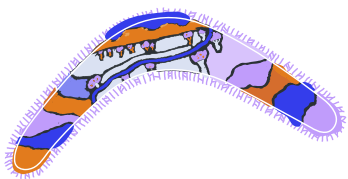
A large, stylized graphic element consisting of two thick, curved lines. The top line is orange and the bottom line is light purple. They start from the left edge and curve towards the right, meeting at a point that forms a shape similar to a teardrop or a stylized 'C'.

**Working with employers to  
advance opportunity:  
*A roadmap to strengthen the  
eco-system***



## Acknowledgment of Country

Social Ventures Australia acknowledges and pays respect to the past and present traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

*'After the Rains' by Richard Seden for Saltwater People 2024*

## About Social Ventures Australia and our Employment team

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) is an innovative social impact not-for-profit which helps solve challenging social problems. With partners we lead the charge against too hard finding a way through complexity to better support people and communities experiencing disadvantage. Our services increase social impact by helping social purpose organisations, business, government and philanthropists to be more effective funders or providers.

SVA's Employment team identifies, tests and promotes approaches that can contribute to systemic change towards a more inclusive and equitable labour market. For nearly 20 years a key focus has been working to support and encourage employer practice change to improve access to good quality jobs for those who might otherwise miss out. Key principles that underpin our work include a commitment to partnering with others, centring the voices of those most affected, and contributing to evidence-informed practice.

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by SVA. Contributors from SVA include Lisa Fowkes, Doug Hume, Ronan Smyth, Miran Fernando, Simon Crabb and Jo Tabit.

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# Executive summary

## Background

The current, historically tight labour market has led many employers to consider whether they are tapping all possible sources of talent. Emerging skills needs are prompting discussions about developing new earning and learning pathways for those from less privileged backgrounds. Increased economic inequality in Australia raises questions about whether employers are creating equitable employment opportunities across the income and social spectrum. Employers are exploring ways to change their employment practices to better include underrepresented groups.

While some employers independently attempt to change their practices, many seek external advice and practical support – especially when engaging historically underrepresented groups. Governments and philanthropic funders invest considerably in organisations that work with these groups to prepare and support them into employment. Some of these organisations see their role as simply matching a candidate to a particular role. But a growing number work with employers to help them to identify and implement practice changes that open up career opportunities for those at risk of exclusion. This group of organisations comprise what we refer to here as the *employer practice change eco-system*.

The concept of ‘employer practice change’ is widely discussed in the context of inclusive employment practices, workforce development and economic mobility. Although there is no single, universally accepted definition, for our purposes this paper adopts the following:

**‘Employer practice change’** refers to changes made by employers to their employment policies, practices, and culture to create quality job opportunities and more inclusive, equitable, and supportive workplaces. Changes tend to emphasise creating opportunities for traditionally marginalised or underserved groups.

## About this report

Prepared by SVA, this report provides observations on the employer practice change eco-system in Australia, and outlines opportunities to increase the positive impact of this system. Specifically, the report aims to:

- Increase understanding of the employer practice change eco-system in Australia
- Highlight learnings from overseas that could be relevant for the Australian context
- Explore opportunities to accelerate employer practice change by fostering the development of the eco-system.

It draws on desktop research, stakeholder engagement and SVA’s own analysis to reach its conclusions. A list of stakeholders engaged is in the Appendix. Its primary intended audience is actors within the Australian employer practice change eco-system.

## Current state of the eco-system

There is a diverse range of organisations involved in employer practice change in Australia. A typology of organisations and activities involved in employer practice change is detailed in Chapter 3.1. Research surfaced observations about the characteristics of the eco-system.

- **Emerging eco-system and identity.** The employer practice change eco-system is still emerging in Australia and in its infancy. Many stakeholders do not recognise themselves as part of a broader network or align their efforts under a shared purpose, limiting ability for large-scale change.
- **Population focus.** Efforts are often targeted at specific demographic groups such as First Nations people or individuals with disabilities. While this focus addresses unique needs, it can create silos and hinder learning across sectors.
- **Issue framing.** Organisations are often organised around a problem or issue – which can be driven by government policy silos.
- **Geographic focus.** Organisations and initiatives have different geographic focuses (place-based, state or national). These efforts generate deep insights within the issue areas, but are rarely framed in a way that allows broader action or learning across the eco-system.
- **Fragmentation and duplication.** There is fragmentation and duplication of effort within the eco-system, which impedes effectiveness and contributes to employer confusion.
- **Activity focus.** Most organisations focus on working with individual employers to shift their practice – often via a programmatic response.
- **Funding.** Funding drives behaviour in the eco-system. Limited funding for employer practice change activities is hindering progress.

Consultations unearthed insights on what's holding employers back, as well as the work of the eco-system. The focus of this report is on the latter. Chapter 3.3 outlines these insights.

Looking at the eco-system itself, our analysis found that actors within the eco-system rarely think of themselves as a 'community' with a common goal, and so are not operating as a 'field'. We assessed the strength of the field in Australia using Bridgepan's Strong Field Framework, and found that it needs strengthening. Systems change practitioners and researchers highlight the importance of strong fields to achieve systemic change. As the Bridgespan Group described:

'Systemic change is critical for solving some of the greatest social challenges... And one of the most important levers for bringing about such change is **field-building** — coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common goal and creating the conditions necessary for them to succeed.'

## Learnings from international case studies

The eco-system supporting employer practice change in the United States of America (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) is more developed in many respects than in Australia. Chapter 4 outlines case studies of several initiatives, and identified the following key insights.

- **More developed eco-systems.** Both countries have examples of widescale initiatives driving employer practice change.
- **Intermediaries play a catalysing role.** In both countries, but particularly in the US, intermediaries have played an important role catalysing change.
- **Shared language.** In the US, there has been an explicit effort to develop and use a shared language to describe employer practice change work.
- **Initiatives tailored to local context.** The contexts in the US and UK differ from Australia's, and the initiatives address those contexts.
- **Inspiration for the Australian eco-system.** Despite differences in each nation, there are initiatives worthy of further exploration in the Australian context. These have informed the opportunities outlined below.

## Opportunities to catalyse change

Building and strengthening the field which addresses employer practice change in Australia is, in our view, a critical strategy to improve access to quality jobs for underserved groups. Using the Strong Field Framework and the findings from our research, we identified 16 opportunities to strengthen the field and its impact in Australia.

Category	Initiative
<b>1. Shared identity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring eco-system actors together to build a community</li> <li>• Develop shared language around employer practice change</li> </ul>
<b>2. Standards of practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidate and catalogue practice change guides and identify gaps</li> <li>• Work towards agreed practice frameworks</li> <li>• Develop capability building and fellowship programs for professionals in the eco-system</li> </ul>
<b>3. Knowledge base</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Map existing research and identify and prioritise addressing research gaps</li> <li>• Develop and implement new data collection and reporting measures</li> <li>• Develop a digital platform to facilitate sharing research, evidence and tools</li> <li>• Consolidate evidence on the relative strength of available policy options and leverage points, to inform further advocacy across the eco-system</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot, incubate and evaluate new services and initiatives that advance employer practice change</li> </ul>
<b>4. Leadership and grassroots support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in field co-ordination and field-building</li> <li>• Build an alliance of employers who will advocate for employer practice change</li> </ul>
<b>5. Fundraising and supporting policy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify new funding for employer practice change and/or field-building</li> <li>• Develop measures that build the impetus for employer engagement, incentivise action and create public accountability</li> <li>• Federal government takes steps to foster the authorising environment</li> <li>• Develop and launch a targeted public awareness campaign</li> </ul>

### Where to from here?

Employer practice change is crucial for addressing labour market inequalities in Australia. This report provides a roadmap for the eco-system to accelerate progress through strategic coordination, and move from an eco-system of disjointed actors towards a 'field' with a shared purpose, goals, values and activities, to better achieve practice changes that will provide more equitable access to quality jobs.



# 1 About this report

## 1.1 Purpose, audience and context

Employers are constantly adapting their practices to a changing environment. Many employers are seeking to access untapped talent pools, whether in response to a tight labour market, a desire for innovation or in response to competitive, regulatory and social pressures. This often requires rethinking 'business as usual' practices in areas like hiring, retention and progression. Some employers are seeking support with this work through organisations that work with people who experience labour market exclusion – for example organisations working with the unemployed, First Nations people and people with disability. Some of these support organisations see their role as simply matching a candidate to a role. But a growing number are working with employers to help them to identify and implement practice changes that will open up career opportunities for those at risk of exclusion. It is this group of organisations that is the focus of this paper.

The paper provides observations on what we are calling the 'employer practice change eco-system' in Australia. It outlines opportunities to increase the positive impact of this system – in other words, to support the acceleration of employer practice change.

The aims of the paper are to:

- **Increase understanding of the employer practice change eco-system in Australia**, including sector characteristics, what works well, and the challenges standing in the way of achieving systemic change.
- **Highlight learnings from overseas that could be relevant for the Australian context** through case studies of organisations and initiatives aimed at fostering employer practice change in the UK and the US.
- **Explore opportunities available for those within the eco-system to accelerate employer practice change.**

The intended audiences for this paper are the various stakeholders interested in supporting employer practice change in Australia. We have included a typology of these organisations in Chapter 3. They include governments, peak bodies, philanthropic funders, researchers, contracted employment service providers (government funded) and employment program providers (funded through a variety of sources).

SVA's Employment team initiated the research, taking inspiration from a similar project undertaken in the US in 2018, led by FSG.<sup>1</sup> Given the growing number of stakeholders and activity in the employer practice change space in Australia, SVA felt it timely to take stock of the emerging eco-system, to reflect on what's working and what's standing in the way of progress, and to learn from those who have trodden a similar path abroad.

---

<sup>1</sup> FSG (2018). *Accelerating Employer Practice Change, Strategy Summary*

## 1.2 Approach

This paper draws on a combination of desktop research, stakeholder engagement and SVA's own analysis to reach its conclusions. The work was oriented to answer several research questions, the key question being:

*How might we accelerate employer adoption of practices that increase access to quality jobs for those currently missing out?*

Stakeholder engagement involved a mix of interviews and workshops. Over 45 people were engaged from 37 organisations, including 6 organisations in the UK and US. A full Stakeholder list is included in the Appendix.

Desktop research comprised documents identified by SVA's employment specialists, SVA's online searches, and sources recommended by those we interviewed.

The paper's development benefited from strategic input from Professor Jo Ingold, a leading expert in employer engagement at Australian Catholic University, and Jessica Graham-Franklin, a Partnership Associate at the Paul Ramsay Foundation involved in funding employment programs.

# 2 An introduction to employer practice change

## 2.1 Defining employer practice change

The concept of ‘employer practice change’ is widely discussed in the context of inclusive employment practices, workforce development and economic mobility. Though there is no single, universally accepted definition, for our purposes this paper adopts the following:

**‘Employer practice change’** refers to changes made by employers to their employment policies, practices, and culture to create quality job opportunities and more inclusive, equitable, and supportive workplaces. Changes tend to emphasise creating opportunities for traditionally marginalised or underserved groups

This definition is underpinned by a belief that all people should have equitable access to high-quality careers with pathways to economic mobility, while providing employers with a broader pool of talent with the skills that are needed.

In identifying ‘employer practice change’ as a distinct area of practice, we recognise that it intersects with a number of different policy agendas and actors. Diversity and Inclusion practitioners, employment services case managers, workforce development bodies and unions all seek to shape employers’ practices in some way – but not all of what they do fits into our definition. The different drivers of action in each of these areas – and their differing policy ‘architectures’ – is one of the obstacles to concerted action. We’ve outlined these interrelated policy agendas below, and their limitations and gaps.

