



Charting Australian education research priorities and future directions

Response to consultation paper on a Decadal Plan for Australian education research 2025–36

Brotherhood of St. Laurence

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Summary

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) is a social justice organisation working towards an Australia free of poverty. Our purpose is to advance a fair Australia through our leadership on policy reform, our partnerships with communities and the quality of our services. Our approach is informed directly by people experiencing disadvantage and uses evidence drawn from our research, together with insights from our programs and services, to develop practical solutions that work.

BSL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia's Decadal Plan for Australian education research 2025–36 (the Plan). BSL supports the Plan priorities (justice quality and equity; a prepared and well supported education workforce; cross-sector collaboration and shared understanding and knowledge; and a world-class connected research capability). BSL makes several recommendations in response to the consultation paper.

Recommendations

Priority focus areas and addressing gaps in understanding:

1. The Plan should include a specific program of research that focuses on understanding how lived experience and life-stage influences how learners move through and experience different education settings.

2. The Plan should include a stream that focuses on the impacts past reforms have had on improving learner outcomes.
3. The Plan should include a program of research that examines how artificial intelligence (AI) is being used across different education settings and how its use impacts access to education and learner outcomes.

Attracting and retaining a diverse education workforce:

4. The Plan should include a research stream that focuses on structural barriers impacting diverse workforce attraction and retention across early childhood education and care (ECEC), schoolteachers and the VET workforce.
5. The Plan should include a focus on recognition of prior learning (RPL) and how this can support attraction of those from diverse backgrounds and professions into schools and VET teaching and recognition of skills.

Aligning and complementing existing research activities and mechanisms, and prioritising cross-system and cross-sectoral understanding:

4. The Plan should be scoped to intersect with, and be complementary to, work underway by Jobs and Skills Australia and the TAFE Centres of Excellence.

Enabling conditions for rich and diverse research and maximising impactful translation to practice and policy:

7. The Plan should focus on research that connects theory, practice and lived experience to strengthen the translation of research into policy and practice.
8. The Plan should consider how funding arrangements can better support collaboration across research institutes, universities, vocational education and training (VET) and other stakeholders in the education sector to limit duplication and leverage diverse expertise.
9. The Plan should prioritise the establishment of increased data sharing and data linkage efforts within and between jurisdictions, with a focus on ethical access to support research capabilities.

Priority focus areas and addressing gaps in understanding

BSL welcomes the development of a Decadal Plan for Australian education research, which can better direct, and strengthen the impact of, education research over the next decade.

We welcome the discussion paper's explicit focus on equity and inclusion. While current education reforms have attempted to address equity issues, much of the policy focus in VET (for example) has been around improving access to training for specific cohorts. BSL considers gap in existing effort is the consideration of how a learner's lived experience contributes to how, and whether, they can engage in education opportunities and the way they participate once engaged.

Reforms across the schools and post-compulsory education systems in recent years present an opportunity to understand the impact of reforms on experiences and outcomes for learners. Research that examines learner experiences across the life course will enable researchers and policymakers to better understand whether these systems meet the needs of different types of learners. It will show the impact of the reforms on short and long-term learner outcomes. This life course focus should include a consideration of learners' transitions between education systems, and their re-entry into education systems after initial qualification.

AI adoption in education is underway, and will significantly impact learners' experiences of, and outcomes from, formal education. AI adoption within education presents benefits and risks. Research is needed to ensure that AI-supported education does, in fact, enable long-term positive outcomes for learners, both social and professional. Research is also required to ensure that learners 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.

Recommendations:

1. The Plan should include a specific program of research that focuses on understanding the way lived experience and life-stage shapes how learners move through and experience different education settings.
2. The Plan should include a stream that focuses on the impacts of past reforms have had on improving learner outcomes.
3. The Plan should include a program of research that examines how AI is being used across different education settings and how its use impacts access to education, learner equity and learner outcomes.

Attracting and retaining a diverse education workforce

A skilled and sustainable education workforce is critical to an equitable and inclusive education system. Over 850,000 people are employed across ECEC, schools, VET and higher education. As the Plan notes, there are significant and increasing workforce shortages across these sectors, which are exacerbated by workforce attraction and retention challenges. The Plan represents an opportunity to include a program of work that seeks to understand structural factors that impact workforce attraction, retention and diversity.

