

# Making Sure No Mind is Left Behind



As the report *No Mind Left Behind* points out, the nature of work is changing. Skills and technical knowledge that were once a necessity for the work environment have become redundant and must be replaced by different capabilities. In Australia, there also is a growing disparity between high and low academic achievers.

The recommendations outlined in the report can assist in restoring Australia's education system to being 'an ultimate equaliser', to reduce inequality in our nation, and to give Australia the skilled workforce it requires to drive our economy well into the second half of the century.

We need to work together to improve Australia's chance of competing in the international marketplace through a world-class education system and a highly-educated population. Governments can lay the path, educational institutions and NGOs can deliver the programs, businesses can provide the opportunities, and parents and students can cultivate a commitment to lifelong learning.

This singular vision is a challenge - and an opportunity - for us all.

## Note from the Managing Director

As the world's leading learning company, it's important for Pearson to facilitate debate around the barriers to achieving world-class education.

That's why we supported a report by progressive think tank The McKell Institute, *No Mind Left Behind*, about building a modern education system for Australia.

Building on the report's recent release, we gathered a roundtable of top thinkers to gauge their reaction.

Representatives from academia, business, policy, and the media gathered in our Sydney office and discussed the new research, which maps education advantage and disadvantage by federal electorate.

This summary captures the core insights from those conversations and highlights reactions to the report's ten recommendations to restore Australia's education system.

I thank the roundtable participants, educators and learners everywhere for advancing good education in Australia and around the world.

Below are the Pearson Roundtable's thoughts and policy positions.

The group worked to build a path for higher education to follow toward a better system for our learners, educators and the nation.



→ David Barnett

# The academic

**Professor Shirley Alexander,**  
Deputy Vice-Chancellor and  
Vice-President Education and  
Students at University of  
Technology Sydney



Professor Shirley Alexander is responsible for leading the achievement of the University's key priorities in teaching and learning, the student experience, and the use of data analytics in all aspects of the university's work.

She has an international reputation for her research on the use of information and communication technologies in education and in 2012 chaired Digital Education Advisory Committee (DEAG) to advise the Federal Government on the best use of emerging technologies in the school environment.

**“Ultimately what we need is a vision for our education system in Australia.”**

*Professor Shirley Alexander*

“While the report and its recommendations are a good starting point, the whole education system needs significant reform. The current system serves privileged kids well, but in many ways fails the underprivileged ones.

“It also fails teachers. I'd like to see a system where teachers are not stuck in front of a class all day but are facilitators and designers of personalised learning. Teachers don't need to ‘teach’ content – they should be free to make use of a range of formal and non-formal, traditional and non-traditional learning opportunities to

→ Professor Shirley Alexander



“The current system serves privileged kids well, but in many ways fails the underprivileged ones.”

*Professor Shirley Alexander*



enable students to frame their own questions. Teachers could then support students as they investigate their questions, making use of existing eLearning resources and visiting museums, libraries, businesses, and labs.

“Making education for the future is really about teaching kids to be able to ask good questions, to be able to engage in critical thinking and problem solving. We should also be embedding STEM skills into every single course.

“Early intervention is important, but parents need to see themselves as part of an education system that values innovation, curiosity, and holistic learning, rather than just helping kids with their homework. I think this mindset shift could also help solve the issue of who wants to become a teacher because teaching would be a more interesting and involved profession.

“But ultimately what we need is a vision for our education system. This includes the urgent need for a national innovation plan, a plan for strengthening innovation in the VET sector, in primary and in high school. It won't happen overnight but if you can agree on a vision everyone thinks is worth working towards you can move there in steps.”

# The young entrepreneur

**Taj Pabari,**  
CEO Fiftysix Creations



→ Taj Pabari

**Taj Pabari is a seventeen-year-old inventor, social entrepreneur and educational pioneer passionate about inspiring children to discover and embrace the world of entrepreneurship through technology and innovation.**

**Taj was the Winner of The Australian Young Innovator of the Year for 2014. He is currently studying in Grade Twelve at John Paul College in Brisbane, Australia. When he is not at school or ‘working’ on his ventures, he divides his remaining time between tennis, martial arts and travelling.**

“Three recommendations really resonated with me: career guidance, volunteering and training programs for parents.

“I’m still in high school, and there’s a huge negative stigma around school counsellors – if we walk into their office, people think something bad must have happened. But while counsellors are good at helping students through their ups and downs, we also need guidance about bigger issues.

“Young people love to volunteer ... this stuff really works.”

Taj Pabari



“The whole idea of [student] counselling needs to be redefined.”

Taj Pabari

“Wouldn't it be great if counsellors asked: what are your passions, your hopes for the future, what do you love doing? At the moment, any career advice tends to be based solely on job prospects. The whole idea of counselling needs to be redefined and expanded.

