

Submission to the Productivity Commission: Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

From: A practising classroom teacher

Topic: Building a skilled and adaptable workforce through a coordinated national approach to AI in education

I welcome the interim report's recognition that a skilled and adaptable workforce requires foundational education reform and a national approach to advanced educational technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). As a classroom-facing teacher, I see daily the urgency of this challenge. AI has erupted into education and is reshaping how students learn and how teachers work. However, three key conversations are occurring in parallel without sufficient intersection:

- Policy: High-level strategies are often built on flawed assumptions (such as the effectiveness of AI detectors or the myth of 'AI natives').
- Learning research: Nuanced, evidence-rich studies are emerging but struggle to influence system-level policy or reach schools.
- Classroom reality: Students and teachers are already using AI tools, making some policy debates seem disconnected from lived experience.

This disconnect creates a vacuum where ed-tech hype outpaces evidence. In this context, a coordinated national approach could enable not only safer adoption but also transformational shifts that strengthen the workforce pipeline. Bridging research, policy, and classroom practice is the most urgent task we face.

Strategic Partnerships for Iterative Innovation

I urge the Australian Government to fund and support strategic partnerships between schools and research organisations to enable iterative, evidence-informed approaches to AI implementation across multiple dimensions of schooling. Potential focus areas could include:

- AI and Digital Pedagogy: Investigate how AI can transform teaching practices, instructional design and classroom interaction. Explore integration of AI-powered learning tools, their impact on pedagogy, and new teaching strategies that leverage AI while strengthening student agency.
- Leveraging Data and Generating Insights: Explore how schools can use the data generated by AI systems to inform teaching and learning decisions. Research accessible methods of data analysis and visualisation for teachers, and how to integrate data-driven insights into daily pedagogy.
- Business, Operations Systems and AI: Examine how AI can streamline administrative workflows, optimise communication, and support data-driven leadership decisions across schools, colleges and multi-school networks, strengthening operational efficiency.

- **Addressing Inequity and the Digital Divide:** Investigate how AI might interact with existing educational inequalities. Explore strategies to ensure equitable access and outcomes, addressing digital access, algorithmic bias, and digital literacy development, and using AI to reduce disparities.
- **Implementing Innovative AI:** Develop processes for identifying opportunities, co-designing AI tools with educators and students, and integrating new AI solutions into existing educational ecosystems.
- **Special Educational Needs and Disability and Personalised Learning:** Explore how AI can support individualised learning for students with diverse needs, from identifying learning differences to adapting content and assessments to students' strengths, while maintaining high expectations for all.
- **Early Years:** Investigate how age-appropriate AI tools could support play-based learning, language acquisition and early numeracy, while maintaining a focus on physical, social and emotional development.

Why This Matters for Workforce Adaptability

As the interim report notes, 'well implemented generative AI and other technologies have tremendous potential to support students who are falling behind, and challenge those who are ahead'. A national, evidence-informed approach would:

- Accelerate diffusion of effective innovations across states and territories
- Reduce duplication of effort and cost
- Ensure that disadvantaged students and under-resourced schools are not left behind
- Embed AI literacy and adaptability as foundational skills, preparing students for a rapidly changing workforce.

Currently, these kinds of school–research collaborations exist in pockets, but they lack sustainable funding, coordination, and feedback loops. This leaves schools isolated, pilots under-evaluated, and lessons unshared.

Recommendation

I call on the Productivity Commission to explicitly recognise the link between foundational AI literacy, equity, and workforce adaptability, and to recommend that the Australian Government:

- Support the creation of nationally coordinated, funded school–research partnerships at scale to develop and evaluate AI use across all school dimensions,
- Embed continuous feedback and professional learning into these initiatives, so that schools receive ongoing guidance on safe, effective and innovative AI use.

This approach would give schools the strategic support, time and tools to engage in iterative action research and build a cohesive national evidence base for AI in education, a crucial step toward building a skilled and adaptable workforce for Australia.