

CHANGE IN MOTION  
Five Years of Progress Towards  
a Transformed Learning System

2020-2024 Impact Report





We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land throughout Australia who have been learning and educating on Country for over a thousand generations.

We pay our respects to their Elders past and present for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to live in spiritual and sacred relationships with Australia.

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At Learning Creates Australia we believe in the potential of young people and the power of learning. Learning holds the power to shape lives building a foundation for lifelong wellbeing and success most profoundly for those navigating significant barriers.

While there are many points of intervention in the education system, our focus is at the intersections between schooling, further learning and work.

Adolescence and the transition to adulthood is a pivotal juncture, setting young people on paths toward opportunity and achievement or, for those most at risk, toward deeper disadvantage and disengagement. This is a time of immense brain growth and potential, where the quality of a school environment can have a measurable impact. When young people's learning is well supported during this period, it can significantly enhance their ability to thrive.

Over the past five years, we have convened a diverse range of people and organisations from across the education and learning system - students, First Nations communities, policymakers, educators, researchers, industry professionals, and system leaders. Their perspectives echo findings from a decade of reports and reviews, painting a clear picture of a learning system that is outdated, stagnating, and often underperforming - especially for those who need it most.

We refuse to accept the reality that a student's postcode or the school they attend should determine their future. For too long, vulnerable young people have been confined to narrow pathways, sidelined into specialised programs by systems that fail to value their diverse skills, experiences, and potential.

Finishing school well is fundamental not only for individual wellbeing but also for Australia's wellbeing and productivity as a nation.

A strong educational foundation equips young people with the necessary skills and confidence to navigate the complexities of modern careers, fostering resilience, critical thinking, and adaptability. These qualities are not just critical for personal success - they are the building blocks of a robust and innovative workforce. As individuals thrive, so too does the country; a well-educated population drives economic growth, enhances social cohesion, and strengthens national productivity.

Together, we are working to create a learning system that champions equity, values individuality, and moves beyond two-track solutions, towards a system that equips all young people with the skills to succeed and contribute.

We've placed recognition of learning success at the heart of our approach to systemic change. We know that by broadening how we recognise young people's skills, knowledge, and capabilities, we can open doors to opportunities that shape their wellbeing, engagement in learning and pathways. This shift challenges outdated definitions of success, grounded solely in academic outcomes, and embraces a more inclusive understanding of what it means to prepare young people for a complex and dynamic world.

Young people are demanding this too. They want a learning system where they are seen as their whole selves; their wellbeing is prioritised alongside their learning; their teachers are empowered and engaged; their connections to community and places are valued and enduring; and, they are enabled to pursue pathways that reflect their unique strengths and aspirations.

Our work has been, and will continue to be, driven by innovation, local trials, young person leadership, community ownership, new technical and participatory research, growing sector-wide support, and bold policy agendas.

This report reflects the impact of our collective efforts. It highlights how a growing alliance of stakeholders has united around a shared vision: toward a system that values diverse learning experiences, breaks down silos, and creates equitable, just and vibrant opportunities for every young person.

We have long understood that recognition is just one of the many levers required to bring about the system change needed. The role and wellbeing and our educators; digital transformation, personalised learning and how decision making is shared and understood in communities are interrelated areas of action and outcome that are also progressing. Despite our shared goals, these efforts remain too isolated from each other, even though they are fundamentally connected in driving broader systemic shifts. Our next phase of work will bring together these areas of action, creating opportunities for collaboration that transcend traditional boundaries.

The next decade will be crucial as we strengthen our commitment, build on the growing momentum, and further connect key points of influence to create a more unified approach to systemic change, moving us closer to achieving our bold, shared vision for Australia.

**Thank you for being part of this journey with us.**

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CEO, Learning Creates Australia

*Bronwyn Lee*

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Co-Chairs, Learning Creates Australia

*Jan Owen AM*

*Hayley McQuire*

*Anthony Mackay AM*

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## The challenge

# Significant progress has been made, but there is still work to do

Education is key for our young people - it opens up a world of opportunity, imagination, growth, wellbeing and prosperity. But currently, our learning system is stuck - it's unfair and underperforming in all the ways that matter - performance, productivity, equity, engagement, wellbeing, identity and inclusion.

While other developed nations are forging ahead with 21st century learning strategies to secure and bolster their future productivity, Australia is being left behind with an outdated, underperforming education system.

We have long understood that recognition is just one of the many levers required to bring about the system change required. Over the past five years, it has become increasingly clear that one of the primary barriers lies in the silos within which different advocates for change operate. Despite our shared goals, these efforts remain isolated, even though they are fundamentally connected in driving broader systemic shifts.

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**20**  
YEARS OF DECLINE

Australia's performance against international education benchmarks like PISA has fallen over the last twenty years (OECD, 2023)

### Gaps in learning are widening

Despite delivering longer hours of education than other countries, Australia faces a growing divide between our advantaged and disadvantaged learners (ACER, 2023). Our education system, strained before COVID-19 is now fracturing at the seams. With more than 90 per cent of new jobs requiring post-secondary education, young people need to be supported not just to finish school but to go on to further education (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023).

**50%**  
INCREASE

Increase in young people experiencing mental health challenges in the last 40 years (ABS)

### Wellbeing is declining

Over 40% of Year 12 students report symptoms of anxiety and depression higher than the normal range for their age (Black Dog Institute, 2019). Since 2016, less young people report good general and mental health and happiness with their life as a whole (LSAY - Life at 22, 2023). 38.8% of people aged 16-24 years had a 12-month mental disorder (National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2023). Australia also ranks 3rd for disruptive classrooms and 2nd for school bullying in the OECD (ACER, 2024).

**50,000**  
YOUNG PEOPLE

School aged young people who were estimated as missing from schools (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019)

### Teachers and students are voting with their feet

A Senate Inquiry and subsequent reports have revealed that nearly 40% of families have children that have experienced school refusal in the past year (Commonwealth, 2023). This builds off the 2019 estimate that 50,000 school-aged young people were missing from schools (Watterston & O'Connell, 2019). Simultaneously, around 6,000 teachers are leaving the profession each year, with one in three planning to exit before retirement (AITSL, 2022, 2024). Teacher supply, growing at just 0.2% per year, is falling short of the 2.4% annual demand (AITSL, 2022).



## Learning Creates an innovative, independent non-profit organisation

Since 2020, we've leveraged two main mechanisms to drive impact:

### The Learner's Journey National Social Lab (2020 - 2022)

The Learner's Journey National Social Lab played a pivotal role in anchoring our work in equity through the lived experience of young people and educators. The Lab focussed on the intersections between schooling, further learning and work and brought together a diverse range of stakeholders from across the country. Young people, First Nations communities, educators, employers, regional and remote communities and cross-sector experts co-designed solutions to meet the needs of young people facing barriers to their learning success.

The Lab not only provided valuable insights but also laid the groundwork for ongoing, sector-wide efforts to build a more inclusive and just learning system. It generated four co-designed prototypes - Industry Trustmark (now SkillStory), First Nations-led Charters, Tertiary Pathways (now SkillSpark) and The Pulse Lab - breakthrough ideas that could demonstrate the potential and promise of broader learning recognition.



