

What do Australians think is important for national progress?

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Introduction

This report presents summarised results from ANDI's 2018 national survey on national progress and its measurement.

The survey was part of a pilot project undertaken by the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Limited in collaboration with the University of Melbourne and ANU's Social Research Centre in 2017-2018.

Context and purpose of research

ANDI Ltd is an Australian not-for-profit public interest corporation incorporated in 2012. Its principal purpose is to develop a national Australian index of progress and wellbeing 'beyond GDP', that reflects extensive community engagement and high-quality research, and incorporates best international practice and experience.

The work of ANDI has developed and been shaped in the context of a broader global movement that has emerged over the past two decades. This movement was driven initially by dissatisfaction with the influence of GDP as the globally dominant but flawed measure of national progress. With leadership from the OECD, the EU and the UN, it has gradually drawn together many different sectors and movements (environmental, women's, social justice, community development etc). The initial focus has been on the search for alternative measures of social progress that are both more holistic (that is, they combine not just economic, but also social, cultural, environmental and governance dimensions of national progress) but also more democratic (they better reflect what matters to people and directly engage citizens in determining them). More recently, attention has turned to the question of how to build wellbeing and progress goals and measures into government through (for example) the budget process, planning and evaluation, citizen consultation and legislation.²

Aims

The key aims of the pilot project were

- to better understand Australian attitudes and beliefs about 'national progress', what it is, what are its most important components and how we should measure it;

¹ Director ANDI Ltd and Hon Senior Research Fellow, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne. This report draws extensively on earlier work by Dr Matthew Courtney and Dr Kate Lycett, members of the ANDI Pilot project team. Latest revision: 22-8-21.

² For further background on ANDI and the global and Australian context, see 'References' below.

- to trial a community-research process for developing an index and key indicators of progress in two key domains, education and health, as a model to guide the development of the broader ANDI Index across 12 more comprehensive domains.

Method

The national survey was undertaken as part of an eight-stage 'Draft ANDI Indexing Process' summarised below and elaborated in Appendix A1.

1. Identify core values and meanings for societal progress, drawing on sources including UN Declarations and Covenants, relevant Australian statements and declarations and the report of the International Panel on Societal Progress etc to derive a general notion of societal progress.
2. Review local and international projects to develop frameworks for measuring societal progress, focusing on methodology, citizen engagement, most common progress domains measured, and application in practice, especially by government.
3. Convene 'Domain Advisory Groups' to bring together academic, policy and community experts to agree draft domain goals and measures for overall progress and specifically for health and education.
4. Convene community focus groups to discuss perceptions of (1) societal progress and its most important domains and outcomes, and (2) perceived priority outcomes for health and education.
5. Carry out a representative national survey to identify broad attitudes on progress and its measurement (including citizen engagement in determining progress measures) and to rank the importance of draft progress domains and draft indicators in health and education.
6. Reconvene domain advisory groups to review survey results and propose draft indicators.
7. Convene statistical advisory groups to review indicators, apply weighting and standardisation and develop index.
8. Compile final report.

The design and content of questions for the national survey (stage 5 above) were guided by the earlier review, advisory and focus group processes and where possible, survey models developed in comparable projects.

The questions were included in a panel survey carried out for ANDI in June 2018 by the Social Research Centre (Australian National University) as part of its regular LinA study.

The LinA study is an ongoing month-to-month survey of about 2500 randomly sampled adults from across Australia based on randomly dialed telephone numbers. This method of sampling is at the forefront of sampling methodology worldwide and provides researchers with very high levels of confidence that the statistical results identified in the sample can be generalisable to the broader Australian population.

A total of 2489 participants were invited to participate, and 1853 respondents completed the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 74.45 percent.

To maximise the findings of the study, the ANDI project team decided to present some questions (those needing a higher level of certainty) to the broader sample of approximately 2500, and other questions to random sub-samples of approximately 615 persons. Both approaches were deemed to provide the team with a high level of confidence, as described above.

Survey questions and results

The survey’s six questions were divided into two broad categories:

- Three general questions to identify broad attitudes on progress and its measurement (including citizen engagement in determining progress measures)
- Three specific questions aimed to rank the importance of suggested progress domains and suggested progress outcomes in health and education.

Questions and results are reported below.

