

Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research 2025–36 Consultation Response

Strengthening Research and Research Infrastructure through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights-Based Approaches

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Consultation Paper, "Charting Australian Education Research Priorities and Future Directions." This Decadal Plan (2025–36) is crucial for shaping the trajectory of Australian education research, and I offer these perspectives from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based approach, which I believe is essential for building a robust, ethical, and impactful research infrastructure. This approach fundamentally foregrounds the invaluable insights and leadership of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts within the research community**.

Justice, Quality and Equity for All: A Research Infrastructure Imperative

In the pursuit of justice and equity for all learners, the Decadal Plan must proactively address systemic injustices within Australia's education research infrastructure. The Consultation Paper rightly identifies that access to high-quality education remains unevenly distributed, yet the **research capacity and infrastructure to rigorously investigate and address these disparities** remains underdeveloped and fragmented.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, systemic barriers persist, yet **research infrastructure capable of generating culturally relevant, rights-based evidence** is chronically under-resourced. The principle of "culturally affirming environments" must extend to the research community itself, guiding all research infrastructure investments and capability development.

To comprehensively address Consultation Questions 4, 5, and 6, **our research infrastructure must move beyond mere identification of disparities** to actively support research that dismantles the systemic structures perpetuating them, countering colonial research paradigms often described as 'Extractive,' 'Deficit-Oriented,' 'Epistemically Violent,' and 'Paternalistic.' The expertise of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts in the research field** is critical in defining and shaping research infrastructure priorities.

Consultation Question 4: What current policy and practices enable or constrain equity and justice for all?

Research Infrastructure Perspective

Current research funding policies and infrastructure arrangements, even those ostensibly designed to promote equity, often fall short when they fail to adopt a genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based approach. Many research funding frameworks, while acknowledging disparities, can inadvertently perpetuate a "needs-based" rather than "rights-based" discourse, treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research aspirations as deficits to be addressed rather than inherent entitlements.

Constraints include:

- **Fragmented research funding** that fails to provide sustained, long-term investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research infrastructure
- **Research governance structures** that centralize non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpretations of "cultural safety" or "cultural competency" without genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and data sovereignty
- **Lack of mandatory training** in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based methodologies for researchers and HDR supervisors
- **Absence of national research data infrastructure** governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov) principles

- **Limited career pathways** and research capability development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, particularly in education

Enablers include:

- Policies that explicitly mandate **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)** and **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov)** for all research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - Research funding mechanisms that embed **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance** with decision-making authority, driven by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**
 - Investment in **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research hubs and centres of excellence**
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Consultation Question 5: What research focus areas should be prioritised to improve quality and equity for all learners? Briefly describe the specific research investments, capabilities and relationships that would make this possible.

Prioritised Research Infrastructure Investments

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-Led Research Infrastructure for Success Identification and Profiling

Moving beyond deficit-focused risk identification, **research infrastructure must support** robust data analytics for "Success Identification and Profiling" to understand and replicate conditions for successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This involves:

- **Research investment in:** Longitudinal data infrastructure enabling linkage across sectors (education, health, social services)
- **Development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research teams** comprising **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** with expertise in advanced analytics and ethical AI

- **Piloting ethical, rights-based AI infrastructure** for predictive modelling and real-time dashboards, strictly guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov) protocols
- **Research capability building** to apply frameworks such as the [Higher Education Success Factor \(HESF\) model](#), which statistically validates key factors like mental health and economic conditions

2. Research Infrastructure for Holistic, Rights-Based Interventions

- **Cross-disciplinary research partnerships** focused on Closing the Gap (eg. psychology, education, public health) with dedicated infrastructure support
- **Research capability development** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and support services
- **Relationships built on reciprocity** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** shaping research design and implementation
- **Research infrastructure addressing compounding disadvantage** for regional, rural, and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

3. Research Infrastructure for Equitable Resource Distribution and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Governance

- **Investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led governance research infrastructure**, identifying best practices informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**
 - **Research capability development** for establishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance mechanisms across educational entities
 - **National research infrastructure** investigating funding models that ensure resources are allocated based on research need, prioritising communities and schools with concentrations of multiple forms of disadvantage
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Consultation Question 6: What systematic changes are required to embed First Nations perspectives and practices into curriculum and learning frameworks? Please share examples of effective research-based, community-led and culturally responsive approaches that could be scaled.