“The other recommendation that stood out was volunteering. In my experience [of working with various foundations], young people really do want to volunteer. And it doesn't have to be complicated. In one of our programs, we let young people sit in on Skype meetings. And it's amazing the things they pick up and learn. They get to hear about how teams communicate, how things

get done, how to share ideas and persuade others. This stuff really works.

“I'm also a big supporter of training programs for parents. When I've visited disadvantaged communities there's been little in the way of role models or guidance for kids; it's hard for them to imagine a pathway different from the one they see their parents on. So there's a real opportunity to work with parents to help them challenge their own and their kid's mindsets, and convince them that they can be the change they want to see in the world.”



Kate is a management consultant with a natural sciences background. She is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering and of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Prior roles have focused on industry development, and prior projects focused on gender equity, public housing and disability services while at Coopers & Lybrand. Kate is a lifelong learner with formal completions in science, corporate governance, applied finance, public policy and music. She is a parent to children currently preparing for and at university.

“The power of the report lies in its focus on communities.”

Dr Kate Grenot

“The power of *No Mind Left Behind* is in its focus on communities - on localised variables that can promote and encourage community ownership in the future of education.

“It's about tapping into the enthusiasm of young people, rather than building concern. Kids need to feel that their education is important; that they want to keep learning and figuring things out.

“I'm seldom a fan of deficit-based funding models or legislating for three and four year olds, but otherwise I am supportive broadly of the report's recommendations.

# The business leader

**Dr Kate Grenot,**  
Non-executive director  
and academic

→ Dr Kate Grenot



"I particularly like recommendation 4, employment-based teaching pathways. I've done a fair amount of work looking at rural Australia, and anything that strengthens rural industries would be a strong step forward.

"I strongly support recommendation 9, encouraging university collaboration with industry around education. There is a lot of discussion about how best to do this among my business and academic colleagues at the moment.

"A country comparisons report on STEM came out a few years ago and showed that Australia was falling behind. Since then we have been doing a lot to improve the uptake of STEM - but we also need to lift the level of science literacy broadly in the community. We need people to appreciate science and enjoy science and realise the role science plays in everyday life.

"Overall, the report is strongest in its potential to strengthen community involvement in the repositioning of education in Australia. If it stimulates debate at the community level, we will start to see real shifts occurring.

**"It's about tapping into the enthusiasm of young people."**

*Dr Kate Grenot*



# The consultant

**Kris Isles,**  
PwC Partner



→ Kris Isles

**Kris has more than 20 years' experience in a variety of assignments for public and private sector clients in Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe, Middle East and Asia Pacific regions. Kris currently leads PwC's Queensland Consulting team and the Queensland Education practice.**

**"Parents shouldn't be afraid to be more engaged in their children's early learning."**

*Kris Isles*

Coming from a regional area of Queensland himself, he is truly passionate about finding ways to create education and economic growth opportunities for all Australians regardless of their background or where they live.

"There's merit in all the report's recommendations; they all make sense and are based on sound logic.

"Getting a good early start is absolutely important, so I fully support recommendations 1 and 2, which in my view go hand in hand. Parents shouldn't be afraid to be more engaged in their children's early learning.



“It’s not about more funding but how do we target funding in the right ways and make sure the money is spent well.”

*Kris Isles*

“Teacher development and selection is also important, but there are still questions to answer. How do we lift the recognition of the critical role that teachers play in our society and economy at large? What is the value proposition that attracts highly talented individuals to want to teach? How do we reward and recognise excellence in teaching?”

“The report is thorough in its consideration of input factors, but we also need to consider the ‘pull factors’ that are likely to draw people into the teaching profession in the first place.

“Funding is obviously critical, but to me, it’s not about more funding but how do we target funding in the right ways and make sure the money is spent well to get the right outcomes, which is difficult in education as there is a long lead time to the realisation of these outcomes.

“What’s missing from the discussion is the linkage to jobs in disadvantaged areas. Where there is a lack of industry, jobs and opportunity in particular locations, we need to think about how we connect kids in these locations to people that can further inspire them for what the opportunities may be for them in the future.”

# The journalist

**Tim Dodd,**  
Education Editor,  
Australian Financial Review

**Tim Dodd leads the education coverage in the Financial Review, editing the weekly Monday education section and co-ordinating the daily coverage of education issues. He writes a weekly column, Education Observed, published on Mondays which examines education policy issues and their impact on education sectors including schools, VET and higher education.**

**Tim has direct experience in the education industry working for IDP Education as its External Relations Manager from 2005 to 2012. He has a particular interest in analysing the rapid development of online education and the impact it is having for students and providers.**

“Overall I agree with all the recommendations and a few of them are worth some extra focus.

