Australian Government | Jobs and Skills Australia

Lifelong Learning

JSA is producing a series of working papers focused on informing lifelong learning policy and practice. These papers extend the conversation beyond initial tertiary study, exploring how learning and skill development evolve throughout our entire working lives.

Key findings to date

Adult learning has become increasingly important due to technological, demographic and structural shifts

Our first working paper, *Forces at work: Adult learning and the Australian labour market*, explored the megatrends shaping the importance of lifelong learning. The evidence and insights were presented through 4 key dynamics that we found to be driving the growing importance of lifelong learning.

The 4 key dynamics most associated with increased importance of lifelong learning



Pace of skill change **Structural change** **Population ageing** **Job mobility**

We found that the pace of skill change has increased across most occupations, particularly in fast-evolving technology-intensive areas. To avoid skills mismatches for businesses and individuals, this dynamic needs to be met with more frequent upskilling.

Structural changes in the Australian economy are shifting employment towards higher skill and non-routine occupations, while longer working lives are elevating the importance of lifelong learning as a way to support the productivity and participation of older workers. Job mobility levels in Australia have been stagnant over the past decade, with older workers less likely to pursue learning for the purpose of job mobility. Without any changes to these patterns, Australia's ageing population is likely to limit our ability to improve labour market dynamism through greater lifelong learning participation.

Promoting effective adult learning requires more than efforts to increase participation

Our second working paper, *Systems at work: Trends in adult learning and outcomes,* provided analysis of the current state and key trends across adult learning participation and performance, organised around a theory of change built on the 3 pillars included below.

Summary of results across the 3 pillars of effective adult learning

		Vocational education and training	Higher education	Work-related training
Adult learning activity	**Commenced in most recent year of data**	744,000 VET program commencements and 7 million stand-alone subject enrolments (2025).	152,000 commencing domestic higher education students (2024).	3.1 million adults participated in work-related training (2024-25).
Pillar 1 - Participation and progression	**Adult participation rate**	VET program participation declining; subject-only enrolments increasing.	Generally declining since 2014 (aside from a temporary COVID increase).	Either down or near the medium-term average, depending on the data source.
	Unmet demand	46% of total demand in 2024-25 (up 6 ppt since 2020-21).	40% of total demand in 2024-25 (up 10 ppt since 2020-21).	24% of total demand in 2024-25.
Pillar 2 - Skill development and utilisation	**Student satisfaction and training relevance**	High and improving modestly over time. Increasing contribution to literacy, numeracy & problem-solving skills.	Satisfaction high overall, though outcomes vary across capabilities.	Most adult learners gain new skills and use them regularly at work.
Pillar 3 - Labour market outcomes	**Post-study employment status, income and retention**	69% of students improved employment status post-training.	Strong employment outcomes, though wage growth has lagged inflation.	Higher income growth and retention than non-participants.
	Employer satisfaction	76% in 2025 (down 13 ppt since 2011).	Stable at around 85%.	86% in 2025 (down 10 ppt since 2011).

Many systems shape how adults access, invest in and benefit from learning

Adult learning is delivered, financed and enabled through a range of systems, institutions, funding arrangements and policy frameworks that are often designed for different purposes. This can make it harder for learners to navigate opportunities and supports throughout their working lives and harder for governments, employers and providers to offer a coherent lifelong learning approach.

Improving learning outcomes will require coordinated action across employees, unions, employers, governments, providers and other system actors. Maximising effectiveness also requires a systems approach that recognises the interactions between education and training, employment services, workplace relations, and tax and transfer settings.

Future work

Future work in this series will explore what is preventing more people from accessing learning opportunities and translating them into new capabilities, benefits and outcomes. This future work will be available on the Jobs and Skills Australia website, alongside the working papers already published.

Further information

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