



National consultation:

Australia's progress against Sustainable Development Goal 4

The Department of Education is seeking stakeholder views on Australia's National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education and the questions outlined on the following page, as part of a national consultation on Australia's progress against the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4).

SDG 4 aims to: **“ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”**.

This national consultation process is a key component of Australia's engagement for the global Transforming Education Summit (TES) to be held in New York in September 2022. Stakeholders in Australia's education sectors – including education and training providers, teachers, students, peak bodies, government agencies and non-government organisations – have the option to review the draft National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education and respond to any or all of the questions below. Your responses will help guide Australia's participation at the TES in September, and also contribute to Australia's summary report that will be presented to the TES Advisory Committee in August 2022.

Transforming Education Summit

The UN Secretary-General is convening the TES in New York in the week of 19 September, as part of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly. The TES seeks to renew a focus on the education related goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, following a global slide in progress towards SDG 4 in recent years as a result of COVID-19.

The TES comprises three workstreams: national consultations, thematic action tracks, and public engagement and mobilisation. The questions in this paper form part of Australia's national consultation process, and are based on UNESCO's Guidelines for National Consultations.

Australia will also be presenting a National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education at the TES. This statement represents Australia's vision of the future of education, relating to the four TES themes:

1. Ensuring full recovery from COVID-19 educational disruption
2. Identifying the main strategic transformations and levers for reimagining education for the 21st century and accelerating progress towards shared education goals

3. Reviewing national education targets and benchmarks
4. Ensuring strengthened and more sustainable public financing of education.

The draft *National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education* is below:

Draft National Statement of Commitment

Key themes

Australia recognises the power of education to transform lives. Australia is committed to meeting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 as a global benchmark for ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education and promoting lifelong learning. Australia also plays a key role supporting inclusive and equitable quality education in our region and beyond. Australia's development investments are strongly committed to learning for all, particularly for girls and children with disability within the Indo-Pacific region. Australia meets the majority of targets under SDG 4, however we commit to continuous improvement to meet and exceed all targets.

Australia is committed to working with its domestic stakeholders – including state and territory governments, peak bodies, industry associations, teachers and students – to minimise barriers to accessing high quality education and increase participation from vulnerable and disadvantaged learners at all levels of our education and training systems. We acknowledge the need to address teacher workforce challenges, and note that while the digital transformation of education presents many opportunities for enhancing access to education, it also risks exacerbating existing inequities.

Australia is committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is finely balanced across the priorities of all member states, and recognises the interconnected nature of the SDGs that represent the agreed norms, standards and values of the international development system. Australia looks forward to continued engagement with UNESCO and member states to create a more inclusive and equitable future for learners, and ensure that the benefits of the digital age can be realised by all.

Australia's reporting and measurement on SDG 4

Australia is committed to the ongoing implementation of the Alice Springs (Mpartnwe) Education Declaration as our national vision for education and our pledge to improving educational outcomes for young Australians. The Declaration has two goals: that the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity, and that all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community.

Australia is committed to a sustained reform effort in early childhood education and school education. Through the Preschool Reform Agreement 2022-2025, the Australian Government is working together with Australian states and territories to deliver a minimum of 15 hours of preschool a week for all children in the year before they start school, improve children's attendance in preschool across Australia, and develop a preschool outcomes measure. Improvements to data undertaken through the term of the reform agreement will also strengthen our evidence base for future actions. Through the National School Reform Agreement (2019 – 2023), national goals and targets to improve student outcomes and achieve excellence in classrooms throughout Australia are

outlined and measured annually. A new National School Reform Agreement is set to be developed and agreed in 2023.

Australia is also committed to monitoring and evaluating our progress against goals, including SDG 4 and other targets we have set domestically, through mechanisms such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), which assesses students twice in primary school and twice in high school. NAPLAN shows more students are achieving minimum standards over time, with at least 89 per cent of students meeting minimum standards for reading and numeracy across all year levels assessed. Across the school education system there is a focus on improving student performance against these and other measures.

Equitable and inclusive access to quality education

Australia acknowledges that there are still groups within our country that experience barriers to accessing quality education and lifelong learning. Some of these groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, learners with disability, learners in regional and remote areas and learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Australia is also committed to working with education providers and communities to encourage learners from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to engage in all levels of education, including boosting tertiary education enrolments.