Research Infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges Integration

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives requires **transformative research infrastructure** supporting a shift from superficial "Indigenising curriculum" to **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges Integration**. This demands:

1. Research Infrastructure Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Design and Delivery

- **Research capacity building** to support curriculum and program development led directly by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and expert educators**
- **Research infrastructure** for defining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges across the sector by cultural standards, fostering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemic sovereignty
- **Investment in research** addressing the current gap in Australian university policies that lack clear definitions for discipline-specific integration

2. Research Training Infrastructure for Rights-Based Approaches

- **National research training infrastructure** delivering comprehensive, ongoing professional development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methodologies, FPIC, and IDSov
- **Research capability development** moving beyond insufficient "cultural competency" training to institutional 'accountability'
- **Scalable research training models** such as Rights-Based HDR Supervision Training, with content developed in consultation with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts**

3. Research Infrastructure Supporting Community-led and Culturally Affirming Pedagogies

- **Research infrastructure enabling** on-Country research, place-based research engagement
- **Research capability development** for competency-based pathways for high-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers
- **Research infrastructure addressing** "educative trauma" (racism, assimilation, deficit narratives) experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and researchers

4. Research Infrastructure Advancing Epistemic Pluralism

- **Research infrastructure** elevating practice-based evidence rooted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership
- **Research capability ensuring** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander conceptualizations of knowledge and learning are privileged, guided by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**

Consultation Question 7: How would a more integrated approach to research across sectors, disciplines and institutions benefit the experiences and outcomes for all learners?

Integrated Research Infrastructure Benefits

A truly integrated research infrastructure approach, grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, would foster relationality and reciprocity across the entire education research ecosystem. By ensuring **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty, ethical AI infrastructure, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research** across sectors (ECEC, schools, VET, Higher Education), we can generate more nuanced, holistic, and impactful research insights.

This would lead to:

Culturally Responsive Research Capability: Research infrastructure informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders** would enable research genuinely tailored to diverse cultural contexts and needs, moving beyond generic "one-size-fits-all" research approaches.

Streamlined Research Infrastructure and Reduced Duplication: Cross-sector research data infrastructure (under IDSov) and collaborative research capability, guided by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts**, would identify effective research approaches and prevent duplicated efforts, optimizing research resource allocation.

Enhanced Research Workforce Capabilities: Integrated research infrastructure would prepare researchers with deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and rights-based methodologies, improving research quality and impact for all students, with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** as key contributors to research capability development.

A Prepared and Well-Supported Education Research Workforce

The Paper aptly highlights declining HDR enrolments and a national education research workforce crisis. **Building robust research infrastructure and capability** is essential to address this crisis, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.

Consultation Question 8: How can teachers and early childhood educators be attracted to and retained in the profession, particularly in areas in greatest need?

Research Infrastructure Supporting Attraction and Retention

Research infrastructure must support:

Rights-Based Professional Development Research: Research infrastructure enabling comprehensive evaluation of professional development approaches, with content co-developed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**, moving beyond superficial training.

Research on Cultural Load and Workload Allocation: Research infrastructure explicitly investigating cultural load shouldered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators. Research capability development for effective strategies for its management, informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts**, ensuring research informs workload allocations to prevent burnout and promote retention.

Research Infrastructure for Culturally Affirming Workplaces: Research infrastructure creating evidence for workplaces that are "culturally affirming" and "racially safe," providing robust research evidence for support networks and resources tailored to diverse educators, as **conceptualised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders**.