Related policy agenda	Overview	Limitations and gaps
<b>Diversity and Inclusion (D&amp;I)</b>	<p>Diversity and Inclusion is a framework promoting fair treatment and full participation of all people in employment.</p> <p>Diversity refers to the mix of people in an organisation with reference to their social and professional identities. Common measures of workplace diversity include gender, disability, ethnicity and age. Inclusion involves creating a sense of belonging, trust, respect and safety for all people.</p>	<p><b>In practice, D&amp;I plans rarely consider socio-economic background.</b></p> <p>Recent research highlights that D&amp;I activity in Australian workplaces focuses largely on gender and, to a lesser extent, First Nations peoples, with</p>

	<p>Employer action on D&amp;I is often driven by legislation, including anti-discrimination laws, the Workforce Gender Equality Act, and health and safety laws (e.g. psychological health). Social procurement targets, Reconciliation Action Plans, and Corporate Social Responsibility trends are also key drivers.</p>	<p>socio-economic background receiving little attention.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p><b>Unemployment and the employment services sector</b></p>	<p>In Australia, most activity to address unemployment and underemployment is driven by the Federal Government through its labour market programs (e.g. Workforce Australia, Disability Employment Services). Publicly funded employment programs and services tend to focus on minimising time spent on income support for individuals. These programs or services are provided by ‘employment service providers’. The sector is often referred to as the employment services sector.</p>	<p>Existing program frameworks tend to <b>focus on candidate ‘supply’ not shaping employer demand.</b></p> <p>Further, funding is <b>focused on getting individuals into any job, but does not sufficiently consider job quality</b>, and roles that offer sustainable wages, career growth or job security.</p>
<p><b>Skills and workforce development</b></p>	<p>Refers to measures designed to maximise the availability of a skilled workforce to meet current and future labour market demands. It includes provision of apprenticeships and traineeships, vocational training, and measures to foster a workforce that is adaptable to evolving industry needs.</p>	<p>Tends to be <b>oriented towards economic and productivity objectives, with equity a secondary consideration.</b></p>
<p><b>Industrial relations</b></p>	<p>Refers to the laws, conventions and actors that regulate and influence the employer-worker relationship. Unions play a key role advocating for improved conditions, including for marginalised employees. This advocacy occurs at a system level (e.g. wage rises, gender pay equity, job security, family violence leave) and at specific workplaces (e.g. shift arrangements). Applies a rights framework. Includes specific institutional structures to resolve disputes and create new employment arrangements.</p>	<p>Agenda is <b>constrained and shaped by regulatory environment and priorities of existing union members.</b></p>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), *The State of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Australian workplaces (2023)*. Across several metrics, socio-economic background received the least or no attention by employers. For example, zero percent of organisations surveyed had quotas around socio-economic background and only 2 percent noted socio-economic background during the application process

## 2.2 Why is there a need to shift employer practice?

### Australia's headline employment rate has improved in recent years, but the pathway to a good quality career is far from equal

Since emerging from the pandemic, Australia's unemployment rate has been at its lowest in 50 years. Labour force participation is high. Strong growth in labour demand has reduced the number of people who experience long-term or very long-term unemployment. There are also signs of some improvements in employment rates of some groups who have previously faced labour market exclusion, including First Nations people and people with disability.

But there remains a large group of people who want to work but cannot find work or cannot find enough work to meet their needs. In August 2024 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported that there were 627,000 people who were unemployed and another 975,000 who were underemployed – an underutilisation rate of 10.6%.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there are significant numbers of people who would like to work but are not actively in the labour force, estimated to be over a million people.<sup>4</sup>

Employment rates of different groups highlight persistent inequalities in access to labour market opportunity. For example:

- The employment rate of **people with disability** is 56.1% compared with 82.3% of those without disability (2022)<sup>5</sup>
- **Primary carers** are less likely to be in the labour force (64.6%) than other carers (79.9%) and non-carers (82.0%) (2022)<sup>6</sup>
- The employment rate of **First Nations people** is 56% compared with 78% for the non-Indigenous population (2021)<sup>7</sup>
- **Young people** are more likely to be unemployed (10% vs 4.3%) or underemployed (15.2% vs 6.6%) than their older counterparts, and have declining incomes relative to older workers (2024)<sup>8</sup>
- While **older workers** have very high employment rates, if they lose work, they tend to be unemployed for longer (for example the average duration of unemployment of 55+ year olds was 86 weeks in June 2024, more than double the 37 weeks recorded for 15 to 54 year-olds)<sup>9</sup>
- The average **gender pay gap** (between what men and women earn) is 22%, while occupational gender segregation has actually increased in some occupations (2023).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2024), Labour Force Cat 6202 August 2024.

<sup>4</sup> The Australian Government's recent White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities noted that: "There are around 3 million people in Australia who want work, or want to work more hours – equivalent to a fifth of the current workforce". Australian Government (2023), [Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#), p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> ABS (2022), [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings](#), ABS Website, accessed 14 October 2024.

<sup>6</sup> ABS (2022), *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Productivity Commission (2024), [Closing the Gap Information Repository](#), drawing on ABS Census data from 2021, accessed 17 October 2024.

<sup>8</sup> ABS (2024), [Labour Force, Australia](#), August 2024, ABS Website, accessed 14 October 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia (2024), [Mature aged workers and the labour market: A REOS Special Report](#), August 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2023), [Australia's Gender Equity Scorecard](#), November 2023

There is less discussion of socio-economic background as a driver of economic outcomes, however:

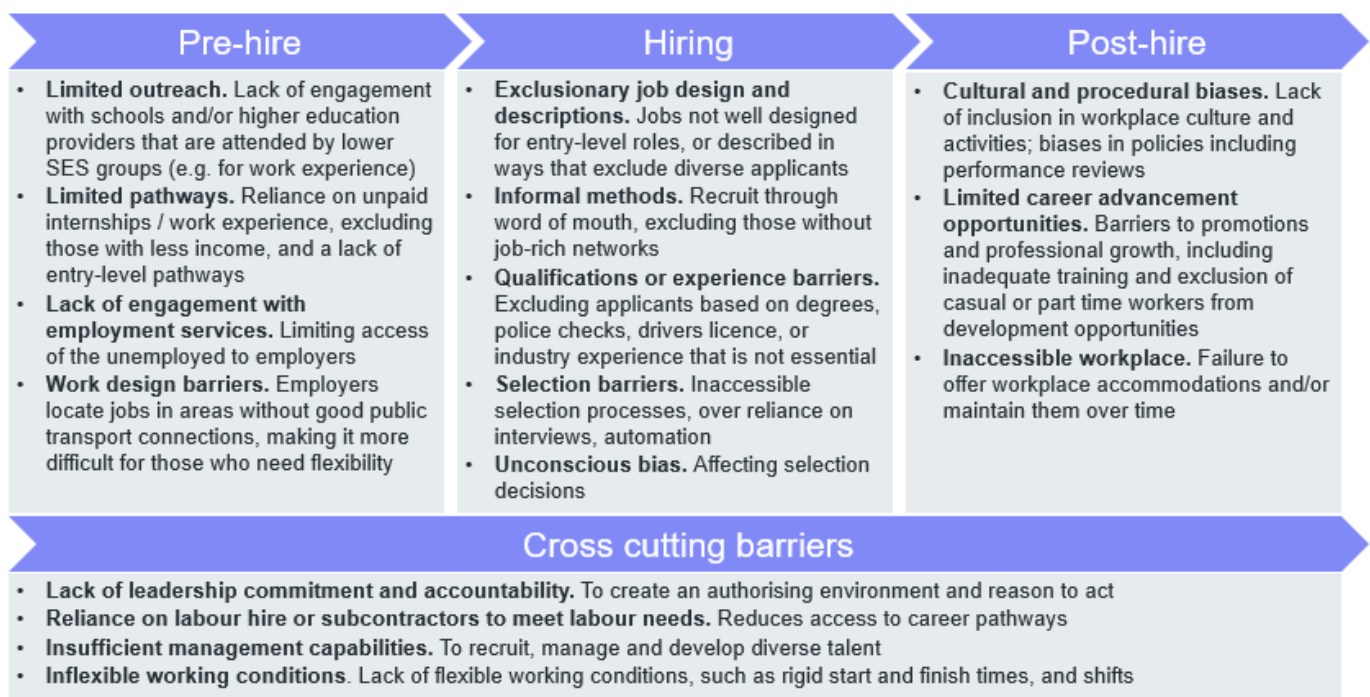
- Those from lower socio-economic backgrounds report more exclusion, discrimination and harassment at work than others<sup>11</sup>
- People born into lower income families are more likely to earn a low income themselves<sup>12</sup>
- One in three children born into the bottom 20% of income distribution, will remain there<sup>13</sup>
- On current trends, it would take a child born into our poorest families four generations to reach the national average income.<sup>14</sup>

These statistics are symptoms of structural barriers in the labour market that limit economic opportunities for individuals, for employers and the economy.

## Employer practices play a central role in reproducing these inequalities at critical stages of the employment journey

Barriers to equitable access to labour market opportunities sit right across the employee life cycle, as illustrated below. Some are largely outside of individual employers' control – such as access to affordable housing, childcare and transport. But employer practices play a central role in reproducing labour market inequalities. This is often unconscious and unintentional, the product of business-as-usual procedures, but can create the effect of locking people out of quality work.

Figure 1: Barriers to equitable access to labour market opportunities, across the employee lifecycle (non-exhaustive)



<sup>11</sup> DCA (2023), [Class at Work, Synopsis report](#)

<sup>12</sup> Productivity Commission (2024), [Fairly Equal? Economic mobility in Australia](#), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Government (2023), [Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#), p. 141.

<sup>14</sup> OECD (2018), [A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility](#), Figure 1.5.

Evidence of employer practices that limit opportunity includes:

- One third of employers are less likely to employ someone if they have been unemployed for 4-6 months, with two-thirds less likely to employ those who have been unemployed for 1-2 years<sup>15</sup>
- A significant number of employers recruit via informal methods, including word of mouth, which locks out those that do not have wide employment networks,<sup>16</sup> while even more employers use this approach in selecting for work experience opportunities – a key pathway into work
- Many common recruitment practices are inaccessible to some applicants or are characterised by unconscious biases, while lack of workplace flexibility locks out many carers and people with disability<sup>17</sup>.
- Despite the millions of people wanting more work, employers report widespread skills and labour shortages. Half of employers report difficulty filling vacancies, despite, in many cases, receiving applicants from qualified applicants.<sup>18</sup> Many opt to leave positions unfilled or readvertise, rather than adjust job requirements.<sup>19</sup>

Exclusionary practices also operate once people are in work. For example, in the Diversity Council of Australia's (DCA) latest Inclusion survey, 59% of First Nations and 42% of employees with disability reported having experienced discrimination and/or harassment at work. Its 2020 survey found that social class, more than any other indicator, predicted people's sense of inclusion or exclusion at work.<sup>20</sup> The lower earnings of particular groups – including people with disability, women, First Nations people, people from poor families – reflects ongoing biases in employers' systems for promotion and progression.

In addition, lack of access to workplace training is holding people back from retaining employment and moving into good quality roles. Level of educational attainment is a key predictor of labour market inclusion, and, factors like socio-economic background, living with a disability and First Nations identity are all strongly associated with lower levels of educational attainment.<sup>21</sup> In this context, access to workplace training is critical to ensuring opportunity to progress and to retain employment during periods of structural change. While there is a long-term trend towards higher skill requirements across the labour market, there has been a decline in workplace training. ABS data show that in 2005, 35.9% of Australians received work related training in the last year.<sup>22</sup> In 2020-21, only 23% received this training. Those in the most skilled occupations were twice as likely to have received training than those in the lowest skilled occupations (40% vs 19%).<sup>23</sup> The poorest 20% were less likely to receive workplace training than the best off (15.3% vs 27.4%).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Australian Government (2023), [Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities](#), p. 147.

