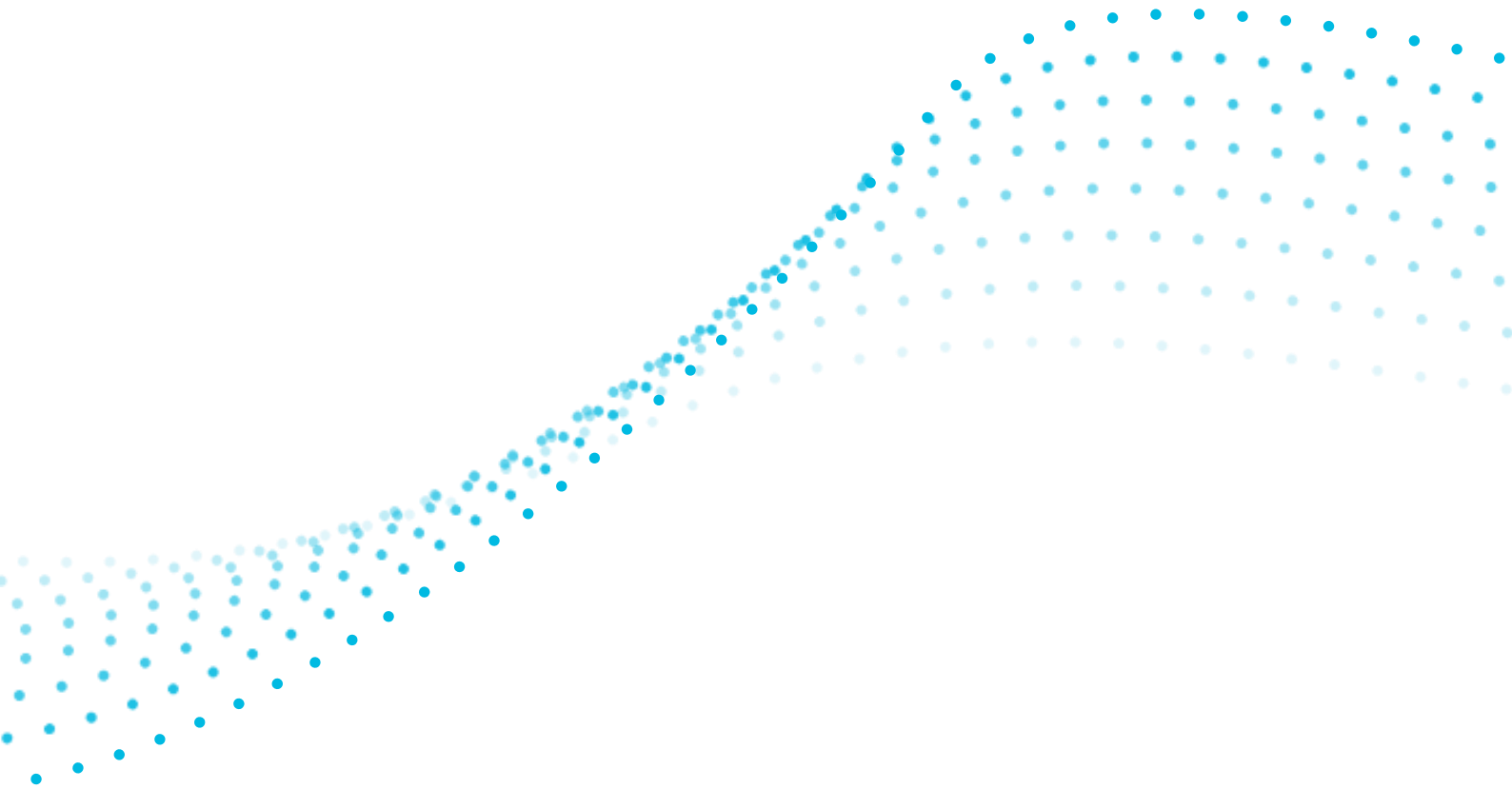




Submission to the *Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research Consultation Paper*

The Australian Council for Educational Research

March 2026



Introduction

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) is committed to advancing high-quality educational research across Australia for the purpose of improving learning for all. We are proud to have been involved in the work towards a Decadal Plan for Education Research. Our involvement in the Decadal Plan reflects our dedication to evidence-informed practice, innovation in teaching and learning, and educational improvement at all levels. Through collaboration with stakeholders, ACER aims to ensure that research outcomes are accessible, meaningful, and directly contribute to positive change for students, educators, and communities nationwide.

