

SCENARIO 1

Civic Learning Commons



**Communities, learners, teachers, leaders
and governments define learning together.**

In this future, the purpose of education is collectively held. Government provides a strong public framework for equity, quality and accountability, but does not define learning alone. Learners across all years of schooling, teachers, families, communities, First Nations knowledge holders, employers, researchers and local organisations all contribute to shaping what learning is for.

Learning is designed around human flourishing, social cohesion, planetary responsibility and democratic participation. From the early years of school to senior secondary, learners are supported to build strong foundations, develop agency, deepen capability and connect their learning to themselves, their communities and the wider world. AI and digital systems are treated as civic infrastructure: publicly governed, transparent, accessible and used to expand learning opportunities rather than narrow them.

Teachers are highly trusted professionals. They use AI to personalise support, reduce administrative burden and connect learners with rich, level-appropriate and increasingly complex real-world problems. Their role becomes more relational, ethical and design-oriented. Learners have meaningful agency, expressed differently across childhood and adolescence, but always within a shared commitment to community, equity and public purpose.

Schools are community hubs. They connect learning with local place, global challenges, culture, work, wellbeing and ecological responsibility in ways that are developmentally appropriate for learners across all years of schooling. Success is measured through growth, contribution, capability, collaboration, wellbeing and foundational learning.

EARLY SIGNS WE SEE TODAY

- ▶ Growing debate about how to govern AI use in education.
- ▶ Rising concern about learner wellbeing and belonging.
- ▶ Renewed attention to learners contributing as active and informed citizens.
- ▶ Demand for greater trust in teacher professional judgement.
- ▶ Increasing recognition of learning that connects learners with Country, culture and community.

? How this future could emerge

2026–2030

Pressure for change builds

Learner engagement and wellbeing data raise questions about whether traditional schooling is evolving in line with changing learner needs.

Teachers and leaders report that the education system is not keeping pace with learner needs, advancements in AI, workforce pressures or community expectations. Public debate shifts from performance metrics to the purpose of education.

2031–2035

A shared reform agenda emerges

Governments, employers, teachers, leaders, learners and communities collectively explore the relevance and meaning of learning and develop a shared reform agenda. Learners have agency in helping shape decisions. First Nations knowledge, teacher expertise and community perspectives help guide reform.

Digital infrastructure is widely available and publicly controlled. AI guardrails are articulated and accepted as an essential requirement. Teachers actively integrate AI to enhance learner development. Learner assessments are redefined and community partnership models are implemented. Schools are funded and governed as public infrastructure, with funding models reflecting their role beyond instruction.

2036–2040

Education is a shared civic project

Schools remain central but operate with an integration and presence of families, communities and local organisations. Learning is whole-person focused around flourishing within a relational and community-connected framework.

SCENARIO 2

Negotiated Learning Ecosystem



No single group defines learning; purpose is constantly negotiated between government, platforms, employers, families, schools and learners.

In this future, Australian education is a mixed ecosystem. Learning across the schooling years is increasingly shaped by technology platforms, employers, universities, community organisations, families and learner choice.

Learners from the early years of school to senior secondary move – in level-appropriate ways – between schools, online platforms, micro-credentials, AI tutors, workplace learning, community projects and hybrid programs. Some learners thrive because they can build personalised pathways aligned with their strengths, interests, developmental stage and emerging sense of future work and contribution. Others struggle because the system is harder to navigate and depends heavily on family capability, digital access and confidence.

Teachers are guides, curators and designers of learning. They help learners make sense of

choices, evaluate information, build relationships, develop capabilities and connect learning to meaningful futures. For younger learners, this means providing strong foundations, structure, care and guided exploration. For older learners, it means supporting pathway decisions, independence, identity formation and transitions beyond school. AI is widely used for tutoring, feedback, planning and assessment, but quality varies.

The purpose of learning is not settled. For some families, it is future employment and opportunity. For some communities, it is belonging, wellbeing and contribution. For some platforms, it is engagement and data. For government, it is equity and national capability. For learners aged 5 to 18, it may shift over time: from curiosity, confidence and foundational learning in childhood, to identity, purpose, flexibility, capability and survival in adolescence.

EARLY SIGNS WE SEE TODAY

- ▶ Increasing use of AI tutors and online learning platforms.
- ▶ Growth of micro-credentials and alternative pathways for learners.
- ▶ Demand for flexible senior secondary and post-school transitions.
- ▶ Employer shift toward skills-based hiring.
- ▶ Increasing interest in learner choice and customisation.

? How this future could emerge

2026–2030

Personalisation pressure builds

Growing focus on the needs of the individual learner leads to calls for a more responsive education model with fewer administrative demands.

Families and learners expect greater choice, agency and relevance from their education. AI-enabled tools are used to supplement or replace learning with tutoring, feedback, planning and learning design.

Teachers increasingly take on mentoring, coaching and individual learning design roles. Governments, systems, schools and private providers prioritise and expand flexible pathways, digital learning, micro-credentials, complex real-world learning and new ways of demonstrating capabilities.

2031–2035

Choice expands while quality varies

Private providers, employers, tertiary education and community organisations offer learning directly to learners and families, promising individualised attention. For some learners, internet connectivity and platform access make schooling less dependent on physical sites and offer more choice.

Consistent standards and quality learning are difficult for governments to regulate as individuals choose their own learning pathways. Access to technology, resources and networks increasingly shape learner outcomes. Equity is challenged as those with greater means can choose higher quality learning options.

2036–2040

Negotiation becomes the system norm

The mix of learning pathways and providers becomes an established part of Australian education. No single group defines what learning looks like, how it should be delivered or how achievement is recognised. Governments, schools, platforms, employers, families and learners continually negotiate these questions.

