

BEYOND ATAR: A PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE

An Australian Learning Lecture Position Paper on transforming the transition from school to higher education, life and work.

SEPTEMBER 2019

WRITTEN BY MEGAN O'CONNELL, SANDRA MILLIGAN
AND TOM BENTLEY

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CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT WORKING GROUP

- Dr Sandra Milligan, Director and Enterprise Professor, Assessment Research Centre, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne (Working Group Chair)
- Chris Wardlaw, Chair, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority*
- David de Carvalho, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) (Until February 2019)*
- Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School*
- Dr David Howes, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority*
- Kathe Kirby, Education Consultant*

**Members of the working group participated in discussions that contributed to the development of this paper. However, being listed as a member of the working group does not constitute or imply endorsement in whole or in part of the views and/or recommendations expressed in the paper*

PATHWAYS WORKING GROUP

- Tom Bentley, Executive Director (Policy and Impact), RMIT University (Working Group Chair)
- Professor Peter Dawkins AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University*
- Professor Linda Kristjanson AO, Vice-Chancellor & President, Swinburne University of Technology*
- Karen Money, Principal, Melbourne Girls' College*
- Dr Gillian Considine, National Manager, Research and Evaluation, The Smith Family*
- Professor Duncan Bentley, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Swinburne University of Technology*

**Members of the working group participated in discussions that contributed to the development of this paper. However, being listed as a member of the working group does not constitute or imply endorsement in whole or in part of the views and/or recommendations expressed in the paper*

AUSTRALIAN LEARNING LECTURE PROJECT TEAM

- Ellen Koshland
- Penny Underwood
- Eleanor Bridger
- Trish Browne

ABOUT THIS PAPER

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www.all-learning.org.au

info@all-learning.org.au

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FOREWORD

For Australian education, a new imperative is emerging. Deep changes in our community, the economy and work futures mean that all young people need to have different options to transition from compulsory education into adult life, further education and citizenship.

There are two reasons why there is a greater urgency than before. First, the nature of success for all students has radically changed and we are falling behind in shifting to adapt to those changes.

Secondly, the cost of not succeeding is falling ever more heavily on those students with lower level skills and lack of confidence.

Schools, educators, systems have been valiantly trying to move in the right direction. But as long as the markers of success reinforce old standards, the degree of change will continue to be limited and efforts counterproductive.

I commend this position paper to you in the spirit of contributing a coherent argument to the debate about this important area of education.

Beyond ATAR: a proposal for change represents an extended collaboration between many sectors of education which began in May 2018 when the Australian Learning Lecture hosted a forum in conjunction with Mitchell Institute at the Melbourne office of PwC. The forum attracted 50 participants, including three Vice-Chancellors, representatives from TAFEs, schools, Universities Australia, ACER, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, the NSW Department of Education, Grattan Institute, Foundation for Young Australians, the Smith Family and other community organisations. Dozens of submissions were received. Among this diverse community was a keen commitment to progress this issue, and a shared appetite for change.


In this paper, we outline an ambitious vision to empower all young people to navigate their individual journeys from school to a productive, thriving adulthood. At present, many young people falter without a clear understanding of how to realise their strengths and achieve their aspirations. Instead, we need to foster every one of their talents.

Our ambition is informed by international research and benchmarks that identify what we want our young people to know, become and be able to do as they leave school. It is based on the premise that recruiters and selectors also need to use better information and form better transition arrangements to align young people's ambition and skill to education, training and employment opportunities.

We articulate three proposals for systemic change: how we treat the 15-19 phase of education; how we identify and measure the capabilities that all young people need, providing a fuller reflection of student achievement, and, how we ensure the tertiary system is accessible to all learners.

We acknowledge that these proposed changes, although relatively simple in concept, have far reaching implications for senior secondary education, post-school recruitment and selection processes, and flow-on effects for middle school curriculum, career guidance and resource allocation.

Education is more critical than ever to success in life. Education needs to shift further to ensure all Australian learners thrive in our changing world. With many official reviews and multiple efforts taking place, we must all make sure this moment of change counts.



Ellen Koshland

Founder

Australian Learning Lecture

AT A GLANCE

This position paper, *Beyond ATAR: a proposal for change*, articulates our ambition for improving the education journeys of 15-19-year-olds. It proposes three inter-locking proposals to improve the experience and life outcomes of all young people. This paper seeks to make explicit the implicit acknowledgement and action by curriculum authorities, schools and education providers across the country to position young people better for a changing future. The proposals build on current work in jurisdictions across Australia and internationally. The proposals are aimed at supporting all young people to thrive in a changing world. We do not provide all the answers, but offer a starting point for cohesive change.

Proposal 1:

THAT the age 15-19 stage of education, from Year 10 to the first-year post school, is re-cast as a specific developmental phase of education in which young people are supported to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities within various domains. All learners should be supported to navigate this phase and find a line of sight into work or further study that can lead them to a thriving adulthood and builds on their unique interests, capabilities and aspirations.

Proposal 2:

THAT a Learner Profile is designed to provide a trusted, common way of representing the full range of attainments of young people during their transition years (within school and beyond) across a broad range of domains. The design of this profile should enable any jurisdiction to map and align it to its own representation of learner outcomes and capabilities, as reflected in its curriculum, reporting and certification systems.

Proposal 3:

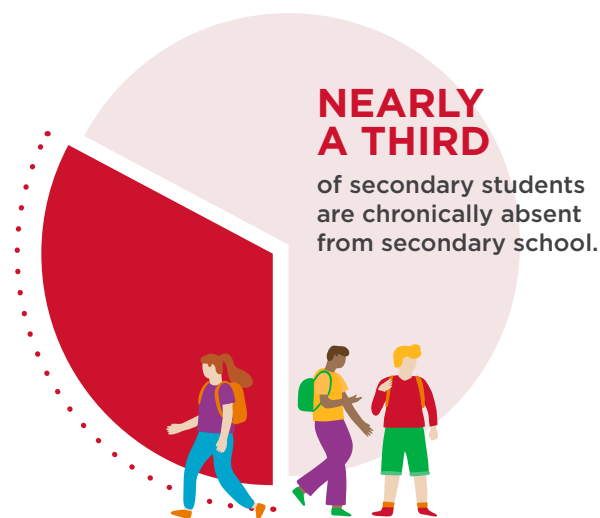
THAT tertiary education providers adopt broader, more transparent entry criteria, design entry pathways and update their admissions processes to better align candidates' interests, capabilities and aspirations with the educational opportunities on offer, and better reflect evidence about the progress and potential of learners.



THE CHALLENGES FACING 15 TO 19-YEAR-OLDS



[Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S (2015), *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*, Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.]



[Australian Government, Productivity Commission. (2019). *Report on Government Services 2019*.]

Supporting all young people to thrive

Australia is in a transition. We have moved beyond the era of universal primary education to near universal secondary education. An era of universal tertiary education is emerging, whereby young people will need to engage in post-school education and learn and relearn throughout their lives. Our education system must be re-configured to support this.