1. Are we making progress as a nation?

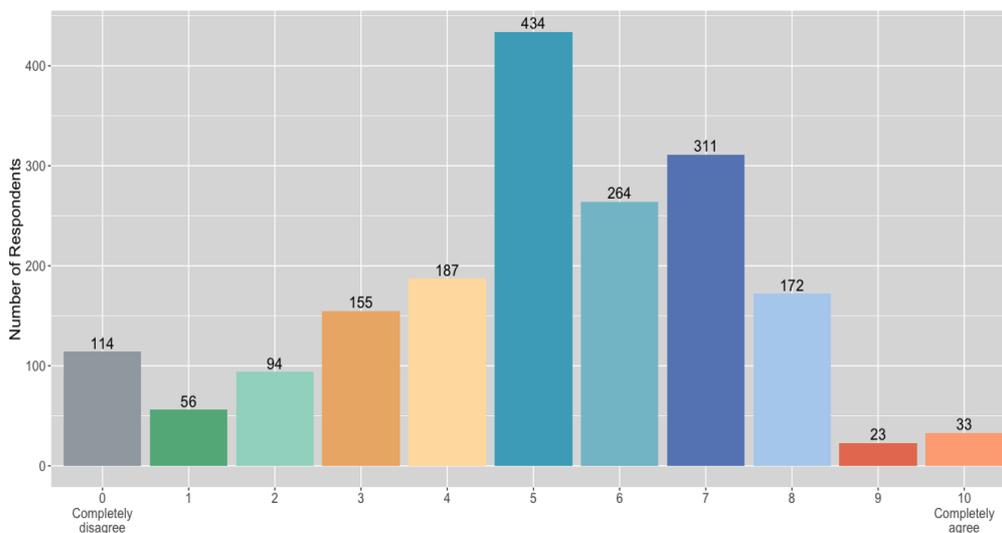
Respondents were first asked to provide a general assessment of Australia's national progress by indicating their agreement or disagreement with the statement

'Australia is currently heading in the right direction'.

Response options ranged from 0 ('completely disagree') to 10 ('completely agree').

The results suggest that Australians are fairly evenly divided on this question, with a mean rating of 5.05. Around 44% gave positive and 33% negative responses, while a very large group of 24% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 1. **Perceptions of Australia’s overall progress 2018**



2. How should we measure progress?

Respondents were asked the following question:

As you may know, all countries measure their progress and development mainly through economic statistics such as Gross Domestic Product or GDP. GDP counts all of a country's money-based income and production of goods and services,

Which of the following points of view on the best way for the government to measure our country's progress and development is closest to your own?

1. *The government should measure national progress using the money-based, economic statistics*
2. *Health, social, and environmental statistics are as important as economic ones*

This wording was similar to that used in a series of international surveys of 11 countries by GlobeScan International over the past decade.

In our survey, around 86.7% of respondents chose option 2.

This can be compared with the 2020 GlobeScan survey which showed that an 11-country average of 72% of respondents (81% for Germany, 77% UK, 69% Australia, 59% China) favoured replacing GDP with broader indicators of national progress including health, social and environmental statistics. In the 2013 survey support in Australia for option 2 was even higher, at 81% (economic insecurity during Covid-19 may account for the downturn in 2020).³

Thus, we can safely conclude that a strong majority of the Australian adult population believe that health, societal, and environmental measures are as important as economic measures in tracking Australia's progress and development.

3. What are the most important issues for national progress?

In this section of the survey, Australians were asked their views about the most important issues or areas of life ('domains' in the common research language) which should be measured when assessing the overall progress and wellbeing of the nation.

The survey question presented respondents with 12 diverse areas of life that might be considered important for Australia's progress, briefly defining each one as indicated below and then asking them to rate the importance of each on a scale from 0 ('not at all important' to 10 ('extremely important'). The order of each statement to respondents was randomized to avoid order bias.

The twelve domains presented correspond with ANDI's twelve draft progress and wellbeing domains. They were broadly selected from the results of focus groups undertaken in 2013 and 2018 and a review (by Saunders and Wong) of the most common domains used in national, OECD and ABS progress measurement frameworks as part of the 2013 report, 'Australia's Progress in the 21st Century' co-sponsored by the Australian Council of Learned Academies'⁴.

