



***Review of Senior Secondary Pathways  
Submission by the Australian Professional Teachers Association***

6 December 2019

The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into work, further education and training. The Australian Professional Teachers Association is a federation of state and territory joint councils representing teacher associations. These associations represent a network of up to 200,000 teachers from government and non-government schools, early childhood services and centres. The vision of APTA is to provide national leadership that supports and advances the teaching profession.

This submission will address the Review questions in turn. Should further information or clarification be required, please do not hesitate to make contact.

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## ***What are the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities students should expect to leave senior secondary schooling with to help them succeed in their post-school lives?***

The Australian Professional Teachers Association (APTA) is a federation of state and territory joint councils representing teacher associations. These teaching associations represent a network of up to 200,000 teachers from government and non-government schools, early childhood services and centres. It operates as a company limited by guarantee and its vision is to provide national leadership that supports and advances the teaching profession.

The state-based associations supported by our members cross all subject areas such as mathematics, English, business and languages as well interdisciplinary areas such as literacy, special education, school leadership and others.

Many of these learning areas are not immediately associated with vocational skills to prepare for a 'robotic age' but are nevertheless vital for social competence, improved physical and mental health outcomes, problem solving and other capabilities essential for success in work and community life.

Teachers also know that lifelong learning requires young people to 'learn how to learn' and that this vital skill can be taught across all learning areas.

Teachers in subject areas which are not immediately associated with STEM or vocational learning worry that their learning is undervalued in an environment which emphasises workforce outcomes and technical skills.

**APTA recommends** that any secondary pathways model emphasises the value of all learning areas and promotes a balanced curriculum.

We note the focus on STEM in the discussion paper. Teachers across the curriculum recognise the changing nature of our society and the need for skills to support dramatic technological change. Professional teaching associations work with their members to include STEM/STEAM methodology across all learning areas. Discussions relating to STEM can often be discipline-based when in actuality it can be applied across the curriculum.

**APTA recommends** that any discussions on the place of STEM emphasise the cross-disciplinary nature of STEM and how it is embedded in all learning areas.

Another emphasis in the discussion paper relates to literacy and numeracy. All teachers acknowledge the vital importance of graduates who are functionally literate and numerate.

As with STEM, literacy and numeracy skill development occurs across the curriculum, and is not the sole responsibility of English and Maths classes.

**APTA recommends** that discussions relating to literacy and numeracy levels of school-leavers explores how functional literacy and numeracy skills can be developed across all learning areas.

## ***How can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?***

The teaching associations represented by APTA's members note variations in subject enrolments. Some subjects are seeing an increased demand in the senior secondary space while others are facing strong decrease in enrolments.

Teachers know that many students select subjects that may not suit their interests or aptitude because they are selecting subjects that universities require for some courses or to chase a particular ATAR score. Teachers know that this is not an ideal approach when selecting subjects at this important stage of schooling.

**APTA recommends** that the ATAR be reviewed as the sole determiner for tertiary entrance for Year 12 graduates, to encourage students to make decisions based on interest and aptitude.

**APTA recommends** that alternative pathways into tertiary education be emphasised to students, parents, school leaders and teachers to redress the higher priority given to ATAR pathways.

Completion requirements for Senior Secondary Certificates of Education (SSCE) frequently emphasise classroom based learning and traditional forms of assessment which often do not mirror real-world learning experiences. Opportunities for valuable learning within school programs that could more effectively guide student decision making are limited. Student decision making would be enhanced by providing opportunities to engage more widely in extracurricular and community based learning, such as volunteering, clubs, enrichment programs, internships, and competitions. If these experiences were given greater focus in SSCE completion (and tertiary entrance) then students can make better decisions about post-school options.

**APTA recommends** that SSCE completion and tertiary entrance requirements give greater emphasis to community based and extracurricular learning.

## ***How do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?***

Teachers recognise that many parents and students hold particular views about which post-school pathways are valuable, and that schools make decisions regarding program and subject offerings to meet parent and student expectations even when alternative options would better meet student and community needs.

These perceptions are reinforced by the emphasis that many schools place on ATAR scores. Some schools divide pathways as ATAR or non-ATAR, creating immediate divisions between student groups. Many schools use ATAR results to promote their school's 'excellence', which further asserts one pathway over another.

The status and emphasis of the ATAR is not matched by data which indicates that most tertiary students did not use an ATAR for admission.