Consultation Question 9: How can those from diverse backgrounds be encouraged and supported to join and stay in the profession? Please share examples and strategies to help identify successful case studies that can be learned from and scaled.

Research Infrastructure for Diverse Research Workforce Development

1. Research Infrastructure Addressing Cultural Load and Taxation

- **Research capability development** to investigate and evaluate effective strategies for cultural load management, informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**

- **Research infrastructure** ensuring cultural load is explicitly recognized, funded, and factored into research workload allocations

2. Research Infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholar Development

- **Dedicated research infrastructure:** Postdoctoral fellowships, dedicated Professional and Academic Staff Development Funds, and structured career advancement pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and educators
- **Research capability building** addressing the identified shortage of education researchers and decline in HDR enrolments
- **Research infrastructure implementing** the [Senior Leadership Capability Model \(SLCM\)](#), with content developed in collaboration with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and Experts**

3. Research Infrastructure for Culturally Affirming Research Environments

- **Research infrastructure** fostering truly **culturally affirming research environments** that respect and strengthen cultural identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and students
- **Research capability development** expediting anti-racism policies and procedures, with direct input from **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and Experts**

4. Research Infrastructure for Targeted Recruitment and Support

- **Research infrastructure** identifying and scaling successful strategies for increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researcher representation
- **Research capability ensuring** recruitment processes where possible have at least 50% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership, designed and evaluated by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**

5. Research Challenging the 'Pipeline Problem'

- **Research infrastructure** critically examining systemic barriers within HDR programs that deter diverse candidates
 - **Research capability** requiring insights from **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and students** themselves
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Consultation Question 10: What are the priority areas for evaluation in educational practice? Briefly describe the specific investments, capabilities and relationships needed for effective evaluation.

Research Infrastructure for Rights-Based Evaluation

Priority research infrastructure must shift from merely measuring outcomes to **supporting research assessing** how well practices align with rights-based principles and contribute to genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

Research infrastructure priorities include:

1. Research Infrastructure for Evaluating Rights-Based Education Implementation

- **Research capability** assessing curriculum integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges
- **Research infrastructure** evaluating adherence to FPIC in all research activities
- **Research capability** assessing impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research approaches, with evaluation criteria developed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders**

2. Research Infrastructure for Evaluating Institutional Accountability

- **Research infrastructure** critically evaluating implementation of accountability frameworks such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights and Cultural Accountability Framework (IRCAF) and SLCM

- **Research capability** measuring progress towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research success, with input from **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts**

3. Research Infrastructure for Ethical AI in Education Evaluation

- **Research capability** assessing ethical deployment of AI tools in research settings
- **Research infrastructure** ensuring AI upholds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty and genuinely supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers without replicating biases or colonial harms, guided by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI experts**

Effective research infrastructure requires significant investment in:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and informed Research Evaluation Teams:

Building research capacity of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities** to design, lead, and interpret evaluations, ensuring cultural relevance and appropriate methodologies.

Robust, Rights-Based Research Data Systems: Investing in research data infrastructure that respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty, allowing for disaggregated data collection (with consent) and culturally appropriate reporting mechanisms, as defined by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts**.

Long-Term, Relational Research Partnerships: Fostering sustained research relationships between institutions, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and government bodies to co-design evaluation frameworks and ensure findings lead to actionable, rights-based improvements. This can be **conceptualised through an Indigenist Total Quality Management (ITQM) research framework** to ensure rigorous, accountable, and rights-based research planning and outcomes, balancing community and institutional expectations, guided by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**.

Cross-Sector Research Collaboration and Shared Understanding

The Paper notes that "siloining and barriers to research-practice collaboration contribute to duplicated effort and prevent opportunities for shared learning." **Addressing this requires fundamental changes to research infrastructure.**

Consultation Question 11: What are the most effective ways in which cross-sector research can help address contemporary challenges in the education sector?