<sup>16</sup> One in seven according to Jobs and Skills Australia (2022), [Findings from the Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey 2021-22](#).

<sup>17</sup> Diversity Council Australia (2022), R. D'Almada-Remedios, A. Kaabel, and J. O'Leary, Inclusive Recruitment: How to Tap into Australia's Overlooked and Underleveraged Talent. Or summarised in this DCA article '[Inclusive Recruitment at Work](#)'.

<sup>18</sup> Jobs and Skills Australia (2024), [Recruitment Experiences and Outlook Survey](#), August 2024.

<sup>19</sup> National Skills Commission (2022), [2022 Skills Priority List Key Findings Report](#).

<sup>20</sup> Disability Council of Australia (2024), [Inclusion@Work Index: Synopsis Report](#), p. 13

<sup>21</sup> See for example: Borland, J, The Conversation (2021) [The next employment challenge from coronavirus: how to help the young](#); Productivity Commission (2020), [Why did young people's incomes decline?](#), Commission Research Paper; and Lamb, S., Huo, S., Walstab, A., Wade, A., Maire, Q., Doecke, E., Jackson, J. & Endekov, Z. (2020). [Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out](#). Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University, for the Mitchell Institute: Melbourne.

<sup>22</sup> Buchanan J (2020), [Submission to Productivity Commission – Interim Report – National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development](#).

<sup>23</sup> ABS (2022), [Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia](#), ABS Website, accessed 29 November 2022.

<sup>24</sup> ABS (2022), *ibid*, Table 2. Non formal workplace training by SEIFA quintile.

## Evidence suggests poor quality jobs can be no better than unemployment

Public and policy attention has tended to focus on unemployment, which has well known detrimental effects on physical and mental health. There is evidence that poor quality work can be at least as harmful.<sup>25</sup> Insecure employment is negatively associated with wellbeing and contributes to poor mental health, in turn reducing capacity to work.<sup>26</sup> Just over half (50.6%) of people who participate in employment services are placed in insecure (i.e. casual or temporary work).<sup>27</sup> This is more often the case for those who face greatest disadvantage (59.1%). People in insecure work are less likely to receive training and other support that would enable them to take up more highly skilled employment.<sup>28</sup> For young people, starting off in poor quality jobs can lead to long-term 'scarring' – reducing their future economic opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

In 2020 the Productivity Commission reported that since the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), young peoples' wages have declined both in real terms and relative to older workers.<sup>30</sup> The decline is attributed to fewer hours worked by young people, entering the market in lower skilled jobs, and slower progression up the career ladder. Young university graduates are taking up jobs that do not use their qualifications, while those without are moving into lower skilled jobs or being pushed off the occupational ladder altogether.<sup>31</sup> The Commission suggested increased focus on the type of jobs that young people are getting, rather than on unemployment alone.

The Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre has found that despite an overall improvement in 'decent work' since the GFC, younger and older workers, women, and those with lower education levels face higher job precarity than others.<sup>32</sup>

Employer practice change sits at the heart of efforts to provide more equitable access to quality jobs.

<sup>25</sup> Butterworth P, Leach LS, McManus S, Stansfeld SA. Common mental disorders, unemployment and psychosocial job quality: is a poor job better than no job at all? *Psychol Med*. 2013 Aug;43(8):1763-72. doi: 10.1017/S0033291712002577. Epub 2012 Nov 22. PMID: 23190443.

<sup>26</sup> Senate Select Committee on Job Security, [The job insecurity report](#), Senate Select Committee on Job Insecurity, Parliament of Australia, 2022, accessed February 2023

<sup>27</sup> DESE, [jobactive PPM survey results - 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2021](#), DESE, Australian Government, 2022, accessed February 2023

<sup>28</sup> G Gilfillan, 'Characteristics and use of casual employees in Australia', *Parliamentary Library Research Paper Series 2017-2018*, Department of Parliamentary Services, 2018, accessed March 2023; N Cassidy and S Parsons 'The Rising Share of Part-time Employment', *Reserve Bank of Australia Bulletin*, Reserve Bank of Australia, 2017, accessed March 2023

<sup>29</sup> C de Fontenay, B Lampe, J Nugent, and P Jomini, [Climbing the jobs ladder slower: Young people in a weak labour market](#), Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, Productivity Commission, Australian Government, 2020, accessed March 2023

<sup>30</sup> Productivity Commission, [Why did young people's incomes decline?](#), Commission Research Paper, Australian Government, 2020, accessed March 2023

<sup>31</sup> Borland J, 'The next employment challenge from coronavirus: how to help the young', *The Conversation*, 15 April 2020, accessed March 2023

<sup>32</sup> Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, [Dimensions and Prevalence of Decent Work in Australia](#), 2024



## Spotlight: What is job quality?

*The six dimensions of job quality*<sup>33</sup>

- **Pay and other rewards:** Includes pay level; benefits and entitlements such as health insurance provided by employers plus worker's satisfaction with pay.
- **Intrinsic characteristics of work:** Includes skill level and use; task complexity; task autonomy plus worker's perceptions of useful/meaningful/fulfilling work; and social support inc. colleagues and management.
- **Terms of employment:** Includes contract type (e.g. permanent or casual), employer-provided opportunities for training, development and progression plus worker's perception of job security.
- **Health and safety:** Includes physical risks and psycho-social risks at work plus perceptions of how seriously employers take employee health and wellbeing.
- **Work-life balance:** Includes: working hours; scheduling; opportunities for flexible working; work intensity plus perceived fit between work and non-working life.
- **Representation and voice:** Includes presence of workplace trade union or other forms of workplace representation, consultation and involvement plus worker's perceptions of consultation and involvement.

## There is a strong business case for employer practice change

Several studies have examined the economic benefits of achieving more inclusive workplaces at both the national level and for individual businesses. For example, Deloitte Access Economics estimated a \$5b annual economic dividend from Australia having more creative and innovative workplaces as a result of greater social inclusion.<sup>34</sup> Another \$7.7b in economic benefit would arise from greater employment and reduced health costs. Similarly, the World Economic Forum has estimated that if Australia could lift its performance on the Global Social Mobility Index – which measures a range of factors that drive equitable access to opportunity – this would deliver a US\$5.6b increase to Australia's annual Gross Domestic Product.<sup>35</sup>

At an individual business level, practice change can help organisations address labour shortages. As the labour market has tightened in Australia, competition for labour and skills has increased among employers. It has heightened the business advantage afforded to employers that hire and develop individuals they may not have otherwise considered for work.

It is expected that 44% of jobs created over the next 10 years in Australia will require a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification.<sup>36</sup> Already there are persistent shortages across many occupations that are reached via VET pathways, including many trades qualifications. Failure to address current and emerging skills shortages represents a threat to organisation-level and broader economic growth. Achieving growth in the VET qualified workforce will mean employers creating

<sup>33</sup> Warhurst, C., Wright, S. and Lyonette, C. (2017) *Understanding and measuring job quality: Part 1 – Thematic Literature Review*. London: CIPD

<sup>34</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2019), *The Economic Benefits of Improving Social Inclusion*.

<sup>35</sup> World Economic Forum (2020), *The Global Social Mobility Report: Equality, Opportunity and a New Economic Imperative*.

<sup>36</sup> Australian Government (2023), *Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*, p 98.

more ‘earn and learn’ opportunities and increasing diversity of the talent pool being recruited. For example, increased hiring of women in non-traditional trades, and increased hiring of people with disability. Reversing the declining rate of apprenticeship completions will also require changes in employer practices, as many non-completers identify workplace relationships and poor supervision as a reason to leave.<sup>37</sup> Completion rates are particularly poor for women, First Nations people and people with disability.

The technology sector is a good example of employer practice change in response to skills shortage. The Tech Council of Australia has estimated that another 650,000 technology workers will be needed by the end of the decade to maximise opportunities in the technology sector and overcome current skills shortages. In a report for Microsoft, Accenture found that 9 in 10 Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) jobs are advertised as requiring a bachelor’s degree or higher, reducing access for many women, people with disability and First Nations people.<sup>38</sup> The report recommends that employers create ‘alternative pathways’ into technology careers, including by offering ‘earn and learn’ opportunities and using VET programs. It identified substantial business benefits through this approach, including through increased retention, increased revenue and productivity. Through the New South Wales Digital Skills and Workforce Compact, an increasing number of companies are taking up the challenge to fill 20% of their entry level roles through ‘alternative pathways’, to help address this challenge.<sup>39</sup>

Another untapped talent pool is that of migrant workers. Deloitte Access Economic research for Settlement Services International found that 44% of permanent migrants in Australia are working in jobs that do not match their skill level.<sup>40</sup> This is particularly the case among women and those from the ‘Global South’. Among the factors identified as contributing to this are employer preference for local employment experience and bias in recruitment processes (for example, favouring people with Anglo-Saxon sounding names). The report finds that closing the gap in skills underutilisation between Australian born and migrant populations would result in a \$70 billion increase in economic activity over 10 years. Among the industries likely to benefit are professional services (such as law and information technology), education, and public administration (including those in health service delivery, such as nurses and pathologists).

**\$70 billion**  
over 10 years

Estimated benefit to Australia's economy, by addressing **migrant skills mismatch**

In addition to accessing talent, workforces that are more inclusive and diverse have been demonstrated to be good for organisational performance. DCA’s workplace research consistently shows a strong link between inclusion at work and team performance. Inclusive teams are:<sup>41</sup>

9.5 x	8.5 x	4 x	2.5 x
More likely to be <b>innovative</b>	More likely to <b>work effectively together</b>	More likely to provide <b>excellent customer service</b>	More likely to <b>work extra hard</b> to help a team succeed

<sup>37</sup> Australian Government (2023), *Ibid.*, p 121-122

<sup>38</sup> Accenture (2023), commissioned by Microsoft, [Break down the Barriers. Hire for skills not just degrees.](#)

<sup>39</sup> NSW Government, [NSW Digital Skills and Workforce Compact](#) website. Accessed 18 December 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Settlement Services International Limited, Allianz Australia Insurance Ltd, Business New South Wales, Business Western Sydney, LinkedIn (2024), [Billion Dollar Benefit: The Economic impact of unlocking the skills potential of migrants in Australia.](#)

<sup>41</sup> Diversity Council Australia (2024), [The Case for Inclusion@Work, Inclusion@Work Index 2034-2024](#), p. 6.

## Even when motivated to act, employers often report capability gaps

The ‘*What will it take*’ report, prepared by PwC for SVA, the Apprenticeship Employment Network and the Global Apprenticeship Network, found that:

*‘Some employers have the knowledge, experience and scale to build employment pathways... But most employers lack this capacity and find themselves having to navigate a complex, and often costly, system. We found that they often find themselves in a vicious cycle in which their inability to find new skilled workers means that they keep experienced workers fully deployed ‘on the tools’, rather than using them to train future workers. As the workforce ages and the economy changes, these obstacles to developing our skills base will become more critical.’<sup>42</sup>*

Amongst other things, these employers sought more coherent and effective support from intermediaries. Similarly, research commissioned by the Collaborative Partnership for Improving Work Participation found that half of surveyed employers were not confident in their business ability to support people with disability or a health condition.<sup>43</sup>

The recent Australian Government White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities noted that:<sup>44</sup>

*‘Despite recent labour market tightness, stakeholders indicated limited changes in hiring practices and flexibility. Employers, particularly small businesses, often face practical challenges such as:*

- *limited knowledge about supporting cohorts of workers with higher needs or in making reasonable adjustments*
- *committing limited resources to establishing policies and championing change*
- *perceived risks of employing an unemployed person*
- *complexities in the hiring process*
- *the cost of training someone who may not stay long term.’*

Where employers are motivated to act, they often lack access to the type of assistance they need. Even those who have made some progress express interest in being able to access more evidence and learning about ‘what works’.<sup>45</sup>

## Historically, much of the effort to address labour market challenges has focussed on individual jobseekers, but this is starting to change

In Australia, since the late 1980s, efforts to address labour market challenges have generally focused on the ‘supply’ side – focussing on ‘activating’ unemployed people to look for work, and providing individual, targeted support. However this approach has often overlooked the significant role that employers play in the labour market in shaping demand for different types of people and offering different types of opportunity. This emphasis on individual jobseekers has shaped efforts from government and philanthropy and been a mindset of the business and general community.

