

THE REVIEW OF
SENIOR SECONDARY PATHWAYS
INTO WORK, FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Report

of the National Youth Forum in Wagga Wagga - 10 March 2020



Disclaimer

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The information provided in this report is based on what participants contributed during the Youth Forum. Information includes examples and insights provided by participants based on their own experiences and feedback. The analysis should not be read as representative of all Australian young people.

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- » The Indie School (NSW)
- » Erindale College (ACT)
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- » Commissioner for Children and Young People WA
- » Jasiri (NSW / ACT)
- » Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (National)
- » YLab (National)

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

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Overview

The National Youth Forum was conducted as part of the Education Council Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training. The Review will provide Education Council with advice and recommendations on how senior secondary students can better understand and be enabled to choose the most appropriate pathway to support their transition into work, further education and/or training. The Review is one of eight national priority initiatives included in the National School Reform Agreement.

Hearing from young people about their expectations and experiences has been a critical part of the Review. An Expert Review Panel, lead by Professor Shergold AC, has undertaken a series of consultations with educators and stakeholders, and hosted a number of workshops with young people from across the country.

These consultations have included looking at how senior secondary education is preparing young people for diverse pathways. The Panel was particularly interested in ensuring students are better supported to make decisions about life beyond school, including how they can build and demonstrate their diverse skills and capabilities. This includes considering the different contexts faced by students, including students with disability, those in regional, rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

As the Review consultation period concluded, the Panel hosted a youth forum with young people from across Australia in Wagga Wagga, NSW. This forum helped to inform the Review and it followed on from a series of workshops with young people held in different states and territories throughout 2019 and early 2020. This report provides a summary of the outcomes of the National Youth Forum.

About the Youth Forum

The National Youth Forum in Wagga Wagga was held on 10 March 2020 and was attended by 51 young Australians, aged between 15 and 25 years. Participants attended from a number of states across Australia, including Western Australia, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. There was a mix of young people from both metropolitan areas and regional towns.

Participation

Forum participants represented a cross section of the youth community including secondary school students and young people who have taken different pathways after school. This included trainees and apprentices, university students, and young people in the workforce. Participants were from diverse groups and included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, and young people with disability.

The forum was also attended by members of the Review Panel, educators, supervisors and support people who contributed to some activities throughout the day. While the youth participants' feedback is the focus of this report, it also includes some insights from these educators and support people.



Purpose of the forum

The purpose of the forum was to explore participants' expectations and preferences for how they could be better supported to follow their desired pathways, and to demonstrate their capabilities, skills and interests as they leave school. We would do this by testing specific prototypes and ideas stemming from the Review consultations and previous youth workshops.

The specific prototypes tested were primarily created from ideas generated by young people during a series of co-design workshops run by [YLab](#).

The forum was opened by Professor Peter Shergold AC, Chair of the Expert Panel for the Review.



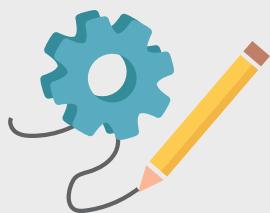
Professor Peter Shergold, Chair of the Expert Review Panel, with students from Riverina Anglican College.

Methodology

The forum included three main sessions:

- » Session 1. Human-centred design sprint to understand student experiences and expectations
- » Session 2. Prototype testing of the process for a learner profile and education passport
- » Session 3. Exploring capabilities for different career pathways

A range of activities were used to create a fun, engaging and interactive environment. Activities included:



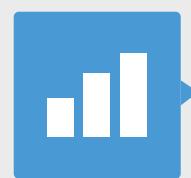
A human-centred design sprint



Group discussions



Testing of concepts and prototypes



Individual reflections and ratings, using an online engagement tool, Mentimeter

Key themes

The following key themes and insights are based on participant responses during the Youth Forum. These were consistent with findings of other youth forums and workshops held throughout the Review.