We need to help young people develop human skills - capabilities including creativity and interpersonal skills - so that they are prepared for a lifetime of learning, adaptation and the future economy.

We need to optimise the talent of all our young people. Each young person needs to be supported to develop their unique skills and talents, and to pursue pathways in which they can personally excel.

We have a world class education system in many respects - with over half of our 25-34-year-olds holding a tertiary education we rank amongst the OECD's highest. Many young people are employed or in education compared to our OECD counterparts, however Australia still has nearly twelve percent of its young people who are not engaged in employment or education. We have an opportunity to lift outcomes for all young people.ⁱ

Whilst this paper is focused on 15-19-year-olds, we anticipate the proposals would flow through to benefit younger learners, and in doing so support engagement and transitions. Opportunities for improvement include:

- whilst most young people complete Year 12, around one in five students do not finish school. This figure varies substantially nationwide, with only one in two learners completing Year 12 in some communities. There is an opportunity, and responsibility, to ensure location is not a barrier to student success.ⁱⁱ
- we can improve student engagement and attendance, particularly in secondary school where around a third of school secondary students are chronically absent.ⁱⁱⁱ
- a significant number of young people need better options and support to engage in education and build their enterprise skills - we must ensure the one in four young people at age 24 who are still not fully engaged in education or employment^{iv} find a suitable pathway.
- smoothing the education to work pathway given that for over half of young people the transition to full time work takes up to five years,^v with many young people working a variety of part-time and casual jobs.



[Lamb, S, Jackson, J, Walstab, A & Huo, S (2015), *Educational opportunity in Australia 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*, Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute.]



[Foundation for Young Australians. (2018). *The New Work Reality*. Retrieved from www.fya.org.au.]

Young people who have developed and can explicitly demonstrate skills such as communication and problem solving, and who have significant workplace experience, make the transition to work quicker than others.^{vi}

Not all young people have opportunities to develop these skills or have them recognised if they do. Overall, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, young people with disabilities, rural and remote young people and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders fare worse than their peers in the transition from formal education to employment.^{vii} These factors can intersect and compound.

For over half of young people, the transition to full time work takes up to five years,^{viii} with many young people working a variety of part time and casual jobs. This can delay young people in developing confidence and optimism about their future, making it more difficult for them to forge foundations for working careers, and family and community life.

The idea that there is an orderly, step by step progression from school to higher levels of learning and the workforce is a myth. For some young people the pathway is laid out and simply realised. New analysis from Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) separated young people into five

transition categories. Although the higher education category is likely to be inflated, as the cohort were disproportionately from higher socio-economic backgrounds, the following transition segments are likely to broadly apply to young people:

- higher education to work – around 60 percent of young people made a smooth transition from school to higher education and work
- early entry to work – nearly a quarter of young people, mainly males, undertook a small amount of post-school training and enter work early through pathways including apprenticeships and traineeships
- mix of higher education and VET – around 8 percent of young people, mainly females, had complex pathways and switch between higher education and vocational education and training
- mixed and repeatedly disengaged – around 5 percent of young people transitioned frequently and disengaged from the labour market
- mainly working part time – around 4 percent of young people were likely to leave school early, less likely to engage in post-school education and more engaged in part time work.^{ix}

For many, the learning journey is unclear and complex, with gates and barriers that require navigation.^x Pathways are often marked by changes in direction, doubling back and rethinking. Some of these pathways are expensive, causing young people to narrow their choices. Some options are well known and well documented, others are obscure and need to be uncovered or created. Some post-school options are heavily competitive, some are open. The opportunities are myriad, but hard to identify and access.

LSAY data highlights the many transitions faced by young people by the time they are 25. Most young people will have at least five transitions: the most disengaged young people are likely to transition in and out of school, training and work up to fifteen times by the age of 25.^{xi}

Even when young people can identify their desired career destination, they do not necessarily have the information or financial ability to pursue their ambitions. There is significant wastage in young people embarking on the wrong pathway – for example undertaking a bachelor’s degree when a vocational qualification is needed for their desired career path. The reverse scenario also applies.^{xii} Different funding models and entry criteria make transitions even more complex.^{xiii}

Student aspirations are typically shaped strongly by family and community backgrounds and experience,^{xiv} and opportunity to realise aspirations can be limited by social circumstance. In addition, access to formal career planning is variable across schools and states, with many students finding pathways single-handedly or reliant on networks which may have narrow reach.^{xv} These circumstances can disadvantage young people, even those who are able and ambitious, if they lack good career planning and cannot locate a range of opportunities, along with sources of advice and support, as they navigate their way.

Recent reports emphasise that better career planning is required to support all young people’s transition.^{xvi} Career guidance must reflect the changing contemporary mix of work skills, learning capabilities and community experience that all young people need. Most of the jobs to be created in the next five years will require post-school qualifications, so all young people need to be prepared for a lifetime of learning after school.

NUMBER OF TRANSITIONS BETWEEN AGE 16 AND 25 YEARS BY PATHWAY PROPORTION OF INDIVIDUALS (%)

Number of transitions	Pathway 1 Higher education and work %	Pathway 2 Early entry to full-time work %	Pathway 3 Higher education and VET %	Pathway 4 Mixed repeatedly disengaged %	Pathway 5 Mostly working parttime %
1 to 5	26.8	30.0	10.2	1.2	9.8
6 to 10	52.0	39.2	46.1	28.4	28.6
11 to 15	18.1	22.5	35.8	38.3	37.5
More than 15	3.1	8.4	7.9	32.1	24.1
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: Chi2 test for differences across pathways. Pearson chi2 (12) = 426.8531 Pr = 0.000.

Source: LSAY 2006 (Y06).

[Ranasinghe, R, Chew, E, Knight, G & Siekmann, G. (2019). *School-to-work pathways*, NCVET, Adelaide.]



STUDENT ASPIRATIONS ARE TYPICALLY SHAPED STRONGLY BY FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

and capacity to realise these aspirations can be limited by social connections. Access to career planning is variable across schools and states, with many students navigating on their own or reliant on parent advice and family networks.

Young people and their families often mistakenly view Vocational Education and Training (VET) as principally the conduit to traditional trades, rather than to a wide range of careers including technologically advanced roles and applied learning in the creative industries.^{xvii} Different funding models add further confusion, with funding anomalies between vocational and higher education courses driving student behaviour.^{xviii}

There is a current mismatch between young people's aspirations and their outcomes, and a pool of lost talent. There are also significant economic costs. Each year around 45,000 24 year-olds are not fully employed, in education or training and are unlikely to be fully engaged in education or work for the majority of their working lives – costing the economy near \$19 billion over a cohort's lifetime in lost taxes and increased expenditure on health, welfare and judicial services.^{xix} Some of these young people left school early and didn't find their way back to gain a further qualification. Others finished school and lost their way.