ACER has been a central part of Australian education research for 96 years. Our organisation sits in a unique space in our sector; we are a for purpose organisation, independent of government, not part of a university or education system – yet we work with educators, institutions and governments to improve learning outcomes for every learner. Our work, funded entirely through the income we generate from our products and services, combines research, assessment and expertise to help people learn, grow and thrive throughout their lives. These factors enable us to offer a unique independent perspective on Australia’s future priorities for education research.

Today we have Australian offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Globally we have bases in Dubai, London, Delhi and Kuala Lumpur. With nearly 500 staff, we currently work across more than 150 countries, supporting educators and systems through assessment, research and capacity building. Our expertise spans early childhood, school, university, vocational and education in the professions. This experience supports our broad perspective on priorities for education across systems and sectors, throughout the lifespan of learning, and around the globe.

We recognise a critical role for education research is to equip educators, leaders and systems with robust information, tools and practices to confidently inform decision-making about teaching, learning, and leadership. We understand that the field of education is highly interconnected and draws on evidence from multiple disciplines; it follows that collaboration in education research is the key to meaningful impact.

We share a deep commitment to learning with educators and institutions and believe that collaboration within Australia’s education community is important. This does not assume that everyone will or should agree on every issue; in fact, diverse perspectives are likely to facilitate more comprehensive and nuanced outcomes. Rather, effective collaboration is reflected in communication, discussion and open dialogue to build a shared understanding of the issues we face in education and the place of research and researchers. A ‘big picture’ approach to collaboration through the Decadal Plan is a positive step towards realising the benefits of a connected, collaborative education research sector.

ACER supports the development of the Decadal Plan. Our response to the consultation paper highlights some areas of consideration for the Plan. The response is structured around the paper’s ‘Priority Areas for Action’. Consistent with the focus of the Plan, our response emphasises how *education research* can be positioned to prioritise improved learning for all. We look forward to continued engagement in this process as the Decadal Plan develops.

Justice, quality and equity for all

This area of the Consultation Paper highlights the significant positive impact that education can have for individuals and communities, and the continuing inequality in the distribution of these benefits across the system. Education research can contribute immensely to realising the goals of equity and excellence through high-quality evidence from a broad range of perspectives to inform teaching and learning in diverse contexts. However, as outlined in the Consultation Paper, education research must address a range of challenges to have a positive impact. ACER is committed to learning opportunities that are fair, inclusive and accessible. We suggest three areas of focus that could be considered in a Decadal Plan: First Nations-led research, increased focus on inclusive education, and ensuring Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be harnessed as a tool to improve learning for all.

First Nations-led research

To improve the positive impact of education research, inquiry must be conducted by, with, and for the communities to which it intends to contribute. In the Australian education context, First Nations-led research will be central over the coming decade to generate culturally responsive ideas, solutions and approaches that can inform educators and support communities to flourish. Education research that is led by diverse First Nations people and involves community can challenge traditional power dynamics, facilitate ownership of processes and outcomes, and support culturally relevant definitions of success. ACER's own experience in recent years in working with First Nations researchers, highlights the pathway to progress through design, development and leadership by and alongside First Nations researchers.

A framework that has underpinned much of the First Nations-led research ACER has been involved with in recent times is the 'respect, connect, reflect, direct' framework.¹ Consideration of embedding this and/or similar frameworks into approaches through a Decadal Plan for Education Research is encouraged.

Inclusion 'mindset' for education research

To ensure that education research informs improved learning for all, we recommend that considerations of inclusion sit at the heart of the Decadal Plan. This includes an explicit focus on research to inform inclusive approaches to education, a recognition that all education research should be considered through an inclusive lens, and a commitment to establishing inclusive approaches to conducting education research.