- » **Participants wanted to broaden their learning and receive more practical assistance to gain the skills they need for life**

Participants said schools need to provide more practical assistance for students to support them to meet the requirements for a range of pathways. They suggested more practical and experiential learning, more opportunities for building skills across a range of professions and careers, and increasing the focus on gaining life skills while at school.

Participants indicated they wanted secondary schools to reduce the focus on traditional subject areas and coursework to create capacity for other learning, such as work experience, community engagement and volunteering, and alternative areas of study such as arts and trades. Further to this, and consistent with their support for the [prototypes](#), participants favoured the expansion of assessments to be more reflective of students' aptitude, attributes and skills relevant to their desired career pathway, including the recognition of external activities such as volunteering.

- » **Participants supported new ways of demonstrating capabilities as they leave school ([the prototypes and a learner profile](#))**

Almost all participants agreed a learner profile that demonstrated the skills, capabilities and interests of a person as they leave school would be significantly more useful than current secondary school (leaving) certificates. In particular, when the prototypes were shared with participants, many expressed their enthusiasm about the potential benefits of gaining and demonstrating their capabilities during and as they leave school.

Young people supported a personalised approach to identifying individual skills and attributes. Participants noted the importance of recognising the range of achievements students might complete during senior schooling, which would provide a more holistic view of an individual rather than only an academic score, such as the ATAR. Participants reaffirmed that they wanted schools to help them better explore different career opportunities and ensure they had the capabilities to pursue their work or higher education options.

- » **Equity was the number one concern for young people**

Consistent with other Review youth forums and workshops, participants in the Youth Forum wanted to ensure there was a strong emphasis on ensuring any new processes or a learner profile developed in senior school were equitable for all students. This included giving consideration to:

- » Where a person lives – as access to work experience or courses, and internet connectivity, may be more limited in rural and regional towns.
- » Cultural differences – including family expectations that focus on academic success, and cultural barriers to the types of employment/career options, including the work experience that young women in some cultures may be permitted to participate in. The importance of having information delivered to families in different languages was also identified.
- » Students with disability – as there may be limitations for some students with a disability to complete or participate in some of the opportunities, which may affect their 'learner profile'. It will be important to ensure the profile is able to fully capture the different abilities of all students.
- » Lower socio-economic schools – as students from lower socio-economic areas may receive less support or more limited opportunities as a result of other priorities and pressures placed on schools and teachers.

Experiences and expectations

Common challenges to accessing pathways

Throughout the Review consultations, young people consistently said they needed more support at school to learn about and experience the different types of pathways available to them after school. They said this would help to improve their transition from senior secondary school into work, higher education and training.

Young people acknowledged that changes in technology, globalisation and automation will mean their pathways are different to their parents. They suggested that schools and parents need to be equipped with more information about the opportunities available to them to be able to support them in their choices and to gain the skills and capabilities they would need to enter different types of occupations in the future.

During the Youth Forum, participants shared their experiences about how they were supported to consider different pathways after school. Participants commonly shared:

They needed more information about the options available to them: Many indicated they were unaware of many of the pathways they could take and the types of career paths, courses or opportunities on offer. They also reported not receiving enough guidance about the options that might be right for them based on their skills, capabilities and interests.

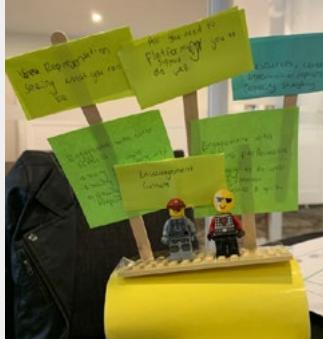
They wanted to be better equipped with the skills and knowledge to confidently transition from secondary school: In particular, some described a lack of guidance to understand the expectations of university or resources to help them make post-school decisions. Some also suggested there's a lack of representation and diversity in examples that show what was achievable for people from different backgrounds. Many reported they didn't get enough opportunity to build life skills, such as financial literacy and organisational skills.