### The Power of Recognising More Action-Research Study (2023-2025)

Building on the Lab and to grow a deeper understanding of the impact that recognition of broader learning success has on post-school pathways and in-school experience is 'The Power of Recognising More', participatory action-research study. Convening 100+ first-mover school communities and leading practitioners, including jurisdictions, engaged in innovating and testing new approaches. Insights from this study also shed light on how broader learning recognition acts as a catalyst for wider systemic change.

Undertaken across five cycles over three years the study is showing that by broadening the definition of success so that it captures not only cognitive abilities but also social and emotional development, we support young people to feel a sense of belonging in their educational environments and prepare them for a rapidly changing world. This shift is critical in creating a system where success is defined not just by test results, but by students' readiness for life.



# Our shared journey to recognise more

We work with trust, we work for justice  
we are committed to transformation



We set out on broaden how we recognise learning success...

With a collective vision, we are embarking on the next stage of a bold agenda

**2020 - 2021**

- 3 technical papers developed
- 4 equity-led prototypes developed
- 160 Lab participants
- 2200+ people engaged (from partners to contributors) across the first 24 months, representing more than 9,000 hours of time
- The Learner's Journey National Social Lab: A new open platform for system collaboration and connection
- Out of the Lab emerged..
- A portfolio of prototypes
- Strong and committed alliance
- Youth employment model
- First Nations self-determined approach

**2022**

- 19 young community associates employed

**2023 - 2024**

- 5 action-research cycles
- 15 youth-led podcast episodes
- 3 annual national events
- 21 young people on the team
- The Power of Recognising More Participatory Action Research Study
- We established as our own independent entity
- Out of the Study and We Are More movement emerged...
- Theory of systems change
- A growing evidence base
- Prototypes transitioning to sector ownership

**2025+**

- We Are More movement to challenge deeply held beliefs that hinder education equity and progress

**What's Next?**  
**5 Action Areas for the next phase:**

1. The Broader Recognition of Learning Success
2. The Relationship Between Learning and Wellbeing
3. The Future of the Teaching Profession
4. Digital Transformation of the Learning Experience
5. Power Sharing and Shifting with People and Places

Illustrations on this page were created by Anaïs Rose Nagy-Smith (see page 19), a young research participant who was commissioned to illustrate these for The Whole Learner Report.



# Our Theory of Systems Change

**Systems are dynamic, complex, ever-evolving, and often hidden from view.**

When we identify a problem within a system - something that is broken - it is rarely isolated. Each issue exists as part of a broader, interconnected whole. To create meaningful and lasting change, we must look beyond the surface and illuminate the hidden structure - or conditions - of the system. Programmatic interventions, while sometimes impactful for individuals as they navigate or “beat the odds” within a system, do not change the underpinning conditions or structures.

Our Theory of Systems Change is guided by this understanding. Systems change requires working across all layers of the system to address the causes, rather than the symptoms. Shifting the component parts and the pattern of interactions to ultimately form a system that behaves in a qualitatively different way.

## Shifting the learning system

Education often appears to follow a linear path: students begin in preschool and move through the grades until they graduate in Year 12 onto further study or work. But the reality is far more complex. The process of learning and the ways we progress through the system is not a singular - it is a dynamic, interconnected web shaped by:

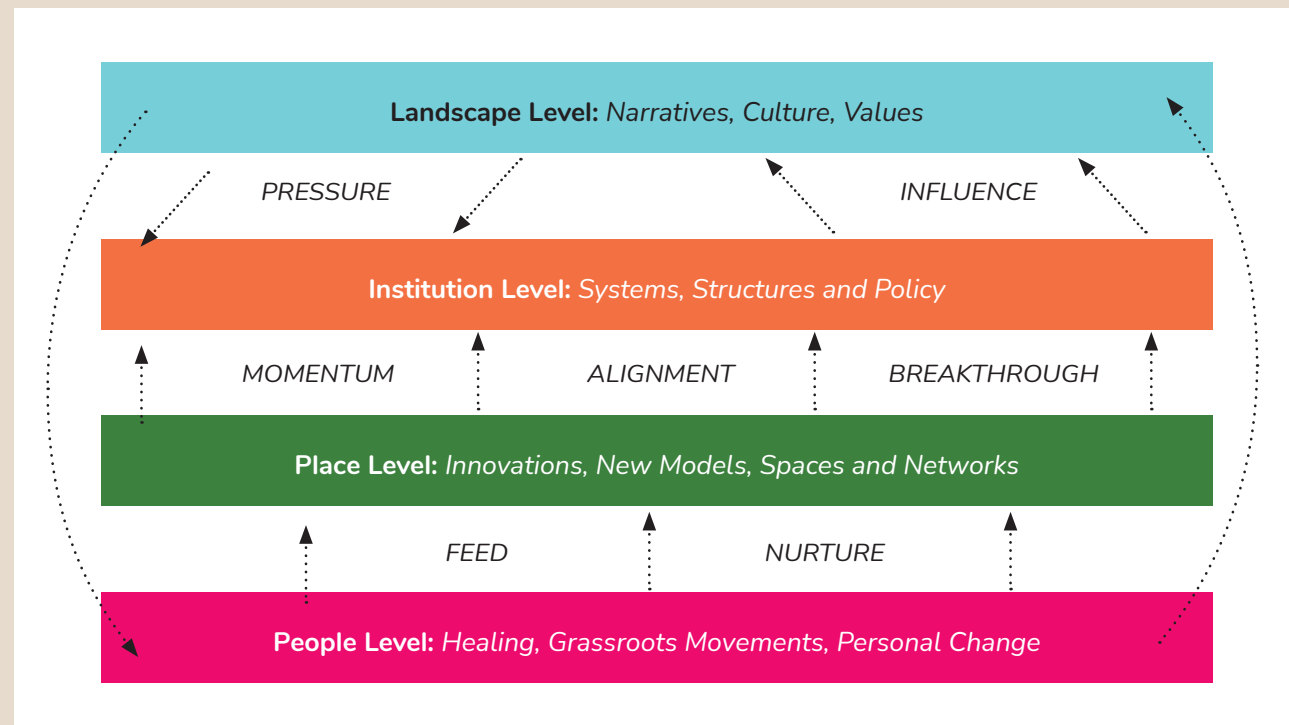
- Multiple processes that drive how learning and development unfold,
- People navigating these in diverse and personal ways,

- Policies that define how the system functions and evolves,
- Power dynamics across various governance structures, and
- Pressures the ways in which education interacts with other societal systems.

Changing the Australian education system is challenging, due to its decentralised structure and diverse priorities among stakeholders.

With two levels of government, eight jurisdictions, thousands of schools, various school systems each with unique priorities, curriculum and assessments, no single authority holds control over the system. Instead, it has evolved over time, shaped by shifting demands and politicised contexts rather than cohesive design. It is young people experiencing social exclusion and economic security who are most impacted by a system that does not first consider their needs or potential.