The Plan should include a program of research that examines successful alternative approaches to workforce development and identify which elements are transferrable and scalable. Many of the current national, state and territory workforce development approaches focus on reducing financial barriers to training. Although this can improve access to training, it may not address other barriers that limit workforce entry. Alternative approaches that enable gradual and structured workforce entry offer a promising approach to workforce attraction.

For example, in the BSL [Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters](#) (HIPPY), tutors are recruited from the local community, and many have been parents in the program. BSL’s program data shows that since 2020, HIPPY has employed 1,138 tutors. Of these tutors, 26% had never been in paid work before. They remain employed for the two-year program, and 43% secure ongoing employment after the program. Research into alternative attraction approaches such as HIPPY would provide greater insight into barriers to education workforce development, and support workforce development approaches that complement mainstream offerings.

Growing the educational workforce, particularly in schools and specialist education support roles, will not be possible just through recruiting school leavers. Workforce development will need to attract people from other professions and more effectively support career change. RPL can support those moving from other occupations and from overseas. Limitations in existing RPL practices have been identified as a barrier to access to training, upskilling and reskilling ([Jobs and Skills Australia 2025](#)). Including a program of work that focuses on improved RPL in the Plan will support the diversification of the education workforce, which, in turn, could strengthen learner outcomes. RPL from overseas can be particularly relevant as nearly one in five Australians speak a language other than English at home ([Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022](#)).

Recommendations:

4. The Plan should include a research stream that focuses on the structural barriers impacting diverse workforce attraction and retention across ECEC, schoolteachers and the VET workforce.
5. The Plan should include a focus on RPL and how this can support attraction and recognition of skills of those from diverse backgrounds and professions into schools and VET teaching.

Aligning and complementing existing research activities and mechanisms, and prioritising cross-system and cross-sectoral understanding

To support the impact of the Plan, its research priorities should complement and leverage existing education system reform and priorities. For example, Jobs and Skills Australia and the TAFE Centres of Excellence are currently focused on VET workforce attraction and development. Aligning the Plan with this work will also support research that examines common opportunities and challenges across ECEC, school and tertiary education.

Recommendation:

6. The Plan should be scoped to intersect with, and be complementary to, work underway by Jobs and Skills Australia and the TAFE Centres of Excellence.

Enabling conditions for rich and diverse research and maximising impactful translation to practice and policy

Maximising the impact of education research requires adequate funding and better coordination of education research and data. The consultation paper outlines how government investment in education research has declined over time, with just five projects on VET funded since 2015. In addition, research can be ‘narrow’ – focussed only on theory, or practice or lived experience. The Plan offers an opportunity to identify and support research that connects theory, practice and lived experience in ways that strengthen practice and policy recommendations.

The Plan also offers an opportunity to consider what type of research needs to be done and by whom. The competitive nature of the research grants process can be a barrier to collaborative research. Research that encourages and funds collaboration across research institutes, universities, VET and other education stakeholders (including the community and specialist support organisations) can reduce duplication, and promote diverse research perspectives and support the inclusion of voices with different lived experiences of the education system. Greater collaboration can also better support the translation of research into practice and policy across different components of the education system.

Access to data has been identified as a consistent challenge when conducting education research. [Jobs and Skills Australia](#), for example, are advocating for the development of a VET workforce data strategy to capture who makes up the VET workforce. The Plan also notes that data currently available is inconsistent across data sets, which limits the ability to understand the factors shaping educational equity. To address this, the Plan should include the development of a data strategy. This strategy would identify which organisations and government stakeholders hold data relevant to understanding Australia’s education systems and outline mechanisms to support data sharing. A data strategy would build data availability and coordination, and support capability of education researchers.

Recommendations:

7. The Plan should focus on research that connects theory, practice and lived experience to strengthen the translation of research into policy and practice.
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9. The Plan should prioritise the establishment of increased data sharing and data linkage efforts within and between jurisdictions, with a focus on ethical access to support research capabilities.