigenous educators remain and succeed in the profession.

Short-term gains can be achieved by directing targeted research funding toward Indigenous-led projects, establishing national Indigenous education research networks, and embedding community partnership requirements into major grant schemes. Long-term advancement requires sustained funding streams, centres of excellence in Indigenous education research and formalised mechanisms ensuring Indigenous representation in research governance bodies across sectors.

Cross-sector collaboration would significantly benefit Indigenous learners. Social and economic prosperity can be achieved by interconnected systems including education with health, housing, justice and employment. A joined-up research approach that links early childhood, schooling, VET and higher education data and practice would enable a clearer understanding of transition points and attrition risks and align to the future prioritisation of



harmonisation. National coordination must include Indigenous leadership at every stage to ensure alignment with community, government and sector priorities and commitments.

Research capability must be strengthened through investment in Indigenous HDR scholarships, culturally grounded research training models and long-term career pathways in education research. Without deliberate action, declining HDR enrolments in education threaten the sustainability of research leadership in this field. Building a strong pipeline of Indigenous education researchers is essential to ensure future policy is informed by lived experience, cultural authority and community accountability.

The Decadal Plan should adopt three foundational principles for Indigenous outcomes: Indigenous self-determination in education research; sustained, long-term investment rather than short-term pilot funding; and accountability to community-defined measures of success. National reform will only be effective if Indigenous peoples are not positioned as participants within research agendas but as leaders shaping them.

Australia's education system has much to contribute to a fair and just democracy. Achieving this aspiration requires the Decadal Plan to embed Indigenous knowledge systems, governance authority and research leadership at its core, not as a discrete priority but as a structural foundation for the next decade of education research.

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