**Our real impact timeline isn't annual, it's generational. Lasting transformation takes time.**



Our systems change model is based on the [The Power Shift Framework](#) by Systems Sanctuary, Tatiana Fraser and Juniper Glass (2020) which draws from Geels Transition Theory (2011).

## Learning Creates: our first five years in numbers





'Learning Creates is unique in the national education landscape. As an organisation it provides a neutral space in which to imagine what the future of education can and should be for Australian Learners. The organisation is passionate about improving Learning Outcomes however, unlike many others working in this space, it is committed to working with stakeholders to explore possible pathways to a better future, rather than seeing itself as having to provide all the answers. The team at Learning Creates are not only committed collaborators, they are also skilled facilitators and negotiators. We have found them to be amazing partners and I look forward to opportunities to work with them in the future.' - Tim Bullard, Former Secretary of the Department for Education, Children and Young People in Tasmania, Current CEO AITSL

#### Before 2020 - When we started this work:

- ATAR results were the primary, nationally celebrated marker of school and student success
- National headlines proclaimed, "Alternatives to the ATAR: 'Most kids don't know about them.'"
- Few reports explored the potential of broader learning recognition
- Practices like Learner Profiles, aimed at recognising more of young people's capabilities, were lesser-known or in their infancy
- Heavy reliance on programmatic and intervention strategies

#### After 5 Years - The system shifts we've seen:

- Growing concern over the pressure and harm caused by narrow measures of success like the ATAR
- Increasing focus on the critical role of student wellbeing in education
- Media outlets now regularly discuss "a future without exams," reflecting a broader conversation
- Over 20 major papers have highlighted broader learning recognition and assessments that capture more of young people's skills
- Nationwide momentum has emerged for broader learning recognition approaches like learner profiles and digital-credentials
- Systems thinking is gaining traction, addressing the root causes of barriers to improve learning outcomes

## LEARNING CREATES CONTRIBUTION

### Progress: Landscape Level

Shifts across prevailing narratives, culture and values

**We've been building a movement, We are More, to challenge deeply held beliefs that hinder education equity and progress, contributing to landscape-level shifts in tangible ways:**

- Through We Are More, we've amplified diverse experiences of young people, creating a counter-narrative to the narrow focus on academic markers like the ATAR. This narrative has gained traction in schools and public discourse, driving conversations about redefining success in education
- By collaborating directly with students, educators, and families, we've uncovered and challenged long-standing assumptions about learning success. These partnerships have empowered schools to adopt broader recognition practices tailored to their local needs and contexts
- We've produced reports and technical papers, countless case studies and lived-experience stories that provide critical insights for system leaders and make a strong case for prioritising young people's holistic development and wellbeing
- Showcasing and piloting tools across communities we've accelerated their adoption nationwide, transforming what was once an emerging idea into a movement reshaping how learning is recognised
- Our systems change approach has helped education leaders to see beyond isolated programs and address systemic barriers. This has fostered collaboration across sectors and new partnerships, paving the way for sustainable transformation in recognising and valuing young people's capabilities

**These efforts have helped move the national conversation from a narrow, programmatic and intervention focus to an Australia-wide movement that values equity, wellbeing, and the diverse capabilities of young people.**





## WORK SPOTLIGHT

# We Are More Movement

We work with diverse communities to support in telling a renewed story of education for Australia

The We Are More Movement is reshaping education in Australia, starting with a powerful idea: young people are more than a mark, rank, or score. What began as a focus on broader recognition of learning has grown into a national conversation, challenging the narrow dominance of the ATAR and sparking a shift in how success is defined. The movement has also highlighted the interconnected changes needed across the system, such as the wellbeing of students, the transformation of the teaching workforce, and the creation of more equitable and flexible pathways. We Are More is shining a light on these broader shifts, creating a shared vision for a system that values and uplifts every young person.

Three education jurisdictions, Tasmania, South Australia, and the Northern Territory, have joined as partners, alongside First Nations organisations, universities, and schools, representing every state and territory around Australia and reflecting a shared national commitment to systemic change. The movement amplifies innovative, place-based initiatives across diverse contexts, from flexible learning spaces to independent and state schools and higher education.

The work has highlighted not just one way forward, but a tapestry of ideas, each contributing to a clearer picture of what young people need to thrive where they live.

It's not about finding one solution, but about understanding what works, identifying essential elements that must be upheld, and exploring how these can be adapted to meet the unique needs of different local contexts. We recognise that there is no single way forward - the right approach will look different for every community, shaped by their specific circumstances, values, and aspirations.

Annual national gatherings and a youth-led initiative, The WAM podcast, have highlighted how communities are engaging with this work. Recent school-leavers and co-creators of the podcast, Megan, Ellie and Jay reflected: "If we had been offered the opportunity to have more of our achievements formally recognised by the education system, it would have made such a difference to our confidence, our drive, our sense of self-worth, and our love for learning. The WAM Podcast is designed to make others aware of the amazing initiatives unfolding."

The unified message of We Are More has sparked new conversations, partnerships, sharing of practice and lived-experiences, inspiring communities and influencing policymakers as they lead new narratives for learning success in their spheres of influence and expertise.

Media discourse is shifting, and public awareness is growing as CEO Bronwyn Lee explains, "Families and teachers already know young people are more than a number and need to be well to learn well. Our challenge is ensuring the system reflects that."



You can tune into the WAM youth-led podcast:

[> Listen on Spotify](#)

[> Watch on YouTube](#)



# New Evidence and Thinking to Shift Mindsets

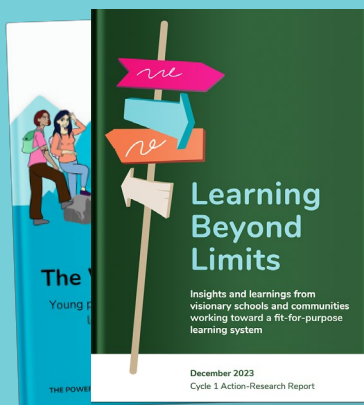
We're growing a practical knowledge base, drawing insights from across the learning system to ensure system-responses are rigorous and well informed.

[> Explore our growing knowledge base](#)

[> Explore provocations](#)

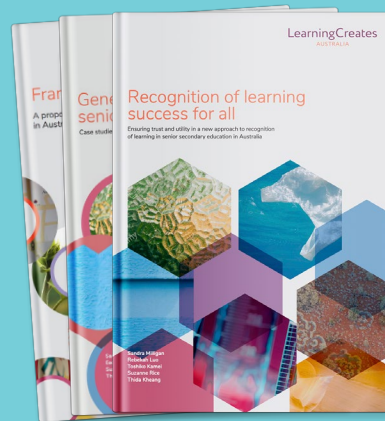
Our work is grounded in the belief that evidence and knowledge are essential to addressing the structural barriers young people face in their learning. From our origins with the Foundation for Young Australians and the New Work Order research series, we've consistently produced critical insights that empower educators, communities, system leaders, and young people to unlock the full potential of learning.