<sup>42</sup> SVA, AEN & PwC (2021), *What will it take?* Creating better, more sustainable jobs for young people

<sup>43</sup> Collaborative Partnership for Improving Work Participation (2018), *Employer Mobilisation Final research report*

<sup>44</sup> Australian Government (2023), *Working Future: The Australian Government’s White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*.

<sup>45</sup> Ingold, J, Knox, A, Lee, QY (2024), *Accessing hidden talent to improve organisational outcomes*, Good Work Research Group:

From a government perspective, Australia's principal publicly-funded employment services, currently called 'Workforce Australia', focus on the supply of jobseekers. This is typically through a combination of light touch assistance and the application of obligations to jobseekers – like applying for a certain number of jobs each month. The Federal Government provides a 'job brokerage' service for employers through its online job vacancy portal and its network of employment service providers. Government figures suggest that as few as 4% of employers engage with these services.<sup>46</sup> Some smaller scale initiatives (e.g. Employment Facilitators, Launch into Work) seek to better connect employers with local unemployed people and services. However, overall, very little government activity seeks to directly influence employer practice change.<sup>47</sup>

## **Spotlight on employer engagement in employment services - extracts from the Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services**

As noted above, employer engagement with government-funded employment services is low. The reasons for employers disengaging from these services are varied but include: that employment services are fragmented and/or confusing for employers; that employers have negative perceptions of the client base; and provider staff have varying levels of skills for engaging employers. The Select Committee report identified a range of services that could be delivered through the employment services system to improve employer engagement and, through this, achieve greater employment outcomes for unemployed people. These included:

*'Working with employers to deliver recruitment and workforce development support, including job design and job carving, new human resources practices and adapting work environments to welcome new and diverse employees and support them to stay.'*

*Working with employers to encourage and support them to deliver training, and to encourage employers to see themselves as not just a destination but as a key contributor to skills development...*

*Providing in-employment support, including career development.'* (Recommendation 45)

In addition, the Committee identified the importance of increased use of intermediaries who can assist in 'de-risking' engagement of disadvantaged jobseekers and work with employers to create 'bridges' into sustainable employment.

The Federal Government is currently considering ways to improve functioning of the system for both unemployed people and employers.

<sup>46</sup> House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services (2023) Rebuilding Employment Services: Final report on Workforce Australia Employment Services, clause 2.37.

<sup>47</sup> Deloitte Access Economics has estimated that less than 5% of spending by all Australian governments on employment support was directed at employer capability building. See Deloitte Access Economics (2024), [Understanding the benefits, costs, and funding flows to tailored jobseeker supports](#).

Historically, philanthropic efforts have similarly focused on supporting jobseekers, with the majority of funding directed towards initiatives aimed at improving their employability and providing wrap-around support. This has started to shift, with a growing community of funders investing in demand-side solutions. For example, both the Macquarie Group Foundation and the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation have signalled a shift in focus towards initiatives that address employer demand. Overseas philanthropic investment in employer practice change is more developed, with philanthropically funded initiatives like the Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program in the US and the Social Mobility Foundation in the UK supporting employers to adopt practices that create more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

This emerging shift acknowledges that employers play an active role in shaping employment opportunities. By changing their practices, employers can play a pivotal role in addressing labour market inequalities and unlocking the potential of a broader talent pool. This includes adopting fair and inclusive hiring practices, providing flexible work arrangements, and creating supportive workplace cultures that cater to the needs of marginalised groups.

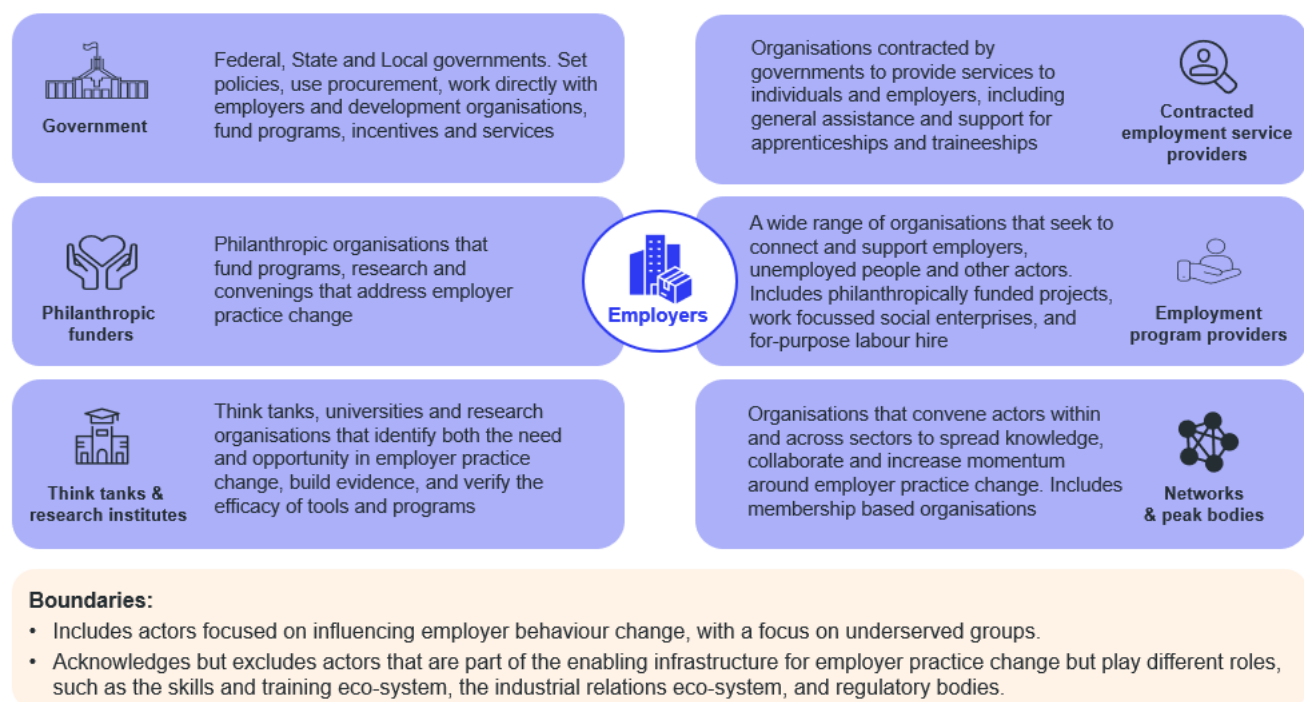
# 3 Current state of the Australian eco-system

## 3.1 What are the characteristics of the employer practice change eco-system?

Australia’s employer practice change eco-system includes a range of organisations and activities that aim to influence and support employers to improve employment opportunities for those at risk of exclusion. It also includes individuals who are seeking to bring about change within their employing organisations (e.g. human resource (HR) and D&I managers), who play a critical role. The focus of this report, however, is on organisations that sit outside the employers’ walls.

A typology of organisations involved in actively trying to influence and support employer practice is outlined in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Types of organisations engaged in employer practice change



We note that some organisations take on multiple roles in the system, so these categories are not always mutually exclusive.

Examples of the organisations within each category are outlined in Figure 3 on the next page.

Figure 3: Types of organisations, illustrative examples

Type	Examples
<b>Government</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Federal:</b> e.g. Dept. Employment and Workplace Relations, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Department of Social Services</li> <li>• <b>State:</b> e.g. Jobs Tasmania, Jobs Victoria, QLD Industry Workforce Advisers</li> <li>• <b>Local governments:</b> e.g. through economic development functions</li> </ul>
<b>Philanthropic funders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Private trusts and foundations:</b> e.g. Paul Ramsay Foundation; Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, small number of high net wealth individuals</li> <li>• <b>Corporate foundations:</b> e.g. Macquarie Group Foundation</li> </ul>
<b>Think tanks &amp; Research institutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Think tanks:</b> Australia Institute’s Centre for Future Work, BSL’s Social Policy and Research Centre</li> <li>• <b>Universities and research institutes:</b> Melbourne University – Welfare to Work Hub; Australian Catholic University &amp; University of Sydney – Good Work Research Hub, Centre for Social Impact Swinburne.</li> </ul>
<b>Networks &amp; peak bodies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workforce, regional and skills development networks:</b> e.g. Jobs and Skills Councils (est. by Jobs &amp; Skills Australia), Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), Local Jobs Taskforces, Regional Development Australia, Gold Coast Youth Employment Body</li> <li>• <b>Peak and member bodies:</b> e.g. Diversity Council of Australia, Australian Disability Network, Disability Employment Australia, Jobs Australia, National Employment Services Association, Australian Industry Group, Australian Human Resources Institute, Global Apprenticeship Network</li> </ul>
<b>Contracted employment service providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Organisations delivering Federal Government programs:</b> Including non-profit providers like Ability Options, Wise Employment, CoAct, Youth Projects and WorkSkil, and for-profit providers like Asuria and APM</li> <li>• <b>Organisations delivering state programs:</b> e.g. SYC, Impact Community Services, Settlement Services International, Tasmanian Regional Jobs Hubs</li> </ul>
<b>Employment program providers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Population specific initiatives:</b> e.g. CareerSeekers, Australian Human Rights Commission’s IncludeAbility, Brotherhood of St Laurence National Youth Employment Body, Asylum Seekers Resource Centre, Generation Australia, Achieve Foundation, SVA Employer Innovation Lab, Beacon Foundation, ABCN, Productivity Bootcamp</li> <li>• <b>Population agnostic initiatives:</b> e.g. Jobs Bank</li> <li>• <b>Social enterprises working to change employer practice:</b> e.g. Xceptional, White Box Enterprises, Australian Spatial Analytics, Good Cycles, Fitted for Work</li> <li>• <b>Group Training Organisations (GTOs) and for purpose labour hire:</b> e.g. MEGT, WestVic, BSL’s Given the Chance, YCareers</li> </ul>

There could be as many as 700 organisations in total across the eco-system, with the majority (some ~500-600), split between contracted employment service providers and employment program providers.

The largest group of organisations in the eco-system, by level of investment, is contracted employment service providers. Approximately 200 organisations deliver programs totalling around \$1.2b annually, with the focus on connecting unemployed people to work. The programs that these organisations deliver and how they deliver them are shaped by government policy and program arrangements. Relevant Federal Government funded programs include Workforce Australia, Transition to Work, Disability Employment Services, Community Development Program and Australian Apprenticeship Support Services.

