



Development of a sample learner profile: utility, with fairness and inclusion

Overview

There is considerable value from a well-developed learner profile that captures the breadth of information about an individual school leaver.

To focus the learner profile on:

1. assisting the school leaver to work with education providers to identify the right course for them; and
2. demonstrating to education providers that they are suitable for that course

the learner profile should emphasise the description of the person ahead of strict comparability with others.

Context

The proposal to develop a learner profile for school students comes from the 2020 Shergold report *Looking to the future: the review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*. The review addressed the question of how to optimise the transition from schooling to further education and employment.

One aspect is how to collate and present information about a student to support them to gain access to both.

The *Learner profile* is one mechanism that could assist. The discussion paper defines the learner profile as a short statement about the person, distinct from a *Portfolio* of supporting material by the student and *Passport* that contains detailed sets of information about the student.

The IRU provides a short comment to address two of the questions:

- Q1 the purpose and utility of a learner profile; and
- Q5, on fairness and inclusion, to challenge its assumption that ‘fairness and inclusion’ link either logically or necessarily to the information being ‘comparable’.

IRU members will provide more detailed responses considering how universities could use a learner profile to improve the transition to university education.

Purpose and utility, with fairness and inclusion

The shadow of the Australian Tertiary Entrance Rank (ATAR) hangs dark over discussions of school leaver transition to university. It impacts other options such as vocational education choices and employment, through the ATAR being an easy-to-use guide to the individual, even where academic skills are only moderately linked to the qualification or employment in question.

A learner profile could improve the assessment of individual suitability through setting out other factors beyond academic capability and learning that could be relevant.

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The discussion of the learner profile needs to distinguish, and then bring together:

- the needs of the individual for further education, where the focus is on assisting the school leaver identify a suitable qualification and then be accepted for it; and
- the needs of education providers, and employers, to know whether the person is suitable for the qualification or job and, where there are more applicants than places, to decide whom to select.

In a well-functioning education system school leavers (and older potential students) should access suitable qualifications, based on the individual's needs, interests and current capability. Selection would focus on suitability for the course, not how many places are available.

School assessment systems and the construction of ATAR and other tests of capability for specific disciplines or for those who left school several years previously give universities a comparative basis where they need to assess students to exclude some and include others.

The value a learner profile offers is to assist universities advise students about study options that would best suit them. It may help universities decide whether an individual meets the threshold for likely success at a particular course.

The main tension is between comparability of the information provided, and how well the information provides illustration of the person. A desire for comparability brings with it a tendency to standardise what is included and to prefer measurable information. Illustration emphasises the individual; it will be less standard but more informative.

The discussion paper rightly raises the risk that some school leavers might be better able to populate a learner profile than others. It argues that fairness and inclusion links either logically or necessarily to the information being 'comparable'.

Were the Profile to become important to competitive selection decisions, it would force a counterproductive degree of standardisation that would then see schools assist their students complete the profile. Based on other experiences, the more complicated the process the more it weighs toward re-enforcing existing biases in schooling outcomes. The La Trobe University submission considers this in depth.

Conclusion

Hence, to focus the learner profile on:

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2. demonstrating to education providers that they are suitable for that course

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