Research Infrastructure for Cross-Sector Collaboration

Effective cross-sector research infrastructure must be predicated on genuine co-creation and reciprocal relationships. This requires:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and informed Research Agendas: Research infrastructure ensuring research questions and priorities are directly informed and, where appropriate, led by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and peak bodies, with their knowledge holders and experts** guiding research processes. This counters extractive research that often dictates agendas.

Shared Research Infrastructure for Ethical Data: Establishing national, cross-sectoral research data infrastructure that strictly adheres to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty principles, enabling ethical data sharing and linkage while maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control, as determined by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts**.

Co-Designed Research Translation Pathways: Developing collaborative research infrastructure translating research findings into policy and practice, ensuring **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** are involved throughout research processes, from initial research design to implementation and evaluation.

Consultation Question 12: How would a more joined-up approach to research across different sectors, disciplines and institutions benefit the education workforce across their career?

Research Infrastructure Benefits for Research Workforce

A more joined-up research infrastructure approach, applying an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based lens, would profoundly benefit the research workforce by:

Enhancing Research Efficacy: Providing researchers across all sectors with access to high-quality, culturally relevant research infrastructure and methodologies, empowering them to better conduct research supporting diverse learners, informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders**.

Reducing Research Cultural Load: Distributing research responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives integration across the entire research workforce, rather than disproportionately burdening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. This requires genuine research partnerships with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts** to define equitable research workload models.

Creating Clearer Research Career Pathways: Offering clearer research career pathways and professional recognition for expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and rights-based research practice, fostering a more valued and culturally astute research workforce. This recognition must be driven by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**.

Fostering Reciprocal Research Learning and Collaboration: Promoting a research culture of reciprocal learning where **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and knowledge holders** are recognized as research experts, enriching collective research understanding and practice. Cross-sector research collaboration involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be founded on principles of Aboriginal community control, capacity building, cultural safety, practical outcomes, reciprocal learning, long-term commitment, and transparency. This includes compensating **Aboriginal and Torres**

Strait Islander research collaborators, including knowledge holders, as equal research partners, not relying on "pro bono support."

Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Priorities: Instead of separate research strategies, research infrastructure should prioritize embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research priorities across **all** research activity, with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** leading the definition of research priorities.

Addressing Research Data Fragmentation: The document highlights "data gaps and inconsistencies" in educational research data. A truly joined-up research infrastructure approach necessitates nationally harmonized processes for accessing and sharing research datasets, strictly guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty protocols, as established by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts**.

A World-Class Connected Research Capability

The Paper acknowledges that "concerted effort is needed to sustain Australia's education research capability," particularly given declining HDR enrolments. **This requires fundamental investment in research infrastructure and capability.**

Consultation Question 13: What are the capabilities and relationships required to enable educational research to impact change over the next decade?

Research Infrastructure and Capability Requirements

To enable educational research to truly impact change, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success, the following research infrastructure and capabilities are required:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Leadership and Mentorship

Infrastructure: Investing in dedicated research infrastructure and resources to cultivate a

strong cadre of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research leaders and knowledge holders**, providing them with mentorship, research funding, and opportunities to shape national research agendas.

Research Infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights-Based

Methodologies: Developing national research capability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based methodologies (IRBM), ensuring researchers are trained in ethical research engagement, FPIC, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov). This involves rigorous research training infrastructure and accreditation programs, with content and delivery shaped by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts**.

Research Infrastructure for Intercultural Research Partnerships: Fostering genuine and equitable research partnerships between **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers**, built on respect, reciprocity, and shared commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, acknowledging the distinct research contributions of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders**.

Strong, Accountable Research Governance Infrastructure: Research relationships between research and policy must be underpinned by strong research governance infrastructure that prioritizes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and holds research leadership accountable for research commitments. [The Senior Leadership Capability Model \(SLCM\)](#) can be instrumental here, linking research funding and accreditation to institutional research performance on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research agendas, informed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts in research governance**.