State and territory investments are smaller, comprising an estimated 15% of total government spending on employment supports.<sup>48</sup> The nature of state and territory initiatives varies considerably. They include: initiatives to link employers with schools (including promoting School Based Apprenticeships) – such as Local Learning and Employment Networks (Vic); Regional Industry Education Partnerships (NSW); place-based initiatives like Jobs Tasmania’s Regional Jobs Hubs and project-based funding such as ‘First Start’ provided under the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

The employment program provider grouping is the most challenging to identify and quantify. For example, a recent survey of 518 social enterprises (from an estimated 12,000 nationally) found that 27 (5%) reported that they had facilitated placement of people with employers.<sup>49</sup> Over half identified one of their main goals as employment. With respect to philanthropic funders, 36 trusts and foundations are members of Philanthropy Australia’s Jobs and Skills Funders Network, each of which supports multiple grants into this group. However, only a small number explicitly target initiatives that address employer practice change. Many organisations deliver employment initiatives that are local, temporary, specialised and/or that are designed to complement other activities of the organisation. While overall investment across this group is smaller than investment in government programs, many innovations in employer focussed activity emerge from this group.

Research with representatives across organisation types surfaced several observations about the eco-system and the organisations within it.

Figure 4: Observations about the eco-system

Insight	Outline
<b>Emerging eco-system and identity</b>	<b>The employer practice change eco-system is still emerging in Australia.</b> Many actors within it do not think about their work as ‘employer practice change’ or recognise that they are a part of a wider eco-system working towards similar goals. Research into systems change suggests that shared identity and common purpose are important pre-conditions for eco-system actors to achieve large scale change. <sup>50</sup>
<b>Population focus</b>	<b>Organisations are often focused on a specific population.</b> For example, there are initiatives aimed at people with disability, people seeking asylum

<sup>48</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2024) Understanding the benefits, costs, and funding flows to tailored jobseeker supports, Paul Ramsay Foundation, p22

<sup>49</sup> Social Traders (2023), Profile of Australia’s Certified Social Enterprises.

<sup>50</sup> See for example, The Bridgespan Group (2009), [The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact](#)



and refugees, First Nations peoples, and young people. While this specialisation enables recognition of specific contexts and experiences, it may limit attention to areas of shared learning or of cross-cutting issues like socio-economic background.

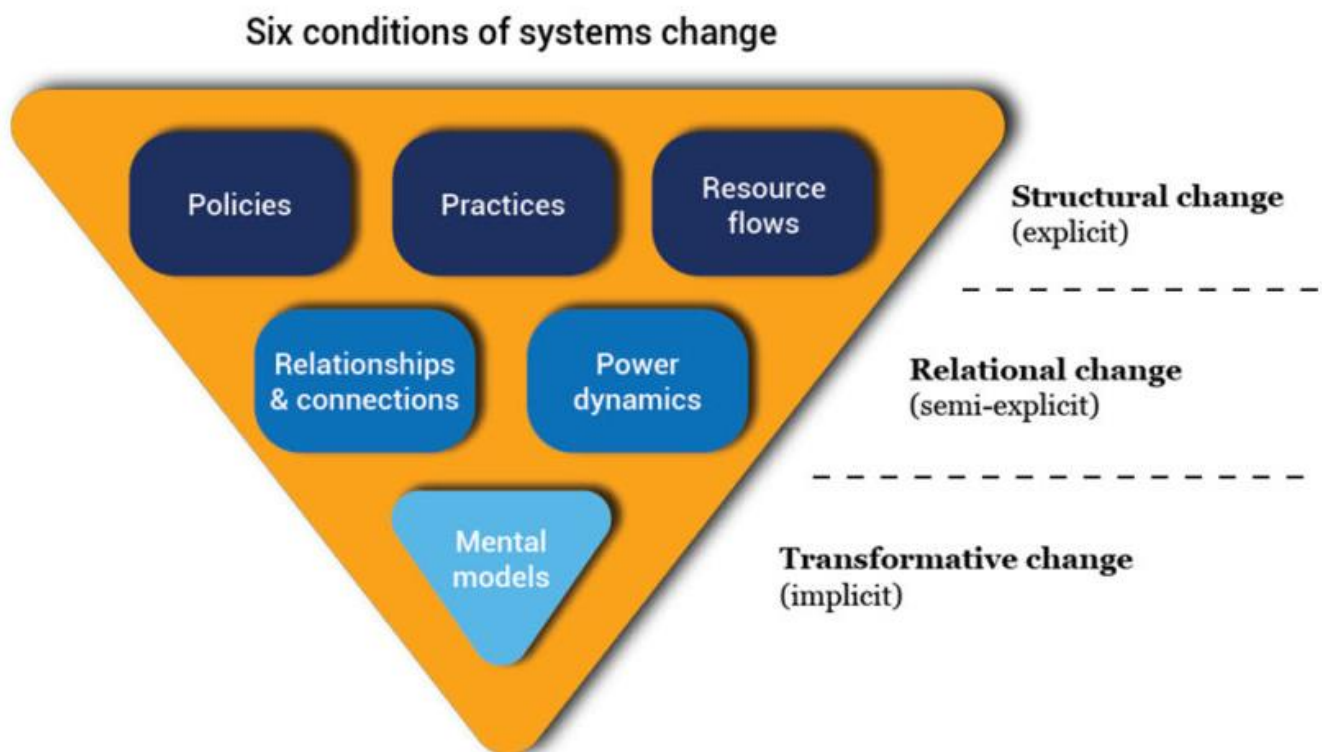
<p><b>Issue framing</b></p>	<p><b>Organisations are often organised around a problem or issue – which can be driven by government policy silos.</b> For instance, supporting employers to hire income support recipients, increasing apprenticeship completions, supporting school to work transitions, or helping people enter specific industries. These efforts generate deep insights within the issue areas, but are rarely framed in a way that allows broader action or learning across the eco-system.</p>
<p><b>Geographic focus</b></p>	<p><b>Organisations and initiatives have different geographic focuses (place-based, state or national).</b> Many shared that there is excellent work being done in local, place-based initiatives, while other initiatives have a wider (often industry based) focus. To achieve impact at scale, these initiatives must be mutually reinforcing – but connections at this stage are limited.</p>
<p><b>Fragmentation and duplication</b></p>	<p><b>There is fragmentation and duplication of effort within the eco-system.</b> Be that through duplicating tools and frameworks, or not knowing what others are doing due to silos between sectors, population focuses or geographies. Within the system, many actors don't know who to turn to for the 'source of truth' on employer practice change research and practice. Fragmentation contributes to employers' views of the eco-system as being hard to navigate.</p>
<p><b>Approach, and focus point in the eco-system</b></p>	<p><b>Most organisations focus on working with individual employers to shift their practice – often via a programmatic response.</b> Few are focused on addressing the blockages or issues standing in the way of systemic shifts in the adoption of employer practice change, such as undertaking research, creating momentum across the system as a whole, or sharing lessons learned.</p>
<p><b>Funding sources</b></p>	<p><b>Funding drives behaviour in the eco-system. Limited funding for employer practice change is hindering progress.</b> The Federal Government is the biggest funder in the eco-system through its contracted employer services providers. While many providers develop deep relationships with employers, these relationships are not essential to delivering their contract successfully. In this context, philanthropy is playing a crucial role fostering systems thinking and innovation – though few funders are active. Some organisations generate fee-for-service income, but most report that there is insufficient employer demand to enable them to cover their activities. As employer practice change is still emergent in Australia, long-term, risk-tolerant philanthropic funding has proven key. Lack of access to funding for long-term work with employers limits the development and growth of organisations focussed on employer practice change.</p>

## 3.2 What are the conditions for achieving employer practice change at scale?

Stakeholders shared their views about what is helping or hindering efforts to achieve employer practice change at scale in the eco-system. These contributions can be used to better understand the conditions that hold current employment practices in place, and the levers that could be applied to bring about systems change.

From the consultations, we identified key themes that map across many of the conditions of systems change, so we have used this framework to organise the findings. The framework (Figure 5 below) is designed to draw attention to the complex array of factors involved in systems change – from addressing explicit policies and practices, to understanding power dynamics and relationships, to deep – and generally unspoken – views about the world. In Figure 5 we have documented the key conditions relevant to employer practice change, before outlining findings across these conditions in the next section.

Figure 5: Six conditions of system change (also known as the ‘Waters of systems change’) <sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P., The waters of system change, 2018, accessed 14 October 2024. FSG

Figure 6: Conditions holding employer practices in place, and levers for system change

Structural change (Explicit)	
Condition	Outline
Policy and regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government:</b> Policy and regulations; procurement and contracting to influence employers' hiring and advancement practices.</li> <li>• <b>Employers:</b> Recruiting policies e.g. required qualifications and experience; police checks.</li> </ul>
Practice and processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government:</b> Programs and initiatives putting policy into practice, and processes to enforce it, e.g. contract management.</li> <li>• <b>Employers:</b> Business as usual practices (formal and informal) across the employment pipeline.</li> </ul>
Financial incentives and drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government:</b> Wage subsidies, apprenticeship incentives, use of procurement to drive creation of jobs and training opportunities.</li> <li>• <b>Philanthropy:</b> Funding eco-system actors that influence practice change.</li> <li>• <b>Employers:</b> Investments in practice change and related services, training and development, targets in relation to headcount.</li> </ul>
Information and evidence	Research, tools, evidence and data to build understanding of what works and ease of access to that information.
Relational (Semi-explicit)	
Condition	Outline
Organisational power dynamics and alignment	Extent of shared understanding and commitment to change within different levels of management in employer organisations.
Connections between employers & underserved groups	Extent of engagement between people in decision-making roles and people in entry level roles and/or from specific underserved groups.
Connections between employers	Extent of connection between employers to enable sharing of practice.
Connections within the eco-system	Extent of connection amongst different parts of the eco-system, to enable sharing and influencing of practice.

Transformative change (implicit)	
Condition	Outline
Employer attitudes	Employer perception of their role in contributing to social and/or economic outcomes beyond their own organisation; and biases about underserved groups capacity to perform at work.
Eco-system attitudes	Extent to which the eco-system has a shared identity and alignment in goals and purpose.
Societal attitudes	Community attitudes and expectations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. that employers should adopt fair and inclusive employment practices;</li> <li>2. towards marginalised groups, including seeing unemployment or underemployment as an individual capability deficit.</li> </ol>

### 3.3 What's helping and hindering the eco-system from achieving employer practice change at scale?

Key stakeholder findings are outlined below with reference to the relevant condition, and what's working well, or presenting a challenge. You'll note that the findings tend to cut across two different, but linked, parts of the problem, denoted with an icon throughout this section:




- **Shifting employer practice.** What's working or inhibiting employers to change their practice? (e.g. wage subsidies, social procurement, or addressing social attitudes)



- **Shifting the eco-system.** What's working or holding back the actors within the eco-system from supporting employer practice change?

# Structural change

Condition: Government policy and regulation; practice and processes 	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>There are pockets of government work shifting employer practice.</b> At the federal level, government has acknowledged the importance of demand-side solutions. Jobs and Skills Councils and Launch into Work (a pre-employment program) hold promise for influencing employer practice. <u>State</u> governments have also invested in initiatives like Jobsbank (Victoria) and Employer of Choice Assist (Tasmania).</p>	<p><b>Employer-focused programs are often small scale and temporary, limiting their ability to shift practice at scale.</b> Most investment in employment programs is focussed on services for individuals, with assistance to employers tending to be secondary/transactional. Providers delivering these services are hampered in their work by high staff turnover, limited time and skills. Employer facing programs, like Workforce Specialists (Commonwealth) and Priority Workforce Projects (Victoria) tend to come and go.</p>
<p><b>Some regulations are driving change in employer practice.</b> E.g. the <i>Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012</i> is supporting public accountability around gender equity; the Victorian Government’s Social Procurement Framework incentivises suppliers to adopt and maintain fair, inclusive and sustainable business practices;<sup>52</sup> the state and federal skills guarantees are providing opportunities for apprentices, trainees and cadets to work on major projects.</p>	<p><b>Social procurement that targets direct employment and/or investment in skills is changing employer behaviour, but accountability needs to improve.</b> There is no question that social procurement has shifted some employer practice. However, these changes are limited by: lack of monitoring of outcomes; limited effectiveness of penalties for non-achievement; practice of shifting obligations to sub-contractors who are less likely to invest in practice change and/or able to offer long-term quality jobs.</p>

Condition: Financial incentives, funding and commissioning 	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Wage subsidies can be effective in</b> encouraging employers to select jobseekers they might not have considered, as demonstrated by research.</p>	<p><b>Wage subsidies may not always lead to practice change.</b> Must be matched with employer culture and process changes to achieve lasting change. Many employers are unaware of subsidies or find them difficult to access, limiting their effectiveness.</p>

<sup>52</sup> See Victorian Government, [Social Procurement – Victorian Government Approach](#) and [Major Project Skills Guarantee](#); and Australian Government, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, [Australian Skills Guarantee](#); accessed 5 November 2025.

