



About Australian Learning Lecture

This submission is from the Australian Learning Lectureⁱ, a ten-year initiative by Koshland Education Innovation Ltdⁱⁱ designed to bring big ideas and new approaches in education to national attention. The Australian Learning Lecture is built around a biennial lecture. Each lecture introduces a big new idea presented by an international thought leader which is supported by an impact program. The program is designed to show that big ideas are possible in practice, and can drive greater benefit to students.

ALL acts as a hub and a catalyst, working with the world's leading knowledge shapers to drive impact in key areas of need for change. It draws on the input of multiple voices and stakeholders to strengthen the importance of learning for all Australians. ALL is not politically or commercially aligned.

Overview

The current Productivity Commission Inquiry *From Learning to Growth* has the potential to be a defining event in the evolution of Australia's school system.

We concur with the Commission that a quality education benefits both individuals and society and that education has a cost and uses valuable resources. We also agree with the Productivity Commissioner's viewpoint that **education is ripe for disruption**.

However, our view is that:

Focusing on reform within schools will not get us where we need to go unless we address broader structural issues.

Australia is out of step with the rest of the world in four ways:

- We do not have a common clear basis for funding schools which drives success for all.
- We are not measuring the right skills for the economy today: problem solving, communication, digital, beyond reading and writing
- We are the only country within the OECD to use a single score, ATAR, for measuring and there is also too much memorising/ rote learning in our measurements from NAPLAN to ATAR.
- We do not recognise, unlike China, Finland and South Korea for example, that teachers need time to reskill for our changing world and that more teacher-student time is not necessary.

These are all factors that need to be addressed in any discussion about productivity, learning and growth.

General comments about the Interim Report

An unlevel playing field

It is time for the Australian school education system to be transformed, rather than continue with the piecemeal approach to reform. To achieve this, we believe that equity in funding must be considered as part of any discussion about productivity, learning and growth. It is not enough to focus on teacher effectiveness.

The causal relationship between the funding allocation across regions, schools and students, is responsible for producing concentrations of social disadvantage which, in turn, contributes to poor learning outcomes for disadvantaged students and coasting in advantaged students. Both contribute to poor productivity.

This trend has continued despite efforts and money seeking change.

To address the problems facing Australian schools we must understand that **Australia is out of step with the rest of the world in our structural arrangements.**

Australia is internationally unusual in permitting largely taxpayer funded non-government schools almost complete autonomy over enrolment practices. In countries like New Zealand, South Korea, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom, governments regulate non-government school enrolment policies to ensure inclusivity.

In Australia, entrance tests (also found in some selective government schools), as well as expulsion policies, exclude disadvantaged and/or low achieving young people.

The top performing school systems in the world have abolished most of their summative assessment pieces for students throughout their school lives.

However, the Australian state governments are ignoring the latest research, as well as the success of international systems. Instead, they are implementing more system-wide assessments, from the Victorian government introducing phonics testing in year 1, to Queensland's new high-stakes, final year 12 exams; and education ministers throughout the country are doubling down on NAPLAN tests, despite their uselessness to teachers and to instruction.

These factors, among others, contribute to acute concentrations of disadvantage which harm student learning outcomes. **Without reform in wider system frameworks, our efforts at reform within schools will fail.**

We need to create a **common** system where schools help each child achieve a full year of learning, every year, and to realise their full potential.

In today's world more than ever before, productivity and society all suffer if all children do not go forward with a strong educational base.

Proper funding for schools

Proper funding of public schools would provide significant economic returns to Australia; high quality education provides the foundations for Australia's competitive, highly skilled, qualified and capable national labour force.

