



Strategic Insights

Aligning Education with Australia's Future Workforce

ECA Strategic Insights Report 2026

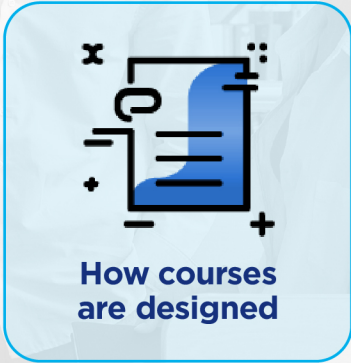
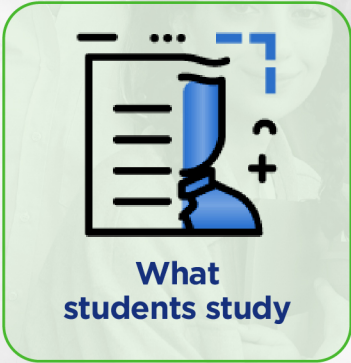
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Strategic Insights: Aligning Education with Australia's Future Workforce

The Shift in International Education

Australia's international education sector is entering a new phase, where success is no longer defined by recruitment, but by outcomes.

As labour market demand evolves, a gap is emerging between:



Institutions that address this gap will be best positioned to deliver long-term value, for students, partners, and the broader economy.

Key Insight

Nearly 50% of new jobs will require a Bachelor's degree or higher by 2035

The Big Shift

A Workforce Becoming More Skilled

Australia's labour market is shifting toward higher-skilled, degree-qualified roles.



Where Growth Is Happening

Health

Driven by an ageing population and rising demand for care

Technology & IT

Accelerated by digital transformation and AI adoption

Professional Services

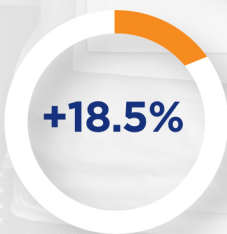
Expanding with demand for specialised expertise

These are not emerging sectors. They are established industries undergoing transformation at scale.

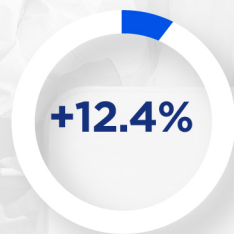
Sector Growth (to 2035)



Health



Professional Services



Education

Demand Spotlight

541,900 additional health professionals needed by 2035

The Key Insight

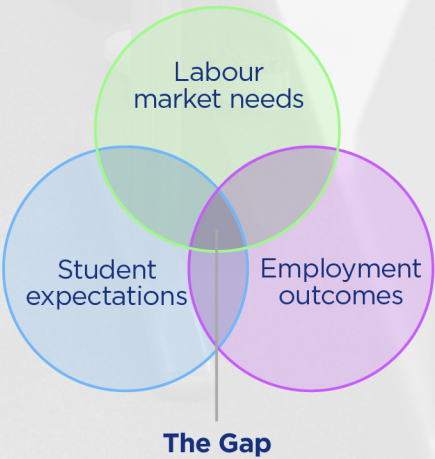
The Alignment Gap

A structural challenge is emerging within international education.

Course portfolios are often shaped by legacy frameworks, while demand is increasingly driven by:

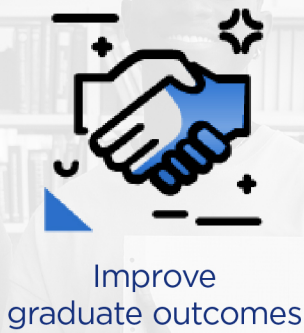
- ✓ Labour market needs
- ✓ Student expectations
- ✓ Employment outcomes

This creates a growing disconnect between qualification and career readiness.



A Strategic Opportunity

Institutions that align course design with workforce demand and student pathways will be better positioned to:



AI Is Reshaping, Not Replacing

AI is transforming how work is performed across industries.

Rather than reducing demand, it is increasing the need for problem-solving, data interpretation, and strategic decision-making

Where the Real Opportunities Are

Health: Scale and Certainty

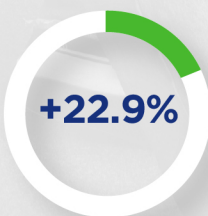
Healthcare is Australia’s fastest-growing sector, with strong and sustained demand driven by demographic change and an ageing population.

This is not short-term growth. It reflects a long-term structural shift that creates consistent demand for skilled professionals across a wide range of roles.

Technology & IT: Transformation at Pace

AI and digital adoption are accelerating demand across technology-related roles, particularly in software development, cybersecurity, data and systems. These roles are growing and becoming more complex, requiring a combination of technical expertise and advanced capabilities.

Employment growth (2023–2033):



Employment growth (2023–2033):



Business: Evolution, Not Decline

Business and finance roles continue to expand, but the nature of these roles is shifting. There is increasing demand for strategic advisory, data-driven decision-making, and higher-value analytical capabilities. This reflects a broader transition toward more complex, knowledge-based work.

Employment growth (2023-2033):



Postgraduate Pathways Drive Long-Term Outcomes

Postgraduate study is a key driver of career outcomes. In 2024, postgraduate courses accounted for a significant proportion of international higher education enrolments in Australia, highlighting the importance of advanced qualifications in competitive job markets.

Postgraduate qualifications play an important role in career progression, with 20–40% of professionals in high-growth occupations holding advanced degrees, depending on the field.

Key Source Markets

International student demand is driven by key markets: India, Nepal, and China, which continue to play a central role in enrolment growth.

Graduate Outcomes and Implications

The Missing Piece: Graduate Outcomes

While over 80% of graduates report feeling prepared, this does not consistently translate into employment outcomes.

Key barriers include:



Limited access to work experience



Visa constraints impacting employment



Underemployment in early career stages

Graduate Insight :



80% of graduates in Australia feel prepared for employment

The Real Shift

The next battleground is not recruitment. It is outcomes.

Strategic Implications for Universities

To remain competitive, institutions must:

- ✓ Design demand-led, outcome-driven programs
- ✓ Embed work-integrated learning experiences
- ✓ Align curriculum with future skill requirements
- ✓ Clearly communicate career value to students

ECA's Role

ECA operates at the intersection of market intelligence, student demand, and education delivery.

ECA supports institutions to:



Identify high-growth opportunities



Align programs with workforce demand



Strengthen student outcomes



Build future-ready portfolios

Closing Thought

The future of international education will be shaped by institutions that align education with employability.