Mental health and wellbeing are common concerns as they transition from secondary school: Several participants indicated that increased pressures contribute to poor mental health for some students in senior years of school, including anxiety from the pressure of exams and content-heavy coursework. Some reported they felt pressured to pursue a 'good' university degree instead of being encouraged to follow their interests.

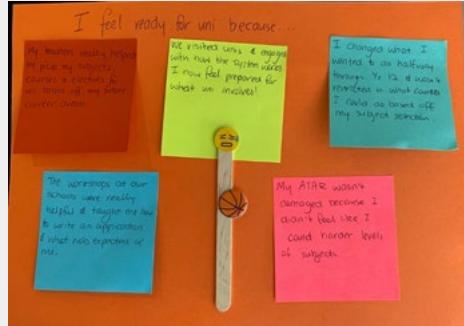
Solutions and ideas for improving access to pathways

Participants identified a range of solutions they felt would help to overcome these challenges. They suggested:

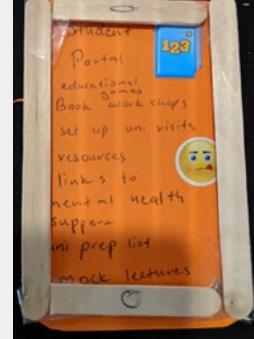
- » More hands-on assistance from schools for students to meet the requirements of any chosen pathway
- » Students to be encouraged and supported to follow passions and interests, and more diverse pathways, rather than being primarily pushed towards more mainstream options
- » Provide students with access to a more varied, comprehensive range of options and course subjects both during and after secondary school. This would help to promote alternative pathways for some students
- » More career advice that is provided earlier, in more detail, and is personalised
- » More digital resources supporting students to understand the options and opportunities available to them, including apps or digital tools that help them to connect with peers and mentors to make decisions
- » Ensure school culture focuses on encouragement to achieve potential, in a more diverse range of areas
- » Improve the connections and networks between schools, universities and industry to support a better understanding for students about the available pathways to support their transition into work, further education and/or training.



Participant's prototype of a holistic secondary school learning experience



Participant's prototype of school facilitating different learning experiences and opportunities to better prepare students for university



Participant's prototype of a digital student portal with resources to prepare students for the transition from secondary school and available on their devices.

Gaining skills to support a desired pathway

Having the right mix of skills to be prepared for their desired pathways after school was identified as very important to young people.

Participants across a number of the Review workshops, including during the Youth Forum, focused on the need for more opportunities to gain life skills, interpersonal skills, practical skills and problem-solving skills during senior schooling (see Figure 1).



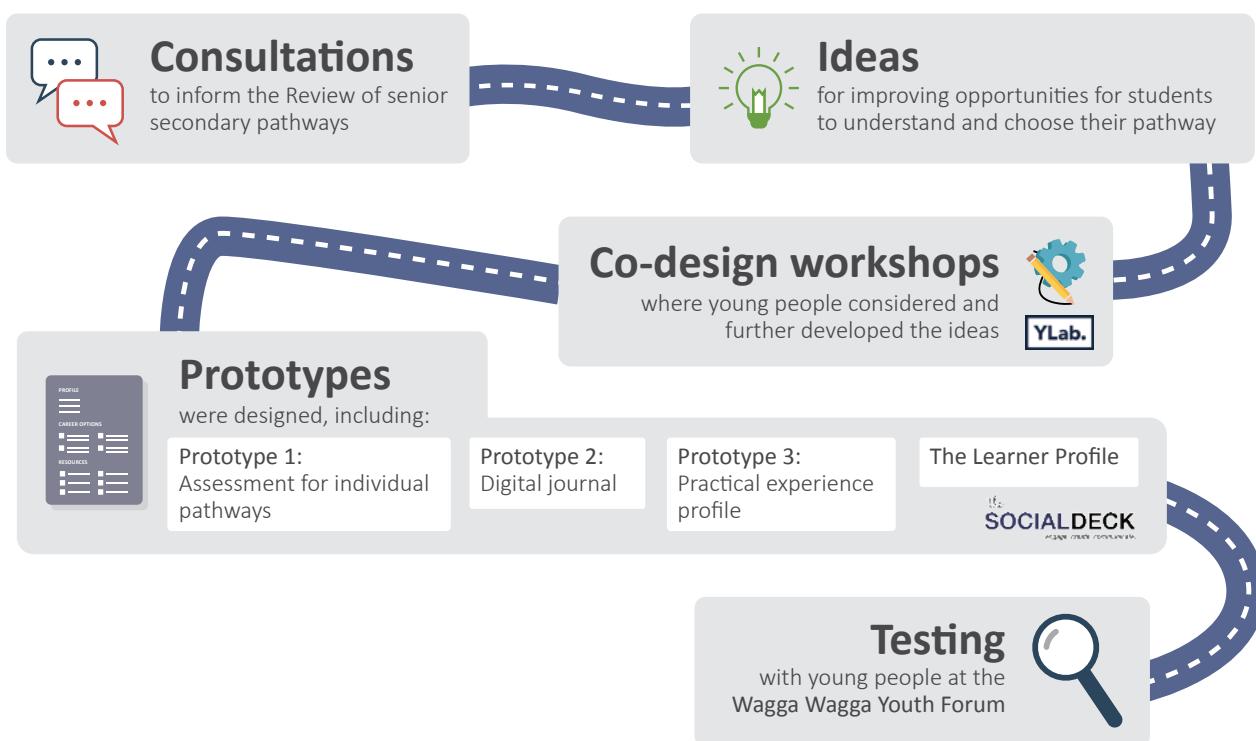
Figure 1: Youth Forum participant responses to the Mentimeter question ‘What are three important skills people should develop in secondary school that will help them in their future career?’.

This was supported by educators who also identified that skills in emotional intelligence, and how to apply these, was also critical for students to be able to transition from senior schooling.

Prototypes

Based on their wide ranging consultations, the Review Panel have considered a number of ideas for how senior secondary students can be supported to better understand their pathway opportunities and be enabled to choose the most appropriate pathway for them. This included how they can be supported to build and demonstrate their academic achievements, skills, capabilities and interests during and as they leave senior schooling.

These ideas were considered and further developed by young people in a series of co-design workshops in early 2020. The co-design workshops were held by YLab, a social enterprise who employs young people to design solutions for the future. From this generation of ideas by young people, three prototypes were designed and tested with participants in the Youth Forum.



How were the prototypes tested?

Participants worked in groups of 5 to 8 to consider each of the prototypes and answer a series of questions about:

- » The benefits of the idea or process
- » The limitations of the idea or process
- » Whether it would work for everyone, including students from different backgrounds or regions
- » What was missing in the current process or idea and how could it be improved.

Participants then rated the usefulness of each of the prototypes from 1 to 5.

Prototype 1: Assessment for individual pathways

The features of this prototype included giving students regular psychometric and ‘soft skills’ assessment, from Years 9 to 12. This would help students to learn about themselves and track improvements in developing new skills and attributes. The assessments would also help teachers to understand the different learning styles and adapt their teaching and support to the individual needs of students.

In year 12, students are provided with a profile that helps them to communicate the attributes and skills they have gained to potential employers, higher education and VET providers. They would also be given suitable career options, based on the assessment of their interests, skills and attributes, and information about resources that can support them to pursue and achieve those careers options (see Figure 2).

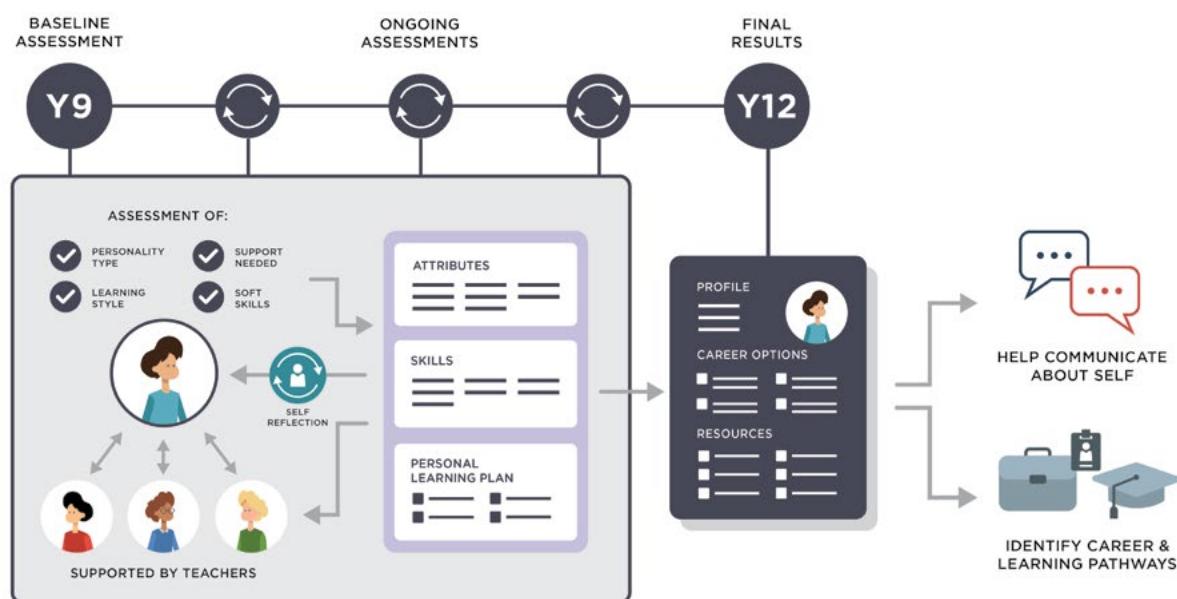


Figure 2: Assessment for individual pathways (Prototype 1)

Benefits

Participants acknowledged the benefits of having a more personalised assessment tool that would assist students to self-reflect on the career pathways. They also recognised this would be a positive approach to learning that would help students focus on developing individual skills, rather than only focusing on general academic learning while at school. They also noted it might help teachers to better understand individual students’ needs.

Concerns and limitations

Participants were concerned about how assessments of their personality, learning style and soft skills would be done, and how this type of information could be standardised for assessment. Participants were also concerned it might not be equitable for students from different backgrounds or for schools in lower socioeconomic areas who may have less time and resources, or understanding of the assessment process.

Areas for improvement

Participants recommended that school time would need to be allocated for assessments on a more regular basis, such as at the start, middle and end of the year as students will be in different mindsets at different times of year. They said it would be useful to have the profile start in year 10, rather than year 12, so there is more time to explore career options and get experience. Some also suggested there should be a focus on providing more education about the skills different pathways require, and how to gain them.

Prototype 2: Digital journal

This prototype was based on an online diary, which students from years 9 to 12 would regularly input into. Students would add their extra-curricular activities, achievements and the skills they have developed through different school-based and outside of school activities or programs. They could also invite people in their network to write testimonials or act as referees to verify their skills, including teachers, coaches and mentors.

The diary creates a ‘living profile’ throughout school that can be used for self-reflection and career planning and to demonstrate skills, capabilities and achievements to potential employers, TAFE and universities, alongside their academic results (see Figure 3). While the digital journal would be developed during school, it could then be used throughout a person’s life.