Consultation Question 14: What is working in current approaches to research training? What isn't working?

Research Training Infrastructure Assessment

What is working in research training infrastructure:

- Some progress in increasing basic awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues within research training
- Research infrastructure initiatives offering specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate scholarships or research support networks showing promise in retention

What isn't working in research training infrastructure:

- Current research training infrastructure is largely insufficient in preparing researchers for ethical and impactful research engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and knowledges
- Critical absence of robust, mandatory research training infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methods and methodologies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov), with content developed by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts**
- Decline in HDR enrolments in education programs, especially within Group of Eight universities, disproportionately impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research capability development
- Lack of culturally safe research supervision and institutional research support contributing to mental health challenges and attrition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HDR students
- Research training focus remains on individual "cultural awareness" rather than systemic "cultural accountability," failing to adequately integrate expertise of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and Experts**

Beyond these systemic research infrastructure gaps:

We must develop **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers** robustly, ensuring the next generation of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers** are confident

and competent not only in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methodologies but also in Western research methods and contexts. For too many **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers**, research employment is based primarily on perceived racial identity rather than full academic and research capabilities, which is a disempowering and racist practice that undermines genuine intellectual contribution and perpetuates tokenistic approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship. Research training infrastructure and research career pathways must actively dismantle this, focusing on intellectual merit and comprehensive research skill development.

Consultation Question 15: How might a national approach increase the impact of education research and build research relationships, both across sectors and within Australian and international research communities?

National Research Infrastructure Approach

A national research infrastructure approach must fundamentally embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and wisdom as central to its vision:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Research Infrastructure

Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research hubs and centres of excellence, ensuring:

- Sustainable long-term research funding
- Dedicated research career pathways for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars and knowledge holders**
- Research infrastructure supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research leadership
- Research capability building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research communities

2. Mandatory Rights-Based Research Training Infrastructure

Implement national mandatory research training infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based methodologies, FPIC, and IDSoV for all researchers, particularly HDR supervisors. This will ensure:

- Ethical and accountable research practices across the research sector
- Research training curriculum developed and delivered by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts**
- Research capability development in rights-based research methodologies
- Research infrastructure supporting ongoing professional development

3. International Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Infrastructure

Actively foster research relationships with international Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research communities, promoting:

- Exchange of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom and knowledge, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** at the forefront
- Rights-based approaches to decolonizing research methodologies
- Research infrastructure aligning with global efforts like the 2025 UN theme "Indigenous Peoples and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures"
- Research capability building through international research collaborations

4. Unified Research Data Governance Infrastructure under IDSoV

Create national, harmonized research data infrastructure for education data collection, linkage, and access governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty principles, enabling:

- Robust, ethical, and culturally relevant research
- Research infrastructure adhering to CARE and OCAP® principles
- Research governance and implementation led by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts**
- Research capability ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control over research data

Unaddressed Perspectives and Critical Research Infrastructure Themes

Beyond the direct consultation questions, several critical Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research infrastructure perspectives require explicit consideration for the Decadal Plan to be genuinely transformative.

1. Defining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges for the Research Community

We, as the research community, must develop clear, widely accepted understanding of what constitutes **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges**. At present, absence of robust, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led definition leads to dubious research claims by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers.

Research infrastructure must recognize:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges are intrinsically "in and of Country and place"
- They are deeply spiritual, relational, and sustainable, derived from over 65,000 years of connection
- Some knowledges do not belong in Western research contexts as we frequently lack means, understanding, or ethical research protocols to honor them appropriately

National research infrastructure must support:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders** in defining these distinct epistemologies
- Research infrastructure establishing necessary frameworks for ethical research engagement
- Research capability protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledges within academic research contexts, if and when appropriate

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty (IDSov) as Fundamental Research Infrastructure Principle

The Paper acknowledges data gaps and inconsistencies, particularly lack of "ethnic or cultural background" in workforce data. This is significant research infrastructure oversight.

