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Group of Eight submission to *Measuring What Matters* – second phase consultation

Please note that this submission represents the views of the Group of Eight (Go8) and individual member universities may wish to make their own submissions. The Go8 also consents to this submission being made public.

Introduction

The Group of Eight (Go8) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the second phase consultation in the development of a *Measuring What Matters* Statement. The Go8 supports the development and use of broader measures of national progress and wellbeing.

This submission provides recommendations on the five emerging policy themes: prosperous, inclusive, sustainable, cohesive, and healthy, outlined in the *Measuring What Matters* consultation paper (April 2023); the future development of metrics/indicators associated with the themes; and next steps.

Underpinning the Go8 recommendations is the importance of Australian universities in contributing to positive outcomes in the emerging policy themes, through our research, teaching, and engagement both locally and internationally. Without our world class institutions, Australia's prosperity, inclusiveness, sustainability, cohesiveness, and health would be greatly diminished.

Emerging policy themes under *Measuring What Matters*

Elevate the importance of innovation based on research and development within the themes

While the Go8 has no issues with the broad "headline" five emerging policy themes, we do recommend that under the "Prosperous" theme, the importance of new knowledge through research and development (R&D) be elevated.

Long term prosperity on productivity and innovation drives productivity. Innovation is underpinned by world leading R&D. Therefore, we recommend the sub-heading be amended to: "A productive, innovative and resilient economy".

In addition, the descriptor given as the fourth dot point under the "Prosperous" theme should emphasise new knowledge underpinned by R&D, while the descriptor given as the second last dot point should also be strengthened beyond merely indicating encouragement and opportunities for innovation. For example, it could be rephrased as: "An economy whose dynamism and growth are underpinned by innovation and entrepreneurship".

The role of Australian universities R&D in contributing to the emerging policy themes

Go8 universities underpin innovation through being world leading research providers, collectively spending around \$7.7 billion annually on R&D across all key disciplinary areas, including in relation to the *Measuring What Matters* emerging policy theme areas of sustainability and health. As such, research should represent an integral component of Australia's well-being Statement.

- It is worth noting that the Go8 recently contributed to Australian Government policy development on the national science and research priorities, where similar themes were endorsed by the Go8 as reflective of the key challenges and opportunities facing the nation. The urgent need for additional social science data to inform effective policy development and responses to new challenges and issues was also emphasised.

University research, and by extension R&D across the economy more broadly, are necessary enablers of social and environmental wellbeing. Without science and R&D, many if not all the aspirations described under each emerging policy theme cannot be progressed and delivered.

- If the *Measuring What Matters* Statement is to succeed, considerable and continual resourcing, in the form of investment, skill building, R&D, data collection, community outreach and uptake programs, to name a few, will be essential.

Regardless of challenge, policy theme or priority for Australia, research is critical to our nation's predictive capacity, to anticipating many of the issues that need to be addressed, and the opportunities that can be realised. Research will be at the heart of the nation's effort to manage the next pandemic, finding the next novel energy or food source, helping our communities adapt to and responsibly adopt advanced technologies, fostering attitudinal shifts that support climate adaptation measures as we transition to a net-zero economy, and resolving economic and social disparities.

Go8 researchers contribute not only to the nation's predictive capacity, but also to advancing knowledge in its pure and applied forms. For example, directly relevant to all of the five emerging themes, researchers can help ensure *Measuring What Matters* remains relevant and valid, they can also help determine synergistic links between distinct areas of interest, such as social attitudes to COVID-19 prevention strategies or economic factors driving household preparedness for bushfires; and they can develop datasets in response to particular socio-economic, health, environmental or other questions.

- For example, the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) Survey conducted since 2001 by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne in partnership with the Australian Government Department of Social Services ¹ is a valuable and widely recognised resource.

¹ <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/news/news/new-hilda-survey-data-release>

Elevate the importance of higher education attainment within the themes

Education – and the subset of higher education – are vital to all five themes, in a similar way to research.

Universities not only teach and train their own students, they have a direct and indirect impact on broader Australian understanding of the world: universities train our next generation of doctors, build community awareness of the dangers of smoke inhalation during bushfires, encourage people to adopt social distancing during a pandemic, prepare the entrepreneurs and innovators of the future, and highlight the dangers of ideological extremes to a cohesive society, to use a few examples. In that sense, education could serve as one of the cross-cutting elements this consultation seeks to uncover.

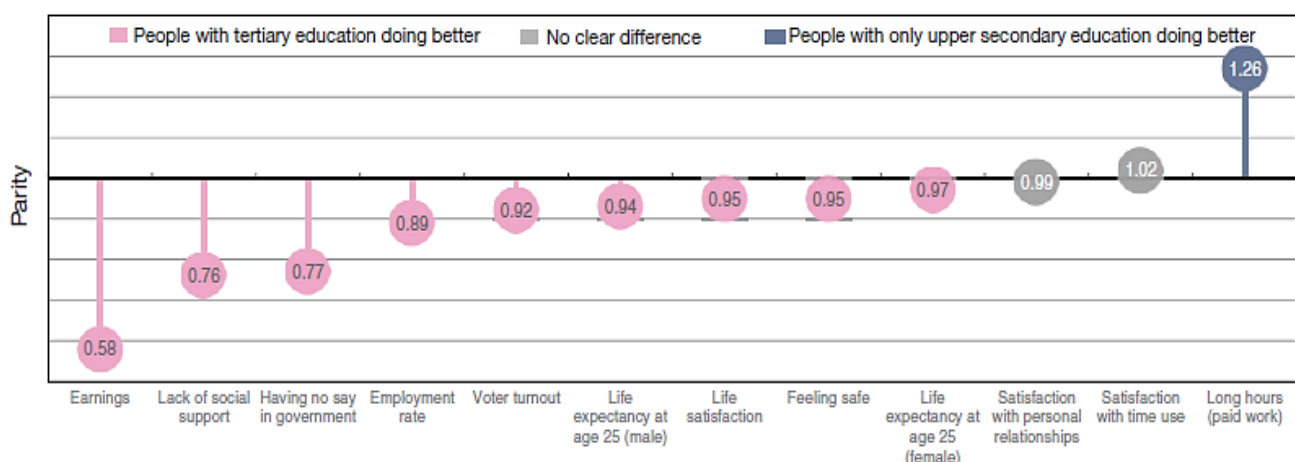
Another option is to include education more overtly in the description of the themes. While mentioned as a part of the descriptors under the “Prosperous” theme, education also enables people to fully participate in society, including having economic accessibility and achieving intergenerational mobility, and is therefore also relevant to the “Inclusive” theme. Education is also positively associated with on average better health and wellbeing, similar to the role of innovation underpinned by R&D discussed earlier.