By combining lived experience with rigorous expertise, we integrate diverse perspectives, data, and experiences to develop a more inclusive, holistic understanding of the challenges young people face. This approach is reflected in our partnerships with leading research centres where we explore innovative models and metrics that better meet young people's needs.



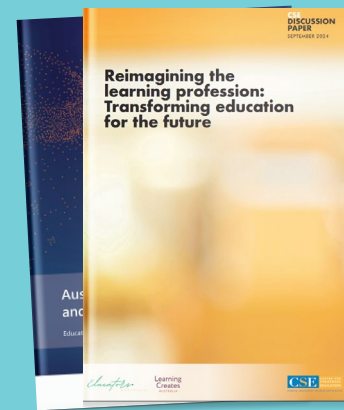
## The Power of Recognising More - Report Series

Brings together insights and learnings from early-mover schools, academics, employers, universities, admissions centres and jurisdictions who are working to transform how we recognise learning beyond only academic measures.



## The Learner's Journey - Technical Papers

This report series commissioned with Melbourne Metrics at the University of Melbourne underpins our approach to policy and practice. It ensures the work is grounded in technical rigour and builds trust and utility at both an institutional and system level.



## Discussion Papers

These papers explore different aspects of the future of learning in Australia. One focuses on challenges in the teacher workforce, another on preparing young people for the changing world of work. Others examine how technology and growth industries are reshaping entry-level jobs and the policy and structural features of the Australian learning system.



## Provocations and Stories

Written by leading thinkers and practitioners, the provocations reflect the complex challenges facing many young people in their learning and lives today. They offer a starting point for new discussions on what's needed to shift educational outcomes in the next critical decade. They complement the stories and videos we have of young peoples lived experiences.

### Before 2020 - When we started this work:

- A federal review of senior secondary pathways emphasised the importance of broader recognition of learning, but actionable strategies weren't on the agenda
- Shifts in intergovernmental architecture reduced opportunities for collaboration among Education Chief Executives and Secretaries
- ATAR was the dominant tertiary entry pathway
- Employers faced significant skills shortages, with existing credentials failing to capture the capabilities needed in entry-level workers

### After 5 Years - The system shifts we've seen:

- 18 national reviews and longitudinal studies focusing on broader learning recognition are now underway
- 7 out of 8 jurisdictions have conducted related inquiries, reflecting a growing interest in transforming how we recognise learning success
- Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia have committed to strategies that recognise more student capabilities
- The dominance of ATAR is declining, with more than 75% of young people now pursuing further education, training, or work through alternative entry pathways
- Over 60% of university offers are now based on pathways other than ATAR, with around half made before Year 12 results are released
- Employers are wanting to know that young people have a raft of capabilities that they value, with capabilities such as creative thinking and analytical thinking vital for current and emerging roles

'The good thing about Learning Creates is it is seen as a third party... Learning Creates has that trust value because it is seen as neutral.' - Partner

## LEARNING CREATES CONTRIBUTION

### Progress: Institution Level

Shifts across deeply embedded systems, structures and policy

**We've created safe pathways for system leaders to make bold, systemic commitments that transform entrenched policies and practices, contributing to institution-level shifts in tangible ways:**

- Providing a national convening space for system leaders to share insights, challenges, and learnings, fostering collaboration and innovation
- Leveraging policy windows, identifying and acting on key opportunities, to drive structural change at national and state levels
- Backing leading jurisdictions with tools and support to drive innovative education agendas
- We've catalysed shifts in tertiary pathways bringing together leading Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs) and universities to codesign non-ATAR, strengths-based pathways - creating new and more equitable entry routes for students
- We've proactively contributed to 7 parliamentary inquiries and presented to 2 expert panels (WA and Commonwealth), leveraging our knowledge base to inform key reforms. Our work is widely referenced as leading evidence in the field
- We've supported employer-driven change, aligning practices with the future currency of skills and attributes, influencing how employers and tertiary institutions value young people's capabilities

**These efforts have shifted deeply embedded systems, influencing outdated policies with a more inclusive framework that recognises and nurtures the full potential of young people.**

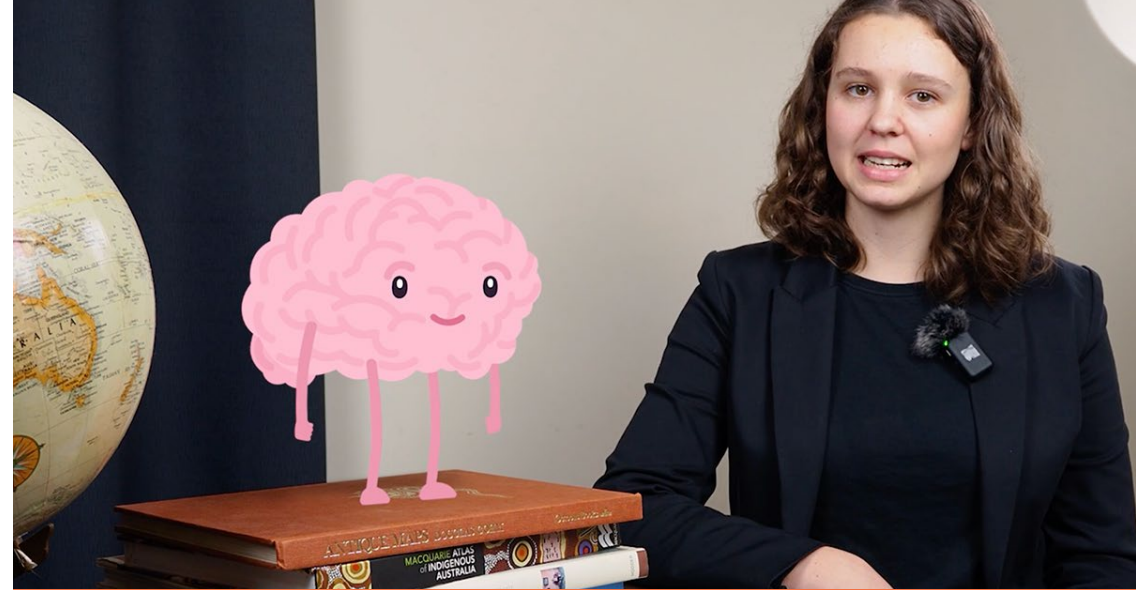


## Convening system leaders

We're creating safer paths for system leaders from Government, Authorities and Institutions to make bold commitments

We harness opportunities at the state level to drive structural change while working to align national priorities and amplify impact. This includes backing leading jurisdictions with the tools and support they need to drive innovative education agendas. Since 2020, we've convened policy leaders across Australia to explore systemic inequities and opportunities for transformation. In the absence of a unified authority, our convenings have enabled system leaders to come together to address shared and unique challenges, fostering a platform for productive debate, the sharing of practice, intelligence, and innovative solutions to chart safe paths forward. Notable experts have contributed to these discussions.

Our partnerships with state jurisdictions in SA, Tasmania, and the NT, alongside statutory bodies, universities, and tertiary admissions centers in SA, NSW, ACT, and Victoria, and our contribution to] WA's Pathways to Post-School Success and Tasmania's Independent review, highlight our role in driving substantial momentum for change at the institution level.