The negative effect of failing to properly fund schools is shown through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-standard Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) metric which demonstrates that Australia's performance in reading, science, and maths has steadily declined since 2000.¹

A significant number of Australian students do not meet international STEM-related achievement benchmarks: for example, the 2019 Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) results demonstrate that between 68%-78% of Australian students achieved the TIMSS Intermediate international benchmark – the nationally agreed proficient standard – compared to more than 90% of students in the highest achieving country, Singapore.²

A report commissioned by the Australian Education Union in 2016³ showed that an increase in the average PISA score of 25 points would deliver significant long term economic benefits through improved skills, life outcomes and a lower requirement for government assistance. The report found that the economic benefits would include:

- An average \$65 billion in increased economic benefits each year until 2095, an additional benefit of approximately 5% of GDP.
- A future economic benefit of \$5.2 trillion (discounted for inflation) until year 2095 - an economic benefit that is 335% of current GDP.
- A GDP level that will be 29% higher in 2095 due to the reform.¹¹ Productivity effects of early education.

These are but a few reasons for including funding in any commentary about productivity and learning and growth in Australia's education system.

Productivity, learning and growth

We agree with the Australian Education Union that the benefits of properly funded, accessible education extend far beyond its productivity impacts. Quality public education provides a bedrock for Australians' quality of life – from teaching foundational life skills like literacy, numeracy, creativity and social skills, to skills needed in contemporary life: problem solving, communication skills, critical thinking and digital.

¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, PISA 2018, p 1 and p 4

² Thomson, S., Wernert, N., Rodrigues, S., & O'Grady, E., TIMSS 2019 Australia. Volume I: Student performance, Australian Council for Educational Research, 2020, p.xvi,

³ Rorris A., Australian Schooling – The Price of Failure and Reward for Success, 2016, p 6,

Education also contributes to the broader social, cultural, civic, and democratic benefits of quality public education. As the Principal of Warakirri College⁴, an independent selective school, in Sydney, said: *“Our students have disconnected from mainstream education or don't feel comfortable in a traditional school. By coming here, they have the chance to learn in their own way and time. They end up with jobs rather than in queues at Centrelink. They contribute to their local community.”*

Specific comments to the Interim Report

Digital learning through the lens of COVID-19

We note that the Productivity Commission is requesting information about how digital technology can be used to reduce teaching out of field, including the risks of providing access to virtual schooling and best models; as well as better support for schools in accessing and using digital technologies; the barriers to change; respective roles for all governments to coordinate and support technology adoption; and equitable access to technology for students.

In the Australian Learning Lecture submission⁵ to the Victorian government about lessons from the COVID-19 period of remote and flexible learning, we made the following points:

- COVID-19 has shown that our young people are resilient, creative and critical thinkers who, when given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning, can be excellent self-managers and thrive in often challenging circumstances.
- With well-designed and technology supported learning experiences, the locus of control can shift from the teacher in the classroom to anytime, anywhere learning driven by young people and expertly facilitated by educators.
- This gives hope that we can move from a one-size-fits-all model of schooling to a more flexible, personalised and authentic learning journey for each young person, with the school as the hub and learning experiences coming from the local and global communities.
- There is an extraordinary opportunity for what the Brookings Institution has called educational ‘leapfrogging’ – harnessing the power of innovation and opportunity to create transformative shifts in models of learning to meet future needs compared to slow incremental change.
- Many schools used the pandemic as a transformative moment to reimagine their educational offering.

Learners during COVID who had a safe, quiet place to learn, access to reliable hardware, Wi-Fi/NBN and materials could undertake remote and online learning either directed by their teachers, supported by their parents or independently. Young people who did not have these home conditions or those with additional learning needs struggled to learn irrespective of the format of learning. This highlights the need for each child to have access to high quality learning and technology and appropriate learning support when learning remotely. In government schools, this should be provided by the Government (as was the case in Victoria) but technology is only as good as access to Wi-Fi and a reliable Internet.