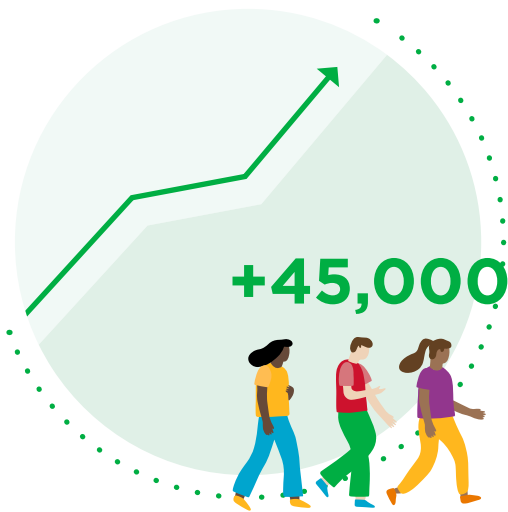
The narrow measure of success

Many schools are supporting the development of the broad student capabilities as articulated in the Australian curriculum both within the classroom and through extra-curricular activities. However, current senior secondary curriculum assessment and certification systems in Australia do not support the recording of a broad range of capabilities such as communication, collaboration and creativity. Senior secondary education reform is needed because the measures of success at senior secondary permeate through secondary schooling, resulting in a narrowing to improve Year 12 results. Reform here will open up space for consistent, aligned reform efforts across education.

The Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) was established to provide a consistent way for university selectors to make distinctions amongst the many highly academically able school leavers. The costs of selection by ATAR are not high for universities, as the examination and moderation costs are borne by schools and governments. However, as each year passes, the ATAR becomes less fit for purpose.

Now however, too many students and schools consider the attainment of a 'good ATAR' to be the dominant goal of this phase of education, with the importance of a good score overshadowing everything else.^{xx} Young people may abandon their real interests, push aside extra-curricular activities and part-time employment to focus on achieving a score. Mental health problems are on the rise as young people feel pressured to achieve.^{xxi}

The ATAR compels young people to compete for a ranked position. The 30 percent of young people who rely on ATAR to enter tertiary education from school might focus their final two years of schooling on this score to the exclusion of developing broader capabilities for the future.^{xxii} The 70 percent of learners who will neither enter university nor use the ATAR for university entry are subjected to narrow curriculum areas and stressful forms of high stakes assessment for little gain. Assessments by high stakes exams can drive pedagogy focused around memorising and recalling content. This problem is understood by curriculum authorities and policy makers as jurisdictions seek to broaden pathways through senior secondary education and create a better combination of outcomes, opportunities and capability for the future, for more young people.^{xxiii}



Each year around 45,000 24 year olds are not employed, in education or training and are unlikely to be in the labour force for the majority of their working lives costing the economy near \$19 billion over a cohort's lifetime in lost taxes and increased expenditure on health, welfare and judicial services.

But despite the ATAR declining in usage from around one in three to one in four enrolments in recent years, it remains the dominant narrative in education and community forums.^{xxiv} The ATAR is seen as the standard for completing a course – even though it is just a rationing tool with the number not reflecting the difficulty of the course in question.

The reliance on ATAR fails to allow for recognition of students with a 'jagged' profile who excel in certain areas while performing adequately in others. The ATAR puts emphasis on achieving a high average in all subjects, limiting appreciation of different kinds of excellence and different rates of progress across varied domains, thus removing incentives to optimise individual talents and pursuits and artificially narrowing pathways for students.

A single number is a thin representation of the outcome of 13 years of schooling. A single number does not capture the attainments and qualities of any student, and is not a reliable predictor of future academic success for students with scores below 70, or success in life.^{xxv} The ATAR is treated as the narrow funnel into university despite rapid growth in alternative entry routes, both for school leavers and for the growing numbers of university entrants who do not apply straight from school.^{xxvi}

ATAR can distort student choice of subjects, and later courses.^{xxvii} The first year of tertiary education, whether vocational education and training or university, is often not well-informed by what was studied in secondary school – with some students repeating content and disengaging without support to change course. ATAR doesn't assist tertiary providers to plan courses based on what students already know. For some learners, their transition extends outside the 15-19 age group.

The value of a high school certificate has diminished in relative terms, as most students gain Year 12. It is not enough to have a Year 12 certificate, and a ranking does not provide unique insights into a student's strengths and passions. A new approach to is needed that encourages and reflects the breadth and diversity of individual student achievement and enables a smoother transition to tertiary education.

THE TIME IS RIPE

There is increasing recognition, across the nation and across different jurisdictions, that the system of certification and assessment Australia uses for senior secondary education is not providing the value for young people that it might and should.

Many Australian industry leaders and educators are trialling and building approaches that do it better.

Several different reviews and inquiries are in train or foreshadowed, each seeking to update the curriculum or qualifications frameworks to help the Australian education system evolve to meet the changing needs of learners, new social and economic circumstances, and to ensure Australia remains competitive globally.

A curriculum review is underway in New South Wales and a new senior secondary pathway will start in Western Australia in 2020.^{xxviii} Current and recent national reviews include the Australian Qualifications Framework Review, the Review of the Melbourne Declaration, and the Joyce Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System.^{xxix}

Various tertiary and business reviews have also focused on the need to reform the tertiary education sector to better support pathways and align with business needs. These include the Business Council of Australia's *Future Proof* and Monash Commission's *Three recommendations for the renewal of post-compulsory education in Australia* which seeks to support lifelong learning,^{xxx} and the Dual Sector Universities *Reforming Post Secondary Education in Australia* Report and Australian Industry Group's *Realising Potential* Report which include a call for modernised qualifications and a fair funding framework across tertiary education.^{xxxi}

The latest National Career Education Strategy, *Future Ready: A student focused National Career Education Strategy*, highlights the need for students to build their capabilities as part of a planned program, to strengthen collaboration between schools, employers and local communities and improve student skills in career navigation and engagement with work environments.^{xxxii}

Achieving a lift in ambitions and outcomes requires some important systemic changes across the Australian educational landscape. To make these changes, we need to re-imagine the ways in which secondary and post-compulsory education work.



Building on current initiatives

Many of Australia's tertiary institutions are now actively experimenting with broadening the pool of candidates and making selection procedures more sensitive to young people's attainments and aspirations, opening new pathways and credit transfer arrangements.^{xxxiii}

These include approaches through universities such as Swinburne's Alternative Tertiary Entry program and RMIT's Urban School which involve students combining VCE units with vocational and higher education units to offer different pathways into higher education.^{xxxiv} ANU has introduced a new entry model which requires students to meet a co-curricular or service requirement in addition to ATAR entry.^{xxxv}

A variety of school-based innovations are emerging, such as Big Picture schools which embrace project based learning with students building a portfolio of achievements to support their university entrance, and the Future Schools Alliance with its focus on individualised student pathways and student-led models of real world learning.^{xxxvi} Other schools are implementing maker spaces and enterprise learning to combine academic and applied learning experiences.

