

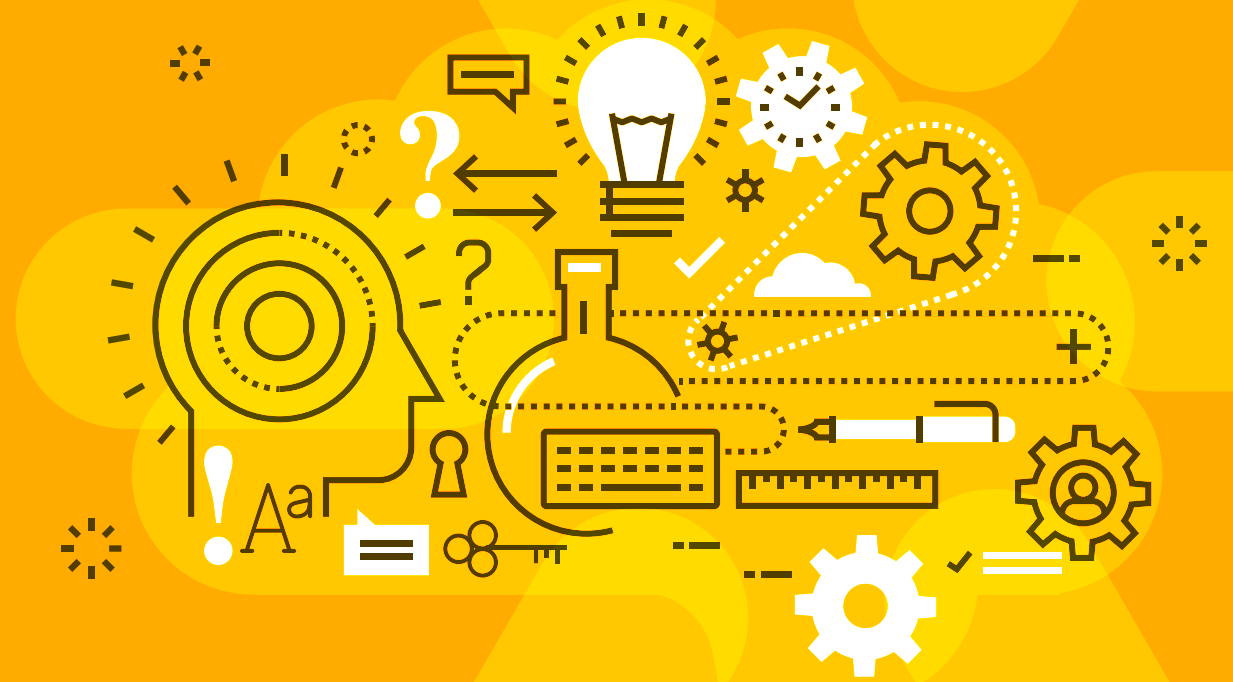
TERTIARY LEARNING FUTURES: TRANSFORMATION NOW!

An Introduction to What's Possible, and the Framework to Start Report Primer

Tertiary learning institutions are no longer contemplating the confluence of disruption and transformation—they are experiencing it, every day.

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were indicators that the tertiary learning sector was in desperate need of reinvention. In 2020, many of its leaders finally accepted the need for critical change. But the question remains: **how can this sector find a pathway towards a sustainable future in conditions that are severely disrupted?**

This primer provides insight into a full report by Resilient Futures into the future of tertiary learning and lays out what's possible and how transformation can be achieved.



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A New Possibility for Tertiary Learning

Realizing a new possibility for tertiary learning is critically important.

What if learning institutions could operate as open innovation platforms working at the speed of demand? What if these institutions primarily demonstrated value by developing quality standards but also operated flexibly, allowing users to customize their learning experience? What if the self-assessed needs of learners facing an increasingly disruptive world truly dictated the shape of institutional learning? What if?

When we speak about the future of post-secondary learning in the report, we start with terminology—and, right away, this reveals much about the conversation we must have.

As the authors of this report, we have chosen the term “tertiary learning” because it is maximally inclusive. It refers to learning which can happen within a university, a trade school, or any number of non-institutional platforms. It positions learning as an experience that perhaps no single type of institution can deliver.

