National education and union news



Gender pay gap down

Australian Unions have welcomed figures showing that jobs and wages are continuing to rise, with a strong lift in both employment and pay for women.

New ABS data released shows the gender pay gap is at a record low of 11.5 per cent and that women's participation in work is at a record high of 63.5 per cent. The labour market outcomes data showed strong jobs growth, including 60,000 new full-time jobs.

This reduction in unemployment is underpinning strong growth in wages for seven quarters in a row, as confirmed by recent Wage Price Index data. Wage growth of 3.4 per cent for the year to June is outstripping the consumer price index, helping workers to catch up on lost income under the cost-of-living crisis.

The situation is even better for workers on collective agreements, winning real wage growth of 1.7 per cent for the year to June 2025, the highest real wage growth since June 2012, during the last year of the mining boom.

Workers are taking up rights to collectively bargain with their employers, and the reforms in workplace laws for better pay for undervalued sectors like aged care and early childhood education and care are now showing up in the data.

The changes which were introduced to fix our broken equal pay laws, as well as a stronger right to request flexible working arrangements, are also delivering better pay and work from home arrangements.

ACTU President Michele O'Neil said: "This new data shows the gender pay gap has been stubbornly high for decades but now it is finally coming down – thanks to the collective efforts of working people, their unions and reforms by the Federal Labor Government."

"Collective bargaining delivers tangible results, in wages and conditions, as working people have always known. To see wages rising, especially for women, is proof that these reforms are working."



Protecting creative workers and their industries

Media reporting has shown that business peaks and bosses from Australia's creative and journalism industries and unions are aligned in insisting on stronger protections for Australian workers and their industries from the rampant theft perpetrated by multinational tech companies.

Calls from the large multinational tech sector and regurgitated by the Productivity Commission for a copyright exemption for artificial intelligence (AI) firms while they train their new models would see creative workers, journalists and academics' work stolen to build the profit of some of the world's biggest companies and richest people.

Australian Unions stand alongside industry representatives in demanding that protections in copyright law should not be watered down and these protections must be fit for an AI age.

It is completely unacceptable that technology platforms would be permitted to use and profit from the content produced by Australian journalists, creatives and publishers without permission or payment.

It is also not appropriate for big tech to steal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' cultural output without consent or remuneration.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Joseph Mitchell said big tech had been profiting from stealing the work of Australia's creative workers and journalists and calls to legitimise this theft were incomprehensible.

"Australia's cultural identity is built of the labour of our creative workers, and our democracy cannot function without strong journalists," he said.

"Unions are aligned with news media and employer organisations in calling for clear and robust protections for these industries. If a workers' output is used to build a more profitable model, then they deserve to be paid and share in the success of that model.

"Unions are firmly opposed to any watering down of our copyright laws and want to ensure that they are robust enough to withstand the significant global tech changes that are occurring."

Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance chief executive Erin Madeley said: "To ensure Australia is a place where ideas can be tested in the public domain, we must protect our journalists and creatives from having their work scraped and stolen by AI tech platforms."

"Without these protections, investment in journalism and creative content will be at more risk and that's bad news."

Productivity Commission skills report lets employers off the hook

Australian Unions are urging the Albanese Government to reject key elements of the Productivity Commission's newly released interim report *Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce*, arguing it prioritises employer cost-cutting over effective solutions to address Australia's skills and training challenges.

Unions oppose the report's proposals to undermine essential safety and quality standards, claiming it dismisses the value these requirements provide to workers and the public, with its primary focus on reducing employer training costs.

Unions warn that the Productivity Commission's proposal to lower occupational entry requirements to address workforce shortages risks a "race to the bottom." These entry requirements represent the minimum level of skills and suitability to operate in that occupation.

The report's recommendations do not address job quality issues in occupations experiencing a shortage. It also fails to recommend improving employer investment in training and addressing the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships through pay increases and better support.

The report's finding that there is little unmet demand for workplace training ignores the reality that employers have entirely ceased to provide effective onboarding training to new workers and no longer provide training to their own workforce when they want to introduce new technology or ways of working.

Whilst the report recognises falling levels of investment in training and the greater need for a trained and skilled workforce in future, and the low overall rate of investment in Australia compared to other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development nations, it fails to propose any meaningful solutions to lift training rates.

The Productivity Commission suggests the continued handover of taxpayer dollars to employers to do what they should be doing anyway – investing in their own workforce – a measure that has failed to arrest the decline in work-related training.

Australian Unions have thrown their support behind a national skills levy, a mechanism to ensure that employers contribute to the cost of training workers and boost productivity.

Unions are proposing a revival of the National Training Guarantee by imposing a levy of 1.5 per cent of payroll for medium and large businesses with a turnover over $500,000 a year who fail to spend that amount on training for their own workforce each year.

The last time a levy like this was imposed, expenditure on training by employers rose 18 per cent – despite the recession occurring at the same time.

Unions also strongly oppose the expansion of non-apprentice pathways for apprenticeship-based occupations.

Apprenticeships offer significant value to workers and employers and are the bare minimum requirement for workers to operate safely in those occupations.

Non-apprentice pathways typically offer no job security for workers, require workers to meet the cost of their own education and often deliver a lower standard of training.

The apprenticeship model has a long history of success in Australia and overseas, and issues with commencement and completion rates can be more effectively addressed via increases in apprentice pay and industry-based provision of apprentice support

Australian Unions support the proposals around recognition of prior learning and streamlining the transfer of credits across Universities and TAFEs but call for this process to include consultation with unions and employers.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien said attacking occupational licensing and registration undermined worker and public safety.

"These minimum standards have been developed to ensure quality services and consumer protection and are often the driving force for productivity," he said.

"The Productivity Commission's suggestion of inferior pathways for apprenticeships will erode the successful model that so many trades rely on, exacerbating skills shortages in the future with workers developing narrower, less transferable skills.

"The Productivity Commission has severely misunderstood the drivers of the lack of investment by large employers in training, and then suggested the answer is to provide small and medium businesses with a tax break. This is a missed opportunity.

"Employers need to contribute to the nation's training effort. We don't support a handout from the Government with no requirements, as that is not a training policy, it's corporate welfare. That's why we've called for National Training Guarantee,

which the Commission admits worked to increase training in the 1990s, be brought back."

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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