## SkillSpark


Tertiary-sector adoption of a strengths-based path to university

SkillSpark offers a positive reimagining of Educational Access Schemes, addressing barriers faced by young people experiencing disadvantage. Instead of requiring students to relive and detail personal hardships, this innovative pathway invites them to showcase the attributes and strengths they've cultivated both inside and outside the classroom.

This shift to a strengths-based approach removes a significant hurdle for students, empowering them to celebrate their resilience rather than revisiting trauma. By fostering a positive mindset, SkillSpark supports their success in further education and beyond, a critical step, given that more than 90% of new jobs require post-secondary education (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2023).

Developed in partnership with the Universities Admissions Centre, Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre, and 12 low SES schools across Victoria, NSW, and the ACT with the resources provided to access the pathway being designed by young people themselves. SkillSpark demonstrates the potential of broader skills and capabilities as reliable predictors of success at university - offering a strengths-based approach that tertiary providers can utilise and trust.

> [Discover more about SkillSpark](#)



'Just a quick follow-up to say thanks so much for being prepared to be so curious, flexible and adaptable to ensure that our students had the opportunity to share their expertise and ideas. As I mentioned yesterday I was so surprised by the responses of some students and I just want to make sure that the young co-researchers are able to see that the conditions that they created with their approach and openness. It really was beautifully and sensitively conducted. I look forward to watching this project move forward as I think the idea of peer-to-peer collaboration and conversation is so important at this point in the process – congratulations to all involved.' - Jodie Long, David Scott School

#### Before 2020 - When we started this work:

- Broader recognition practices were emerging, with a few leading schools engaged nationwide
- Innovation in education was occurring at the margins, primarily in under-resourced schools addressing urgent needs or independent schools with access to significant resources
- There was no centralised evidence base or platform to foster shared learning and innovation in practice
- Discussions were growing on the importance of transferable 21st-century skills and their relevance to the future of work

#### After 5 Years - The system shifts we've seen:

- Over 500 schools are now actively engage in broader learning recognition practices
- Emerging collaborations between schools, industry, tertiary institutions, and training providers have created new opportunities for student pathways
- Place-based approaches have gained traction, empowering local networks to drive tailored solutions
- A rise in approaches and methods to recognise and credential transferable skills in trusted ways

## LEARNING CREATES CONTRIBUTION

### Progress: Place Level

Shifts across innovations, new models and local networks

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**We've connected innovative place-based practices and grown a practical knowledge base, contributing to place-level shifts in tangible ways:**

- We convened practitioners nationwide, providing a space to share insights through The Power of Recognising More our three-year action-research project which is generating evidence on the impact of broader recognition, connecting practice to measurable outcomes
- Through the ongoing delivery of four place-based projects, we've maintained strong relationships, collaborating closely with communities, drawing on their lived experiences to co-design solutions that reflect local strengths. This approach prioritises adaptability over replication, focusing on what works and how to tailor it to context
- By integrating technology, data insights, and localised sentiments, we've highlighted ways to support young people's pathways into growth-industry sector jobs locally that emphasise their capabilities
- We supported the redesign of the Tailored Learning initiative in South Australia to ensure that more high school students with complex needs can continue their education. At the heart of the initiative is a tool that helps schools identify each student's unique strengths and track their engagement and progress. It also enables schools to determine the most effective strategies for meeting individual needs, providing them with greater capacity to offer personalised approaches that empower students in their learning journeys.

**These efforts have strengthened place-based networks, fostering environments where schools, communities, and partners collaboratively support young people's diverse capabilities and pathways. By centering on local needs and voices, these approaches have given communities and young people greater agency to shape their futures.**





WORK SPOTLIGHTS

## SkillStory

### Connecting Skills to Career Pathways

In Liverpool, New South Wales, SkillStory is transforming how young people connect their skills to career pathways, empowering them to view their unique strengths and experiences as the foundation for a fulfilling future. In collaboration with the Liverpool Innovation Precinct, local schools, employers, and community organisations, the initiative links students' talents with emerging industries like allied health, early childhood education, and health technology, ensuring they can see and confidently pursue opportunities in their region.

SkillStory challenges traditional career guidance by embracing a flexible, individualised approach that reflects the realities of a modern workforce. Instead of predefined roles and standardised pathways, it celebrates diverse skills and experiences, helping students understand that success is not a linear journey but a unique combination of learning, growth, and opportunities. By aligning young people's strengths with local growth sectors, SkillStory ensures they can map meaningful paths forward while contributing to their community's economic and social development.

With a strong focus on inclusivity, the initiative particularly supports students from migrant, refugee, and low-income backgrounds by addressing barriers to employment and creating tailored pathways to success. SkillStory is not just preparing young people for the future - it is equipping them to thrive in a dynamic world and empowering them to envision and shape their own futures with confidence.

## Engaging for Success

### Illuminating the growth and abilities of young people facing complex barriers to learning and engagement

Engaging for Success is part of South Australia's Tailored Learning Provision, supports students at risk of disengaging from education due to barriers like poverty, trauma, mental health challenges, and caregiving responsibilities. It provides a digital tool and wrap-around support to help students, alongside their teachers and caseworkers, measure their learning progress and personal capabilities, allowing them to track their growth and strengths in meaningful ways. Traditional measures of success often overlook the unique challenges and abilities of these students, leaving them without recognition or a clear path forward. This initiative addresses those gaps, helping students - many with inconsistent attendance - identify and build on their strengths, fostering connection, engagement and progress.

"A lot of us have come from spaces where the teachers or the people in power don't necessarily recognise the effort it takes to get school, to do the work, to get the qualifications... Which can be really disheartening, because if you put in all of this work and no one so much as acknowledges it. It makes you feel like it was all for nothing." - Secondary Student

Learning Creates Australia played a pivotal role in accelerating this work, providing the resourcing and support to quickly develop the tool and move from concept to reality. This approach enabled a rapid rollout, leading to a \$48M investment in the broader Tailored Learning initiative by the South Australian government. The resource, co-designed with students, teachers, and communities, is being piloted in schools in 2024 and 2025, ensuring it meets the needs of students facing personal and systemic barriers. This is a collaboration with the South Australian Department for Education and the SACE Board.