Tertiary learning could choose a new approach and become a revolutionary leader in the process. Tertiary learning could become a pioneer in building a truly “human economy”, one in which dignity, fairness, equality, respect, and independence are available to all people.

If Australia is going to remain a nation that supports its citizens and continues to grow and develop, sustainably, it must begin transforming its capability base now. Of course, there is no more appropriate player to lead this charge than the tertiary learning sector.



The Objectives of the Report

Identifying what's Possible, and the Framework to Start

In exploring the possibility for tertiary learning, we have organized the report around four objectives:

1. Demonstrating the need for a revisioning of the tertiary learning sector.
2. Providing a framework for adapting the sector's mindset, toolset and strategic focus for meeting the needs of twenty-first century learners.
3. Providing a “start small, grow smart” pathway for tertiary learning institutional transformation.
4. Providing prompts— not predictions—for considering the tertiary learning sector's future environment and capability requirements.

Six Patterns Shaping the Future of Tertiary Learning

Thinking past what we know now is only a small part of what we need to know. We must think into and prepare for the exponentially changing emergent conditions and patterns.

Proposing what we see as possible for tertiary learning began with a robust analysis of the immediate and emergent conditions impacting learning, work, and industry. In these conditions, we see six patterns of note:

- 1. 21st Century Strategic Mindset, Toolset and Focus:** a need for planning methodologies that allow for change ahead of change.
- 2. Our Learning World Reality:** recognition of the role of both informal and formal influences in a journey of life-long learning.
- 3. The Learn-Live-Work Space:** an emerging space in which socio-cultural influences converge with increasingly autonomous technologies to drive both the obsolescence of traditional capabilities as well as new possibilities for learning, living, and working.
- 4. The Global COVID Economy Meets the Unreliable Climate Economy:** the reality of an economy permanently altered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is approaching even more existentially disruptive conditions through a highly unreliable planet.

- 5. A Social Contract for Cohesion:** a socio-economic context in which disparity is growing steadily, eroding old social contracts and revealing a need for new platforms and social-economic models to equip and empower learners and workers.
- 6. Transforming Tertiary Learning:** the reality of formal education's lag in accommodating the needs of 21st century learners, and the opportunity for this sector to adopt a new role as "central provider" of customized learning pathways and learning management systems.

With these six patterns—which represent risk and opportunity in equal measure—in mind, a new strategic vision must emerge.

But if we consider the Australian institutional tertiary learning sector, in particular, we discover additional factors fuelling the urgency of this discussion. Australia, arguably, is well entrenched in a state of Managed Adaptive Decline (MAD). MAD is defined as "adapting to declining conditions in an apparently well-managed manner."

MAD occurs when the conditions that once allowed an organization's (or a nation's) capabilities to generate sustainable value change. The organization—or nation—effectively denies the severity of this decline by maintaining business as usual in as orderly and efficient a manner as possible. This "well-managed" response prevents radical and potentially risky investment into the capabilities needed for sustainable value generation.

If we were to add a seventh pattern, it would represent the dichotomy of and tension between Leading Learner Australia and MAD Australia. A choice we must make now!

Looking for Pioneers to Shape a New Pathway

If tertiary learning leaders are to choose a pathway towards a sustainable future, they must act now, changing ahead of change.

With a new strategic mindset, skillset, and focus, the tertiary learning sector could become a critically important new leader in the tumultuous days ahead. If its leaders are to choose a pathway towards a sustainable future, they must act now, *changing ahead of disruptive change*.

The opportunity to become the pioneer of a new pathway is there—but leaders must be courageous enough to seize it.

Why the Urgency?

Ordinary people are being left behind, with little to no guidance over which skills will enable them to participate successfully in the future. This negligence is creating severe cracks in the foundation of Australian society

Comprehending and responding strategically to these profound global shifts is beyond the scope of most individual citizens. As a result, ordinary people are being left behind, with little to no guidance over which skills will enable them to participate successfully in the future.

This negligence is creating severe cracks in the foundation of Australian society—and these cracks are emitting troubling phenomena, from increasing economic disparity to the possibility of social upheaval similar to the USA.

A reshaping of this reality for the masses is not just a possible pathway forward for formal learning institutions; it is fast becoming a clear responsibility for the leaders of our learning institutions. They must act now to transform the future of tertiary learning or risk becoming irrelevant as well.





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For access to the report:

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