



Building a skilled and adaptable workforce

Submission in response to the Productivity Commission interim report

Brotherhood of St. Laurence

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Summary

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) welcomes the Productivity Commission's interim report *Building a skilled and adaptable workforce*. BSL supports draft recommendations 1.1 (a national platform for lesson materials), 1.2 (equitable access to education technology and artificial intelligence), 2.1 (a national system of credit transfer and recognition of prior learning) and 2.2 (incentives to lift work-related training in small and medium enterprises (SMEs)). These reforms can contribute to productivity by building a more skilled and adaptable workforce.

To ensure productivity gains flow widely across the economy and community, BSL also calls attention to the need for more equitable and inclusive practices across all levels of education and training. Equitable and inclusive practices can maximise economic participation for all and reduce reliance on government service systems (with associated costs) to address educational exclusion. To address these concerns, BSL makes following additional recommendations:

Related to Interim recommendation 1.1 (national platform)

- The Australian Government, with states and territories, should develop an effective national lesson-plan platform for teachers that includes resources and tools to strengthen teachers' capability in differentiated, equitable and inclusive classroom practice.

Related to Interim recommendation 1.2 (edtech and AI)

- Include foundational edtech and AI safety in the national teacher training curriculum for all pre-service teachers.
- Adopt a national definition of 'equitable' AI adoption that explicitly considers equitable access, reducing the risk of reinforcing existing social and economic inequality.
- Support teachers to ensure digital safety for both teachers and students (in addition to access and functionality).

Related to interim recommendation 2.1 (credit transfer and RPL)

- Design a national system for recognition of prior learning (RPL) that includes skilled migrants, avoids duplicating existing efforts and does not create competing systems.

Related to interim recommendation 2.2 (incentives)

- Design financial incentives and monetary supports for SMEs with accountability safeguards so funds are used for training rather than general business operating expenses.

BSL does not have specific comment on recommendations related to occupational entry (3.1–3.4).

1 Comments on selected recommendations

Recommendation 1.1

A national lesson plan platform

A national platform for lesson-planning materials that takes a 'one-size-fits-all' approach risks enshrining non-inclusive practices. This can harm productivity by compounding student disadvantage, undermining school completion, and reducing readiness to access post-school work and learning. An effective national platform must include resources to build teachers' capability to support students with additional and specific needs. This includes children and young people with experiences of self or family incarceration, mental health challenges, family violence and/or trauma, poverty, neurodiversity, caring responsibilities and geographical transience.

A platform that enables access to lesson-planning materials and tools requires teachers to have a strong foundation from which they can build high quality, inclusive edtech- and AI-enabled classroom practice. While standard 3.4 of the current Australian Professional Standards for Teachers requires capability in use of ICT to engage students in learning, the rapidly changing digital technology and AI landscape calls for a proactive approach to teachers' AI capability within initial teacher education programs.

Recommendations:

1. The Australian Government, with states and territories, should develop an effective national lesson-plan platform for teachers that includes resources and tools to strengthen capability to implement differentiated, equitable and inclusive classroom practice.

Recommendation 1.2

A coordinated national agenda for AI and edtech use across education and training is needed

BSL is concerned that unfettered digital technology and AI adoption in education and training, including schools and tertiary education, risks reproducing existing disadvantages and biases with resulting productivity losses. This can lead to unfair outcomes and perpetuate existing inequalities.¹

AI adoption in education is about more than enabling access for students and building their AI skills for future work and learning. AI adoption includes decisions about information sharing, social power dynamics and the role of technology in reinforcing existing social norms, values and inequalities. To maximise the potential of AI as an education tool and productivity benefit, clear guidance on effective and equitable adoption is needed. Most urgently, guidance is needed to ensure that students experiencing disadvantage are not left behind or further excluded as a result of a) inequitable adoption of AI in the classroom, b) inbuilt social biases within AI and c) a lack of consideration of the digital literacies foundational to AI skills needed for work and learning opportunities.

These risks should not be seen as an acceptable cost that is outweighed by AI's benefits, but risks that government, teachers and education and training system leaders must mitigate (and where possible preventing). Just as a chemistry or woodworking teacher is expected to understand and mitigate the risks that come with the usage of chemicals, tools and equipment in the classroom, BSL considers that teachers and schools that utilises AI should understand and mitigate the risks that accompany it.

Recommendations:

2. Include foundational edtech and AI safety training for all pre-service teachers in the national teach training curriculum.
3. Adopt a national definition of 'equitable' AI adoption that explicitly considers equitable access, managing the risk of reinforcing existing social inequalities and digital safety for both teachers and students (in addition to access and functionality).

Recommendation 2.1

Skill recognition

Australia's skills shortages and lagging productivity growth require a trusted, well-functioning national system of skills recognition that rapidly harnesses the skills of both skilled migrants and locally trained workers. Almost half of permanent migrants in Australia have skills that are not fully used² – a clear productivity loss. Despite being a core feature of the Australian Vocational Education and Training

¹ Erica Ferrara, 2024. '[Fairness and Bias in Artificial Intelligence: A Brief Survey of Sources, Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies](#)'

² Settlement Services International. [Activate Australia's skills: a blueprint for activating Australia's overseas-trained workforce.](#)

(VET) system for more than three decades, RPL is significantly under-used. The latest available analysis (2018) shows that fewer than 3% of all students completed VET subjects through RPL.

We urge immediate action to establish a nationally coordinated approach, building on existing regulatory settings for training providers, that recognises existing skills and qualifications in the workforce more effectively and more rapidly. Implementation should avoid duplication of existing efforts and/or the development of competing systems.

Recommendation:

4. Create a national RPL system that includes skilled migrants, avoids duplicating existing efforts and does not create competing systems.

Recommendation 2.2

Incentives

BSL supports, in principle, expanding incentives and supports to increase the rates of work-related training in SMEs. As noted in BSL's submission to the first phase of consultations, our work with learners and early-career employees shows that barriers to successful work-related training often rest with employers – most frequently due to poor workplace culture, limited capability to support training or pursuit of incentives without intent to deliver quality training.

Recommendation:

5. Design financial incentives and monetary supports to SMEs with accountability safeguards to ensure they support training and are not used for other business operational or income-growth efforts.