Other models such as school-based apprenticeships and P-techs enable young people to combine school and vocational education with employment. For example, the Hunter Valley P-tech supports students to commence pathways in Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering and Aviation whilst still at school.^{xxxvii}

Systems to support learners also come from outside the schooling system with providers such as the Smith Family and Brotherhood of St Laurence providing wrap-around support to assist disadvantaged families. This includes supporting young people to access mentoring and careers advice throughout high school and, more recently, opportunities for paid work experience via a cadetship during tertiary education, supporting young people to gain vital industry skills and networks.

Intermediary organisations such as Australian Schools Plus and the Australian Business Community Network provide opportunities for industry to support schools through mentoring and other partnering initiatives.^{xxxviii}

This growing range of initiatives creates an opportunity to learn from, co-ordinate and systematise practices that develop student capabilities, in part by addressing barriers to their broader adoption such as narrow metrics of success.



Some commonly asked questions and their answers, some of which might surprise



Don't all countries rank their students for tertiary entry?

No, Australia is alone in ranking students. In other countries students may get a score or scores but are not placed in a rank order. A range of approaches are used internationally. In Singapore students are graded on individual subjects, critical thinking and a group project. The UK uses A levels with early offers based on predicted grades. In the US, Scholarship Assessment Tests are taken on a variety of domains including writing, maths and critical thinking.

Is career planning really necessary before year 12?

Thinking about careers exposure needs to start well before students leave school. Some children unconsciously narrow their options whilst still at primary school. Middle to lower secondary school is the ideal time to actively explore a range of possibilities, while developing the deeper foundations and learning capabilities that will support long term achievement.

Do we know what young people need for the future?

Yes, and no. We know skills currently in demand include interpersonal skills and critical and creative thinking. We also know young people are likely to have multiple roles so need to be adaptable and resilient. Maths and technological skills also heavily feature in skills in demand.^{xxxix} What we don't know is the precise knowledge or content young people will need, which will change over time. Lifelong learning is vital.

Is it to be expected that young people will take a long while to find their path?

Youth unemployment tends to be higher than unemployment for other age groups, but the tremendous lag now being experienced between finishing tertiary education and entering stable, full time employment is worrying. It points to a need for more work- integrated learning so young people can be on their job pathway sooner, and so they can combine different kinds of experience during their extended transition from adolescence into adulthood.

Don't all universities need to recruit students using the same, common, standard criteria?

No, universities have autonomy in how they accept students and a variety of models are already in use. These include direct entry arrangements for candidates with wider educational experience; standardised entrance tests for medicine and teaching; portfolios and special entry provisions for arts and creative areas, and, interviews for high demand courses. Effective entry arrangements need to be clear, fair and equitable in every case. The main objective should be to establish a fair means to ensure a good match between a candidate's capacities and aspirations, and the requirements of the opportunity on offer. Where there is competition for a place, it needs to be allocated using means that are equitable and transparent.

Aren't post-school pathways equal?

Not really. Each young person needs to find the best fit for themselves. One size won't ever fit all. In addition, pathways are not equal in terms of the knowledge you need to find them, or the funding you need to pursue them. Many students do not understand vocational education, and the cost of vocational education including upfront fees can be prohibitive.

Changes to the labour market and the provision of vocational education over the last decade have fragmented the pathways and opportunities on offer to young people as they leave secondary education.^{xl} We know both vocational and tertiary education can improve employment outcomes, but in different ways for different candidates, so we need students to understand the implications of their choices and to relate them to their own aspirations and development.

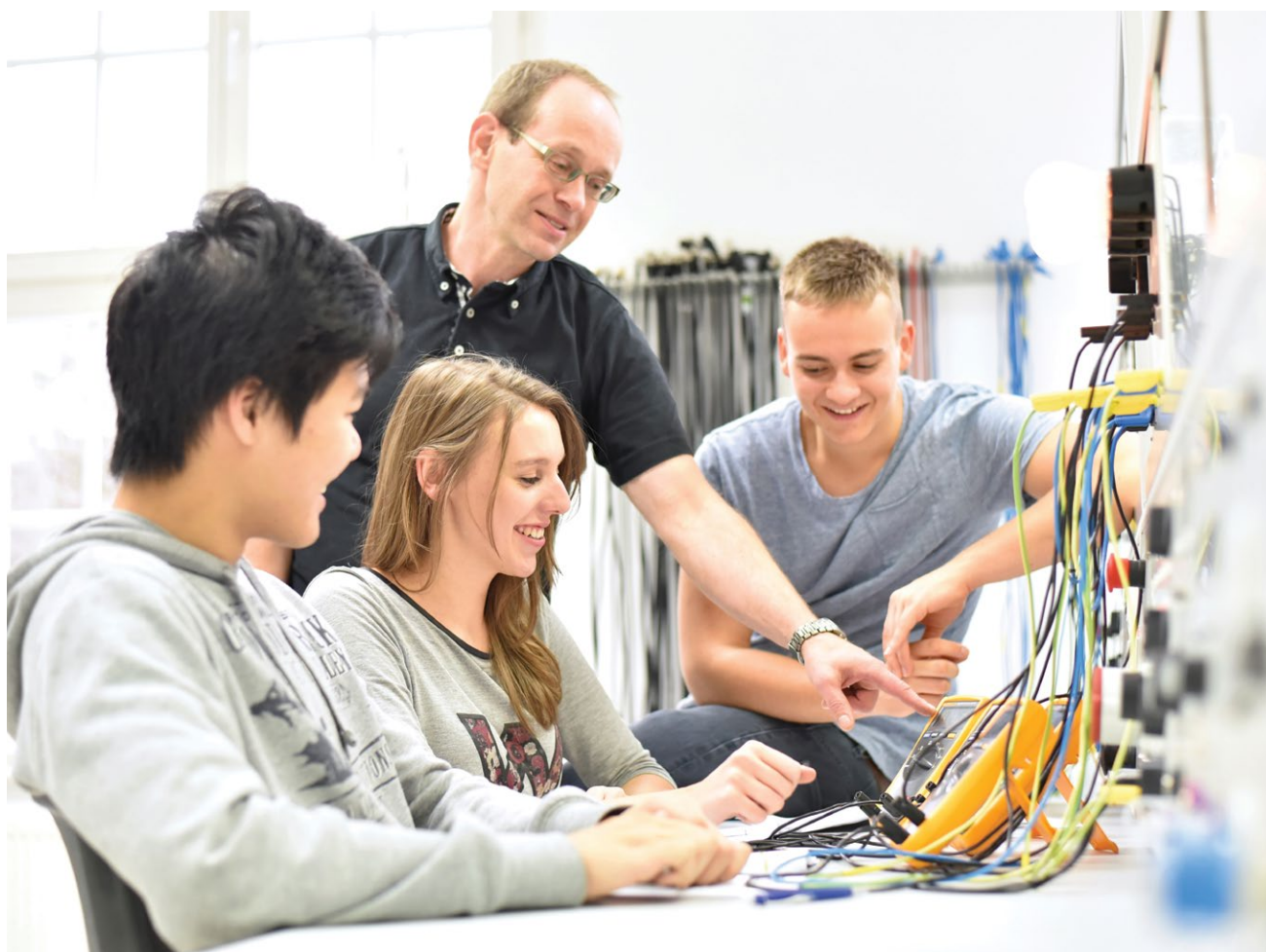
Surely exams are the best way to assess students?

