

Beyond Reform

A Submission to Consultation Draft: Pathways to Post-School Success Review

Context

[Learning Creates Australia](#) is a pioneering, independent non-profit organisation. We believe an Australian education should equip every young person to dream, achieve, and thrive. Our mission is to advance a just and vibrant learning system that leaves no young person or place behind. Guided by a diverse and growing alliance of stakeholders, including young people, educators, parents, policy makers, First Nations communities, employers, academics, and tertiary providers, we are focused on catalysing transformation in this next critical decade.

We welcome this timely review into post-school pathways and applaud the Consultation Draft's focus - a fit for purpose senior secondary system and its prioritisation of a learner-centred and equitable system design. The case for change and the recommendations of the Consultation Draft, align well to best practice in high-performing systems internationally¹. These systems all perform well on literacy and numeracy outcomes while also reorienting their focus to the needs of post-industrial economies, which is important context following another release of underwhelming NAPLAN results nationally and in Western Australia².

There are many positive recommendations made throughout the Consultation Draft which Learning Creates Australia also recommends that the Department of Education should explore - but the challenge lies in the prioritisation and implementation of so many important recommendations.

In our role as a national convener, Learning Creates Australia has built collaborations with hundreds of learning communities (including internationally) and leading national jurisdictions that are on the same journey as Western Australia. Through these partnerships we've observed three important guiding principles for implementation that the Department of Education could consider adopting:

1. Learner-centred design that prioritises and better matches individual needs, strengths and aspirations to post-school opportunities
2. Bridge the arbitrary divides between school and further learning, and, academic and vocational learning
3. Beyond bottom-up reform: fostering creativity and community-driven solutions where Government is a key enabler

¹ [Masters, G. \(2022\). Building a world-class learning system.](#)

² [ACARA \(2024\). NAPLAN national results.](#)

Learner-centred design that prioritises and better matches individual needs, strengths and aspirations to post-school opportunities

The system objectives set out in the Consultation Draft and many of its recommendations coalesce under a guiding principle to utilise a learner-centred design for implementation. In our first submission we detailed the challenges of student engagement and mental health alongside what we've heard from over 1200 young people - that they want senior secondary to enable them to personalise their learning and be recognised as their whole selves.

Consultation Draft recommendations to clarify the purpose of senior secondary education and involve young people in system and course design have strong precedents in Australia and globally. Redefining the purpose of education is one of the most powerful levers for transforming the learning system and inclusive and intentional dialogues are needed to surface values and beliefs about education and to develop a broadly shared vision of the purpose of education. By involving young people, parents, employers, and educators, we ensure that all stakeholders play a role in shaping senior secondary education, aligning with the "more complex set of inter-connected purposes" described in the Consultation Draft. This inclusive approach will encourage participants to think beyond the confines of current educational experiences, envisioning an improved and relevant system. It is vital to consider the unique needs of young people, communities, and First Nations people, fostering a shared understanding and agreement on the purpose of education.

This shared vision will serve as a powerful lever for driving systemic change. Learning Creates Australia has observed a strong desire for transformation among Australian stakeholders, mirroring a global trend seen in UN member states working towards educational visions for 2030. To achieve this, open, inclusive, and intentional dialogues are essential to surface the values, beliefs, and aspirations of education and learning in Australia.

Drawing inspiration from successful models, such as the [Northern Territory Learning Commission](#), the [student forums](#) that informed the [strategy for public education in South Australia](#) and [The Big Education Conversation](#) in the UK, Western Australia can develop a learner-centred design strategy tailored to its context.

The system objectives and recommendations in the Consultation Draft coalesce under a guiding principle to utilise a learner-centred design for implementation which we recommend the Department of Education consider adopting.

Bridge the arbitrary divides between school and further learning, and, academic and vocational learning

The Consultation Paper sets out the important goal to ensure senior secondary schooling prepares young people for a broader range of pathways. Our social and economic future hinges on a fit-for-purpose learning system that equips all young people with the skills they need to thrive and contribute to society, that has changed dramatically over the past decades.

There are several recommendations around pathways that we think could be crystallised into an implementation principle aimed at bridging the arbitrary divides between school and further learning, and academic and vocational learning. These recommendations include but are not limited to: “supporting enhanced career education and pathway planning”, “clarifying the purposes of VET in senior secondary education” and “strengthening university enabling programs”. We support all these recommendations and believe that this guiding principle captures the essence of them and could support implementation.