³ <https://globescan.com/global-survey-most-prefer-expanding-gdp-health-education-environmental-data/>

⁴ <https://acola.org/australias-progress-21st-century/>

The question and definitions are set out below.

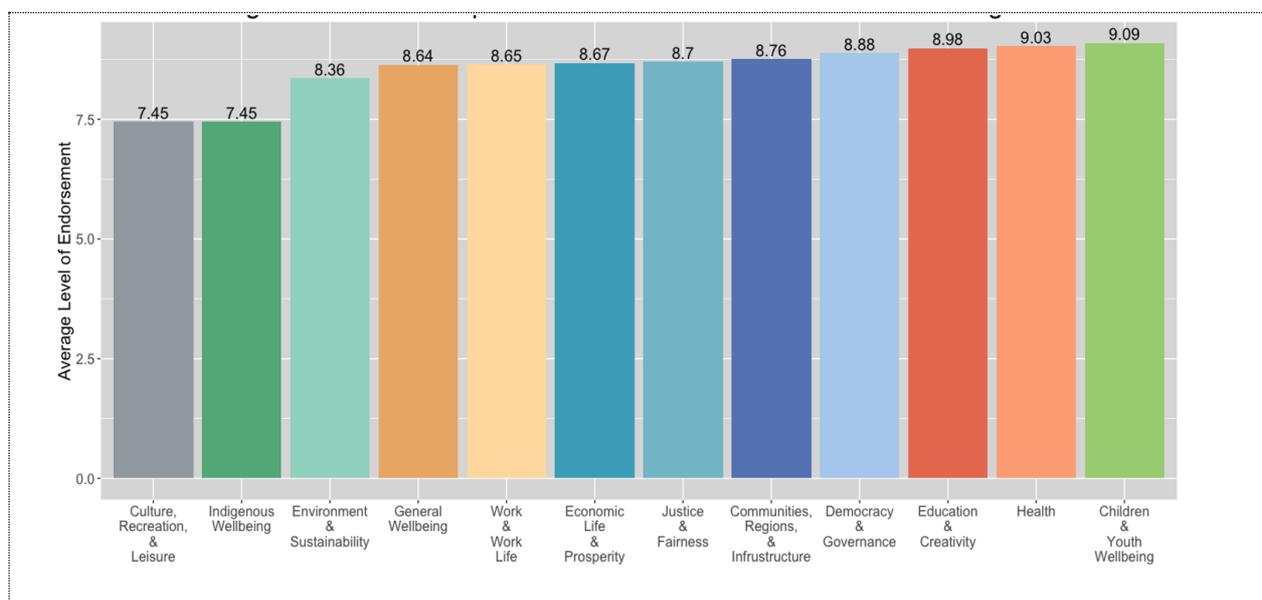
Listed below are some areas or factors that different people might think are important for Australia's progress. Please indicate how important you think each of these areas is in measuring our national progress on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is 'not important at all' and 10 is 'extremely important'. How important is...?"

- 1. Children and youth wellbeing** – *Children and young people growing up happy, healthy and secure, and able to achieve their full potential*
- 2. Communities, regions and infrastructure** – *Strong communities and regions, good local facilities, well planned cities, high quality transport, sense of community, good local governments*
- 3. Culture, recreation and leisure** – *Ensuring people have access to a range of arts, cultural, sporting, and leisure activities, preserving and enhancing cultural and natural heritage, celebrating diversity and different cultures*
- 4. Democracy and governance** – *A fair and democratic government, giving people an equal voice, governments that are honest, trusted and effective, and that plan for the future and consult the community*
- 5. Economic life and prosperity** – *A prosperous, balanced, productive and diverse economy that provides useful products and services, creates valued and fairly paid jobs and skills and is sustainable*
- 6. Education and creativity** – *High quality education that is affordable, accessible and inclusive for all ages, teaches basic skills, life skills and community values, promotes innovation, creativity and lifelong learning.*
- 7. Environment and sustainability** – *Tackling climate change, protecting and enhancing our lands, forests, green and public spaces, seas and rivers, reducing pollution and waste, developing renewable energy*
- 8. Health** – *Promoting physical and mental health at all ages, access to high quality, affordable healthcare, local health services, healthy eating, dental health, and reducing obesity and alcohol and drug consumption*
- 9. Indigenous wellbeing** – *Supporting Australia's indigenous people to enhance their health, wellbeing, educational and economic opportunities, strengthen their autonomy, and promote their culture and history*
- 10. Justice and fairness** – *Equal legal treatment and full human rights, ending poverty, fair distribution of wealth, support for the disadvantaged, equal opportunity, reducing violence and crime*
- 11. General wellbeing** – *People are happy and satisfied with their lives, have good friends, relationships, a sense of purpose, good values and trust each other.*
- 12. Work and work life** – *Availability of work, support and retraining, decent, secure jobs with fair pay and good working conditions, supportive unions, work-life balance*