As a peak body representing teaching associations, APTA knows that many teachers are frustrated that many students select subjects and post-school pathways based on perceived status and not what will suit their particular learning needs and interests. They know that parents often exert

pressure on their children, and that schools could do more to address the perceived value of ATAR over non-ATAR pathways.

**APTA recommends** schools de-emphasise the significance of the ATAR as this will play a strong role in reducing negative perceptions of vocational or non-traditionally academic pathways.

### ***How can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?***

In many jurisdictions, associations for career educators and advisors – including some affiliated with our member associations - actively support professional associations for career teachers. We note that much work has been done in enhancing the knowledge, skills and qualifications of career educators. We want to emphasise the valuable role that career teacher professional associations can play in exploring issues related to student decision making.

**APTA recommends** that professional teaching associations for careers teachers across Australia be actively consulted in exploring issues relating to student decision making.

Additionally, APTA acknowledges that teachers in other subject areas have knowledge of career and training opportunities specific to their learning areas which can be valuable when assisting students making decisions about their futures. Professional teaching associations often actively engage with industry and community groups to build professional networks between teachers and the world of work, and these relationships are incredibly valuable in supporting student decision making.

**APTA recommends** that the work of professional teaching associations in strengthening the connections between teachers and industry and community groups be acknowledged, and that additional funding or in-kind support be provided to associations to expand on these relationships.

Our members support associations which offer a broad range of extracurricular events, competitions, enrichment programs, workplace and community outreach and engagement activities to students across Australia. Teachers provide these services to students – usually voluntarily – because they recognise the value of these educational experiences. These opportunities allow students to explore career and further educational options that are contextualised and outside of the classroom, better enabling students to make decisions about whether a particular field is right for them.

We see tremendous value in exploring ways in which these learning experiences can be included in a student's SSCE.

**APTA recommends** that SSCEs in all states and territories include ways to include extracurricular learning when determining completion requirements.

**APTA recommends** that these extracurricular learning opportunities also be considered in determining tertiary entrance requirements for school leavers.

## ***How can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?***

Some schools struggle to attract and retain experienced and specialist teachers. Teaching associations are a valuable conduit for supporting teachers in regional and remote areas, and for providing feedback to decision making bodies on the experiences of teachers in these contexts.

**APTA recommends** that close collaboration with professional teaching associations can support strategies to improve the quality of teaching in regional, remote and hard-to-staff locations.

Teachers in hard-to-staff locations struggle to access professional learning and support. Teaching associations can address this disadvantage by mentoring early career teachers, through professional learning and support online networks. Many associations emphasise outreach to teachers in regional locations and work hard to support them, often with limited resources. Teacher associations provide services in areas where commercial providers choose not to invest.

**APTA recommends** that educational jurisdictions increase funding and support to professional teaching associations to formalise support strategies provided to teachers who require additional assistance, including teachers in remote and complex environments.

Many jurisdictions use ICT to support students and teachers in regional and remote areas, and **we recommend** that educational jurisdictions continue to support online professional learning communities and to explore opportunities for enhanced communication and engagement for educators in rural and regional locations.

Teaching associations work closely to develop relationships between teachers and industry and community groups, which is essential for students in regional and remote locations to identify career and training pathways in their local areas. These relationships also support curriculum based learning, particularly where teachers with industry knowledge and skills are unavailable.

**APTA recommends** that support be provided to enhance the relationship between teachers, schools, industry groups and community organisations to support students.

Teachers note increasing challenges in arranging worksite visits and excursions due to the complex and time-consuming processes imposed on them when conducting out-of-school events. Also, some workplaces are reluctant to have students attend events on site due to WHS concerns.

**APTA recommends** that governments explore ways to reduce the burden on schools and workplaces to be able to more effectively and efficiently organise work experience and workplace visits.

Our members support teaching associations that directly support special education teachers, ESL teachers, literacy teachers and Aboriginal educators who are vital in supporting students who may find post-school opportunities limited.

**APTA recommends** that teaching associations who directly work with teachers supporting students with additional learning needs be actively consulted.

***Is there anything else you would like the Review Panel to consider?***

The Australian Professional Teachers Association wishes to emphasise that professional teaching associations actively work with the tertiary sector, industry and community groups. In fact, within teaching associations themselves, there are many members who work outside of schools in these sectors, thus strengthening the opportunities for collaboration and communication between schools and post-school institutions. It is crucial that key government educational stakeholders recognise the existing networks and provide opportunities to develop these further.