

Innovation has been a buzzword of Malcolm Turnbull's government, but the public reception of this message has been less than enthusiastic.

Innovation and Science Australia chair Bill Ferris launched a report this week setting out a plan over five key areas – education, industry, how government can be a catalyst for change, research and development, and culture and ambition – that seeks to put Australia into the top tier of innovation nations by 2030.

Ministerially, the innovation area has had much churn, with five ministers since Turnbull became prime minister. Ferris acknowledges this has meant losing some continuity but is pleased with the dramatic increase in venture capital supply under initiatives that have been launched.

Education, he says, is key to the blueprint – it's a complex area requiring "a cocktail of things" to be tackled. This includes a change in the way that industry supports schools, and an urgent review of the VET sector, which has suffered from educational snobbery.

In industry policy, Ferris says there is a pressing need to rebalance business incentives to use more direct incentives to ensure Australia is competitive. He also says the government's announcement to increase defence exports should focus on innovative products.

The blueprint also includes proposals to improve the commercialisation of research, a quest of successive governments.

Then there is the matter of moonshots – big ideas that would make Australia stand out – such as promoting genomics and precision medicine to help make "Australia the healthiest nation on Earth".

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

Politics podcast: Bill Ferris on Australia's innovation mission

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