



The ATAR fails the most basic test and it has to be scrapped

2 May 2022

This is the text of an opinion piece that was published in The West Australian on Monday 2 May 2022:

An obsession with ATAR, the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank, is unravelling the educational principles that are vital to creating a sustainable, innovative future.

Our country needs capable, courageous and caring young people equipped with tools to innovate, collaborate, take risks and make a meaningful contribution to improving the world around them. It is not clear how the current pathway into the tertiary system is achieving that goal.

It's more than two years since the Gonski Institute for Education's national survey of 1170 people revealed 80 per cent of its respondents thought ATAR should consider student ability and talent as well as exam results. Eminent British educationist Sir Ken Robinson warned in 2006 our systems were educating children out of their creative capacities with a focus on academic areas deemed useful for work and university entrance at the expense of creativity. Canadian education and school

system expert Professor Michael Fullan, contends that young people require the skills of deep learners, not just the ability to sit exams. Professor Fullan says the pandemic has provided an opportunity for an overdue redesign of school systems around the globe.

In Australia, the chair of a national review of senior secondary pathways, Professor Peter Shergold, released an eight-point plan to give each student a Learner Profile and Education Passport to better reflect their capabilities and achievements.

The late Sir Ken said by the time most children had become adults they had lost their creative capacity because they were scared they might make a mistake. He warned that an education system that strip-mines children only for their academic achievements deprives them of creative opportunities to expand on future possibilities.

For many schools, a focus on high ATAR scores has been driven by a desire to convince parents they are getting the best value for money in a highly contested private education market. We believe a single-minded focus on ATAR is undermining the capacity to produce resilient, bold, creative future problem solvers.

Professor Shergold's *Looking to the Future* review recasts secondary schooling as a way of preparing young people for life-long learning. Ideally, we would be part way through an overhaul of Australia's secondary system, making it a genuine resource to prepare young people for lifelong learning and ATAR would be dead and buried.

Professor Fullan argues learning outcomes that focus on the six Cs character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking will far better prepare students for a complex, unpredictable world.

At Perth College, we are addressing Sir Ken's warning about schooling "educating people out of their creative capacities" at an industrial scale. We created *sparc*, a multidisciplinary, flexible program to give our students tools to prepare for the future, embrace technology and solve problems. Our *InsideOut* positive psychology initiatives are crafted to help our students develop self-leadership skills, examine thoughts, behaviours and emotions that hold them back and exercise brave and positive choices.

We give our students freedom to explore their potential, ask difficult questions, take risks, make mistakes and learn from them. We create an environment where they are empowered, take responsibility, develop critical and creative thinking and self-governance and concern for others.

For us, education is not limited to academic excellence or inequitable ranking systems such as the ATAR. Education is about self-awareness, communication, initiative, innovation, sustainability, collaboration, enterprise and making a meaningful contribution. It is about supporting every child to reach their true potential.

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PO Box 25 Mount Lawley WA 6929 Australia

+61 (8) 9471 2100

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