The results are set out in Figure 1 below and they show that:

- All of the 12 domains were considered important to very important (7.45 to 9.05/10)
- The five most important domains (between 8.76 and 9.09) were in order: Children and youth wellbeing; Health; Education and creativity; Democracy and governance; Communities, regions and infrastructure
- Economic life and prosperity falls in the lower half of issues considered most important for progress and wellbeing. This is consistent with many international surveys of the key factors of wellbeing, as Table A shows.

Figure 1. Perceived importance of various domains for national progress 2018



By way of comparison, the OECD Better Life Index consists of 11 domains, and it reports on the importance ranking of each these for OECD countries (compiled from the self-selecting input of BLI users in each country).⁵ Results for Australia are shown in Table A below.

Table A. OECD Better Life Index: Domain importance rankings (Australia)

BLI domain	Rank
Work life balance	1
Health	2
Education	3
Life satisfaction	4
Safety	5
Housing	6
Income	7
Environment	8
Jobs	9
Community	10
Civic engagement	11

4. Relative importance of education progress outcomes

A set of questions concerning the relative importance for national progress of twelve possible outcomes in education was developed in consultation with the Education Domain Advisory Group (established under the process indicated above) and a review of comparable national and international education progress indicators. The questions were presented to a random subsample of 620 participants, who were asked about the degree to which they thought each

⁵ <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/responses/#AUS>

outcome was important for national progress for education, below. The order of the outcome statements was randomised. Response options ranged between 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important).

EDUCATION PROGRESS

To help us measure Australia's progress in education, we want to find out which educational outcomes you think are the most important. Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not important at all' and 10 is 'extremely important', how important are the following for measuring progress in Australia?

- a. *Ability in language and maths (e.g. reading, writing, numbers)*
- b. *Well qualified, high status teaching professionals*
- c. *Physical fitness (ability to move and play)*
- d. *Teaching community engagement and life skills*
- e. *Ability to cooperate and solve problems (teamwork)*
- f. *Teaching cultural and historical awareness (e.g. indigenous and other)*
- g. *Fair and affordable access to education (including pre-school to higher education)*
- h. *Different groups in society (gender, ethnicity, income etc) should have equal educational outcomes*
- i. *Opportunity for non-university technical training and apprenticeships*
- j. *Fair access and opportunity for people with disability*
- k. *Opportunities for workplace education and training*
- l. *Engagement and participation in lifelong learning*

The results are shown in Table B below, which suggests that

- All twelve suggested education outcomes were ranked as important
- Fair and affordable access to education is seen as most important outcome for national progress by the Australian adult population
- Teaching cultural and historical awareness was rated at 7.28 on the 0 to 10 scale suggesting that, whilst still important, it was considered less important among the set of educational goals.

Table B. Relative importance of education goals for national progress

Outcome	Rank 0-10
Fair and affordable access to education	9.11
Ability in language, maths and science	8.88
Fair access and opportunity for people with disability	8.78
Opportunity for non-university technical training	8.76
Well qualified, high-status teaching profession	8.52
Opportunities for workplace education and training	8.52
Teaching of community engagement and life skills	8.42
Ability to cooperate and solve problems	8.40
Equal education outcomes for groups	8.36
Engagement and participation in lifelong learning	7.96
Physical fitness	7.71
Teaching cultural and historical awareness	7.28

5. Relative importance of health progress outcomes

As with the education question, the question on the relative importance for national progress of possible health outcomes (below) was developed in consultation with a Health Domain Advisory Group and after a review of comparable national and international health progress indicators. The questions were presented to a random subsample of 621 participants, who were asked how important they thought each outcome was for national progress, using the format below. As with education, the order of the health outcome statements was randomized, and response options ranged between 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important).