Exams are an efficient way of assessing students in some domains, particularly in academic or cognitive skills. However, exams are not the best tool for assessing complex capabilities in which nuanced responses to specific, practical challenges are desired, or when capabilities such as collaboration, communication, leadership, or enterprise are required.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The second Gonski report argued that every child can grow and succeed in the changing world given the right environments and supports.^{xlii} The Australian Learning Lecture supports this view, and believes that the following principles should underpin action in this area:

- Australian educators and industry must be supported to mobilise efforts in post-compulsory education to realise a higher and better aspiration for all learners. All learners should develop the confidence and capabilities to thrive as citizens and community members, as well as engaged, resilient workers and entrepreneurs.
- every learner needs to develop the mix of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and beliefs they require to navigate a successful transition from school to employment, further study and to thrive in adult life.
- each young person should be supported to find a line of sight for their future, so that they leave school with a clear view of the pathway that aligns with their abilities and interests, and make a realistic transition amidst a changing economy.
- students should be supported and emboldened to be the key drivers of their future, so that they can recognise their own strengths, passion and needs and be empowered as agents of their own learning.
- early funnelling of students that closes off options should be avoided, with students supported to explore long term goals and various options for how they might reach them.



OUR AMBITION

We make three inter-locking proposals to support better outcomes from the age 15-19 phase, with the central focus being the learner profile. They are:

Proposal 1:

THAT the age 15-19 stage of education, from Year 10 to the first-year post school, is re-cast as a specific developmental phase of education in which young people are supported to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities within various domains. All learners should be supported to navigate this phase and find a line of sight into work or further study that can lead them to a thriving adulthood and builds on their unique interests, capabilities and aspirations.

Proposal 2:

THAT a Learner Profile is designed to provide a trusted, common way of representing the full range of attainments of young people during their transition years (within school and beyond) across a broad range of domains. The design of this profile should enable any jurisdiction to map and align it to its own representation of learner outcomes and capabilities, as reflected in its curriculum, reporting and certification systems.

Proposal 3:

THAT tertiary education providers adopt broader, more transparent entry criteria, design entry pathways and update their admissions processes to better align candidates' interests, capabilities and aspirations with the educational opportunities on offer, and better reflect evidence about the progress and potential of learners.

Although these directions are simple and clear, they have system-wide ramifications. Over time, they are likely to shape other areas, including:

- education before 15 years, to ensure young people are retained in the education system and build their aspirations,
- career education including support for families and communities to help every young person to navigate their future; and,
- a transparent framework aligning skills and employment capabilities to make visible the capabilities and experience needed to gain, create and change roles and support multi-directional movement.

These proposals are derived from a review of current innovative practice in Australia and also draw on reforms internationally. They are designed to support the transition of a young person from school to work and entrepreneurship and into a thriving adult life. They will assist in establishing priorities for curriculum reform of senior secondary schooling and improving recognition of student progress during this phase. They will assist more learners to orient their way between education, community and employment options. Lastly, by broadening what success in senior secondary looks like, they will broaden the understanding of recruiters and selectors and young people themselves.



PROPOSAL 1: DISTINCTIVE PHASE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 15-19

We can re-cast the 15-19 phase as a specific stage of education to support each young person to develop the knowledge, know-how, attitudes, values and beliefs they need for successful transition into adulthood.

This age-range has been chosen as it is a formative time where young people start to explore pathways, and need to develop a more complex, better integrated mix of discipline-based knowledge, skills and capabilities as they navigate the transition into adulthood. It is the junction point between the compulsory years of schooling in which national and state curricula apply, and entry into adulthood. It is also a time when young people begin to develop the independence they need to assume full responsibility for themselves as adults. Currently, support for this age group is fractured with no one public institution having clear responsibility for a young person's transition or for ensuring a coherent educational pathway.

These proposals are designed to encompass all young people in the age range, including those currently in school, plus the many who are in alternate pathways learning through work or vocational education, as well as those who take gap years or enter straight into a first year of a higher education institutions. This period is governed by a variety of frameworks including the Australian Qualifications Framework and determined by the requirements of various selectors and recruiters, but no one public institution or government entity has responsibility for the phase. Students choose programs in the hope that the knowledge and skills they gain will be enough for their future ambitions. Even in the most clearly defined interface, between Year 12 and higher education, there is often poor articulation. Some young people repeat what they have already covered, and others flounder, struggling to fill gaps in their learning.

A wider debate is needed to reach a common understanding of what young people should learn during this phase, while ensuring space remains for young people to pursue and develop their particular passions and interests in depth. The F-10 curriculum provides this for learners before senior secondary but there is currently no shared national view of what a post compulsory curriculum should provide. The aim of this is not to restrict students – it is to agree on what core knowledge and/or skills and capabilities will position students for the future. Around this core, students would have freedom to pursue learning that develops their unique strengths and passions.

Equity is crucial

One feature of this phase of schooling is that out-of-school learning experiences play an important developmental and transformative role. These include participation in sports and community services, participation in outreach programs provided by universities or businesses, and participation in employment, social or other activities that provide opportunities for young people to build their capabilities and support social, personal and vocational development.

However, these experiences may not be accessible to all young people since they are not funded as part of the core, can be cost prohibitive and depend on the sometimes limited social resources of families and communities. They are also not currently recognised as part of a student's learning. It is essential that capability development is supported and recognised by the education system.

Aspirations, especially for lower socio-economic students, can become fixed from a young age as expectations are lowered in the face of additional barriers and reduced opportunities. Ongoing exposure to the world of work from primary school is vital.^{xiii} An effective education system enables students to undertake learning and development in different ways that build on their strengths and interests, without prematurely sorting different groups of young people into separate 'tracks' or 'streams'.



Schools are and should remain the core community institutions charged with supporting equity for all students, but interaction with family, community and industry is also important to broaden experience, build capability and access a range of expertise. These experiences need to be harnessed and documented and included as part of a student's learning, with attention paid to ensuring all students can access variety of experiences.

Better career information and guidance is key

Personalised and effective career information and guidance is essential to helping young people identify their strengths and areas for development, and orienting their learning journey. This includes support from an early age to harness and maintain aspiration, especially for children and young people who may not have the family or community resources to support deep exploration of opportunities both within and outside communities. Resources should be made available to help families and communities guide young people to navigate employment and pathways, recognising that not all families and communities have equal access to information and networks.

A personalised, learner-centred approach is required to provide up to date information, advice, guidance and mentoring to help learners to find, plan, access and complete the learning opportunities that best meet their needs. A plan could draw together a variety of school and non-school learning experiences and build on assessment from the earlier years of a student's educational experience.