There is growing recognition of the need for evidence-informed inclusive practice as it applies to curriculum, teaching, assessment, learning, positive behaviour support, and physical and digital spaces. The importance of building workforce capability and inclusive systems to support diverse learners is also a high priority. Australian education research can have a significant impact by establishing a comprehensive, cohesive evidence base for inclusive practice from early childhood through to adulthood, including a nuanced understanding of contextual factors that affect implementation. We see this as an important focus for the Decadal Plan.

Beyond the topical focus of education research, we also recognise the need for inclusive approaches to research design and implementation. This includes adopting principles of universal design in

¹ Yunkaporta, T and Shillingsworth, M (2020). [Relationally responsive standpoint](#). *Journal of Indigenous Research*, 8: 4. This framework has particularly shaped numerous projects ACER has partnered on with Ninti One.

research methods regardless of the topic of inquiry, and ensuring that research on diversity and inclusion is co-designed and co-conducted with people with lived experience.

AI as a tool for learning

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming a part of every area of life, including education. Educators and students are experimenting with AI, building, and learning from success and from failure. Education leaders are being asked to provide guidance in a context where platforms and approaches evolve far faster than policy. Education research has a central role to play in helping to harness AI as a tool for learning.

Education research can work with educators, students and industry to collate collective insights, contextualise application and provide guidance to harness the potential of AI and emerging technology in the coming decade. Approaches that reduce teacher workload, enable learning and inform valid assessment and effective feedback can be developed through collaborative research.

An additional layer for consideration in this regard is maintaining an equity lens across the development of AI tools and practices in education. Through education research, we must ensure inclusion of key elements such as language, accessibility, connectivity and culture in the development of tools and framing of approaches.

A prepared and well-supported workforce

Educators are central to the success of students, schools and education services, and broader systems. We recognise that education research can only make a difference if it speaks to educators and addresses current and future workforce priorities and challenges. As such, we advocate for a Decadal Plan for education research that acknowledges educators as a key audience of education research.

Research that supports educators as professionals and gives authentic voice to teachers and educators at all levels is important. A Decadal Plan for education research should focus on harnessing research to inform and build capability for effective teaching and educational practice. It should also address approaches to clearly documenting and communicating the impact of educators at all levels and across all types of education to raise the profile and standing of the profession.

Research in education over the coming decade should also focus on clear articulation of workforce mapping and needs to inform broader policy initiatives.

Cross-sector collaboration

In the focus area of 'Cross-sector collaboration and shared understanding and knowledge', our core message for focus in the Decadal Plan is the need for education research to listen to, work with and better understand the needs of policy makers. This message is not intended to contradict our message about the central importance of educators in our work, it is to highlight that for broad, systemic influence we need to be able to bring insights that can be operationalised and support equitable education systems and opportunities for learners. A plan for research over the next decade needs to be clear on the audience it is intended to inform, to influence and to help. Delivering research that has a practical application, offers operationally feasible approaches, and considers 'what works in what context' is critical to framing communication and achieving impact.

To achieve positive impact, the role of collaboration across sectors is also important. Education research can collaborate and learn from many sectors. Of particular relevance to our suggestion above, the need for meaningful collaborative research with economists is one example of collaboration that could be increased. Collaboration in this regard does happen, but for systemic influence, consideration of a strategic and focused partnerships to shape and talk to different needs and perspectives in government would be beneficial.

A world-class connected research capability

Australian education research is world-class. In many respects this community ‘punches above its weight’. However, we recognise the need to better harness capabilities and build connections that further develop expertise and attract new talent.

For nine decades, ACER has worked to take Australian expertise to the world and to attract experts from the world to Australia. We will continue to play this role, with a particular emphasis on where our organisation demonstrates world-leading skills and capabilities, particularly in assessment for learning.

We encourage the Decadal Plan to work towards developing approaches to collaboration not only within Australian education research, but to building strong connections internationally for Australian researchers to learn from others and for Australia to share our knowledge abroad for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Building and working as a strong research community will help to achieve the broader ambitions of the Decadal Plan.