



Name: Brotherhood of St. Laurence

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Improve school student outcomes with the best available tools and resources

What (if anything) needs to be done to improve the use of edtech tools (including GenAI) in schools?

Harnessing technology, including artificial intelligence (AI) offers the potential to support educators and improve educational outcomes for learners. However, if these technologies are utilised uncritically, they will only further widen equity gaps within education. Research into AI decision-making and AI-generated content is increasingly demonstrating that AI systems reproduce existing biases present within the cultural contexts in which they are developed and the data they are trained on. These biases 'can lead to unfair outcomes and perpetuate existing inequalities' (Ferrara, 2024). Effective deployment of AI's benefits, and mitigating its risks, requires a fundamental shift in educational systems, culture and policy without de-prioritising intentional human interaction and relationships. Professor Leslie Loble's work on the role of AI and edtech to address the learning gap in Australian schools (Loble & Hawcroft 2022) provides substantial insight to guide how policymakers can promote more equitable outcomes for students by harnessing AI's and edtech's transformative potential, ensuring that usage of edtech and AI aligns with Australian priorities.

Building the systemic conditions for equitable and inclusive use of edtech and AI requires clear departmental and policy leadership and oversight by both the national and state/territory departments of education. There also needs to be intentional investment in capability building within initial teacher training and upskilling of existing teachers, to make sure all teachers have the skills to use edtech and AI in ways that expand opportunities and do not reinforce existing inequities.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government, in partnership with state and territory governments, should take leadership of developing safe and equitable processes for the usage of GenAI in schools, and ensure best practice approaches are included within foundational teacher training (e.g. AQF Level 7 qualifications).

Ferrara, E 2024, 'Fairness and Bias in Artificial Intelligence: A Brief Survey of Sources, Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies', Sci, vol. 6, no. 1.

Loble, L, & Hawcroft, A 2022, 'Shaping AI and Edtech to Tackle Australia's Learning Divide', University of Technology Sydney.

What more (if anything) needs to be done to improve awareness and access to high quality lesson planning and curriculum materials in schools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Is there anything more you would like to say about edtech, GenAI or lesson planning and curriculum materials?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes you?

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence is a social justice organisation working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to address the fundamental causes of poverty in Australia.

Are you currently using any edtech tools (including learning games and GenAI) to support teaching and learning in the classroom?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Are there things you would like to do with GenAI or edtech tools that you can't do currently? What's stopping you from doing these things?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using any edtech tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Do you access lesson planning and curriculum materials online?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what has been your experience with using these tools?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you tell us why you are not using online lesson planning and curriculum materials?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Support the workforce through a flexible post-secondary education and training sector

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

In your experience, how well does the credit transfer and recognition of prior learning system operate in Australia? Does it adequately support students to move between courses or have their work experience recognised as part of a qualification? Are there ways it could be improved?

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence's (BSL) work supporting individuals experiencing disadvantage through education and into sustained employment has frequently identified weaknesses within the current credit transfer and recognition of prior learning (RPL) practices. Poor credit transfer and RPL practices are particularly limiting for those experiencing disadvantage and disrupted education and training trajectories.

The recent Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive Scheme highlighted the need for further action from the Australian Government and VET system regulators, to support more consistent and equitable RPL practices. While BSL welcomes the expansion of government funded RPL initiatives in the construction industry aimed at fast tracking the credentialling of existing workers in the building trades, standardised and equitable RPL practices are needed across additional industry areas, particularly in those sectors where low credentialling is impacting marginalised workers and job seekers (e.g. care work).

The problems caused by poor RPL practices are exacerbated by current occupationally-narrow offerings for learners undertaking foundational training for workforce entry.

Without effective RPL and credit transfer, learners undertaking occupationally-narrow offerings who wish to change their course of study are often required to start their new course from its beginning, regardless of their level of existing training, skills, and workplace experience. This significantly increases the investment required by the learner, delays the benefits of full qualification attainment for both workers and workplaces, and delays the application of new skills in the workplace and associated productivity gains.

In addition to improvements in RPL and credit transfer practices, these problems can be addressed through the current qualification reform effort underway in VET. The narrowness, complexity and inflexibility of current qualifications raises the threshold of what is required for RPL and credit transfer to be 'effective'. One of the core ambitions of the qualification reform effort is to reduce the volume of foundational offerings available to learners, and to increase the breadth of transferable skills the qualifications develop. If successful, this will reduce the complexity that RPL and credit transfer practices will need to account for. Aligning the Productivity Commission's focus on RPL and credit transfer with this reform effort will support the development of more effective and more simplified RPL and credit transfer practices.

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should build on the expansion of funded RPL initiatives in the construction industry by expanding it to additional industry areas.