**Apprenticeship incentives have some success.** The Boosting Apprenticeships Commencement scheme was successful in counteracting any reduced willingness of employers to take on apprentices during Covid. It also encouraged employers to take on apprentices for the first time.

**Apprenticeship incentives appear to have an outsize effect on employer willingness to hire apprentices.** As a result, withdrawal or restructuring of incentives risks a substantial negative response, and achieving positive change requires a significantly greater response (a ratchet effect)

**Structure and quantum of funding streams – to employers and to actors in the eco-system.**

While wage subsidies and incentives attach to individuals, employer practice change occurs at an organisational level. These small scale, just in time, payments are not well suited to incentivise long-term practice change for employers. Similarly, a substantial portion of employment services payments are attached to individual outcomes, and incentivise providers to focus on speed and volume of employment placements. They are not well suited to support long-term relationships with employers or promote innovation. **Overall**, there is only a limited volume of funding being directed to organisations working with employers to achieve practice change.

**Condition: Employer policies; practice and processes**



**Working well**

**Employment policies and practices – pockets of good practice.** There are examples of employers adopting innovative employment practices, such as ANZ hiring refugees.<sup>53</sup>


**Challenges**


**Employment policies and practices – change isn't fast enough.** We are yet to see widespread adoption of innovative employment practices. HR practices haven't changed much over time – and are outdated. There are cultural barriers holding the system in place (see 'Transformative change' below) rather than un-changeable rules. The outsourcing of recruitment to third parties, and employment to labour-hire companies, impedes internal change.

**Employers, particularly small businesses, also face practice challenges.** As outlined earlier in this report (see *Spotlight on p. 19*).<sup>54</sup>


<sup>53</sup> ANZ, [Given Talent a Chance](#), accessed 13 November 2024.



<sup>54</sup> Australian Government (2023), [Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities.](#), P. 156



Condition: Employer financial incentives and drivers 	
Working well	Challenges
N/A	<p><b>Costs of change.</b> Employers focus on the costs and commercial constraints of developing and implementing inclusive practices.</p>
	<p><b>Workforce training – declining investment.</b> There is evidence that employer investment in workforce training is declining and that, where it occurs, it is more likely to go to those who are already better educated.</p>

Condition: Information and evidence 	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Development of resources, research and evidence – pockets of great work.</b> There are good examples of evidence backed resources that address practice change. For instance, the Diversity Council of Australia’s Inclusive Recruitment Toolkit.</p>	<p><b>Development of resources, research and evidence – gaps, duplication, and fragmentation.</b> Stakeholders felt there is duplication between some tools and frameworks, and fragmentation – actors do not know what others are focused on due to silos between sectors, population focuses or geographies, or competition. In addition, there are gaps in the research. There is a lack of quality case studies, research into socio-economic background at work, or evidence of what works in employer capability building.</p>

## Relational change

Condition: Employer organisational power dynamics and alignment 	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Organisational alignment.</b> Change can be achieved where there is organisational buy in from top to bottom. Some employer practice change initiatives are effectively influencing multiple layers of management.</p>	<p><b>Organisational disconnect.</b> In some organisations there is a disconnect between strategy, executive team, line managers and HR on driving inclusive practices – hindering progress.</p>
	<p><b>Devolving responsibility</b> for inclusive employment to sub-contractors and/or labour hire providers shifts the burden of change to employers who have less power in the system.</p>

Condition: Connections between employers and target groups  	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Lived experience voices.</b> Engagement between employers and employees firsthand has been shown to influence how employers recruit and retain workers. Intermediaries can play useful roles surfacing those voices.</p>	<p><b>Increased distance between decision makers and potential employees.</b> Use of external recruiters, online application systems and, increasingly, AI is reducing opportunities for engagement between decision makers and people seeking opportunities.</p>

Condition: Connections between employers  	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Sharing of information and good practice.</b> There are pockets of this happening, such as events run by peaks within a sector to celebrate good practice. E.g. Chemistry Australia runs DEI awards.<sup>55</sup></p>	<p><b>Limited collaboration between employers.</b> Collaboration is time-consuming and is inhibited by competition. When it happens, it is often at C-suite levels where employees feel they have permission to share, but less responsibility for day-to-day implementation.</p>

<sup>55</sup> See Chemistry Australia, [Diversity and Inclusion](#), accessed 5 November 2024.





## Condition: Connections within the eco-system

### Working well

**Sharing of information – pockets of good practice, generally within a sub-section of the eco-system.** There are some effective vehicles for sharing information and connecting stakeholders. At a government level, these include the Local Jobs Program Employment Facilitators, Regional Jobs Hubs (Tasmania) and Jobs and Skills Centres (Western Australia). The newly created Jobs and Skills Councils bring together employers, unions, RTOs and other stakeholders in the skills sector. Peak bodies (like Jobs Australia) bring together employment services providers. BSL’s NYEB brings together government, philanthropy and industry stakeholders.

### Challenges

**Sharing of information overall is limited.** Generally, there is a lack of sharing of information, ideas and case studies across different parts of the eco-system, be that by cohort (e.g. people with disability or young people), sectors (skills and employment), industries (resource sector), levels of government, and geographies.


**Collaboration is limited.** Consistent with the point above – there is a lack of collaboration across different parts of the eco-system. This includes at a policy level, within governments (e.g., disability employment and general employment sit in different federal departments) and between jurisdictions (e.g., youth transitions sit across state and federal areas of responsibility). Factors contributing to lack of collaboration at a program/practice level include lack of resources, lack of visibility of activities outside the immediate field of interest and competition.



**Lack of a shared identity.** As outlined in Section 3.1, Many within the ecosystem do not see themselves as actively engaged in employer practice change.



Working well	Challenges
N/A	<p><b>Employer relationships.</b> Many interactions between employment service providers and employers are highly transactional – aimed at immediate placements rather than long-term employer practice change. Relationships have been strained by employer experiences of the system. Where they work, they are often held by individuals and undermined by high staff turnover in employment services. Other eco-system actors – like social enterprises and philanthropically funded program providers – struggle to secure the long-term resourcing needed to build and retain relationships over time.</p>

## Transformative change

Condition: Employer attitudes 	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>Employer attitudes towards practice change – are slowly changing in some areas.</b> For example there is evidence that leading companies in the tech sector have recognised barriers to employment, and the business and social case for driving inclusivity. This motivates them to develop alternative pathways into work in the sector that are more inclusive.</p>	<p><b>Employer attitudes towards practice change – the majority are still reluctant.</b> Many employers are reluctant to develop inclusive employment strategies, due to (1) fear of impact on the bottom line – assuming lack of capability of jobseekers; (2) perceiving employers don't have time to train employees, and that they need to be productive from day one; and (3) fears around legal risk of unfair dismissal if it doesn't work out (often misplaced).</p>

Condition: Societal attitudes  	
Working well	Challenges
<p><b>The community is favourable to fair and inclusive recruitment.</b> An overwhelming majority of Australians (75%) feel D&amp;I work is important – although they have a narrow perception of what that includes.</p>	<p><b>The community doesn't recognise economic mobility as an issue, and a growing minority aren't favourable to fair and inclusive recruitment.</b> D&amp;I activity in Australian workplaces largely focuses on gender, and to a lesser extent First Nations peoples, but not socio-economic status.<sup>56</sup> Research has found Australians perceive Australia as a 'class-less' society, despite people from lower socio-economic classes experiencing discrimination at work.<sup>57</sup> Further, a small but growing number of Australians are opposed to D&amp;I (now 7%), but has doubled in 4 years.<sup>58</sup></p>
	<p><b>Many believe that unemployment reflects individual lack of motivation or lack of capability.</b> Many in the community feel the blame rests with jobseekers. As noted in the Select Committee report, labour market policy has tended to be based on the assumption that being unemployed is an individual failure. This reinforces negative perceptions of the unemployed.</p>

These key findings, together with the eco-system characteristics outlined in Section 3.1, show that there is promising work to build on at every level of the system. However, there are significant challenges hindering employer practice change at a larger scale. For sustained and meaningful change, efforts will need to span all three levels of the system.

### 3.4 Shifting from an eco-system to a field of practice

This report set out to explore how we could better support the eco-system of actors working to achieve employer practice change. Our consultations unearthed insights with a broader focus – both on what's holding employers back, as well as the work of the eco-system.

But systems change practitioners and researchers highlight the importance of reflecting on the eco-system itself. As the Bridgespan Group described:<sup>59</sup>

'Systemic change is critical for solving some of the greatest social challenges... And one of the most important levers for bringing about such change is **field-building** — coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations and individuals around a common goal and creating the conditions necessary for them to succeed.'

<sup>56</sup> Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI), [The State of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Australian workplaces \(2023\)](#).

<sup>57</sup> Social Ventures Australia and Essential Media (2024), [Fair Chance - Campaign Feasibility Report - April 2024 \(unpublished\)](#)

<sup>58</sup> Disability Council of Australia (2024), [Inclusion@Work Index: Synopsis Report](#)

<sup>59</sup> The Bridgespan Group (2009), [The Strong Field Framework: A Guide and Toolkit for Funders and Nonprofits Committed to Large-Scale Impact](#)

Bridgespan define a ‘field’ as: ‘a **community** of organisations and individuals: (a) Working together towards a common goal, and (b) Using a set of common approaches to achieve that goal.’

Throughout this report, we have referred to the actors involved in influencing employer practice change as being part of an **eco-system**. A key finding in this chapter has been that organisations and individuals fostering employer practice change in Australia rarely think of themselves as a ‘community’ with a common goal, and so are not operating as a field.

For the Australian eco-system to have the greatest chance of achieving the change we seek, it is important to reflect on the state of the field. Bridgespan’s ‘Strong Field Framework’ provides a series of indicators that suggest a strong field is present (Figure 7 below). Many of the findings outlined in Chapter 3.3 highlight gaps in the strength of the field in Australia. We will return to this framework in Chapter 5 to outline how we might strengthen the field, following a review of learnings from international eco-systems.

Figure 7: Bridgespan Group's Strong Field Framework

Shared identity: Community aligned around a common purpose and a set of core values			
Standards of practice	Knowledge base	Leadership and grassroots support	Funding and supporting policy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Codification of standards of practice</li> <li>• Exemplary models and resources (e.g., how-to guides) Available resources to support implementation (e.g., technical assistance)</li> <li>• Respected credentialing/ ongoing professional development training for practitioners and leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credible evidence that practice achieves desired outcomes</li> <li>• Community of researchers to study and advance practice</li> <li>• Vehicles to collect, analyse, debate and disseminate knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influential leaders and exemplary organisations across key segments of the field (e.g., practitioners, researchers, business leaders, policymakers)</li> <li>• Broad base of support from major constituencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling policy environment that supports and encourages model practices</li> <li>• Organised funding streams from public, philanthropic and corporate sources of support</li> </ul>

# 4 Learnings from the international context

## 4.1 Overview

The eco-system supporting employer practice change in the US and the UK is more developed in many respects than in Australia. In this chapter we use case studies of several initiatives (*Figure 8*) to identify possible lessons for Australia.