## WORK SPOTLIGHT

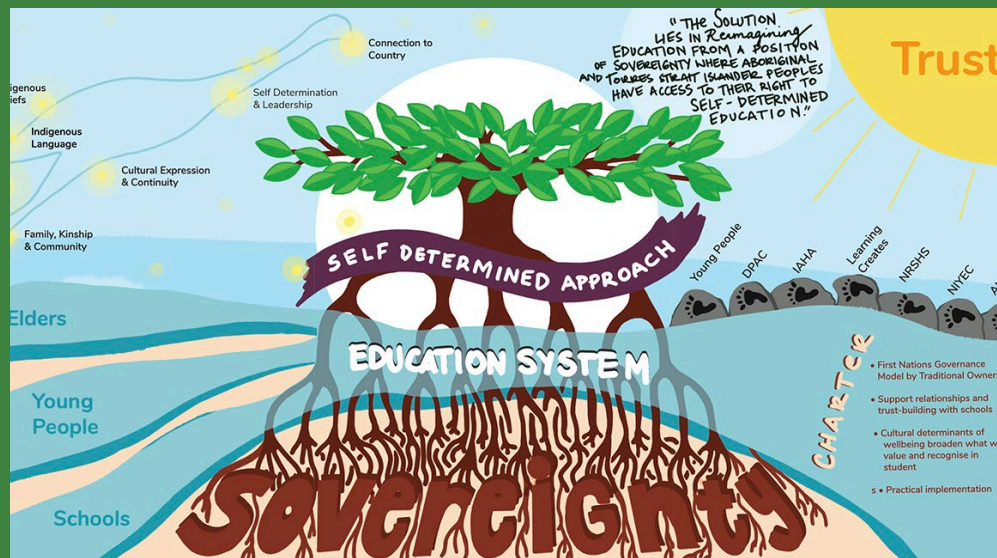


# Indigenous-Led Learning Charters

Fostering First Nations-led partnerships with secondary schools to strengthen young people's learning and wellbeing

On Darumbal Country in Rockhampton, Queensland, Indigenous-led Learning Charters are demonstrating the potential of building new and trusted relationships with secondary schools that monitor and value Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing and that recognise the importance of learning that connects young mob to their Country, Language and Culture.

> [Watch the video discussing the Charters](#)




The colonial legacy of the education system continues to impact First Nations young people, families and communities. First Nations students report having to adapt, assimilate or give up parts of themselves in order to “succeed”. As one First Nations Educator shared, “It’s about students finishing and feeling like they’ve achieved something without having to sacrifice anything - without losing part of themselves or without having to ever be in any circumstance to believe that their Aboriginality and the identity of blackness is somehow less important than the success at school or they need to give up one thing to achieve another.”

Systems struggle to value and recognise the different intelligences, strengths and contributions to community that young people engage in to care for Country and/or connect with and maintain their culture(s). The responsibility of local Traditional Owners to care for young people on Country or enter into genuine equal partnerships with local communities remains a challenge for schools and school leaders. Rather than placing significant value on the wellbeing and belonging of a young person, the system has focused on retention and attendance rates as markers of educational success. These measures aren’t adequate to capture the whole First Nations young person - their wellbeing, or their learning ambitions.

First Nations young people deserve to see their whole selves valued and recognised by their community, and broader school systems. The Charters are building a growing community of practice, with local schools to demonstrate new ways of working with First Nations communities so that both the school and community where learner wellbeing is valued just as much as academic measures.

The community of practice has also been trialing the development of the LearningWell Prototype, a student-driven tool that allows First Nations learners to capture learning experiences linked to cultural determinants of wellbeing. This tool is being tested in schools to help educators better understand their students and ensure that learners feel confident and comfortable bringing their full selves to school.

This work now extends beyond Queensland, through the sharing of knowledge with the SACE Board of SA to support broader efforts in South Australia and the Northern Territory. We thank the Darumbal People Aboriginal Corporation and the Indigenous Youth Education Coalition for their leadership, and our Community of Practice Partners: North Rockhampton State High School, Nullu Badi Ngudyubay Academy, Rockhampton Grammar School, Rockhampton Flexible Learning Centre, and the SACE Board of SA - for their collaboration in advancing this vital work.



'Learning Creates has empowered me as a young person. The training, facilitation and trust placed in the associates and I in our research project has been great. You guys have high expectations of us and other young people which is empowering. But you also give us space to learn, grow and be facilitated by your expertise which I have really enjoyed... It has been a steep learning curve, but one that I have really appreciated. In my opinion [co-design] is the best form of collaboration because it allows power and decision making to be spread evenly across everyone involved.' - Young Associate

### Before 2020 - When we started this work:

- Efforts to engage students were limited, with no real power given to young people
- Young people and First Nations communities regularly excluded from research processes that impacted them
- Equity in learning outcomes steadily declining
- Engagement and excellence measures sliding for over 20 years, with Australia performing below OECD standards
- Disadvantaged young people were pushed into "second track" solutions rather than addressing systemic inequalities

### After 5 Years - The system shifts we've seen:

- Equity is gaining prominence in national conversations about learning, shifting from being an afterthought to a core priority in system-level approaches
- Young people and First Nations communities are leading and contributing to our growing evidence base
- Cross-sector momentum has developed for centering student and community voices in designing learning solutions
- Disadvantaged young people are increasingly recognised for their diverse capabilities, with alternative learning pathways being elevated as credible, equitable solutions

## LEARNING CREATES CONTRIBUTION

# Progress: People Level

## Shifts in power across healing, grassroots movements and personal change

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We've been at the forefront of supporting these people-centred transformations, contributing in tangible ways:

- Advocated for and partnered with First Nations people and organisations to support self-determined education transformation, elevating local expertise and cultural knowledge
- Conducted a National Social Lab to co-design equity-first systemic solutions with cross-sectoral teams, embedding inclusive and sustainable practices in pathways
- Convened an intergenerational 'Learning Council' of passionate and highly qualified leaders, each representing diverse sectors. Their contributions help to ensure that Learning Creates work remains innovative, relevant, and impactful in transforming education systems
- Developed a young person leadership model with a power-shift framework, 1:1 coaching, and skills tracking tools to map capabilities gained through employment and participation
- Championed young people to take central, paid roles in designing and implementing systemic solutions, with partners valuing their contributions and in some cases funding their continued work or integration into teams
- Supported young people and First Nations leaders to conduct research cycles in the Power of Recognising More study, contributing key insights into broader learning recognition

**These efforts have helped transform how learning systems engage with and value young people and communities - fostering a sense of agency, inclusivity, and purpose for those most affected by inequitable systems.**





WORK SPOTLIGHT

## First Nations Self-Determined Approach

Learning Creates commitment to First Nations self-determination is grounded in a sense of Place. We operate on the lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

We recognise that inequity within the current education system has especially disadvantaged First Nations young people. This extends beyond accessibility to education due to geography or physical space, but permeates social, economic and cultural determinants that contribute to culturally safe, available and appropriate learning environments.

We are committed to a self-determined approach that deeply respects and elevates Indigenous learning systems, First Nations leadership and sovereignty. This work centres Indigenous perspectives of wellbeing, honouring the essential role of learning in connecting First Nations children and young people to their Country, Language, and Culture.

[> Read about our commitment](#)

## Putting First Nations Self-Determination into Action

Our commitment to First Nations self-determination is not just a statement of intent - it is embedded in our work and guided by clear, actionable principles.

Recognising the profound knowledge, leadership, and expertise within First Nations communities, we ensure that resourcing for initiatives involving First Nations learners and communities is directed to and led by First Nations-controlled organisations. This principle affirms the right of communities to lead their own change while also strengthening the capacity and sustainability of First Nations-led efforts.