Recommendation 3: The Productivity Commission should seek to align its efforts to

strengthen RPL and credit transfer with the current qualification reform effort underway in VET.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence is a social justice organisation working alongside people experiencing disadvantage to address the fundamental causes of poverty in Australia.

In the past 3 years, have you applied for credit recognition or recognition of prior learning (RPL)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, what was your experience in applying for credit recognition or RPL like?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on why you didn't apply?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Work related training

What are the main reasons individuals and/or businesses do or do not participate in work-related training?

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) welcomes the Productivity Commission's recognition of the importance of ongoing skilling for individuals once they enter the workforce. Effective lifelong learning is an essential component of an effective skills and training system, and an important driver of productivity. The responsibility of government to support this skilling and reskilling does not cease when employment is first achieved. BSL's experience working with employers, jobseekers, and those re-entering the workforce has highlighted several reasons why individuals and businesses do not participate in work-related training, or do not take up the offer of work-related training where it is provided.

BSL has observed that many individuals choose to not participate in work-related training due to concerns that unaccredited and informal training does not always provide clear accreditation and/or proof of completion, and is misaligned with the accredited training that employees have already received or are able to receive in future. This limits the currency of this training when employees seek to change employers, or seek recognition of prior learning and industry experience with another employer or training provider. Employees are less likely to undertake work related training if there is a risk that they will be required to repeat that training across multiple workplaces, or undertake similar accredited training for the skills they have developed to be formally recognised. Employers and employees often attribute this misalignment to a disconnect between employers and the training system. This disconnect limits the training system's knowledge of the unique needs of employees and employers in a specific workplace, and employers knowledge of formal training pathways that employees undertake across their professional lives.

The disconnect between employers and the training system is also the cause of another common reason that individuals and businesses choose to not participate in work-related training: it has eroded the capability of employers to lead the training and development of workers. Individuals who experience training that is ineffective and

unengaging are less likely to participate in further training delivered by that employer or within that workplace. Similarly, many employers that BSL has spoken to are conscious of their limited understanding of how to effectively design and/or deliver training. This causes them to be less willing to deliver training to their staff. The same limitations also apply to employers' capability to meaningfully collaborate with training providers to deliver on-site training. Without establishing practices of collaboration, and knowledge of the education sector, employers are less able to work with providers to develop training that is tailored to their business's specific needs.

Workplace culture and relationships also play a key role in the uptake and success of work-related training. BSL possesses extensive experience working with employees who have backgrounds of disadvantage, and partnering with similar organisations that work to support them. This experience has shown that a positive relationship with an employer or manager, as well as a supportive workplace culture, are key indicators of the uptake and success of training in the workplace. This is particularly the case for cohorts who have historically faced barriers to education and employment, such as people living with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Employers who are willing and capable of wholistically supporting employees enable stronger learning outcomes. While there are limited studies that support this when applied to non-accredited, informal work-related training specifically, these observations are supported by data on barriers to the successful completion of apprenticeships in Australia. Data on those who did not complete a trade apprenticeship reveal that approximately three-quarters cited employment-based reasons as their reason for discontinuing (Misko, Gu & Circelli et al. 2020). These employment-based reasons included having a poor relationship with their boss and co-workers, working conditions and pay.

Misko, J, Gu, Z & Circelli, M 2020, 'Traditional trade apprenticeships: experiences and outcomes', NCVER, Adelaide.

What role, if any, should businesses be playing to address any barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

Businesses, industry, and employers should all play an important role in supporting the delivery of work-related training to employees. To enable this, employers should take an expanded and formalised collaborative role to be engaged in the design and delivery of training, to enhance on-the-job learning and bridge the gap between employers and the training system. While these systems and obligations partially exist at the state and national level, industry representation and participation usually sits within the remit of peak bodies, which represent the industry as a whole. The ambition to build the capability of individual businesses requires recognising that, in practice, 'industry' and 'employer' are not synonymous terms. Bringing employers and the training system closer together will enable the sharing of expertise and the alignment of ambitions. It will support closer alignment between the pre-employment and post-employment dimensions of an individuals' learning. It will ensure that the training accurately reflects the broad and specific needs of employers, while building the pedagogical capabilities of employers and supervisors to deliver on-the-job training that aligns with industry standards and long-term educational outcomes for employees.

These changes should be supplemented with an increased focus from employers and managers on developing onboarding, induction, workplace supervision and workplace culture practices that create safe and inclusive spaces, and establish the conditions for more effective and accessible skill development opportunities. While these practices are

often in place within larger organisations, many small-to-medium enterprises (SME) lack sufficient, or at times any, processes and practices to build positive workplace culture for employees. BSL's longstanding relationships with social and community services organisations has highlighted that even where larger organisations have such policies and practices in place, they are not fit for purpose for specific cohorts, such as people living with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These social and community organisations often possess the most up-to-date understanding of best practice, and their expertise can be invaluable for employers aiming to build their capability in this space.