IDSov must be a core, underpinning principle for all research data collection, analysis, and governance within Australian education research.

Research infrastructure requirements:

- Explicit research participant consent
- Research data access protocols
- Research data deletion procedures
- Research data anonymization standards
- Cultural safety protocols in research data management
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance approval process at highest research level, led by **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data experts and knowledge holders**
- Research infrastructure adhering to CARE Principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, Ethics) and OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession)

Without IDSov research infrastructure, data collection risks perpetuating extractive colonial research practices and reinforcing the "inclusion industrial complex."

3. Research Infrastructure for Ethical AI and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wisdom

As a leading scholar, I advocate for transformative research infrastructure supporting AI that understands relationships and reciprocates care, moving beyond Western-centric research models that risk perpetuating cognitive imperialism and colonial legacies.

The Decadal Plan should explicitly support research infrastructure:

- Research into training AI on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom principles (Relational, Narrative-Based, Holistic/Embodied, and Place-Conscious Learning)

- Research infrastructure ensuring co-creation with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders** in AI development
- Research infrastructure aligning with UNDRIP and FPIC
- Research capability in specific applications including revitalizing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

4. Research Infrastructure for Institutional Accountability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Success

Audit findings within institutions demonstrate disproportionate concentration of lead research responsibilities within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander portfolios without dedicated research funding, indicative of broader systemic research infrastructure issues.

The Decadal Plan must mandate robust research accountability infrastructure:

- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific research KPIs in all executive and senior leadership position descriptions
- Research accountability frameworks shifting responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research success across entire institution, not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific research units
- Tying research funding and accreditation to Senior Leadership Capability Model (SLCM), with oversight from **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance experts**
- Research infrastructure ensuring dedicated funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research portfolios

5. Research Infrastructure for "Rightful Success" and Rights-Based Research Praxis

My intellectual project focuses on "Rightful Success" – aiming for 80% tertiary attainment, cultural identity, and community benefit by 2050. This is grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based approaches (IRBA) to education.

Research infrastructure must:

- Contribute to achieving rights-based research praxis
- Move beyond simply offering research opportunities to ensuring institutional co-accountability for addressing research barriers

- Support rightful research opportunities, guided by vision of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders**
- Ensure research infrastructure treats education as affirmation, growth, and liberation

6. A Two-Phased Approach to Rights Based National Research Infrastructure

To enact meaningful change, national research infrastructure approach must distinguish between:

Phase 1: "Stopping the Harm"

- Short-term research accountability
- Research infrastructure protection from deficit research practices
- Immediate research policy reforms

Phase 2: "Building the Future"

- Long-term research sovereignty
- Epistemic justice in research infrastructure
- Research system transformation

This dual research infrastructure strategy ensures both immediate redress of research harms and foundational shift towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based research future, with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders and experts** leading definition of both research infrastructure phases.

Conclusion

A Decadal Plan for Australian Education Research that truly champions "Justice, Quality and Equity for All" must be profoundly informed and shaped by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights-based research infrastructure approaches. This requires not only addressing identified research infrastructure gaps but also proactively embedding **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, knowledge holders, research leadership, and data sovereignty** into every facet of the research ecosystem and research infrastructure.

The research infrastructure transformation demands a shift from:

- "Needs-based" research rhetoric → "Sovereignty & Rights"-based research infrastructure
- Identifying research "barriers" → Ensuring "Research Institutional Accountability"
- "Culturally Responsive" research → Achieving "Research Epistemic Justice/Intellectual Sovereignty"

This requires sustained, substantial investment in:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research infrastructure
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research capability development
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research governance mechanisms
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research data sovereignty infrastructure
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research career pathways
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research training infrastructure
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research evaluation frameworks

Only through this comprehensive research infrastructure transformation can Australian education research truly serve all learners and contribute to genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and "Rightful Success."