⁴ <https://www.warakirricollege.nsw.edu.au/>

⁵ <https://all-learning.org.au/submissions/all-submission-to-the-victorian-department-of-education-review-into-remote-and-flexible-learning/>

Case study on successful virtual schooling

The Northern Territory Learning Commission (NTLC) is a collaborative initiative providing an opportunity for students to grow their agency through analysing their school's data, co-planning and co-implementing a project with the goal of improving learning at their school.⁶ In 2020 and beyond, the Commission worked to develop hybrid ways to keep the learning going. The online versions of what were traditionally face-to-face events included whole-group instructional elements, and follow-up by supporting individual schools in virtual breakout rooms for clinic-style expert meetings. Today differentiated instruction continues to be available for the schools, with a choice of electing to join workshops dependent on the stage of their project, as aligned with the Northern Territory inquiry cycle, and forging ahead for those with well-developed projects. The benefit of this type of format has been the increased ability of schools to share their work and thus share ideas more freely, as some of the projects have a focus on common goals, such as improving feedback, meta-cognition and writing.

There has been a growth in program membership from 11 schools in 2020 to 32 in 2022 as students and schools are more autonomous in their directions, sharing ideas and insights across and within a classroom, which makes cross-school work more visible. Shifting the balance of design and ownership of the program from teacher to students has had significant impact at a school scale, with system-wide implications of enacting strategic goals of students at the centre of the system/learning.

Different models of learning through COVID-19 in Victoria

Some schools put the whole, unaltered timetable online via video calls; other schools allowed entirely self-directed learning with little access to teachers. Both extremes had limits. The unaltered "business-as-usual" had the negatives of young people sitting in front of a screen for a whole day. The totally independent learning proved the need for supportive feedback and feedforward from expert educators as well as peer collaboration.

The most effective models of learning combined intensive synchronous learning, student focused asynchronous learning and an intentional focus on wellbeing and social connection. These models gave learners the agency and context to practise and develop the skillsets, mindsets and toolsets necessary to thrive now and into the future.

Our submission made several recommendations which are pertinent to the Productivity Commission:

- Review the evidence related to learning to produce Victorian Learning Design Principles (and the equivalents in other States and Territories) that consider changes to timetabling, curriculum and learner agency to allow different structures of learning.
- If the positive lessons of COVID-19 are to be built on, it is necessary to recognise the skill sets students have developed which strengthen their preparation for the new emerging economy. The current high stakes testing cannot credential these skills of independence, entrepreneurship, communication, resilience and digital capability.
- Implement the kind of learner profile outlined in the Australian Learning Lecture's *Beyond ATAR*⁷ paper to measure broader skill sets of each individual student.
- Reimagine the assessment system as a driver for this change and rethink the Victorian Certificate of Education to become the Victorian Portfolio of Credentialed Capabilities.

Targeted professional learning for educators

The sudden shift to remote and flexible learning accelerated the adoption of technology. However, it also highlighted the generally underdeveloped technology and skills of educators in a primarily online environment. We recommended that the Victorian Learning Design Principles (and the equivalents in other States and Territories) **include** approaches where technology genuinely enhances learning, global communication, creative media, interaction with experts outside the school.

⁶ See teachermagazine.com/au_en/articles/student-agency-in-action-in-the-northern-territory

⁷ https://all-learning.org.au/app/uploads/2021/02/beyond_atar_proposal_for_change_all.pdf

Case study of virtual learning in action

Emerging Sciences Victoria⁸, an online science school that runs out of John Monash Science School in Melbourne, showcases the opportunity to involve experts from across the world in everyday learning. Two highly skilled teachers based at the school run two hour-long lessons per week in Nanotechnology, Medical Physics, Bioinformatics, the Nature and Beauty of Mathematics, Earth-Saving Science, Astrophysics and Indigenous Science. Each semester-long subject has students from across the state of Victoria participating, collaborating using Google Workspace, building relationships and connecting with other students and experts who are passionate about science. Some of the learners are in their own school's library, the Principal's Office or at home; the place of learning does not matter as much as the learning they experience.

Disrupting the school model

How school operates also affects student outcomes, and thus productivity, learning and growth. However, schooling for many is still stuck in the 1900s, demanding consistency and conformity. Learning is driven by bells and timetables. School systems want learners to do the same thing, at the same time, in the same way.

