

Capability Statements for Australian Enabling Education

A shared evaluative language for considering what enabling education should make genuinely possible for students.

What are the capability statements?

These statements identify eight substantive freedoms and opportunities that enabling education may seek to expand for students. They focus on what students are genuinely able to be and do through enabling education, rather than describing prescribed teaching practices, fixed student outcomes, or a universal checklist for all programs.

Developed through a deliberative process involving scholarship, expert consultation, sector discussion, and practitioner scrutiny, the statements provide a contextually grounded point of reference for Australian enabling education. They are intended to support reflection, program development, sector dialogue, and the next stages of quality-framework development.

Why use a capability approach?

Conventional measures such as access, grades, retention, completion, and progression remain important, but they do not fully capture the value or quality of equity-oriented education. A capability approach broadens evaluation by asking whether students have real opportunities to learn, exercise agency, belong, sustain well-being, participate meaningfully, and pursue educational futures they have reason to value.

This approach also recognises that similar resources or program arrangements do not create equal opportunities for every student. Personal, social, cultural, material, and institutional conditions shape whether students can convert educational provision into meaningful participation and development.

How should the statements be understood?

The statements are provisional and open to scrutiny, adaptation, and refinement. They are not yet validated standards and should not be used as a compliance checklist or as a sufficient basis for endorsement. Their purpose at this stage is to make the proposed evaluative commitments explicit so they can be debated, tested, and improved.

The boundaries between capabilities are also analytical rather than absolute. A single practice, policy, or support arrangement may contribute to several capabilities at once, but should be examined in relation to the particular freedom or opportunity it helps expand.

Next steps towards a quality endorsement framework

The capability statements are intended to form the conceptual foundation for a future NAEAA quality endorsement framework. Further development should proceed through staged co-development and testing rather than immediate conversion into standards.

1. Engage systematically with enabling students and broader stakeholders to test the relevance, language, prioritisation, and completeness of the capability domains.
2. Refine the statements in response to this deliberation, including attention to diverse cohorts, institutions, regions, and program models.
3. Translate each capability into evaluative dimensions while maintaining the distinction between the capability itself and the program conditions that support it.
4. Develop and pilot indicators and evidence sources across diverse enabling settings, mapping evidence transparently where it relates to more than one capability.
5. Use the results of piloting to establish a credible, improvement-oriented quality endorsement process that preserves institutional diversity and avoids narrow compliance logic.

Capability statements

CAPABILITY 1

Epistemic Inclusion and Cultural Empowerment

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- access, contribute to, and shape knowledge in ways that recognise diverse epistemic traditions, including Indigenous knowledge systems, and that affirm rather than marginalise their ways of knowing.

CAPABILITY 2

Equitable Access to Foundational Knowledge

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- develop the foundational academic, digital, mathematical, linguistic, and navigational knowledge needed to pursue higher education from varied prior educational and life circumstances.

CAPABILITY 3

Affirmed and Developing Student Identity

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- explore, affirm, and develop academic, cultural, and personal identities in ways that support their sense of legitimacy and possibility within higher education.

CAPABILITY 4

Personalised Learning and Growth Pathways

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- pursue educational growth through pathways responsive to their strengths, aspirations, responsibilities, constraints, and prior experiences.

CAPABILITY 5

Agency, Belonging, and Well-being

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- make informed educational choices, act on their goals, experience themselves as valued members of a learning community, and sustain their well-being while participating in higher education.

CAPABILITY 6

Inclusive and Collaborative Learning Communities

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- participate in respectful, reciprocal, and collaborative learning relationships in which their contributions can be heard, valued, and taken seriously.

CAPABILITY 7

Critical Awareness and Social Responsibility

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- understand and critically engage with the structural conditions shaping educational access, participation, and inequality, and consider their own role in contributing to more just educational and social environments.

CAPABILITY 8

Meaningful and Barrier-Free Participation in University Life

Students have genuine opportunities to:

- participate meaningfully in the academic, social, cultural, and institutional life of the university, without avoidable structural, material, cultural, or administrative barriers limiting that participation.