“We need to get better data in education and use the data that we have in better ways.”

*Tim Dodd*

“Recommendation 3, selection criteria for teachers, is highly important because it touches on a major problem, which is the types of students who are going into universities and what they are learning there.



→ Tim Dodd



“And this is not just about universities, it’s also about the vocational sector, which is the forgotten sector of education”

Tim Dodd



“In the last five years, there’s been a huge expansion in the number of students going to universities, based on the idea that graduates earn more. But if you keep on turning out more and more graduates then this won’t always be the case. I think universities have perverse incentives to get students in, without looking at outcomes. Students need to have a much better picture of what sort of job they are likely to get at the end of their course so they can work out whether it’s worth investing in.

“We also have to look at how we teach at tertiary level. And this is not just about universities, it also vocational education which is the forgotten sector of education but is still immensely important.

“Curriculum updates [recommendation 5] are important but the curriculum needs to integrate more soft skills, where the students learn to analyse themselves and work out who they are and what they’re good at and become good communicators, good team players, and learn leadership skills. That is the key to finding a good job in the future.

“Yes, I agree with the recommendation about the process for reporting programs [recommendation 10] in particular. More generally, I think we need to get better data in education and use the data that we have in better ways.”

# The policy analyst

**Marieke D’Cruz,**  
Policy Adviser, The McKell Institute



→ Marieke D’Cruz

Marieke is the author of the Pearson sponsored report *No Mind Left Behind*. She holds a Bachelor of Arts with a double-major in International Politics and Media and Communications from the University of Melbourne, and is currently completing a Master of Public Policy at the University of Sydney.

Marieke recently retired as a professional athlete, having represented Australia at the Olympics, World Championships and Commonwealth Games in swimming and is currently the President of the Australian Swimmers’ Association.

## “We need policy leadership from the top.”

*Marieke D’Cruz*

“The aim of the report and its recommendations is to contribute to policy debate in a practical way.

“We wanted to look at how our education system can adapt to new emerging trends. We need to create a plan for the future to ensure Australia has the skills needed to underpin the next 25 years of economic growth.

“What are the trends? Ageing populations, people working for longer, demand for high-level skills, rising automation, increasing interactions with different cultures. All this means our education system needs to adapt and change.

“The end goal is an education system that creates lifelong learners. Individuals, no matter where they come from, who are able to identify and follow their interests, are curious, and are passionate about learning for learning’s sake. These are the things we know drive innovation and growth.



“All the recommendations are important in our view. But one of the overriding ideas is to see stronger links between education and the rest of society. Education is not a silo; it can help drive us forward or hold us back.

## “The end goal is an education system that creates lifelong learners.”

*Marieke D’Cruz*

“But to make this a reality we need policy leadership from the top, and all of the stakeholders on board.”

## A path forward for higher education

The reactions of leaders in business and academia to **No Mind Left Behind** provide an excellent platform for moving forward the debate about higher education in Australia.

Here are where interests align around the report’s ten recommendations, giving the beginnings of a roadmap for action.

## RECOMMENDATION

## REACTION

1

Early childhood education programs extended to all 3 and 4 year olds

Generally supported, with a few exceptions

1

2

Government-led parent-training programs in areas with low educational opportunities

Unanimous support - widely considered a good idea

2

3

Reform of the selection criteria for entry into teaching courses at university

Generally supported - the need to make teaching a more desirable profession was emphasised

3

4

Broad investigation of employment-based teaching pathways (particularly in STEM fields).

Unanimous support - widely considered a good idea

4

5

Curriculum updates become a compulsory part of teacher professional development

Generally supported, including an emphasis on both STEM skills and 'soft' skills

5

6

Continuation of Gonski school funding in its current form

Mixed support - some strongly for it while others had reservations

6

7

Increased local government support for volunteer programs at high schools, TAFEs and universities

Generally supported, with a recognition that the TAFE sector must not be overlooked

7

8

Re-imagined career guidance services within schools

Widely considered a good idea, with some showing strong support

8

9

Greater industry collaboration with universities

Unanimous support - widely considered a good idea

9

10

Standardisation of reporting of programs designed to improve student outcomes

10

Generally supported, particularly the greater use of data to better inform policy decisions



## No Mind Left Behind

### Action steps

While all our leaders don't agree on all the recommendations, there are areas where the consensus is clear.

**Policy makers and other stakeholders should confidently take steps towards action on:**

- Government-led parent-training programs in areas with low educational opportunities
- Re-imagining career guidance services within schools
- Fostering greater industry collaboration with universities
- Broadening the investigation of employment-based teaching pathways (particularly in STEM fields)
- Reform of the selection criteria for entry into teaching courses at university

**Now is the time to take a close look at the higher education sector and how it fits in our economy, and our future.**

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