HEALTH PROGRESS

To help us measure Australia's progress in health, we want to find out which health outcomes you think are the most important.

Using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not important at all' and 10 is 'extremely important', how important are the following for measuring progress in Australia?

- a. Equal and affordable access to health care services*
- b. Good physical health*
- c. Good mental health*
- d. Health services that support individuals during life changing stages (e.g. childhood to adolescence, motherhood, old age)*
- e. Health information and services that are easy to understand and use, and lead to better health decisions*
- f. Health services that recognise the importance of community*
- g. Health policies based on the latest evidence*
- h. Health services that allow for diversity (e.g. refugees, disability)*
- i. Quality health care services (e.g. efficient and timely)*
- j. Equal and affordable access to quality aged-care*
- k. Health services that are focused on prevention and promoting healthy living*
- l. Time to participate in, and access to, a healthy lifestyle*

The results are shown in Table C below, which suggests that

- All twelve suggested health outcomes were ranked as important to very important (7.68 to 9.03 out of 10)
- Good mental health was viewed as the most important facet of health for Australians.
- This was followed by (in order): equal and affordable access to health care services; good quality and efficient health services; accessible and good quality aged care services; illness prevention and promotion of healthy living
- 'Health services that allow for diversity' was ranked as the least important, though still significant, at an average of 7.68.

Table C. Relative importance of health goals for national progress

Outcome	0-10
Good mental health	9.03
Equal, affordable access to health services	8.93
Quality, efficient, timely health care services	8.79
Equal and affordable access to aged care	8.69
Health services focused on prevention promoting healthy living	8.64
Good physical health	8.56
Improved health information enabling better health decisions	8.48
Time and access to healthy lifestyle	8.43
Health services supporting life change stages	8.14
Evidence based health policies	8.14
Community responsive health services	8.03
Health services for diverse needs (i.e., disability, refugees)	7.68

6. Citizen participation in developing new progress measures

A feature of many national projects aiming to build new progress measures has been the development of diverse and innovative programs to engage citizens in the process. Both the OECD and the EU have recognised the importance of this from a democratic standpoint. Appendix A sets out a summary of findings on this subject from a wide range of national and international reports and commentators.

Community engagement is an essential component of the ANDI project, and so to gauge likely support for this, the final question in our survey asked respondents the following question:

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN NEW PROGRESS MEASURES

As part of the ANDI project, a national community engagement program is being developed to enable as many Australians as possible to express their views about what is important and what should be measured for Australia's future progress and wellbeing.

This might include (for example): completing a survey (like this one); taking part in a local meeting, watching a film or video; posting a blog; voting on possible priorities; or being on a panel of citizens.

Would you be interested in further participating in this community engagement program in one of these ways?

In response, 76.3% agreed that they would be interested in further participating.

This figure is consistent with the experience of countries like Canada and New Zealand, where citizen engagement in measuring community and national progress has been built in to the development of such measures and adequately resourced and promoted.⁶

⁶ See for example the engagement process for the Canadian Index of Wellbeing: <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/about-canadian-index-wellbeing/history>

The lesson for Australia is that, with proper planning and resources, and a trusted and accessible process, Australians are more than willing to have their say on this meaningful question for all citizen: ‘What kind of Australia do we want?’

References

(See also other references cited in Appendix A2)