In the current Australian system, many students, and families have a limited understanding of vocational education and training pathways and applied learning.^{xviii} Perceptions of VET were damaged by the rapid growth in poor provision that accompanied the granting of student loans for VET. Vocational programs and experiences need to be developed and linked more coherently as part of an overall system of pathways. Consideration of funding is a major issue as the cost of training can act as a barrier for students. Organised pathways planning as part of curriculum, such as South Australia's personal learning plan, provide an avenue for consideration and discussion of vocational opportunities. Providers of vocational programs, especially TAFE Institutes providing opportunities for thousands of students across specific geographical areas, need to be able to connect and coordinate more effectively with the range of secondary, post-secondary and industry pathways.

Mastering the core domains of learning

We need to ensure all young people can gain the knowledge, skills and broad capabilities they need to succeed beyond school. Young people need to master learning across a range of traditional knowledge domains, as well as build and have their broad capabilities recognised. These are articulated in the F-10 curriculum as critical thinking, ethical understanding, personal and social capability and intercultural understanding. In addition, young people need opportunities to develop in depth in areas that reflect their own capabilities and interests.

Common learning and attainment levels across cognitive domains and broader capabilities should be articulated and reported on, noting that not all students will achieve in all, or achieve equally or at the same time. There is an opportunity to deepen this learning for students who excel and seek further challenge in a certain domain – for example to enable mastery of higher-level science or music. Differentiation between learners, and recognising higher level attainments, is vital.

This approach is consistent with approaches internationally and within the ACARA curriculum for F-10. Jurisdictions across the world are increasingly developing ‘baccalaureate’ approaches with a common curriculum framework to house the options for young people, without inadvertently prompting students to choose their way out of critical areas of knowledge skills and values that they will need for future adulthood. For example, in Hong Kong, core education requirements are specified, whilst freeing up the time for students to pursue learning that interests them and positions them for their pathways. British Columbia has introduced a new curriculum that focuses on developing character, career and academic skills and assesses students on learning towards standards.

The benefits of these approaches are that all learners can be supported to develop both breadth – reflecting community expectation of what all young Australians should know - and depth of understanding and application in areas of their own choice. Most learners will excel in some domains and not others. Some young people might access more challenging tertiary education opportunities and experiences whilst still in school.

Learners who struggle in a particular domain might be provided with additional support, including through their tertiary education if this was required. In this way education can become both more tailored and more equitable. The model provides added flexibility for learners to pursue their interests and combine learning from a variety of institutions, including workplaces and extra-curricular activities, with the intent of smoothing the transfer to post-school options. It removes the element of chance and luck, whereby some students happen to create the perfect mix of knowledge and skills that suits their learning trajectory whilst others do not.

Next steps

Identifying core elements

- Have a national discussion to explore and establish consensus on the core learning expectations for young people aged 15-19. This requires commonly accepted descriptions of the broad domains of learning, including but going beyond subject mastery, to underpin an age 15-19 phase of education. The aim is not to provide a prescriptive national curriculum but to articulate the domains and attainment levels that will serve learners well, rather than require each learner and system to navigate individually.
- Mapping Pathways: Develop a clear, functional, working map for young people articulating the range of pathways that exist for learners, both within and outside of school. If all young people are to be able to navigate a range of pathways it is vital that these are made visible and coherent across the wider community. Modern methods of visualisation might be employed which utilise big data methods to depict real pathways, not theoretical ones, linked to costs and success rates.

PROPOSAL 2: A LEARNER PROFILE

The Australian Learning Lecture proposes that a nationally agreed Learner Profile is designed and piloted to provide a trusted, common way of representing the attainments of young people during their transition years and an underpinning framework for the collection and communication of common information about the development of each learner. The profile would be designed to overlay existing jurisdictional curriculum, enabling any jurisdiction in Australia to map its own reporting and certification approach to the Profile, and to consider specific forms of alignment and verification over time.

This flexible, framework-based approach to a Learner Profile would enable recognition of a variety of different forms of student achievement – moving away from the current system which preferences examinations. It would provide a broader and better integrated representation of success for all students, by recognising a range of verified achievements that can be related to diverse pathways, criteria and fields of activity. It would provide a unifying document that students take with them through school and beyond.

The profile would provide a snapshot of the level of attainment of each young Australian across a range of domains. It would reflect the breadth of learning we commit to providing as a nation to all learners, and be driven by each young person

according to their strengths and passions. It would be a living document, enabling young people to chart their learning and development, indicating growth over time. To be useful for learners, teachers, recruiters and selectors, a Learner Profile would need an agreed structure and components and be readily understood, in turn reflecting and aligning with the underlying definition of core learning components discussed above. It would be a framework to reflect a diverse range of attainments across a variety of domains, with student choice of subjects and experiences determining which domains are addressed and to what degree. Student attainment would need to be referenced to agreed levels of standards and be well evidenced across a range of dimensions. It would need to represent validly and reliably the cumulation of a student's achievements both in and outside formal education. It could include verified and unverified content. Whilst a variety of bodies could warrant achievement, a rigorous process would need to be followed to ensure authenticity of achievement.

Whilst the profile may seem complex in construction, it would provide a much fuller, more transparent tool to help inform students on their strengths, and selectors to match applicants with courses or positions.



HONG KONG STUDENT LEARNER PROFILE

A fuller picture of student competencies and specialties

3 years academic results
Learning experiences, including a description of the values and attitudes developed through the experiences validated by school

- Lists of awards and achievements
- Performance/Awards gained outside school
- Student's self account, an essay describing the student's learning and development

HARVARD COLLEGE UNIVERSAL COLLEGE APPLICATION

Helping college applications

Includes academic information, extra-curricular, volunteer and employment information, a written statement about an activity, multimedia samples.

External marked reports on students: Academic and Personal characteristics

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

To ensure and recognise well rounded applicants

ANU requires students to attain three of the following seven skills:

- Community Engagement
- Inclusion and Awareness of Diversity
- Communication
- Leadership
- Personal Responsibility
- Teamwork
- Creative and Critical Thinking

Across a range of community, sport, employment and academic activities. Attainment must be validated

Drawing on local and overseas experience

Learner profiles are already being used internationally to support recognition of student attainments, including supporting tertiary selection. The matrix above shows three key examples from which Australia could learn.

Although learner profiles are still in their formative phases internationally, they reflect a desire across the globe to present the full breadth of student development, including capabilities, alongside academic learning.



Presenting the learner profile

Many of the profiling approaches currently in use, such as the University Common Application at Harvard and the approaches used by Hong Kong, provide lengthy details of student achievement across academic and non-academic pursuits. They usually include a lengthy portfolio of student work.

Whilst this enables a deep dive into student achievement, it would make it difficult for selection committees, admissions officers or employers to compare students side by side. The learner profile therefore needs to provide an 'at a glance' overview to enable comparisons whilst providing further details to enable understanding of and discrimination between learners.

One approach is to have a one-page profile, with click-through sections that may hold further evidence, such as portfolios and essays, that a student may wish to include as supportive information.

A variety of methods can be used to graphically represent student learning and attainment.

Following is a snapshot of approaches used in a range of current initiatives.

RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

SUBJECT	GRADE	TRANSFER [NEAR: MEDIUM: FAIR]
English	B	M
Mathematics	B	M
Cert III information, Digital Media & Technology	-	N
Integrated Learning	A	F
Chemistry	B	F
Philosophy	A	M

UNDER PINNING SKILLS

Literacy

Transfer

Numeracy

Transfer

ICT & Cyber

Transfer

CAPABILITIES

ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING

A student profile might include the traditional grades for each subject plus information about the extent to which the student has demonstrated that they can transfer their subject-specific knowledge and skills. Using a similar “traffic light” system, proficiency in literacy, numeracy and ICT/ cyber are indicated on the profile and again an on-balance judgement of the extent to which the student can transfer these skills is included. Evidence of a student’s capabilities are captured on the profile in a snapshot represented by the size of each circle and the underlying components of each available in detail (entrepreneurial thinking in this example). Source: SACE Board of South Australia.

MY STORY

MY LEARNING BY DOMAIN

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Scientific reasoning
- Artistic expression
- Physical education
- Evaluation, critical thinking and problem solving
- Teamwork
- Local and global competence
- Motivation and metacognition
- Social and emotional
- Creativity and entrepreneurship
- Ethics

MY VALUES

A one-page profile, with click-through sections, could represent student learning.



Who would use the learner profile?

Students and schools would use a commonly agreed Learner Profile to better understand their own individual strengths and areas for development, referenced against standard levels like the Australian Qualifications Framework or Australian Core Skills Framework. If properly designed on good quality assessments, the learner profile could provide a way to monitor progress over time, and to focus efforts on domains important for a student's future destinations. Student input would be vital to co-design a profile that is easy to complete, can move with students and is a useful tool for student planning.

Student agency is a key, with the profile being used by young people as a tool to build and showcase their capability, and to track their progression through schooling. The profile will support young people to better understand themselves, their study and career options and create plans for pursuing their life goals.

Across Australia there is a need for more informed career guidance to provide young people with lines of sight to potential careers. With better insights into their strengths and passions, young people can make more informed career choices. This is consistent with the recently released National Career Education Strategy

which aims to 'ensure career education meets the individual needs of every student, identify students' individual passions and strengths to support their future pathway choices and recognise student diversity to support the career aspirations of all students.'^{xiv}

The learner profile could also help selectors and recruiters to match candidates to opportunities for work or further study. A recent survey has shown around a third of VET students need a bachelor's degree for their desired occupation, while 45% of bachelor students need a VET qualification.^{xiv} This represents a waste of money, time and talent due to young people engaging in the wrong learning for their desired destination.

Insights garnered through the learner profile would support students to see how their strengths align with industries and roles, and to use these insights to plan their future pathways.

Tertiary providers could set minimum levels of attainment in specific areas or overall that students need to enter a course. Tertiary providers could choose how they use all or elements of the profile, preferencing areas that have higher relevance for their courses and enabling selection of students with key strengths and jagged profiles.

Trust, comparability and opportunity to shine

Care must be taken to ensure that the Learner Profile provides a framework that is at least as reliable and equitable as the ATAR for purposes of candidate comparison and admissions criteria. The reliability and equitability may not be defined in the same way as the ATAR, but instead depend more directly on validation. New assessment technologies such as progressions and standards can be employed, noting that statistical moderation is only one way of seeking validity.

The proposal to make a Learner Profile the centrepiece of reporting, selection and recruitment for young people navigating the transition from school to post-school opportunities thus raises the need to ensure that content on a Learner Profile can be trusted, verified, and keyed to agreed standards. It must be comparable, reliable and scalable as well as authentic.

Any recruiter or selector examining the profiles of any two candidates should be able to trust that similarities and differences in profiles reflect similarities and differences in attainment. This is particularly relevant given that many capabilities which are of interest to recruiters and selectors are more difficult to assess than cognitive learning outcomes, although recent progress has been made assessing complex competencies and credentialing.

Current research^{xlvi} is exploring how equity and excellence can be built and maintained in a Learner Profile which is used as a common standard for recognition of learner capabilities. The challenge is to base it on valid assessments which capture complex competence; to devise credentials which profile a person's capabilities; to retain qualities such as scalability, reliability, fairness, and comparability; and which reference common standards. A new currency for recognition of learning that would suit a Learner Profile is likely to comprise elements such as warranted micro-credentials, learner profiles, developmental and judgment-based assessment, tiered progressions of competence, multi-level standards, and changes in employer and tertiary recruitment.

Care needs to be taken to ensure profiling new kinds of attainments does not deepen existing inequalities in education. The use of profiling should be designed so that it cannot be used to privilege some learners over others, because of inequality in resources. For example, more affluent families could seek to build stronger student profiles by purchasing additional services to help their children to showcase their capabilities. Resourcing would be needed for schools to support all learners to showcase their profiles, including to build on areas of learning that require further development.

It is also important that the design of new selection and recruitment processes does not result in transfer of costs. Selectors should be discouraged from adopting changes in selection and recruitment processes that have the effect of transferring costs of selection and recruitment to young people or their families or to other sectors.

Next steps

- Convene diverse stakeholders with an interest in learning outcomes of young people to design a Learner Profile that would be able to be used as an overlay on current credentials. Student input is essential to ensure that the profile will meet their needs. Consultations and co-design with recruiters, selectors and teachers would also support the profile to be a living document.
- Identify data the Learner Profile could contain, how it will be verified and by whom and the platform on which a profile could be housed to enable student access within and post-school to help inform the design.
- Explore how a Learner Profile should be mapped to individual jurisdictions to ensure it is applicable to the range of curriculum across the country, and that common standards are applied to instil confidence in the document.

PROPOSAL 3: MOVE TERTIARY SELECTION BEYOND THE ATAR

We propose that tertiary education providers adopt broader, more transparent entry criteria, design entry pathways and admissions processes to better align candidates' interests, capabilities and aspirations with the educational opportunities on offer, and better reflect evidence about the progress and potential of learners.

No other educational jurisdiction in the world seeks to rank school-leaving candidates according to a single numerical scale drawn from the complex mix of subjects and certificates on the basis of statistical weighting and moderation. As a ranking, the ATAR says nothing about the other learning capabilities that are increasingly important, about prior achievement, or about potential and application.

The learner profile provides an opportunity for tertiary providers to draw on a richer dataset when selecting applicants – a common framework would support this to occur in a systematic manner. Providers could specify the capabilities needed to complete a course, including and beyond traditional academic measures, and use these as a basis of selecting applicants.

At the same time, tertiary education providers need to provide a breadth of pathways into programs, and to support students more effectively to develop their capabilities and pursue their particular strengths and passions. In providing this breadth, transparency and accessibility remain crucial so young people and their families have a clear view of their paths from school to study and work.

Accelerating moves beyond ATAR

Despite their easy reliance on the ATAR percentage system, Australian universities retain autonomy over their admissions requirements, making offers across different ranges of ATAR scores, and using a growing variety of alternative measures and criteria. Australian vocational education providers also use their own sets of admissions criteria, some related to the Australian Qualifications Framework and to specific industry standards. Employers are increasingly demanding and seeking out evidence of a broader, richer range of experience, motivation and capability among candidates.