Teaching is also constrained by old ways of thinking. Despite the growing recognition of demands on teachers' workloads, their work is still often measured by their physical presence in the classroom. Everything else that enables successful lesson delivery such as lesson planning, learning design, marking, and assessment, is often unacknowledged and undervalued. Teachers consistently report they do not have the time to meet the increasingly complex needs of their work.

Other countries' disrupting school models

*Building a world-class learning system*⁹ is a review of a joint study between National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to understand how five jurisdictions – British Columbia, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong and South Korea – are approaching school education and its transformation.

These countries all perform unusually well in international achievement surveys, including the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The study explores aspects of the 'learning systems' these jurisdictions have established, including the school curriculum, assessment and credentialing processes, teacher preparation and professional learning, leadership development, and the creation of supportive learning ecosystems.

Despite their relatively high performances on these traditional metrics, these five jurisdictions are all working to redesign their school learning systems to better prepare young people for future life and work, and to ensure that every young person learns successfully, achieves high standards and leaves school well-prepared for their future.

Curriculum reform

General concerns in these jurisdictions have been that a broad curriculum results in less deep learning, overemphasising passive, reproductive learning, and leaves little room for teachers to make professional judgements about what, when and how they teach.

In Hong Kong, for instance, the 2002 Learning to Learn curriculum reduced the amount of rote learning required of students, and a 2020 task force recommended further trimming of that territory's curriculum to enable more in-depth learning.

⁸ CSE-Leading-Education-Series-11_Renegotiating-learning-in-a-hybrid-world (1).pdf (p7)

⁹ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1evSWkCOpwGLYCrQNbzgXfhY_eu9JYcfq/view

In downsizing their curricula, most jurisdictions have not simply removed existing content. Instead, curricula have been replaced by several more broadly defined student outcomes. The British Columbia's 2011 Education Plan, focuses on 'fewer but more important' learning outcomes.

What is the role of the teacher?

We are concerned about the Commission's suggestions that teachers are given additional tasks to improve their teaching; longer schooldays; online classes taught by qualified teachers, and streaming students into ability groups to improve Australia's educational performance.

Our viewpoint is we need to trust teachers and young people by presenting them with more leadership regarding teaching and learning in schools. The overworking and undervaluing of the teaching profession directly damages the productivity of the teaching workforce, and in turn Australia's intergenerational productivity by harming the education of students, with subsequent implications of a less skilled, less capable, less qualified labour force.

Four-day school week

The Commission asks for feedback about four-day school weeks. A four-day school week is not a new idea. However, current models that cram the same number of school hours into four days are last-resort responses to teacher shortages. They don't recognise nor value teachers' work outside the classroom.

In addressing the productivity issue, we need to reconsider the curriculum and cut compulsory face-to-face learning hours for students, to enable teachers to design more personalised and responsive student learning, and give students more control over their learning and deepen their learning. Teachers also need time to reskill for our changing world.

Case study

Emmanuel Catholic College in Perth is currently engaging with its school community to consider a four-day week for Year 12. It believes that it would assist with work/school life balance, given students the chance to access professional internships which otherwise they could not. Students would be able to come to school for one on one assistance with staff or to collaborate with other students. It is also moving from a six-period day to provide more time for deep learning to occur, as well as introducing five subjects only in Year 12 to provide a study period each day. The view is that if the school can provide more time, students will be more engaged, discover a passion, achievement will improve as well as the health and wellbeing of students.

The risks

There are risks to a four-day school week. It may be a way to further cut teacher numbers, reduce their pay or make them teach more classes. Such measures all fail to understand the complexity of teaching and learning. So much of teaching is often invisible, the work behind-the-scenes is just as important as the more visible classroom teaching. Both must be valued if education is to truly evolve.