Globally we’re seeing movements making the case for a bridging of the arbitrary divide between our secondary and tertiary education systems. [The Big Blur](#) (USA) has convened leading jurisdictions, higher education, industry and learning communities to develop a policy roadmap that erases “the boundaries between high school, college, and careers, and creating one new system that works for everyone”³. In the UK, as in Australia, there have been dedicated efforts to improve equity access to post-schools learning and training⁴. And many jurisdictions already place equal value on vocational and academic learning (eg. Denmark and Germany⁵).

In Australia, there has been a push for “tertiary harmonisation”⁶ of academic and vocational learning alongside an attempt to align senior secondary and tertiary qualifications. The Noonan Review (2019) of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) found our qualification system was confronted by rapid growth and changes in knowledge, by a proliferation of education and training providers, and the increasing use of short-form credentials. The review included a recommendation that the qualification type for the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education should be more clearly defined and represented in the AQF in terms of its role in preparing young people for a range of pathways, at different levels⁷. The Qualification Reform Design Group continues its work of designing a reform process of VET qualifications and the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) will soon begin its work of tertiary harmonisation.

Bridging the arbitrary divides between school and further learning, and academic and vocational learning will take time and will be supported by momentum at a Commonwealth level and in the tertiary sector. We recommend adopting this guiding principle could help enable the implementation of many of the recommendations in the Consultation Draft.

³ [Jobs for the Future \(2023\). The Big Blur.](#)

⁴ [House of Commons Library \(2024\). Equality of access and outcomes in higher education in England.](#)

⁵ [OECD \(2022\). The Landscape of Providers of Vocational Education and Training.](#)

⁶ [Department of Employment and Workplace Relations \(2024\). Australian Universities Accord.](#)

⁷ [Milligan, S., Mackay, T. & Noonan, P. \(2023\) Framing Success for All: A proposal about regulatory arrangements for certification in Australian senior secondary schooling](#) & [Dawkins, P., Lilley, M. & Pascoe, R. \(2023\) Rethinking Tertiary Education](#)

Beyond bottom-up reform: fostering creativity and community-driven solutions where Government is a key enabler

From our work with jurisdictions and pioneering learning communities, we've observed a shift in approach to systems reform that's enabling jurisdictions to be more purposeful in their role as enablers of community adaptation and innovation. Systems are moving beyond bottom-up reform by fostering an environment where creativity and community-driven solutions can thrive, with Government shifting its role from top-down regulation to active enabler.

In South Australia, this is described as what is held "tight" (purpose) and what is held "flexible" to local context⁸. In Singapore, there has been an intentional shift away from top-down, centralised directives and "teacher-proof instructional strategies" to "ecological whole-of-system innovations" and "learner-centric pedagogies" led by teacher-researchers⁹. What is common across these examples and others globally, is a shift beyond a simple top-down or even bottom-up approach to reform. Jurisdictions are moving beyond bottom-up to build to a new approach, where they build the capacity of the local learning communities to innovate and learn from each other, then allow them to influence how the system determines what to hold tight and loose in its enablement of whole of system transformation.

The We Are More movement has hosted events in [Adelaide](#), [Hobart](#) and in 2025 Darwin in partnership with these three jurisdictions to build whole of system momentum towards a focus on the whole learner and needs of 21st Century economy and society. By centring young people and pioneering learning communities alongside all other system actors we can explore and test what enables and blocks the realisation of recommendations like the ones in this review, in specific localities and contexts.

Western Australia already has under-acknowledged progress towards many of the goals and outcome in the Consultation Draft. As an example, pioneering learning communities, including in Western Australia, have come together through [The Power of Recognising More study](#) to focus on probing common, complex and challenging questions that are necessary to build robust evidence on the impact and value of broader recognition of learning.

This review is a timely opportunity to build off the innovations of many schools and other education institutions towards a learner-centric, equitable and fit-for-purpose senior secondary education.

⁸ [Department for Education South Australia \(2023\). Our strategy for public education in South Australia.](#)

⁹ [Brookings Institute \(2023\). Singapore's educational reforms toward holistic outcomes.](#)

Conclusion

Learning Creates Australia's submission to the Consultation Draft applauds the many positive recommendations and overall focus for Pathways to Post-School Success Review. We provide three guiding principles that we recommend the Department for Education consider in its implementation of the Review.

1. Learner-centred design that prioritises and better matches individual needs, strengths and aspirations to post-school opportunities
2. Bridging the arbitrary divides between school and further learning, academic and vocational learning
3. Beyond bottom-up reform: fostering creativity and community-driven solutions where Government is a key enabler

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Learning Creates acknowledges 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, present and emerging 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.