Around a third of school leaver applicants are now accepted to university through a pathway that does not solely rely on the ATAR. A range of pathways supplement the ATAR including selection tests to measure attributes and suitability for vocations such as medicine and teaching. Most universities offer Special Entry Access Schemes or Education Access Schemes which enable students who have experienced disadvantage to add bonus points to their ATAR, or to complete pathways programs and articulate into degree programs.

Tertiary institutions seek to select applicants most likely to complete their courses successfully. Many students currently undertake and change courses multiple times, leave university or find they are not suited to their chosen occupation upon graduation. Selection mechanisms that consider an applicant's 'fit' with an occupation and dispositions aligned with course content may improve this.

This proposal for a broader and more transparent admissions system would support the development of a common framework within which approaches to tertiary entry are developed: providing greater certainty and transparency for students; reducing the burden of establishing selection criteria from individual education providers, while respecting institutional autonomy, and; encouraging coherence, transparency and evidence-based decision-making across the whole tertiary sector.

Given the raft of diverse entry mechanisms currently used by tertiary providers across the country, the framework would enable students to more readily understand and meet the requirements for tertiary entry. It would make more visible the range of opportunities and avenues for tertiary entry, rather than students needing to individually discuss alternative pathways with each tertiary provider. This visibility would assist schools and careers guidance practitioners to locate pathways for students, particularly those students who do not qualify for direct entry to their chosen course.

For tertiary providers, a common framework would ease the burden of developing bespoke criteria for courses that are offered in a range of institutions. It would also enable the development of a stronger research base to refine criteria over time and support completions, for example by enabling analysis of cohorts of students by methods of entry and associated supports.

Broadening pathways

Over the next five years, tertiary entrance pathways could also be reconceived to ensure students do not have to repeat learning or experience large gaps in their learning because they do not have access to knowledge, skills or experience that are assumed during secondary education.

A range of specific pathways and transitional support frameworks could accompany enhanced criteria and admissions processes, so students could access specific support and achieve their eventual learning goals in a sequenced manner – for example undertaking bridging courses prior entering a degree program or receiving exemption in a subject if they have already proven capability in that domain. Additionally, new options for the first year of degree and associate degree programs could be explored that provide breadth and defer the streaming process until later in tertiary education. This may require consideration of funding streams to support these pathways.

The opportunities highlighted in this paper for improving pathways and for building a more accurate, helpful picture of student success through a learner profile would, year by year, assist admissions bodies in broadening their entry mechanisms and relating them to a more consistent and transparent decision-making framework.

Next steps

- A joint task force, bringing together different tertiary providers with industry bodies, curriculum and assessment authorities, secondary and vocational education providers, should meet to devise common measures and criteria for entrance to tertiary education programs.
- Tertiary providers work towards a shared and open framework for these common standards for entry, aligned with various educational pathways emerging out of secondary schooling and drawing on rich data available including through the Learner Profile.
- Pathways and transitional supports be developed and mapped to support students to reach learning goals in a sequenced manner.

CONCLUSION

Globalisation and new technologies are already disrupting young people's worlds. Young people need social, emotional and cognitive capabilities to succeed – to gain and retain human connections, to build resilience and learn to learn throughout their lives and across a range of domains. It is imperative that the education system adapts to these shifts, reflects the full range of young people's achievements and supports young people to navigate a breadth of opportunities.

As this paper identifies, education needs to help young people to recognise and build upon their strengths and passions. Unless schools are enabled to build and report upon the breath of young people's strengths many students will fail to develop or recognise the capabilities that will support them to prosper. Guidance and tools are needed to help young people negotiate their learning journey.

By re-casting senior secondary learning outcomes and supporting young people to understand and pursue their strengths, we will support better transition of young people into tertiary education and improve their chances of long-term success.

Beyond ATAR: a proposal for change outlines an ambition to support young people to thrive within and beyond the school education system. It includes three proposals to ensure that all learners can develop the knowledge, know-how, skills, attitudes, values, beliefs and confidence they need.

The proposals are aimed at optimising the talent of all young Australians and supporting their transition to a thriving adult life. They build on existing local and international innovative practice and are aimed at ensuring Australian learners are equipped to navigate the exciting, changing future landscape.

We welcome your feedback on the three proposals:

Proposal 1:

THAT the age 15-19 stage of education, from Year 10 to the first-year post school, is re-cast as a specific developmental phase of education in which young people are supported to develop knowledge, skills and capabilities within various domains. All learners should be supported to navigate this phase and find a line of sight into work or further study that can lead them to a thriving adulthood and builds on their unique interests, capabilities and aspirations.

Proposal 2:

THAT a Learner Profile is designed to provide a trusted, common way of representing the full range of attainments of young people during their transition years (within school and beyond) across a broad range of domains. The design of this profile should enable any jurisdiction to map and align it to its own representation of learner outcomes and capabilities, as reflected in its curriculum, reporting and certification systems.

Proposal 3:

THAT tertiary education providers adopt broader, more transparent entry criteria, design entry pathways and update their admissions processes to better align candidates' interests, capabilities and aspirations with the educational opportunities on offer, and better reflect evidence about the progress and potential of learners.

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"I am very encouraged to witness this effort led by the Australian Learning Lecture. It is of Australian, and global, importance, as witnessed by the OECD International Symposium on Employability and the Learner Profile. ALL's three proposals are an important rethink designed to ensure that all learners can develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and, beliefs they need to thrive. I encourage everyone to read the paper and become involved in a national conversation to drive change."

CHARLES FADEL, CENTRE FOR CURRICULUM REDESIGN

"Australia needs a better way to capture what students know and can do when they leave school. ATAR has real value, but also real limitations. ALL is moving the debate forward with this thoughtful exploration of what might lie beyond ATAR."

PETER GOSS, THE GRATTAN INSTITUTE

"*Beyond ATAR: a proposal for change* stands out for its thoughtfulness, profound knowledge of the substantive issues, and grasp of the practical challenges in realising the bold vision of a post-ATAR future.

It shows how the learning journey is for the individual student, building on her/his strengths, interests and aspirations, not a narrowly defined, institutionally prescribed 'pathway'.

It highlights the tremendous potential of the Learner Profile to develop personal learning journeys and planning and enable new levels of collaboration in education and learning.

The paper resonates strongly with so many different stakeholders, united around a shared desire for real educational change and the holistic assessment of student achievement.

A veritable revolution in education."

NICHOLAS ABBEY, SCHOOL GOVERNANCE NETWORK

"High school aged students know what they want and need out of education and they will disengage if they don't get it. Unfortunately, the structure and delivery of education in Australia is changing far more slowly than the changing needs of students leading to serious education and social challenges in this country. *Beyond ATAR: A Proposal for Change* recommends sensible, clear and immediate actions that can be taken to better reflect what young people want and need from education."

PROF ADRIAN PICCOLI, DIRECTOR, GONSKI INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION

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