

Sample Learner Profile for Senior Secondary Students

June 2021

Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission on Sample Learner Profiles for Senior Secondary Students, to inform the development of a sample learner profile and generation of advice for the Education Ministers.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 309 Catholic schools that educate more than 156,000 students in Queensland.

In providing this response QCEC has considered the *“Discussion Paper on the development of a sample learner profile: A project commissioned by the Education Ministers, 10 June 2021”* (“Discussion Paper”) and will provide responses across the following themes, as outlined for consideration in the Discussion Paper: purpose and utility; content; fairness and inclusion; recognition and assessment; next steps. QCEC notes the very short turnaround time from the release of the discussion paper and request for this advice.

1. Purpose and utility

QCEC considers the benefit of a sample learner profile to be the provision of point in time statements that describe individual student achievement with a range of identified capabilities. It is encouraging to see the inclusion of extra and co-curricular elements, as well as nuanced understanding of student skills and capabilities. It is understood that a learner profile may assist senior students engage with pathway planning. Whilst the learner profile shifts the emphasis from subject specific capabilities to a focus on skill acquisition and development, it is proposed that there are many ways to demonstrate proficiency of skills (including through the Australian Curriculum subjects and General Capabilities). QCEC is of the view that a learner profile should be used in conjunction with academic achievement to gain a more holistic understanding of a student’s knowledge, competencies and experiences.

2. Content

As recognised in the Discussion Paper, schools already have their own versions of documents that provide detailed information pertaining to individual student learning, co-curricular involvement and service activities while at school. This is often supported by students themselves who collect relevant documentation such as references, referee reports, certificates of achievement (e.g. Maths Olympiad), and the like to obtain a clear representation of the students and their capabilities.

QCEC supports the inclusion of a core capability framework in underpinning a learner profile for senior secondary students. Core capabilities should be grounded in the General Capabilities of the Australian Curriculum and expanded to include knowledge and application of 21st century skills across a range of contexts. The organisation of these capabilities could be achieved through mapping onto the Australian Core Skills Framework, a continuation of the Australian Curriculum Capabilities, or the articulation of 21st century skills. As is the case with many Queensland Catholic Year 12 student reports, a learner profile could include a range of measures such as ATAR, individual subject scores, Vocational Education and Training qualifications and school awards. Co-curricular and extra-curricular achievements are also reported, recognising the benefit of these endeavours to the wholistic development of a young person and their capabilities. It is also suggested that the presentation of any content should be guided by a common set of principles terminology that is accessible to those external to the education system.

3. Fairness and Inclusion

The Discussion Paper highlights “that it is challenging to balance the objectives to be inclusive, fair, flexible and context-relevant, while also being aligned to the more standardised requirements of stakeholders”. This is particularly the case when seeking to assess and verify objective measures of student success that have taken place outside of the school environment. The need for discerning criteria will be of utmost importance if external contributions are to be considered for formalised reporting purposes. It is noted that the Discussion Paper references previous examples in which “profiles also engage a trusted external authority to certify or warrant that a learner profile’s representation of attainment is fair and rigorous.” Whilst the engagement of external assessors potentially increases a perception of fairness, the magnitude of the potential offerings to be included in the learner profile (part-time work, co-curricular, service/volunteer experiences) means that it would likely be difficult to ensure consistency in terms of the standards by which external assessors evaluate the student’s engagement across these activities. The presence of external assessors is unlikely to be equally accessible in rural and remote communities and some method of ensuring that these businesses maintain a high standard of integrity despite financial rewards reliant upon return business from schools, would need to be ensured. It would not be reasonable to expect schools to undertake the additional assessing and reporting. If the current reliance upon students as gatherers of the evidence is to continue, then there needs to be provision for those students who lack the executive functioning or motivation to engage with this process, if indeed the process is to reflect capability and experiences, rather than specific organisation, motivation and self-advocacy skill sets.

There is a risk that a standardised learner profile advantages those students who are afforded greater ranges of opportunities in that these students have more opportunities to engage with multiple experiences, or indeed can afford to be selective and engage only with opportunities that truly hold interest and relevance to their pathway planning. Many extra and co-curricular opportunities incur additional fees and/or transport and/or parent engagement if they are to occur. Additionally, learner profiles potentially advantage students who are emotionally more adept when it comes to engaging in the sensory and social demands incurred with experiences that are additional to the routine school experience - thus potentially undermining the reality that current classroom and curriculum requirements already represent consuming and robust experiences for senior students. Finally, there is the risk that in an effort to boost student performance, opportunities that were once optional may become mandatory with little consideration of how this may impact students, families and staff alike.

4. Recognition and Assessment

Recognising that experiences to date suggest that “a strengths-based and inclusive approach” in which “learners, schools and systems should have some flexibility in what is reported and how it is reported” (Discussion Paper) is a preferred approach, questions arise in terms of the range and implications of such flexibility. In response to the question posed within the Discussion Paper with regards to the potential inclusion of learner self-assessment, there is potential for student voice to be incorporated within an interview process that forms part of the structuring of the learner profile. However, the

emphasis should remain upon the school maintaining oversight by way of collection and confirmation of information for inclusion in the learner profile. The inclusion of teachers as assessors is critical to the credibility of the learner profile as it is unlikely that other community-based professionals would be benchmarking against consistent standards and criteria. Indeed, defining the scope of the learner profile and articulating the resources required for teachers and schools to effectively report on assigned domains will likely constitute one of the greatest challenges in the design and implementation of a standardised learner profile.

5. Next Steps

Given that the scope of content inclusion, assessment measures, reporting processes and human resource requirements are yet to be identified, QCEC would support a pilot approach to testing the design and benefits/costs of a standardised learner profile. A pilot would be imperative to ensuring equity of access for students across a range of socio-economic, learning needs, geographic, residential/boarded contexts.

QCEC looks forward to further participation in conversations pertaining the scope, timeline for implementation and allocation of resources pertaining to the learner profile for senior students.

If you require further information regarding this submission, please contact Shannon O’Gorman, Education Officer, by email shannono@qcec.catholic.edu.au or phone (07) 3316 5862.

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