

# Submission from Beacon Foundation

## About Beacon Foundation

Beacon Foundation has a vision to reach, connect and inspire our future workforce. We want to see an Australia where young people can more easily gain further education or meaningful employment. It is our belief that all of our young Australians have the right to experience a job, a financial opportunity and the sense of personal success this brings them.

Beacon Foundation has operated for thirty years, delivering work readiness programs across Australia. Our success has been in our ability to join business, schools and communities together - with the purpose of helping more young people get ready for the future world of work.

## The purpose of schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The National Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians sets out the agreed values on the role of education. Education is fundamental in giving young people the skills and values they need for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – including the right skills for future employment. This opportunity for employment then generates further opportunities for fulfilment and building that sense of personal success in young people.<sup>i</sup>

Developing these skills fundamentally starts in school. Therefore, we need an education system that is ready to help prepare young people for the future world of work. This then becomes a collective responsibility – both of the education system but also the wider system that surrounds it: business, industry, families and wider community.<sup>ii</sup>

## Knowledge, skills and attributes students should develop at school

There are a range of skills and attributes that young people should develop while they are at school. This includes core literacy and numeracy skills to '21<sup>st</sup> century skills' like critical thinking, real world problem solving, communication skills, and creativity.<sup>iii</sup>

If we agree that part of the purpose of school is to prepare young people for the workforce, we need to make sure that school helps young people develop the right skills and attributes for this. The evidence to date tells us that employers are looking for things like:

- Soft Skills: verbal and written communication skills, working collaboratively in teams<sup>iv</sup>
- General skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, attention to detail

- Character attributes such as mindfulness, curiosity, courage and resilience<sup>7</sup>
- Enterprise or entrepreneurial skills that can be applied and transferred to different jobs and industries<sup>v</sup>

We need to see a shift in education to emphasise these needs, so that “learning ... promote(s) skills of collaboration and problem solving, making and designing, empathy and emotional acuity, rather than dutiful diligence in following a routine to deliver the expected answer at the appropriate moment.”<sup>vi</sup>

## **How the curriculum could support student learning**

At Beacon Foundation we acknowledge that changes to curriculum often happen slowly, and should be influenced by the schools and the communities they operate in. Within that space, the curriculum needs to emphasise the exposure to real life experiences that can enhance and build on the interests and abilities of young people. We have worked for thirty years in schools and communities to bring real world experiences into education that help challenge young people and contextualize their learning. We need to do more of this – not less. Business and industry leaders have rightly been critical of the adhoc way that this is implemented into the curriculum. The NSW Curriculum Review gives us a prime opportunity to start to consistently apply business and industry partnerships in schools.

## **Other comments**

Young people need to be better prepared through both the right level and right type of education. Partnerships between business, industry and schools is critical to building opportunities like:

- Job seeking and career management insights
- Work experience/exposure
- Work networks
- These opportunities should be increased – not lessened.<sup>vii</sup>

Business and industry have a role in education. Currently this is inconsistent and adhoc, with organisations like Beacon Foundation supporting industry partnerships in schools. However, schools that don't have these relationships often don't bring the work exposure and work readiness opportunities– with the young person ultimately at a disadvantage.<sup>viii</sup> Our priority at Beacon Foundation is to see a NSW Curriculum that has the appropriate governance and systems in place that support industry partnerships to thrive.

These partnerships need to be better valued and offered across all schools – not just to those that can afford it. We need to address critical barriers like:

- The time to develop partnerships within the partnerships of schools

- Building the expertise of teaching and school staff to build school-industry partnerships
- Governing arrangements so business and industry partnership activities are integrated into the school curriculum.<sup>ix</sup>

These partnerships need to be prioritised. Conversations about the value of business and industry partnerships have dominated policy discourse in recent years, but in practical terms consistent implementation hasn't happened. <sup>x</sup>

## References

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- <sup>ii</sup> R. Watson (2016), “On education in the 21st century”, *Occasional Paper Series* at [https://education.nsw.gov.au/media/exar/On\\_Education\\_RichardWatson.pdf](https://education.nsw.gov.au/media/exar/On_Education_RichardWatson.pdf)
- <sup>iii</sup> D. Gonski (2018), *Review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools* at <https://www.education.gov.au/review-achieve-educational-excellence-australian-schools>
- <sup>iv</sup> S. Adams (2014), “10 skills employers most want in graduates”, *Forbes* 28 May at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2014/11/12/the-10-skills-employers-most-want-in-2015-graduates/#64dc732a2511>
- <sup>v</sup> L. Sander (2017), “Lack of workers with soft skills demands a shift in teaching”, *The Conversation* Feb 28 at <https://theconversation.com/lack-of-workers-with-soft-skills-demands-a-shift-in-teaching-73433>; K. Torii, K. & M. O’Connell (2017) *Preparing young people for the future of work: Policy roundtable report*, Mitchell Report, March at <http://www.mitchellinstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Connecting-the-worlds-of-learning-and-work.pdf> Accessed 30 October 2018
- <sup>vi</sup> K. Torii & M. O’Connell (2017) ‘Preparing young people for the future of work’
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- <sup>ix</sup> K. Torii & M. O’Connell (2018), ‘Connecting the worlds of learning and work’
- <sup>x</sup> <https://www.themandarin.com.au/98379-the-future-of-education/>