Figure 8: Case studies of employer-practice change initiatives from the US and UK

		Initiative title
 <b>United States of America</b>		Aspen Institute, Economic Opportunities Program
		Jobs for the Future
		Year Up United’s Grads of Life
		FSG’s Talent Rewire
 <b>United Kingdom</b>		UK Government’s Social Mobility Commission
		Social Mobility Foundation

Several key insights have been identified through these case studies.

Insight	Outline
<b>More developed eco-systems</b>	<b>Both countries have examples of widescale initiatives driving employer practice change.</b> These include public accountability mechanisms and incentives (e.g. Social Mobility Employer Index), movements and alliances (Grads of Life’s OneTen initiative), and sharing resources and convening networks nationally.
<b>Intermediaries playing a catalysing role</b>	<b>In both countries, but particularly in the US, intermediaries have played an important role catalysing change.</b> Including playing a critical role in developing a coherent national dialogue, mobilising stakeholders towards a common goal, sharing good practice, and plugging gaps in research and thought leadership.
<b>Shared language</b>	<b>In the US there has been an explicit effort to develop and use a shared language to describe employer practice change work.</b> E.g. The term

	<p>'Opportunity talent' is strengths-based language used to describe people who are traditionally marginalised or excluded in the workforce. 'Social mobility' language seems to be a widely accepted framing of the problem in the UK.</p>
<p><b>Initiatives tailored to local context</b></p>	<p><b>The contexts in the US and UK differ from Australia's, and the initiatives address those contexts.</b> In the UK, 'class' and social mobility are widely recognised issues (not currently the case in Australia), and both the profiled UK initiatives reflect this focus. In the US, discussion centres on 'opportunity', due to low minimum wages, unequal access to university education (particularly for Black Americans) and a less well developed VET system. This has led to a great emphasis on job quality and skills-based hiring. Additionally, philanthropy has played a greater role in the development of initiatives, which may have enabled greater innovation.</p>
<p><b>Inspiration for the Australian eco-system</b></p>	<p><b>Despite differences in each nation, there are initiatives worthy of further exploration in the Australian context.</b> These have been identified at the end of each case study and are further explored in Chapter 5.</p>

## 4.2 Case studies from the US

This section outlines four case studies from the US.

### Case study 1 (US)

## The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program



### Overview<sup>60</sup>

The Aspen Institute is a global not-for-profit organisation focused on driving 'change through dialogue, leadership and action to help solve the greatest challenges of our time.'

The Aspen Institute's Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) advances strategies to help low-income and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. It has been operating for over 25 years, and today has a team of 18 staff.

### Key activities

EOP runs several initiatives focused on employer practice change:<sup>61</sup>

- UpSkill America – Supports employers to provide high-quality educational and career advancement opportunities for front-line workers, through encouraging collaboration between employers. See further detail below.
- Good Companies/Good Jobs – Supports companies to provide good jobs to workers through development of job quality tools, conducting research, supporting pilots and developing case studies on quality jobs.
- The Job Quality Center of Excellence – Provides tools, resources and guidance on job quality to support people working in the sector, including employers. The Centre developed a framework for job quality with a cross-sector Good Jobs Champions Group, which launched in 2022 with over 100 signatories.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> The Aspen Institute, see the following pages on organisation's website: [About](#) and [Economic Opportunity Program](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>61</sup> The Aspen Institute, see the following pages on organisation's website: [Upskill America](#) and [Good Companies/Good Jobs](#), accessed 30 October 2024; The Job Quality Center of Excellence, [About the Job Quality Center of Excellence](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>62</sup> The Aspen Institute (2022) [Good Jobs Champions Group Statement](#).

## Spotlight on UpSkill America

### Background <sup>63</sup>

UpSkill America supports employers and workforce organisations to expand and improve high-quality educational and career advancement opportunities for America's front-line workers.

It was formed in 2015 by a group of businesses, education and workforce training, philanthropic and human resources organisations, in response to President Barack Obama's call for employers to do more to develop advancement opportunities for front-line and entry-level workers.

UpSkill has created a network of employers who collaborate and learn from each other to develop and implement effective workforce development solutions. Today, it has a team of around five staff.

### Key activities of UpSkill America

- Research into employer best practice. Conducts research and develops publications and opinion pieces on upskilling best practices for employers to learn from. For example, it has prepared publications on (1) Company-led work-and-learn programs, (2) Partnerships between employers and educational institutions and (3) Employer-supported education programs.<sup>64</sup>
- Promotion of work-based learning. Supports the development of initiatives which help ensure that work-based learning is acknowledged by other education providers and employers. For example, it recently developed a messaging guide to support the field to work with employers to design and deliver learning and employment records, which are digital records of employees' experiences which can be shared with future employers and education providers.<sup>65</sup>
- Creating improved environments for investment in employees. Works with communities, regions and states to support the development of policies, programs and practices which enable investment in employees.
- Education and Career Mobility Fellowship. A professional development program for early- and mid-career professionals, particularly those working in education, skilling and career mobility. The program aims to upskill staff so that they can facilitate better education and training for employees at their organisation and achieve their own professional development and growth. It involves monthly check-ins and learning sessions as well as three in-person seminars over nine months.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> The Aspen Institute, [About UpSkill America](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>64</sup> The Aspen Institute, [UpSkill America Best Practices](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>65</sup> The Aspen Institute (2024), [Messaging Guide: Making the Case for Learning & Employment Records with Employers](#).

<sup>66</sup> The Aspen Institute (2024), [Education and Career Mobility Fellowship Program Overview Update-2024-25](#).



## What are the lessons for Australia?

- Focus on supporting ‘earn and learn’ initiatives. The UpSkill initiative is focussed on helping companies identify and implement effective work-based learning initiatives that enable upward mobility. The organisation itself comes with an employer focus and equity lens. It is not part of the skills delivery system itself or attached to a specific form of training response.
- Employers appreciate forums to share best practice. UpSkill has found that employers don’t have the opportunity to talk to each other about their practices and common challenges, except at the executive level. Providing these forums has been beneficial, particularly for mid-management professionals. There could be opportunity to expand this approach in Australia.
- Education and Career Mobility Fellowship. Recognises the need to deepen the skills of those working with employers on practice change.

## Case study 2 (US)

### Jobs for the Future



#### Overview

Founded in 1983, Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a not-for-profit focused on transforming the US education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. Its vision is that by 2033, 75 million people facing systemic barriers to advancement will work in quality jobs.<sup>67</sup> It has more than 350 staff.

#### Key activities

- JFF conducts four main types of activities:<sup>68</sup>
  - **Design solutions** – Developing and testing evidence-based models and solutions, through its JFF Labs innovation arm
  - **Scale best practice** – Supporting the eco-system to implement solutions which work, including by distributing tools, resources and strategies
  - **Influence policy and action** – Shaping public policy and employer practice that strengthens the labour market and informs education, workforce and industry in the US
  - **Invest in innovation** – Incubate and invest in solutions which work through its JFFVentures impact venture fund.

<sup>67</sup> Jobs for the Future, [Our Vision](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>68</sup> Jobs for the Future, [Education and Workforce Solutions](#), accessed 30 October 2024

- JFF is structured into 11 different practices and centres. Here we profile several that could be of interest to the Australian context:<sup>69</sup>
  - **Center for Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning** – Supports employers and systems to design high-quality, equitable apprenticeship and work-based learning opportunities.
  - **Employer Mobilization** – Supports employers to develop solutions which help workers and the business and promote diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace. *See further detail below*
  - **Center for Justice & Economic Advancement** – Focused on supporting people with criminal records to gain employment. The Center’s Fair Chance Corporate Cohort program supports companies to improve their fair chance hiring processes.
  - **Horizons Summit** – JFF’s flagship annual event focused on equitable economic advancement which attracts around 1,800 attendees each year.<sup>70</sup>

## Spotlight on Employer Mobilization practice

### Background

JFF’s Employer Mobilization practice is the go-to for employers who want to invest in inclusive talent strategies that benefit both businesses and employees. The practice emerged from the JFF Labs and has a blended funding model with fee for service consulting, and some grants. It has around five staff.

### Key activities of the practice

- JFF’s Employer Mobilization practice offers three key initiatives to employers:<sup>71</sup>
  - **Advisory services** – Supports employers to develop and scale solutions through professional advice, so they can become ‘Impact employers’.
  - **Knowledge and insights** – Shares resources and information to support employers to drive inclusive career mobility.
  - **Network engagement** – Connects employers with their peers to share and learn from each other. The network is currently focused on larger companies and has over 900 individuals from around 400 companies.
- A key resource shared with employers is its **Impact Employer Model**.<sup>72</sup> The model is a talent management toolkit to help organisations support the well-being and career mobility of employees who face systemic barriers to advancement, without sacrificing business growth.

<sup>69</sup> Jobs for the Future: [Center for Apprenticeship & Work-Based Learning](#), [Employer Mobilization](#) and [Fair Chance Corporate Cohort](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>70</sup> Jobs for the Future (2023), [Three Principles for the Past and the Future of Work](#).

<sup>71</sup> Jobs for the Future, [Employer Mobilization](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>72</sup> Jobs for the Future, [Impact Employer Model](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

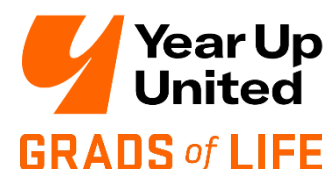
The model's Impact Employer Practices Tool has over 100 proven practices for employers to leverage and includes examples of employers applying these practices. JFF will soon launch a Maturity Model Diagnostic Tool and a Readiness Checklist to the model for organisations to use.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

- **Challenging to fund network engagement.** JFF has found it challenging to attract funders to support development of its employer network, but easier to fund its thought leadership and events.
- **Support for specific employers to design work-based learning approaches.** This is a different approach to that in Australia, where funded assistance is generally designed around particular 'solutions' – e.g. formal apprenticeships.
- **JFF's Impact Employer Model provides a framework that is derived from practice and can be applied by others in the system.** Importantly, it includes case studies and sits alongside practical strategies to engage employers.

### Case study 3 (US)

## Year Up United's Grads of Life



#### Overview<sup>73</sup>

Grads of Life was established in 2014 as part of Year Up United, a national workforce development organisation. Grads of Life's vision is that 'the best way to connect all Americans to opportunity is to leverage the power of the private sector.'

Grads of Life is focused on skills-first talent management, which promotes hiring people based on their skills instead of other factors such as degrees, job histories or job titles. It offers thought leadership and consulting services. It has around 25 staff.

It was originally launched in the context of a campaign called 'Seven Second Resumes' which aimed to open employers' eyes to the talent they were missing out on, by screening out jobseekers without a four-year degree. Grads of Life has been credited as being the first effort to drive employer demand for low-income young adults, in the US.