Recommendation 4: Employers should expand and formalise a more collaborative role with training providers to build their capability to design and deliver workplace training.

Recommendation 5: Employers should develop their capability to create safe and positive workplace environments for employees, particularly those experiencing disadvantage.

What, if anything, could government do to address barriers and better support the offer of work-related training to employees?

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) has significant experience in trying to bridge the gap between the systems responsible for workforce development, including between jobseekers, employers, and the education and training system. Our work to build the capability of these actors to work together highlights the essential role that government needs to play in designing policies and structures to enable this collaboration. Direct subsidies and payments to employers to incentivise the delivery of work-related training can be effective, however some caution is required when taking this approach. Feedback from BSL's frontline service staff and community partners engaged in workforce development for people experiencing disadvantage reveals scepticism about the benefits of wage subsidies and incentives. Many express concern that less scrupulous employers take advantage of these financial supports, taking on employees and delivering the minimal level of training, treating the funds as organisational income. Where BSL has seen targeted supports be effective is when they are used to support the learning journeys of specific cohorts. This can take the form of direct support for members of this cohort, or supports for employers to more effectively work with these cohorts. However, as with direct supports to employers, these supports alone are insufficient to provide long-term solutions to the underlying issues. Access to employer incentives for the purposes of workplace training should be tied to capability-building inputs, such as resources and personal development to strengthen employers' capability to deliver training and manage priority cohorts, ensuring that conditions for success are considered and established from the beginning.

A more effective and long-term solution is to make changes to system architecture to enable stronger integration between the systems responsible for employment and workforce development. Addressing complex, interconnected barriers and points of failure across the development of skills within the workplace can address this complexity and connection. Addressing the distance between employers and the education system, and building the capability of employers to upskill and support specific cohorts requires government to bring these parties closer together. Greater integration and alignment also offers an opportunity to explore the implementation of institutional and systemic accountability for training outcomes, employability, and career progression outcomes for graduates and employees. These changes can be intentionally supported through

formalised structures of collaboration between employers and the training system. Establishing strategic governance mechanisms rather than relying on one-off and ad-hoc instances of collaboration will lead to cultural change and mindset shift. One opportunity to pursue this is through the expanded role of the new Jobs and Skills Councils. BSL remains optimistic about the renewed engagement with employers in the design of qualifications and training products, enabled by the Jobs and Skills Councils. The employer engagement work of the Jobs and Skills Councils is critical to strengthening the capability of employers to feed into the design of accredited work-related training, but there is also an as yet underdeveloped role that the Jobs and Skills Councils could be playing in rebuilding capability of employers, particularly large employers, to contribute to aligning workplace training inputs more intentionally with the existing system of accredited qualifications. This alignment is needed to enable a cohesive skills and training landscape in which training within institutions and within workplaces are complementary parts of the workforce development system.

Recommendation 6: Targeted financial supports should be offered on a limited basis to businesses and individuals to support the uptake of workplace training. However, these supports should be tied to capability building inputs to upskill employers and improve workplace conditions. Financial supports should play a secondary role to structural changes to address barriers to access to and the uptake of workplace training.

Recommendation 7: The Australian government should pursue changes to system architecture to facilitate formalised and ongoing collaboration between employers and the training system, including community level collaboration mechanisms between local employers and training providers.

Which of the following best describes you? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers and sole traders, how many employees do you have?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For employees/individuals, have you participated in any work-related training in the last 12 months that did not relate to general compliance (such as WHS)?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to undertake work-related training?

The participant did not respond to this question.

For business owners, managers or sole traders, have you provided or supported your employees to participate in work-related training in the past 12 months?

The participant did not respond to this question.

If yes, can you elaborate on the reasons for the training and any benefits you or your employees received from doing it?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Can you describe whether you accessed any government assistance, what type, and the amount received? If you didn't access any financial assistance, please tell us the reasons why.

The participant did not respond to this question.

If no, can you elaborate on any challenges or barriers you faced in attempting to provide or support your employees to undertake work-related training, such as the time or cost, availability of relevant or high-quality courses, and level of interest from your employees?

The participant did not respond to this question.

Balance service availability and quality through fit-for-purpose occupational entry regulations

What are the effects of occupational entry regulations? Please describe your experience and name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Do you believe current occupational entry regulations are proportionate to the level of risk associated with different professions? Why or why not? If not, do you have any suggested improvements to regulations to better reflect risks? Please name the specific occupations you are referring to.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which of the following best describes your connection to occupational entry regulations? Please select all that apply.

The participant did not respond to this question.

Which state or territory are you predominantly based in?

The participant did not respond to this question.