The Australian Government has a particular focus on closing the gap between the educational outcomes of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and the non-Indigenous population, with all Australian governments endorsing the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement). The Australian Government is committed to funding targeted measures to lift student outcomes, attendance and engagement, especially with regard to increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent by 2031. These initiatives include improving remote school infrastructure, creating partnerships between high-performing metropolitan and regional and remote schools, and scaling up primary school reading programs.

Under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, all Australian governments have committed to build capability in delivering inclusive education to improve educational outcomes for school students with disability. To this end, the Australian Government is working to implement the recommendations of a 2020 review of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. This work seeks to better support learners, families and education providers to understand their rights and obligations so that learners with a disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers without disability. As children and young people with disability have been among the most vulnerable during the pandemic, the Australian Government Department of Education will undertake a review of the impact of COVID on students with disability, informed by the experiences of students, their families and educators.

The Australian Government is also focused on increasing access to early childhood care and education, and has committed to make child care more affordable for 1.26 million families by increasing the maximum child care subsidy from July 2023 through its Plan for Cheaper Child Care.

Teacher workforce challenges

Australia is committed to ensuring high quality teaching and learning, acknowledging the integral role teachers play as the greatest in-school impact on student learning. While Australia has a well educated teaching workforce, with all teachers required to have an accredited higher education

qualification, there are challenges with securing a sustainable supply of teachers, particularly in regional and remote locations and in some subject areas. Shortages of teachers in Australian schools can have detrimental impacts on both teachers and students, including increased workloads for existing teachers and more out-of-field teaching.

Australia is committed to working with stakeholders to strengthen the supply of high quality teachers. This will be achieved through awarding bursaries for high-performing school leavers to complete a teaching degree; providing additional incentives for teachers who undertake placements in rural, regional, and remote schools; and expanding pathways into teaching for mid-career professionals in other fields.

Education transformation for the digital age

Technology will continue to be a central part of learning as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and it will change the way education is delivered well into the future. We are committed to working to ensure that we can harness the benefits of new approaches to delivering education, also including to deliver benefits for students in disadvantaged communities. There are challenges with ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged populations have access to infrastructure they need.

A restructured and expanded version of the Australian Curriculum's Digital Literacy component will be implemented in Australian schools from 2023 to ensure teachers better understand how school students can confidently use technology.

Australia is also committed to embracing new and flexible learning options for tertiary education, such as online and hybrid modes of delivery and micro-credentials, to address current and emerging skill needs by quickly and flexibly upskilling and reskilling workers.

Questions

1. Ensuring full recovery from COVID-19 educational disruption

- What has been the impact of COVID-19-related disruptions to education delivery in Australia on learning loss, student disengagement and dropout?
- What has been the impact of the COVID-19 educational disruption on the wellbeing of both learners and teachers, including Australia's vulnerable and disadvantaged populations?
- What progress has been made to date to recover pandemic-related losses?
- Do you propose additional measures to support further recovery in the short- or medium-term?

2. Strategic transformations and levers for reimagining education for the 21st century

- What aspects of education in Australia are most important to continue, strengthen and/or safeguard?
- Can you identify any new possibilities or directions for education that have only recently become apparent?
- What are some innovative transformations for education that Australia should embrace?
- Can you identify any groups, bodies or forums that can be leveraged or can lead on education transformations in Australia?

3. Reviewing national education targets and benchmarks

There are several targets that sit underneath SDG 4. You can read about these targets at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>.

Australia has set a number of benchmarks for education that relate to the SDG 4 targets, and progress against those benchmarks is consistently monitored. Examples include the [Alice Springs \(Mpartnwe\) Education Declaration](#), the [National School Reform Agreement](#), the [Preschool Reform Agreement](#) and the [National Assessment Program](#).

- What are your thoughts on Australia's progress in meeting the SDG 4 targets?
- Can you identify ways of accelerating progress towards meeting the targets?
- Are there any opportunities to review, define or evaluate targets and benchmarks?

4. Ensuring strengthened and sustainable public financing of education

- Can you identify any innovative models or mechanisms for financing education?
- How effectively does Australia's domestic education funding address equity issues?

Stakeholder input

Responses to the questions, and any input on the draft *National Statement of Commitment to Transform Education*, should be uploaded at www.education.gov.au/international-education/TES-National-Consultation by **12 pm, 5 August 2022**.

Further information

To learn more about the TES and its workstreams, see: <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit>

If you have any questions about this process, email multilateral@education.gov.au