Education could be mentioned as a descriptor under the “Inclusive” theme – for example dot point three could be reworded to read : “A society that supports social and economic accessibility and intergenerational mobility, including through education”.

The relative importance of post-secondary education (as recognised by Jobs and Skills Australia which estimates that nine out of every ten jobs in the future will require either a university qualification or a VET qualification) could be emphasised under dot point four under the “Prosperous” theme. For example, “People have access to and complete [post-secondary school] education...”.

Indeed, the importance and contribution of (tertiary) education to a broad range of wellbeing measures is highlighted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its work on well-being frameworks. The OECD chart below shows that tertiary educated people tend to, across a range of indicators, experience greater wellbeing relative to those with only an upper secondary education (a value below 1 represents a relatively better outcome for people with tertiary education).

OECD average education ratios (distance from parity)



Source: OECD How's Life? 2020 Measuring Well-being. <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/How-is-Life-2020-Highlights.pdf>

Establishing and tracking metrics/indicators under *Measuring What Matters*

Proposed indicators

The *Measuring What Matters* consultation paper points to the importance of the policy themes being supported by metrics or indicators that are relevant and understandable. In line with the recommendations outlined above to recognise the importance of R&D and innovation as well as (higher) education in contributing to national wellbeing, the Go8 recommends:

- The adoption of the Australian Government's own commitment to raise investment in research and development to get closer to 3 per cent of GDP², as one metric/indicator under the "Prosperous" theme.
- The adoption of the Go8 recommendation to the *Australian Universities Accord* for a target of 75 per cent for the proportion of the Australian resident population aged 25–39 years who have attained or who are attaining a post-Year 12 or equivalent qualification by 2040.³

Both these indicators reflect the importance of research and higher education in contributing to Australia's wellbeing and specifically to all of the five emerging themes under *Measuring What Matters*. These indicators are transparent, already measurable (the Australian Bureau of Statistics publishes statistics) and progress on these indicators can be compared over time.

The role of Go8 universities in measuring progress

The Go8 universities also have an existing role and infrastructure in measuring Australia's wellbeing across a range of fields.

Go8 universities are custodians of key research infrastructure facilities that host or link major relevant data sets to measuring progress against the five emerging themes under *Measuring What Matters*. More, and better linked data collected and developed by researchers can clearly help drive more accurate and better targeted policy responses once the metrics/indicators under *Measuring What Matters* are determined.

- For example, in relation to the "Sustainable" theme, University of Queensland-hosted Terrestrial Research Data Network (TERN)⁴, whose partners include all state governments and four Australian Government agencies, measures and collates ecosystem attributes over time from continental-scale to field sites. It openly provides access to model ready data to enable detection and interpretation of changes in land ecosystems, as a basis to better understanding and managing the environment. TERN's threatened species index helps track the changes in abundance of threatened and near-threatened Australian species.⁵

² <https://alp.org.au/media/2594/2021-alp-national-platform-final-endorsed-platform.pdf>

³ <https://go8.edu.au/submission-australian-universities-accord-panel-discussion-paper-consultation-15-ideas-to-deliver-a-seamless-tertiary-education-system>

⁴ <https://www.tern.org.au/about/>

⁵ Further detail at <https://www.tern.org.au/australias-environment-in-2022/>

Next steps to *Measuring What Matters* impacting policy

The consultation paper emphasises *Measuring What Matters* will help in better understanding our economy and society and support more informed policy making and accountability.

Measuring What Matters can certainly provide more information (and that in turn can indirectly inform policy and accountability) but it is not clear whether the Australian Government intends for it to be a formal “lens” by which future policy and budget decisions are framed and/or prioritised or an informal “snapshot” of (additional) information.

Measuring What Matters can transparently highlight areas of national progress or regress which can act as an independent source of accountability for governments and public officials, as well as broader stakeholders. However, it is not clear what other accountability mechanisms, if any, the Australian Government intends to implement as part of this process.

The awareness, currency, and success of *Measuring What Matters* will require clarification of the intended formal versus informal use of it by the Australian Government in policy decision making, as well as clarity on associated accountability mechanisms to further drive progress.

Conclusion

The Go8 is supportive of the development and use of broader measures of national progress and wellbeing as envisaged with *Measuring what Matters*. Indeed, the emerging policy themes under discussion highlight the important role of Australian universities in contributing to wellbeing, particularly with respect to R&D and higher education functions.

Our recommendations seek to strengthen the understanding of research and higher education as fundamental enablers of wellbeing across prosperity, inclusiveness, sustainability, cohesiveness, and health. I hope to have the opportunity to meet with you in the near future to discuss this submission in further detail.

Yours sincerely



VICKI THOMSON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE