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Dear Mr Orton,

**Re: Discussion Paper on the development of a sample learner profile**

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Discussion Paper on the development of a sample learner profile*, prepared by Nous Group and the Assessment Research Centre.

The potential benefits of learner profiles are considerable. The University of Melbourne's written submission to the Review of Senior Secondary Education Pathways (the Shergold Review) recommended the adoption of learner profiles to complement existing measures of academic achievement. We commend the Education Council for taking the initial steps in the nationwide adoption of learner profiles by commissioning the project to develop a sample.

If implemented appropriately, learner profiles will report on a wider range of student learning achievements than what is captured in existing measures such as the ATAR, encompassing 'general capabilities' such as teamwork and innovate thinking in addition to literacy and numeracy. This will benefit university admissions processes. For example, secondary students and teachers have reported a lack of clarity around the criteria used for university special entry programs. Allowing universities to align criteria for these programs with the capabilities documented in learner profiles will aid transparency in this area. It is possible, however, that learner profiles have greater value for the roughly half of secondary students who do not seek entry to a university program. A more comprehensive approach to the measurement and reporting of the capabilities students have acquired during secondary school will encourage those students to identify more strongly with their learning gains, and build a better understanding of the post-school pathways open to them.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits, learner profiles will fail to deliver if poorly implemented. One risk is that learner profiles are developed in a way that undermines the benefits our current framework for measuring and reporting student learning outcomes in senior secondary school. Another is that learner profiles generate a substantial work burden for secondary school teachers and students but have limited utility if their intended audience (tertiary education providers, employers) pay little attention to them.

Consequently, the University of Melbourne recommends a gradual approach to the development and implementation of learner profiles. Learner profiles are best seen as an incremental change to the way in which senior secondary student learning outcomes are reported rather than a radical overhaul of the current approach. The following comments emphasise three areas where a gradual approach will help ensure the potential value of learner profiles is realised.

**1. Learner profile should supplement existing measures of academic achievement, not replace them.**

As noted, learner profiles represent an opportunity to overcome some of the limitations of the ATAR and of study scores as a measurement of learning outcomes in senior secondary school. However, it is crucial that we preserve the advantages of the existing measurement framework. Measures of academic

performance and preparedness will remain crucial for pathways into university: ATAR and study scores for individual subjects remain an efficient means of setting pre-requisites and processing applications for bachelor programs. Learner profiles should provide information on a student's skills and attributes in addition to, rather than instead of, that provided through existing measures. This can be achieved by including the ATAR and subject study scores in the sample learner profile.

## **2. Flexibility should be prioritised in the initial development of learner profiles.**

The Discussion Paper correctly identifies the need to achieve a balance between “a degree of comparability in the way learning is represented and providing sufficient scope for representations of learning that accommodate the distinctive attainments, interests and circumstances of individual students.” The University of Melbourne argues that flexibility and accommodating diversity should be prioritised in the initial development of learner profiles. While ultimately the aim should be to reach a level of uniformity in the design and content of learner profiles, moving too quickly to a standard format risks impeding the intended benefits of reporting on a diverse range of skills and achievements. Consideration should be given to developing multiple samples in the first instance, and to supporting a number of larger pilot programs, to assist the gradual implementation of learner profiles nationwide.

## **3. Allow time to develop new ways of assessing and measuring general capabilities.**

General capabilities such as teamwork and innovative thinking are important but often difficult to assess and measure. While there is broad consensus that these capabilities should be among those students acquire in secondary school, current approaches to assessment and measurement have a focus on traditional literacy and numeracy skills. Finding ways to accurately and consistently measure general capabilities is an ongoing challenge.

Learner profiles have the potential to drive positive change in this area: a commitment to formally reporting on general capabilities will encourage changes in curriculum design to place greater emphasis on these capabilities. However, learner profiles themselves will not resolve the challenges associated with assessing and measuring general capabilities. It remains the case the traditional written exams are a poor means of testing for these capabilities. While learner profiles should include space for capabilities demonstrated through work experience, there are a number of outstanding issues in this area: there remain cultural and bureaucratic barriers to an expansion of work-based training in senior secondary school, and there are questions concerning how employers are to be involved in assessing capabilities in a way that ensures consistency in these assessments. These issues should be worked out in parallel with the gradual development and implementation of learner profiles, with research drawing input from secondary schools, VET providers and universities. Allowing for multiple samples and expanded pilot programs, as suggested above, will help achieve this.

For further information, or to discuss the submission, please do not hesitate to contact me on (03) 8344 8937 or at [gek@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:gek@unimelb.edu.au).

Kind Regards,



Professor Gregor Kennedy  
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