



Review of the National School Reform Agreement - June 2022

Submission

Background

Learning Creates Australia is an alliance of people and organisations working to create a unified and equitable senior secondary recognition system. Our ambition is that by 2030 all young people are able to confidently move from school to further learning and work through a senior secondary recognition system that values and formally recognises more of what they are, what they know and can do.

Over the past 3 years Learning Creates has convened and designing prototypes for a broader senior secondary recognition system with 5000 young people, 50 organisations, 50 schools, 7 universities, 2 sectors of employers, 3 First Nation communities and public policy leaders (DGs, Dep Secs, heads of ACACAs etc) across all Australian States. Through this process of convening and prototyping we have:

- clarified systemic features undermining equity in senior secondary schooling and pathways;
- identified leading practice in new forms of learning recognition within schools (in Australia & globally); and,
- developed [a proposal](#) on regulatory arrangements for certification in Australian senior secondary schooling.

Recommendation

There has been significant progress towards national collaboration in senior secondary pathways reform as one of the National Policy Initiatives (NPI) under the National School Reform Agreement (NSRA). However, the intent and ambition of the original agreement is yet to be fulfilled. The next phase of the NSRA should reflect the need to implement this ambition for reform and outline progress against the 20 recommendations of *Looking to the Future*.

The Problem

Our current system is inequitable

The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration clearly states the dual goals of equity and excellence in our education system but unfortunately we know many young people are not meeting minimum standards of achievement or missing out entirely:

- Postcode is one of the most powerful and consistent indicators of educational outcomes (Gonski Institute for Education, 2018)
- Student performance is strongly tied to their socio-economic background (Lamb et al. 2020)
- Lowest performing students are not meeting minimum standards of achievement (Thomson. 2021)
- First Nations students are more than two years behind their peers in maths, science and reading (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021)
- Almost 1 in 5 students are leaving school before the end of year 12 (Lamb et al. 2020) and of those in school between 25% and 40% of students miss around one month of school a year (Productivity Commission, 2021).
- It is estimated there is a significant cohort of around 50,000 young people who are detached from formal education settings and not engaged in formal learning (Waterson, J, O'Connell, M. 2019)

Senior secondary pathways are not fit for purpose

Unfortunately our equity problem is exacerbated by a senior secondary pathways system that is not preparing young people with 21 century skills and capabilities they need to thrive in further education and work.

Two milestone reports *Through Growth to Achievement* (2018) and *Looking to the Future* (2020) both document how senior secondary schooling has largely remained unchanged for decades despite major supply and demand changes to post-school pathways. Both reports also identify how the current system over-privileges university pathways during a time in which the strengths of vocational education and a broader range of flexible learning options are increasingly evident. They also point to the need for much better engagement with employers and the need to broaden the capabilities young people develop to reflect the skills and capabilities required in a 21st century workplace.

Learning recognition is a key lever for senior secondary pathways reform

The way we recognise learning contributes to the problem

What and how we recognise learning is important because it determines post school pathways to further learning and work and has a flow on effect into curriculum and what and how we assess young people at school.

The ATAR is the dominant representation of success in schooling. It was designed in an era where only 11% of the population attended higher education, and then most were from higher socio-economic groups. Today, only 26% of university entrants actually use an ATAR to pursue further learning. It is not utilised in any other post school pathway (Pilcher, S. & Torii, K., 2018). In spite of this narrow utilisation, the ATAR has a disproportionate impact on secondary schooling curriculum and assessment. Our school system is geared to ATAR outcomes even if these are not sufficient indicators of a young person's potential to excel in further learning or work.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed open conversations about the value of measuring young people through the current system. Senior education representatives called on governments to abandon end of year exams and utilise in school assessment instead and in some jurisdictions this occurred. Universities around the country made offers based on year 11 results and employers were forced to engage in other forms of credentials. This has increased the opportunity to attain what has previously seemed impossible: a secondary recognition system that is based on broader recognition of who young people are, what they know and can do.

Broader recognition has the potential to transform the life trajectories of disadvantaged young people. Supplementary programs are not enough. They are only accessible to some students and are inconsistent, with different expectations across institutions, making it difficult for a young person to navigate.

Learning recognition is already changing

Over the past few years (particularly during COVID-19) we've seen an acceleration of change within particular jurisdictions, schools and further learning institutions to redesign learning recognition to better meet the challenges of changing work, including:

- South Australia has committed to the introduction of learner profiles with a pilot already underway
- Victorian intends to unify VCAL and VCE certificates for senior secondary students
- New South Wales intends to trial an education passport

- Commonwealth proposal for a tertiary unification plan which would include learner profiles, a microcredentials marketplace, a national credentials platform and reform of the Australian Qualifications Framework
- Numerous school-led alternative accreditation initiatives including new Metrics, Mastery Transcript Consortium and Big Picture Learning
- At least 50% of Australian universities have early offer schemes for year 12 students, not dependent on their ATAR. There has been doubling and tripling of intakes of students into universities through early and alternative entry schemes in recent years

A proposal on regulatory arrangements for certification in Australian senior secondary schooling

The broadening of learning recognition is a positive development in building a better senior secondary pathways system. However, many of these changes (especially at the school, university and employer level) aren't being systematically designed to avoid unintended equity and excellence consequences.

To build a better system, Australia will need a single, unified national qualification approach for senior secondary school that will provide every school leaver with a trusted, useful, official representation of their levels of attainment across a broad range of learning. [Our proposal on regulatory arrangements for certification in Australian senior secondary schooling](#) includes seven directions we hope to further canvas with the relevant jurisdictions and sectors to ensure we build a unified, national system and approach.

Recommendation

Looking to the Future identified 20 recommendations including several focused on learning recognition. There has been progress towards reform of senior secondary pathways with in principle agreement of Education Ministers of all 20 recommendations of *Looking to the Future*. The next phase of the NSRA should reflect the need to implement this ambition for reform and outline progress against the 20 recommendations of *Looking to the Future*.

Learning Creates Australia

Established in 2020 Learning Creates Australia is an alliance of people and organisations working together to create a unified and equitable senior secondary recognition system.

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