Another risk for a four-day school week is the potential for it to widen the gap between the students from the most vulnerable backgrounds and students from the most advantaged backgrounds. For some students, schools are the safest place for them and the most productive place for them to thrive. However, a four-day school week would not mean that school is closed for a day.

New ways of schooling – the Future School¹⁰

The Australian Learning Lecture's Future School¹¹ set out to explore what the Future School is and how it could be embraced by all schools. What emerged from a global scan of future schools, commissioned by the Australian Learning Lecture, is that there is more than one model for schooling; schools no longer exist in their own separate bubbles; and that many of the schools that are intentionally working to be future-fit operate outside the publicly funded system.

The scan unveiled three principles common to future schools:

- Values that future schools should manifest;
- The operational philosophy that demonstrate those values in practice; and
- The learners' experience of all that.

Under values, for instance, future schools applied these design principles:

Purpose driven: Future Schools focus on the purpose of both individual and collective thriving, and on helping their learners to acquire personal purpose: building their 'why?'

Equity-focused: schools work to address inequities and social justice and help young people to do so.

Promoting identity: each learner's social and cultural identity is nurtured, cultivating a sense of belonging and value.

Strength-based: the school recognises, celebrates and builds from each (and every) individual's existing assets.

Relevant: learning is relevant to the local and global community.

These principles do **not** replace the curriculum. Instead they build on and enhance the curriculum thereby engaging students and providing real-life education – contributing to learning, growth and productivity.

Case study

Jeff Holte runs the Liger Leadership Academy in Phnom Penh, a school shaped to create the leaders of the future. This is in a country ravaged by a traumatic past. The school is focussed on ethical leadership and the approach it takes is networking, problem solving, communication and collaboration, and dot connecting. The school does real world projects, such as working on marine biology in the coast off Cambodia. The students have become the first certified scuba divers in the country, and they are working with international researchers to try and save the habitat off the coast.

*"We question the idea of the teacher at school. WE question the whole notion of who is working students and who is helping them learn. The real answer that we have been working for years is that it is **everyone.**"*

Case study

At XP Schools in England,^{12,13} every student, every week has a learning experience offsite, in the local community, in workplaces or in museums. Learning happens anywhere. The first experience of learning that students and teachers have at XP Schools is a week of outward-bound activities; camping, abseiling and building up the sense of belonging or, as XP say, their sense of 'crew' that sets them up for learning anything, anywhere.

¹⁰ <https://all-learning.org.au/future-school/>

¹¹ <https://all-learning.org.au/future-school/>

¹² CSE-Leading-Education-Series-11_Renegotiating-learning-in-a-hybrid-world (1).pdf (p7)

¹³ <https://all-learning.org.au/what-is-a-future-school/xp-school/>

New skills needed as well as foundational skills

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 are narrow and do not support the recording of a broad range of capabilities such as communication, collaboration and creativity which are necessary to our world today or tomorrow. They do **little to nothing** to contribute to productivity, learning and growth.

The Australian Learning Lecture's publication *Beyond ATAR: Proposal for Change*¹⁴ argues the case for moving beyond ATAR to adopting a nationally agreed Learner Profile which 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 provide a snapshot of the level of attainment of each young Australian across a range of domains. It would not concentrate solely on academic achievements but skills gained such as critical thinking, collaboration and problem solving. It would be a living document, enabling young people to chart their learning and development, indicating growth over time.

The concept was embraced in the Review of senior secondary pathways chaired by Professor Peter Shergold AC and Education Ministers agreed with all 20 of the report's recommendations in-principle, and in December 2020, Ministers agreed on an approach and workplan for the priority recommendations, including developing a sample Learner Profile¹⁵.

ⁱ <https://all-learning.org.au/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities/e3401b57-7c06-ea11-a811-000d3ad1fbf8/profile>

¹⁴ https://all-learning.org.au/app/uploads/2021/02/beyond_atar_proposal_for_change_all.pdf

¹⁵ 01 Aiii Review of senior secondary pathways (002).pdf