We prioritise creating culturally safe and responsive environments for our leadership, staff, volunteers, and the communities we work with. This commitment is reflected in representation at all levels of our organisation, including leadership and governance. Cultural safety is embedded in our policies and practices, including ongoing cultural competency training for core staff, accountability frameworks to ensure respectful engagement, and supportive mechanisms for First Nation's staff and partners to raise and address any concerns transparently and effectively.

In line with our commitment to self-determination, we uphold Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights as a core principle. This is reflected in our standard contract terms, ensuring that First Nations peoples retain ownership and control over their cultural knowledge, expressions, and materials across all projects and initiatives.

By embedding these principles into our work, we aim to honor the sovereignty and leadership of First Nations peoples, fostering partnerships that empower communities and contribute to meaningful, long-term change.



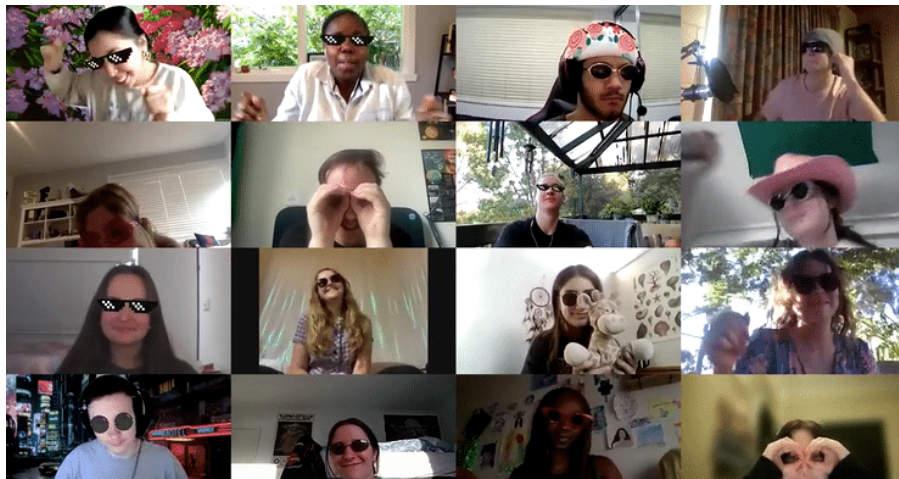


# How we centre young people

We engage and empower young individuals aged 15–25 from diverse backgrounds, skills, interests, and lived experiences, equipping them to lead community-based initiatives across the nation.

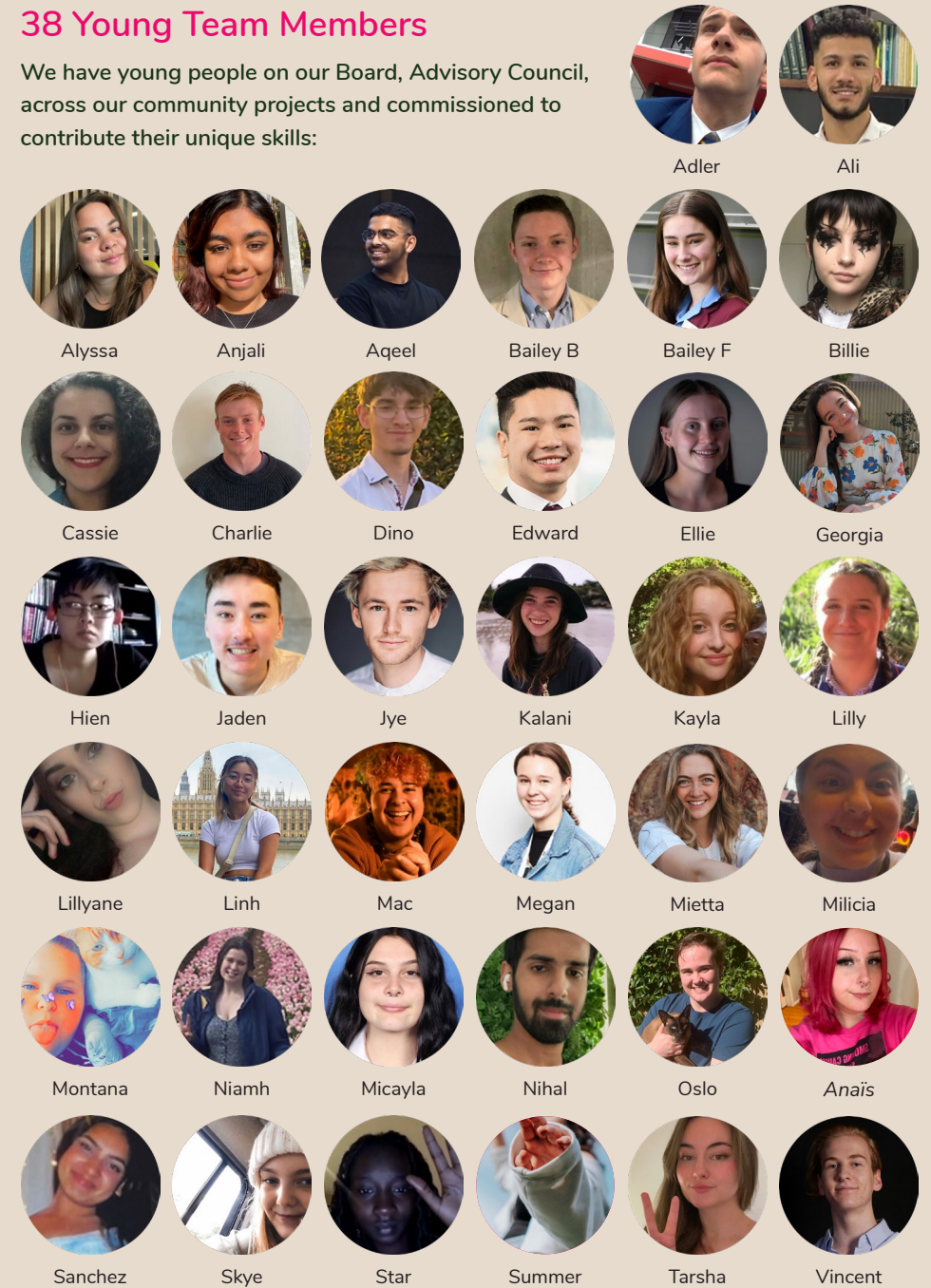
Young people bring unique strengths, talents, insights, and creativity to tackling complex challenges. By granting them access to power and decision-making roles, we enhance our capacity to design systems that are innovative and purpose-driven. So far, we have employed and trained over 38 young leaders from various states and territories, fostering impactful change and collaboration. Projects they have worked on include:

- Co-researchers, designing, running and delivering a research project and report to engage and embed the voices of young people
- Communicators creating youth-centered resources to support young people to apply to the SkillSpark university pathway
- Broadcasters, developing and delivering a youth-led podcast, responsible for interviews, editing, video and audio episodes, the brand and social media campaign
- Embedded with leading practitioners to help advance their initiatives
- Gathering community insights and sentiments from their peers and community about pathways into local growth industries
- Sharing their lived expertise and consult with their communities on the development of early-stage prototypes through the Social Lab



## 38 Young Team Members

We have young people on our Board, Advisory Council, across our community projects and commissioned to contribute their unique skills:





## Our Young Team Members

# Where are they now?

### Jye, 24

Jye first collaborated with Learning Creates in 2020 through the National Social Lab, where he shared his experiences navigating senior secondary schooling and pathways as a young person living in rural Tasmania. Determined to follow a different path, Jye pursued vocational education to align with his passions. Today, he has graduated from vocational training and is a lecturer at Swinburne University, inspiring others to follow their creative aspirations and advocating for vocational education and training (VET).