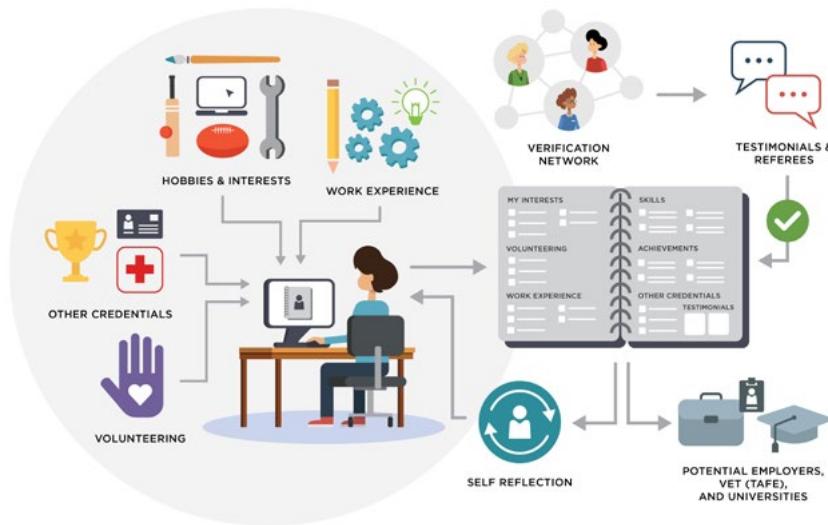


Figure 3: Digital journal (Prototype 2)

Benefits

Participants strongly supported having a tool which helps them to track and show progress of the skills they gain and the achievements they make throughout their senior secondary schooling. They particularly supported its focus on looking at students as ‘the whole person’ rather than only at academic results. Many noted that the diary would be a simple way to end the school year with a comprehensive resume or profile, which could be shared for entry into higher education or with prospective employers. They supported the components for self-reflection, noting it would make students more aware of the skills and capabilities they have gained from different experiences.

Concerns and limitations

Participants were concerned that some students would be disadvantaged where they did not have access to the same experiences, volunteer opportunities, extra-curricula activities or mentor networks. This was particularly a concern for students in regional or rural schools, and for students in lower socio-economic areas. Similarly, concerns were raised about students’ access to an online tool, as lack of internet and digital systems may be limited in some areas. A few participants suggested the diary could add pressure on students as many would be pressured by parents or teachers to do more. They also raised concerns it might make participation in extra-curricula activity and volunteering a more competitive process with people doing it for the wrong reasons.

Areas for improvement

Participants recommended that school time would need to be allocated for students to input to their online diaries, so everyone had the same opportunities to build their profiles. Employers, businesses and universities should be involved in the design of the tool to make sure they value it and it becomes an important part of their application processes. This would enable the tool to be valuable throughout a person’s life. The tool itself would need to be flexible, to allow students to change the order of their achievements and skills when pursuing different pathways. It would also require a verification system to ensure what is included by students is accurate.

Prototype 3: Practical experience profile

The features of this prototype included a profile that supports students to participate in and then demonstrate multiple work placements and in-school practical experiences. From years 9 to 12, students would identify interests in different industries or types of skills they want to gain. This information would be used to identify and participate in suitable work placements and/or in-school courses, industry presentations and workshops.

As students participate in these placements and in-school activities, they document the skills they learn and experiences they have in a profile, which would be used for career and learning pathway planning with teachers and mentors. Students gain accreditations from their experiences (see Figure 4).

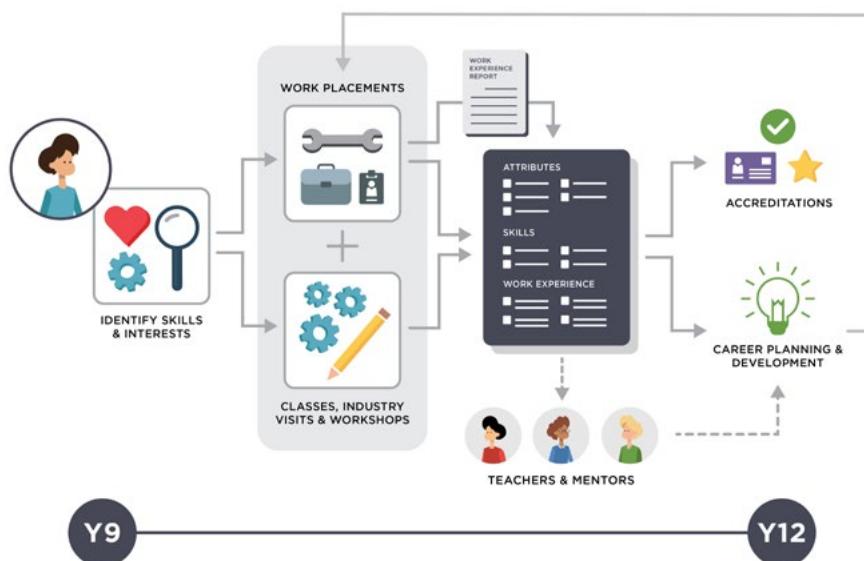


Figure 4: Practical experience profile (Prototype 3)

Benefits

Participants rated this idea highly and suggested it was a very good way to explore different options for work and to gain a wider view of 'what's out there' so they can make informed decisions in the future. The exposure to different workplaces and career types would also provide a more realistic experience of industries. Participants strongly supported the option to develop skills through hands-on experiences and workshops. Participants suggested this would provide a more holistic report of experience and skills to help with career planning and pursuing their desired pathways.

Concerns and limitations

Participants were concerned the work experience profile might not work at every school or in every area as some would have less opportunities and resources to support the variety of experiences and placements. Some participants said it might adversely affect ATAR students as it would encourage those pursuing higher academic results to do work placements which could take time away from study.

Areas for improvement

Participants suggested life and practical skills, such as time management or financial literacy, be a focus of placements and workshops. They said entrepreneurial and creative jobs should be included, such as experience starting a business or producing a podcast. Some suggested there should be exposure to university placements so students can work out if university would suit them. Participants identified that virtual internships could be included, instead of requiring face-to-face experiences. A number of participants noted this idea would require better connections between schools and industries and teachers would need to support students to participate and build their practical experience profile.

Prototype 4: Learner profile

The learner profile is a key feature being considered in the Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training. During the Youth Forum, participants including young people, educators, supervisors and panel members completed a learner profile for themselves, and provided feedback about how well it represented them, what was missing, and its usefulness to young people as they leave school (see Figure 5).

LEARNER PROFILE

ACADEMIC RESULTS		EXPERIENCE & CREDENTIALS
Subject	/100	VET certificates:
English		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Mathematics		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
		Work experience:
		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
		Volunteering:
		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
ATAR		
Achieved competency in:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Microcredentials: eg. short courses or workshops
Literacy		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Numeracy		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Digital literacy		Extra-curricular achievements: eg. first aid certificate
Financial literacy		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
		<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
DEMONSTRATED CAPABILITIES & SKILLS		
<i>Put the rating you've achieved for each skill out of 5 in the box and a combined total for each section</i>		
Thinking skills.....	Total _____	How did you learn or demonstrate these skills?
<input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Creative/imaginative thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Problem solving <input type="checkbox"/> Inquiry		
Interpersonal skills.....	Total _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communication <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional intelligence (EQ) <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork or collaboration <input type="checkbox"/> Social and cultural awareness		
Life skills.....	Total _____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Time management <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability <input type="checkbox"/> Taking initiative <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence		

Figure 5: Learner profile template (Prototype 4)

The learner profile prototype was rated as useful by most participants, particularly when comparing it to the current senior secondary certificates. However, a number of participants, including young people and educators, raised questions about how the non-academic components of a learner profile would be assessed equitably and fairly.

Benefits

Participants recognised that a learner profile would provide a more well-rounded and individualised summary of a person and take into account their broader range of achievements, capabilities and skills.

Participants highlighted the value of the profile in applying for jobs and university degrees, as it demonstrates skills and achievements beyond only their ATAR scores or other academic results. A number of participants identified that in today's workplaces, skills and attributes are often considered just as important as academic results. Therefore, the learner profile would assist them in pursuing their desired work, career or further study.

Participants also recognised significant value in the ability for the learner profile to promote self-reflection and understanding of areas for future learning and development.