SCENARIO 3

Platform-Defined Learning Market



Markets and technology platforms define learning.

In this future, education has become a consumer product. Government has stepped back from direct responsibility. Private providers, AI platforms, employers and market demand increasingly determine what children and young people learn, how they learn and what counts as success.

The purpose of learning is optimisation: employability, productivity, efficiency, customer satisfaction and platform engagement. AI systems personalise learning pathways, recommend credentials, monitor progress and predict future opportunities. From the early years of school to senior secondary, learning is available anytime and anywhere, but it is shaped by commercial incentives and data ownership.

Teachers remain in some parts of the system, but their professional autonomy is reduced. Some become facilitators, platform managers,

wellbeing monitors, salespeople or private learning consultants. For younger learners, adults are still needed to provide care, structure, social development and safety. For older learners, human support is increasingly positioned as a premium service for those who can afford it. Teachers and leaders are increasingly accountable to dashboards, customer metrics and provider performance.

Families with resources can buy rich, human, creative and socially connected education across childhood and adolescence. Others receive narrow, low-cost algorithmic education pathways from an early age. Learners appear to have more choice, but many choices are shaped by sponsorship, platform design, employer demand and predictive analytics, long before they are old enough to fully understand or challenge the pathways being created for them.

EARLY SIGNS WE SEE TODAY

- ▶ Rapid growth of AI learning tools and education platforms.
- ▶ Private tutoring and edtech market growth.
- ▶ Increasing use of learner analytics and dashboards.
- ▶ Employer interest in platform-based credentials.
- ▶ Public and private sector dependency on digital infrastructure.

? How this future could emerge

2026–2030

Capacity strains as learning diversifies

Teacher shortages, workload pressures and demand for personalised learning increase. AI tools are used by schools widely for learning support. Reliance on teachers for some forms of academic learning declines. Families increasingly turn to AI products, tutoring, online learning, home schooling and self-directed learning options.

2031–2035

Private delivery expands and shapes the system

As reliance on human-led teaching declines, governments increasingly use private providers to deliver learning alongside schools. Credentials offered by private platforms are widely accepted as valid and demonstrated learning.

Private providers begin to control most of the learning content, learner data, digital tools and credential pathways. Consistent standards and quality learning are difficult for governments to regulate. Decisions made by algorithms increasingly influence what learners are taught, which pathways are recommended and how success is measured.

2036–2040

Education becomes a consumer market

Education is no longer organised primarily through governments and schools. Private platforms package, sell and recommend learning pathways based on user data, employer demand and commercial priorities. Human-led teaching and support become premium services, while lower-cost algorithmic pathways become the default for many learners.

SCENARIO 4

Crisis-Defined Learning Network



Crisis defines learning, and communities, governments, schools and families scramble to respond.

In this future, the purpose of learning is reshaped by disruption and constant chaos. Climate events, pandemics, economic shocks, misinformation, geopolitical instability, workforce shortages, mental health pressures and rapid AI acceleration make it increasingly difficult to sustain established expectations about the purpose of education, how learning is delivered and what schools should provide.

At first, education becomes reactive. Attendance is unstable across the schooling years. Families vary in their capacity to support learning, with children needing more direct supervision, care and structure. Adolescents need support to stay engaged, connected and oriented toward future pathways. Teachers and leaders are overloaded. Schools are expected to provide teaching, care, wellbeing, social support, technology navigation and community stability all at once.

The purpose of learning shifts from achievement and progression to continuity, safety, adaptability

and survival. Learners need to build strong foundations, stay connected, solve real problems, discern truth, manage uncertainty and care for themselves and others. For younger learners, this means security, belonging, foundational learning and trusted relationships. For older learners, it means critical thinking, resilience, practical problem-solving, civic responsibility and preparation for uncertain futures.

In some places, crisis produces fragmentation and inequity. In others, it sparks renewal. Local learning networks form between schools, councils, health services, emergency services, First Nations communities, employers, families, AI systems and local organisations. AI could help coordinate learning, translate information, personalise support and maintain continuity during disruption. AI systems could also be unstable or unreliable where power, connectivity and infrastructure are threatened. Reliance on human relationships, community networks and non-technical forms of support is heightened.

EARLY SIGNS WE SEE TODAY

- ▶ Increasing climate-related school disruptions.
- ▶ Greater awareness of post-pandemic impact on learner mental health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Increasing cybersecurity and misinformation risks.
- ▶ Global geopolitical uncertainty.
- ▶ Growing interest in strengthening community resilience.

? How this future could emerge

2026–2030

Repeated shocks expose fragility and ongoing instability

Schools face overlapping pressures from teacher shortages, learner wellbeing needs, climate disruptions, mis- and disinformation and cybersecurity risks, while still recovering from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learner attendance, staffing and access to school sites and technology are frequently interrupted. Families vary in their capacity to support learning when usual arrangements are disrupted. Among the volatility, schools endeavour to provide teaching, care, wellbeing support, technology assistance and community stability.

2031–2035

The system struggles to keep up

Arrangements designed to help schools manage temporary disruption are unable to withstand repeated crises. Immediate needs force short-term problem-solving, delaying longer-term action to address systemic issues.

Some families and communities can draw on resources and technology to keep learners supported and connected, while others face greater barriers. Teachers and leaders focus on building strong local networks with communities, health and emergency services, councils, employers and families. Some schools lack the required relationships and resources, and remain fragmented and reactive.

2036–2040

Crisis becomes the organising condition

The purpose of education shifts towards maintaining continuity, safety, adaptability, truth, care and connection during ongoing disruption. Some communities use local networks to renew and strengthen education, while others experience deeper inequity, fracturing and disengagement.