### Cassie, 28

Cassie joined Learning Creates Social Lab through For Change Co., an organisation supporting young people at risk of homelessness by providing meaningful work and pathway opportunities. She played a key role in developing ideas that have brought our industry-focused project to life and was nominated for the 2021 Moreland Award for Youth Contribution for her input. Cassie is now studying at university, serves as a non-profit board member., and works part-time at the Y, continuing to make a difference in her community.



Linh and Mietta sharing their work at the ReimaginEd Conference

### Vincent, 20

Vincent has been employed by Learning Creates since 2020, contributing to the development of several community-focused projects. More recently, he has been working with our partners at the SACE Board to inform curriculum reform and improve teaching practice. Through this work, he has gained extensive experience in co-design, facilitation, and stakeholder engagement. In September 2024, Vincent shared his insights from engaging with over 130 students with a gathering of more than 450 educators from across South Australia. These experiences and skills have been invaluable in supporting his studies in Arts and Law at the University of South Australia.

### Dino, 17

Dino began working with Learning Creates while still in high school, engaging his peers and advising on the real experiences and perspectives of young people in his multicultural community of Liverpool. This was his first job, where he gained valuable workplace skills such as teamwork, online collaboration, note-taking, work planning, and problem-solving. Dino has recently graduated from high school and landed his next job in the trade sector, marking an exciting new chapter in his career journey.

### Anjali, 22

Anjali is a new member of the team, joining as a co-researcher to support a First Nations cycle of Learning Creates' action research project. She has been developing her skills in research and communications and deeply values the opportunity to work on a First Nations self-determined project. Through this role, Anjali is also collaborating and receiving mentorship with our partners at the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition alongside an expert First Nations Steering Group, contributing to a project grounded in cultural leadership and community empowerment.



Ellie, Jaden and Megan filming for SkillsSpark



## What's next?

We believe in the power of learning and the potential of young people

In the next critical decade, we will strengthen our commitment to transforming equitable learning systems, building on the momentum we've gained over the past five years. We will delve deeper into the interconnected forces shaping modern education, focusing on the wellbeing of learners, the evolving landscape of the teaching profession, and the digital transformation of the learning experience.

Our efforts will continue to include fostering broader recognition of learning success and exploring innovative models of power and governance that are necessary to reimagine a future of learning Australia can be proud of.

Our next phase of work will bring together key system actors, aligning them under a shared ambition and creating opportunities for collaboration that transcend traditional boundaries.

This will foster innovative approaches to working together, breaking down silos and enhancing the interconnectedness of change efforts across the system. Through this collaborative, we aim to drive a more cohesive approach towards systemic change, enabling us to realise our shared aspirations for our senior secondary learning environments.

## The learning system agrees:

'A vital part of Australia's social compact is that education is available to all and that enables opportunity for all to participate and engage fully in work and society. Unfortunately, there are many signs that the fabric of this social compact is seriously fraying'.

**Melinda Cilento**

'There is a profound shift happening in education, only accelerated by generative AI. We are moving from an Age of Achievement to an Age of Agency.'

**Rebecca Winthrop**

'A better and fairer education system will remain a distant dream in Australia until we agree what equitable education is in practice. An alternative way is within reach. It requires a courageous determination to transform the mistakes of the past into understanding that quality and equity go hand in hand in education.'

**Pasi Sahlberg**

'What's the point if they can pass our tests but have no resilience in life?'

**Martin Westwell**

'The language of "disadvantage," "catch up" and so on is deaf to the effects of being a struggler or of starting behind and staying behind. Life in the "long tail" is no fun. Even the "extra help" - the "catch up tutoring," the special coaching - can carry a deadly subtext. School is humiliating for many kids much of the time; their confidence is shot. That's one reason why catch-up work is so difficult and why so many catch-up schemes, particularly at scale just don't work.'

**Dean Ashenden**

'The current "system" of education does not work for the majority of students. The situation is worsening, battered by the pandemic that exposed the inner weakness of a structure and culture that does not support well-being and learning in the world in which we live'.

**Michael Fullan and Joanna Rizzotto**



Our 2025 - 2030 Action Areas

## 5 action areas have emerged

### The Broader Recognition of Learning Success

Where there is broader  
recognition of young  
people's abilities.

### The Relationship Between Learning and Wellbeing

When students are  
well, they can fully  
engage in learning.

### The Future of the Teaching Profession

Where teachers are  
empowered to focus on  
the unique individuals  
in their classrooms.

### Digital Transformation of the Learning Experience

Where digital  
supports agency and  
personalisation of  
learning.

### Power Sharing and Shifting with People and Places

Where we enable  
place-based practices  
tailored to the needs of  
communities, spaces  
and networks.



## Thanks to our visionary funders

We are deeply grateful to our visionary funders, whose support has made this work possible. The Paul Ramsay Foundation, Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropies, The William Buckland Foundation, and the Brian M Davis Charitable Foundation, through a partnership with the University of Technology Sydney, have each demonstrated extraordinary trust and openness in backing the bold ambition of this initiative.

Their commitment has enabled us to move beyond traditional programmatic interventions and into the less-charted territory of shifting the conditions that uphold systemic inequities. This transformative work, focused on addressing the root causes of inequality and creating lasting change, would not be possible without their forward-thinking investment and shared belief in the vision for Australia's learning system.

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### Join us

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss collaborating with us on the next critical steps -

Bronwyn Lee, CEO - [bronwyn.lee@learningcreates.org.au](mailto:bronwyn.lee@learningcreates.org.au)



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Through a partnership with the  
University of Technology Sydney:



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Davis**  
Charitable  
Foundation







## Educators look to harness students' knowledge



Hydro Tasmania's Gina Harvey, Clarence High's Charlie Blundell, 13, and Hobart City High School lead principal Britany Roestenburg at Blundstone Arena. Picture: Chris Kidd

# More than a test score

**Simon McGuire** "We know paths to further learning and work are becoming more flexible and broad, yet we define success at the end of schooling by narrow measures," Learning Creates Australia chief executive Bronwyn Lee said. "The ATAR remains the primary do and there is growing momentum for this change." Hobart City High School lead principal Britany Roestenburg, who attended Wyke More, said the state had the chance to provide forward-thinking learning programs. "I think there's amazing as employers around creating a work-ready workforce," she said. "It is amazing to hear from young people and their perspectives, and the need to ensure that we equip our young people to thrive in learning and work." Ms Roestenburg said she

## ATAR is not used by more than 75% of our young people