Concerns and limitations

The most common challenge raised by participants, including both youth and educators, was about how skills would be assessed in a school setting, and scored consistently and equitably. Educators, in particular, noted the importance of ensuring there is clear guidance and systems to accredit and verify points provided for skills. One educator highlighted that there is some risk the proposed learner profile would still benefit students with the most resources, and suggested that instead, the solutions should be more individualised, qualitative and relationship-based.

When completing the learner profile prototype (Figure 5), most participants found it more difficult to complete the lower section on 'Demonstrated Capabilities and Skills', and to answer the question "How did you learn or demonstrate these skills?". Participants suggested guidance would be needed to make sure these sections can be completed by or for students in a consistent way.

Some educators noted that there are already a range of online application tools and this may duplicate other tools or systems used by senior schools.

Areas for improvement

There were recommendations to strengthen the learner profile prototype tested in the forum. For example, some participants suggested expanding sections to include other types of skills and activities. Others suggested it should include a personal biography to show interests and personal attributes, diversity and difference. One educator suggested it could include stories and examples of work or more qualitative indicators of success. Some current students wanted to have recognition for sporting and other leadership roles included in the profile.

A number of participants suggested listing 'demonstrated capabilities and skills' at the top, above 'academic results' and 'experience and credentials'.

A number of participants noted that the learner profile and the process to develop it needs to take into account limiting factors for students such as disability, mental health, or cultural background.

Some participants noted it would be important for the accreditation and implementation of a learner profile to be done nationally. They said this would ensure it's consistent regardless of the state or territory students are in, and would help to ensure it is valued and accepted by education providers and employers. Others suggested it might need to be better tailored to different locations and situations.

Conclusion

In summary, the Youth Forum in Wagga Wagga aligned with the findings of previous youth workshops, with the predominant findings being:

- » participants expected schools could provide a broader range of supports to help them gain different types of skills during their secondary schooling
- » participants wanted to ensure their skills, capabilities and interests are demonstrated as they transition into work, further education and training
- » participants supported an alternative to the current Senior Secondary Certificate of Education that would show a more holistic picture of themselves.

Key skills

The types of skills participants and educators identified that students would need as they completed year 12 were strongly focused on **interpersonal and communication skills**. Beyond learning traditional subjects, young people would like to expand their opportunities to gain these skills through a range of learning and practical experiences to better prepare them for their future pathways.

Prototypes

The three prototypes (1-3) were mostly supported by participants. Young people identified that these tools or processes would help them to develop skills and gain more knowledge and experiences relevant to their pathway options. The feedback on the prototypes was also consistent with their desire to demonstrate a broader range of skills, attributes and capabilities as they leave secondary school.

Educators shared some concerns about the limitations and impacts of the prototypes. They identified challenges associated with implementing the ideas in all schools and on an ongoing basis. These included costs, time and resourcing constraints, and concerns about whether they would be implemented in an equitable way for all students. Educators were also more aware that some elements of the ideas already existed in some schools, and so they suggested the prototypes should leverage and not duplicate existing models. Whereas, most students appeared to see these as very new or different processes to what they were currently experiencing.

The learner profile

The learner profile was supported by most participants. Elements which participants suggested would need to be included in a learner profile were:

- » Featuring the capabilities and skills section at the top of the profile
- » Clear, consistent and equitable ways to give assessments / ratings for these skills
- » Consistency in the academic scoring
- » Space to include sporting and other leadership roles
- » More information about personal interests.

Participants also wanted to ensure designs for a learner profile were equitable and tested broadly with students, school leavers, teachers and other stakeholders who will play a key role in informing a student's learner profile.

It is clear from the Review consultations and this Youth Forum that students wanted to leave school with more than a Senior Secondary Certificate of Education. Most young people agreed that some type of profile, supported by an online portal, which demonstrated both their formal and informal learning and their work experiences would help them in pursuing their desired pathways after school and throughout life. Equally clear is the need for any initiatives to be thoroughly developed and tested with students, families, educators, systems and employers.