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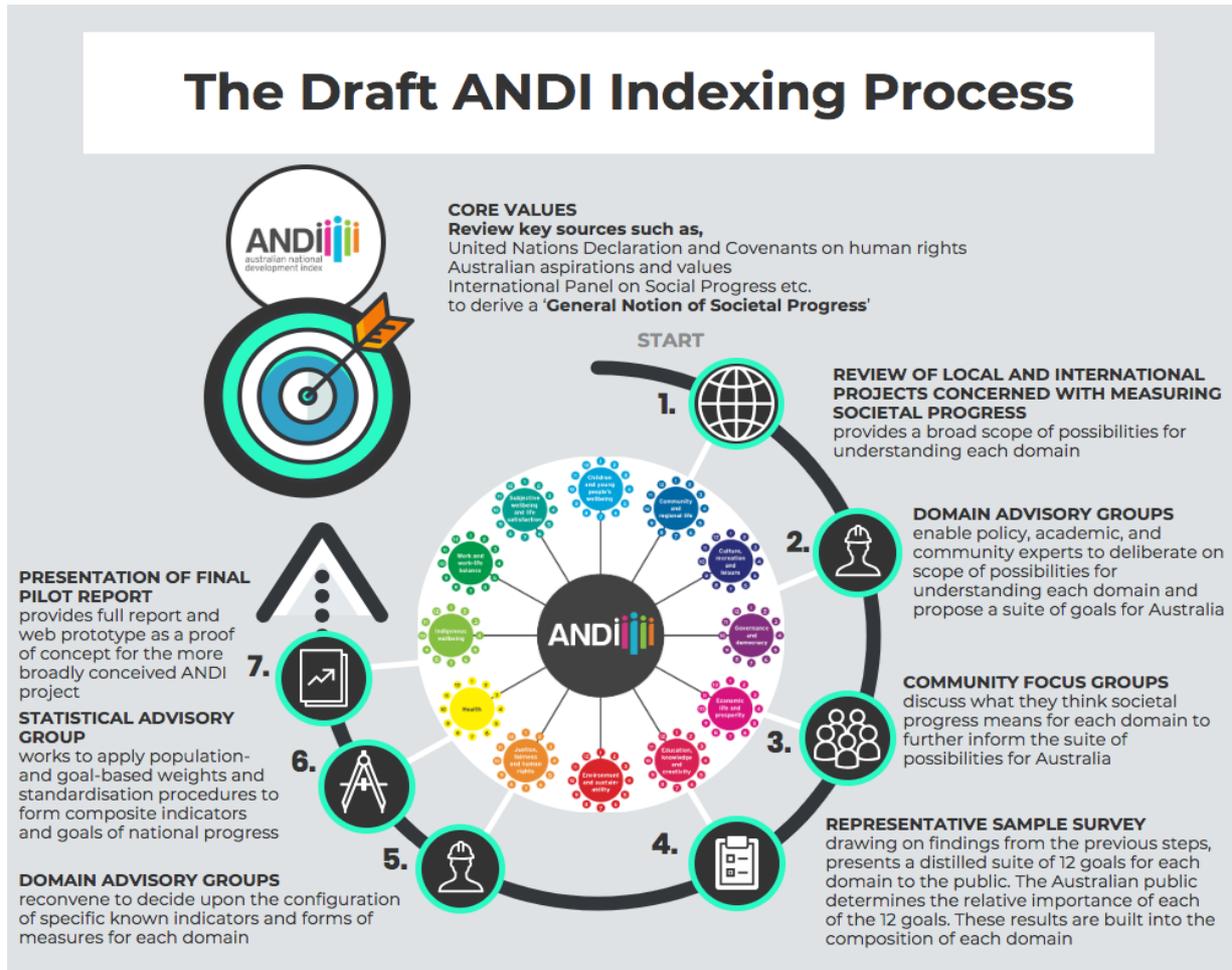
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APPENDICES

Appendix A1. Draft ANDI Indexing Process



Appendix A2: The role of citizen engagement in developing progress measures

(This Appendix is taken from Salvaris 2019, 'New Zealand's wellbeing framework: an Australian perspective: A peer review report of New Zealand's proposed new wellbeing framework 'Indicators Aotearoa New Zealand – Ngā Tūtohu Aotearoa', commissioned by Statistics New Zealand)

Selecting progress measures is a political and democratic process:

'The selection of key indicators is a political process that needs to be carried out in a democratic way, i.e. with the involvement of all components of the society (government, opposition, trade unions, business associations, civil society, etc.), to provide a broad-based legitimacy to the indicator set, which is a necessary condition if it is to be trusted by citizens and recognized as shared knowledge.'

(OECD, 2009, 'Measuring the progress of societies: what is the relevance for Asia and the Pacific', Paper to UN ECOSOC, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific)

Social reporting must measure what society cares about:

'The fundamental aim of social reporting is to measure what is important – what a society cares about. In order to do this, agreement is needed about what to measure.'

(New Zealand, Social Report 2001)

The democratic challenge for statisticians:

'We are now in an era where we need statistics to be a tool of democracy, to democratize in terms of what is counted, how the data is made available and then how it is used in much richer conversations with the public about policy choices.'

(Mulgan, The democratic challenge for statisticians OECD 3rd World Forum, Busan, 2009)

National community engagement is needed to identify shared progress goals:

'At the national level, round-tables should be established with the involvement of stakeholders to identify and prioritise those indicators that carry the potential for a shared view of how social progress is happening and how it can be sustained over time.'

(Stiglitz et al, 2009, p 18)

The key role of civil society in measuring progress needs careful design:

'Civil society, together with the other social and institutional players, should determine the arenas in which the progress of societies is to be gauged, identifying specific areas and salient facts in the economic, social and environmental spheres. This can only be done by means of dedicated information, consultation and participation instruments.'

(European Economic and Social Committee on GDP and Beyond, EU, 2012, p 3)

New progress measures must involve the whole society:

'The fundamental aim of social reporting is to measure what is important - what a society cares about. In order to do this, agreement is needed about what to measure. This involves making some explicit value judgements about what quality of life means, and about the characteristics of society considered desirable.'

(Social Report, New Zealand, 2001)

Good social progress measures strengthen democracy and citizen engagement:

'The availability of statistical indicators of economic, social and environmental outcomes and their dissemination to citizens can contribute to promoting good governance and the improvement of democratic processes. It can strengthen citizens' capacity to influence the goals of the societies they live in through debate

and consensus building, and increase the accountability of public policies.’

(OECD World Forum on Statistics, Knowledge and Policy, Istanbul, 2007)

Rethinking measurement aims to promote public debate:

‘Part of the objective of rethinking our measurement systems is to generate a national and global dialogue on what we care about, whether what we are striving for is achieving what we care about, and whether this is reflected in our metrics.’

(Joseph Stiglitz, ‘From Measuring Production to Measuring Well-being’, Presentation to the Productivity Commission, Melbourne, July 29, 2010)

Policy legitimacy and public values:

‘The legitimacy and sustainability of any major policy decision increasingly depends on how well it reflects the underlying values of the public.’

(Judith Maxwell et al (2003) “Giving citizens a voice in healthcare policy in Canada,” in British Medical Journal. May 10; 326(7397): 1031–1033.)

Progress measures must reflect community values and input:

‘Decision makers at all levels need relevant, credible and legitimate information on which to base their policies. In complex societies progress must be measured as a broader rather than narrower metric in order to more accurately reflect the aspirations of the entire society, possible trade-offs and synergies of societal development. In order to create these measures, collaborative efforts are needed from a range of stakeholders including technical experts and scientists, policy makers and the lay public. The validity and relevance of the measures are largely dependent on the validity and inclusivity of the process used to create them, and good processes often have lasting “ancillary” benefits in society that go beyond those benefits that may flow from the product, i.e. the publication or implementation of indicators in the political decision making processes. However, in the overall “Beyond GDP” debate one rarely reads about processes and rather about the direct outcomes of various projects. So the discussion tends to narrow down to the discussion of the validity of specific indicator sets.’

(Bertelsmann Foundation, Germany, 2011, ‘People, Participation, Progress - Why Process Matters For Measuring Progress’)

Progress goals relate to people’s values:

The goals of progress are inherently associated with people’s values. If these goals are made explicit, values-based assumptions are not hidden by being embedded in the concept of progress. The proposed goals can be clearly identified and assessed for their usefulness. In other words, isolating goals makes the values being expressed transparent. Statistical measures have the potential to influence societal goals and must in some ways anticipate these in order to remain responsive to contemporary concerns. However, it is in fact the role of the Australian community and government to define the goals inherent in Australia’s progress, not the role of statisticians. So, isolating goals assists by making this role separation clear.

(ABS, 2010, Future Directions in Measuring Progress, p 10)

Progress indicators reflect societal values and choices:

‘Indicators reflect societal choices, values and goals. We measure what we think is important and our choice of indicators implicitly defines our goals.’

(Costanza, Hart, Posner and Talberth, 2009, ‘Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress’)

Progress indicators first need clear goals:

A government or society that does not have clearly agreed goals cannot readily formulate agreed indicators of good or bad trends. The first step in developing a system of indicators is therefore to identify very clearly the goals by which events and trends can be measured.

(Raymond Bauer 1966. ‘Social Indicators’)