<sup>73</sup> The Aspen Institute, see the following pages on organisation's website: [About](#) and [Economic Opportunity Program](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

## Key activities<sup>74</sup>

- **Research and insights** – Undertakes research and produces thought leadership in collaboration with academic institutions and consulting firms to support employers to drive skills-first and diversity, equity and inclusion practices. For instance, it published the ‘*Dismissed by Degrees*’ (2017) and ‘*Recredentialling*’ (2024) reports, outlining the cost of degree inflation to business and advocating for skills-first hiring practices and the removing of degree pre-requisites. Another publication, ‘*Ten proven actions to advance diversity, equity and inclusion*’ is powerful because of its evidence base and practical examples. The ‘Opportunity Navigator’ and ‘Opportunity Identifier’ are tools which are, again, evidence-based and accessible for both employers and those working with them. Grads of Life has also developed an Impact Measurement Framework for employer use.
- **Consulting services** – Supports employers in several ways, including: (1) Benchmarking organisation efforts and how to get to the next level (using their Skills-First Navigator, Skills-First Accelerator and Impact Measurement Framework tools); (2) Development and execution of skills-first strategies; and (3) Training and learning services (e.g. skills-first hiring seminars, manager training).
  - OneTen is Grads of Life’s largest client, with Grads of Life advising on its establishment, and running OneTen’s community of practices (see below).

## Spotlight on OneTen<sup>75</sup>

### Background

OneTen is a coalition of 65 companies focused on promoting skills-first hiring, with a mission to support one million skilled job seekers who do not have four-year degrees into family-sustaining careers by 2030. It was formed in 2020 in response to the racial justice movement by five American business leaders, in close consult with Grads of Life.

OneTen was launched at the time of the Black Lives Matter movement in America. Initially focused on facilitating employment opportunities for African Americans, OneTen has since broadened its remit to providing opportunities for people who do not have four-year degrees.

### Key activities

- OneTen coalition members pay a fee to access a talent matching service, consulting advice, online toolkits and resources, and communities of practice. The Coalition has achieved over 100,000 skills-first hires and promotions to date. Coalition members are also contributing to a shift in the culture and mindsets of corporate America, towards skills-first recruitment.

<sup>74</sup> Grads of Life: [Research](#); [Insights](#) and [About](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>75</sup> See OneTen, [Our Approach](#) and [Career Resources](#); and Grads of Life, [Ten Year Anniversary Report](#), accessed 30 October 2024

- OneTen undertakes three kinds of activities to facilitate the adoption of skills-first hiring strategies:
  - **Practice Change** – Supporting companies to adopt skills-first hiring practices.
  - **Human Capital Management** – Developing upskilling and retention strategies to facilitate career growth for employees.
  - **Eco-system Building** – Working alongside employers, jobseekers and community development organisations to ensure that diverse talent is supported at each stage of their career.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

- **Thought leadership has plugged a gap in the sector in the US and spurred other work.** Much of Grads of Life’s ongoing activities have emerged from their thought leadership work, which focuses on how to use inclusive hiring practices to solve business challenges and shift employer practice. This work was not being driven by others in the sector at the time, so addressed an un-met need.
- **Thought leadership is grounded in practice.** Grads of Life emerged from, and is still connected to, Year Up United – a highly successful initiative which works with employers to create pathways to good jobs. It reinforces the importance of new Australian research being grounded in practice.
- **Fee for service revenue has been important, but not sufficient.** Grads of Life receives both philanthropic and fee for service income. However, the fee for service market is challenging, so philanthropy remains a critical part of the revenue mix.
- **Free evidence backed resources have proven useful across the eco-system.** FSG (see below) and Grads of Life collaborated to develop the Opportunity Navigator and now use it across programs. The development of shared resources reduces inefficiency and increases coherence across the sector.
- **The OneTen ‘movement’ has accelerated change and is worth exploring in Australia.** While the context that led to the initiative differs, the movement has brought about more public discussion about the role of corporates in driving skills-first employment. But there are learnings. The membership fee has been a deterrent to some companies, so attracting more philanthropic support may reduce barriers to entry.
- **Grads of Life’s public advertising campaign seeks to change mindsets.** The ‘7-Second Resumes’ campaign spurred momentum in the US and is an example of the type of communications that might be needed to shift attitudes to underserved talent.

## Case study 4 (US)

### FSG's Talent Rewire



#### Overview<sup>76</sup>

FSG is a global non-profit established in 2000 focused on supporting organisations to facilitate social change, to create a more equitable world. It has over 160 staff in three continents.

#### Key activities

- **Consulting services** – Provides consulting services globally with a focus on the US, Europe, South Asia and parts of Latin America.
- **Thought leadership** – Conducts research and develops insights on a range of topics including reproductive rights, corporate racial equity and impact investing.
- **Initiatives and programs** – Runs various field-building initiatives and programs focused on social change including the Collective Impact Forum, Growing Livelihood Opportunities for Women (GLOW), and one program in the employer practice space – Talent Rewire (*detailed below*).

### Spotlight on Talent Rewire

#### Background<sup>77</sup>

Launched in 2016, Talent Rewire's purpose is to increase the economic mobility of frontline employees – particularly people of colour and women. It partners with employers and workforce organisations to develop 'Opportunity Employment champions'. Talent Rewire has eight staff members.

#### Key activities of Talent Rewire<sup>78</sup>

- Talent Rewire undertakes three kinds of activities to support employers: (1) Developing new research, tools and experiences to help employers to make changes to their talent practices; (2) Scales learnings to support the broader workforce system; and (3) Models equity and frontline-centred systems change through their own practices.

Its current initiatives include:

<sup>76</sup> The Aspen Institute, see the following pages on organisation's website: [About](#) and [Economic Opportunity Program](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>77</sup> FSG, [Talent Rewire](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>78</sup> Talent Rewire, [Home Page](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

- **Employer Action Lab Experience** – A 10-month immersive learning experience where a group of employers pilots new talent approaches for frontline and entry-level employees at their organisations, with the support of workforce development experts.
- **Training of Technical Assistance Providers** – Talent Rewire trains others – including employees of employment assistance providers – to support employers through practice change (as part of the Action Lab) – thus contributing to sector capability.
- **Employer Transformation Series** – A series of six workshops for employers to gain tools and guidance on how to drive equitable employment at their workplaces.
- **Rewire Retreat** – A two-day event for employers in the Talent Rewire community to connect and learn from each other.
- **Resources and Tools** – Available on a variety of topics including case studies on how employers have implemented equitable talent practices. Talent Rewire was involved in the design of Grads of Life’s Opportunity Navigator and uses it in its work.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

- **In Australia, the Employer Action Lab experience has been adapted by SVA with success and continues to be a source of inspiration.** Talent Rewire has used the Employer Action Lab as a vehicle to support skills development for individuals in the wider sector – which could be considered here.
- **Talent Rewire benefits from and contributes to the existence of a wider eco-system.** This points towards possible benefits of having a more developed, connected and intentional approach to employer practice change in Australia.
- **Thought leadership is grounded in practice.** Like Grads of Life, Talent Rewire (and FSG’s) thought leadership work and research is grounded in practical action with employers, making their work more compelling to participating employers.
- **Practices developed through the Labs are passed on by engaging others in the eco-system.** The training and support of technical support advisers provides another example of how sector capacity building might be incorporated into program delivery.
- **Philanthropic funding has been key.** Talent Rewire has explored possible fee for service models, but without success. It has relied on long-term, patient funders who are willing to support experimentation.

## 4.3 Case studies from the UK

This section outlines two case studies from the UK.

### Case study 5 (UK)

## Social Mobility Commission



Social Mobility  
Commission

### Overview<sup>79</sup>

The Social Mobility Commission (SMC) is an independent statutory body which is focused on ensuring that in the UK ‘the circumstances of someone’s birth do not determine their outcomes in life.’ The Commission has a chair, two deputy chairs, four commissioners and around 20 staff.

### Key activities<sup>80</sup>

The SMC is responsible for four activities:

- **Publishing an annual State of the Nation Report** – This report describes the Commission’s perspectives on progress in improving social mobility in the UK. Its most recent report included analysis of social mobility in different geographic regions and the university enrolment gap between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>81</sup>
- **Promoting social mobility** – Working with employers, professions, universities and schools to take action to promote social mobility. This includes through sharing resources with employers, parents and carers. The SMC website shares toolkits with employers, for example, to support them to implement practices that support social mobility through their employment practices.
- **Publishing data and research** – Developing and publishing reports, policy papers and other research on social mobility. Its recent research includes potential earnings after university and the relationship between social mobility and innovative societies. The SMC’s website also hosts interactive data about social mobility, drawn from its annual State of the Nation Report.
- **Providing advice to ministers** – Providing advice to UK ministers on request on how to improve social mobility in the UK.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

- **The Social Mobility Commission offers an example of a possible leadership role for government in promoting employer practice change that generates outcomes for**

<sup>79</sup> Social Mobility Commission, [Home Page](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>80</sup> Social Mobility Commission, [What We Do](#) and [Our Research](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>81</sup> Social Mobility Commission (2024), [Social Mobility Commission launches State of the Nation 2024 Report](#).



**people at risk of exclusion.** The SMC signals the importance of social mobility to government and counters narratives that ascribe economic outcomes (e.g. unemployment) to individuals. Importantly, it provides a credible, ongoing source of data in the same way that initiatives like the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse and Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting do in Australia.

- **The Commission has had a critical role in establishing a shared definition of socio-economic background that can be used by employers.** The lack of a shared way of measuring socio-economic background is a key obstacle to action on economic mobility in Australia.

## Case study 6 (UK)

### The Social Mobility Foundation



#### Overview<sup>82</sup>

The Social Mobility Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation established in 2005 to ensure that talented people from all social backgrounds can achieve their potential. It has around 60 staff.

#### Key activities

The Social Mobility Foundation has three key initiatives:

- **The Aspiring Professionals Program** – Supports young people through mentoring, skills sessions and career workshops, university application support and connecting young people with internships with employers.
- **Department of Opportunities** – Conducts advocacy and campaigns on structural social mobility issues, including through direct involvement by young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Also publishes the annual Class Pay Gap Report, which explores how professionals from working-class backgrounds are being paid less than their more privileged peers in the same occupation, and tracks progress each year.<sup>83</sup>
- **Social Mobility Employer Index** – A benchmarking and assessment tool for employers which is reviewed and published each year. *See further detail below.*

<sup>82</sup> The Social Mobility Foundation, [About](#), [Programme](#), [Social Mobility Employer Index](#) and [Campaigns](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>83</sup> Social Mobility Foundation (2023), [The Class Pay Gap 2023](#).

## Spotlight on Social Mobility Employer Index<sup>84</sup>

### Background

The Social Mobility Employer Index is an annual benchmarking and assessment tool which since 2017 has assessed employers on areas of employer-led social mobility. The Index uses the latest research and best practice to measure entrants' performance in eight areas of employer-led social mobility, providing expert guidance on how to improve year-on-year.

The Social Mobility Foundation publishes the Employer Index Report annually, which provides detailed data and insights from that year's entries including the top 75 ranked employers and offers advice for employers to improve practice. In 2024, 150 organisations entered the index.

### Key features of the Social Mobility Employer Index

- Employers can participate confidentially, or publicly, to understand how they compare to others. Those that enter publicly then appear in the Index's published annual report.
- The eight areas covered by the Index are: (1) Outreach to schools and young people; (2) Attraction and university outreach; (3) Recruitment and selection; (4) Routes into the employer; (5) Data collection; (6) Pay, progression and retention; (7) Culture and internal advocacy; and (8) External advocacy.
- Employers pay an entry fee of £1,200 to participate (charities and small employers are exempt from the fee). Employers choose to be assessed against all or some of the eight areas and can remain anonymous. Employers complete an online form which asks questions on their efforts to drive inclusivity at their workplaces. All employers who enter the Index get a feedback report with advice on how to improve social mobility at their organisation.
- The initiative offers a point of difference from a similar initiative in the US, the American Opportunity Index, which does not allow employers to 'opt-out' of the Index, but rather publishes a ranking based on its own research.<sup>85</sup>

### What are the lessons for Australia?

- The Social Mobility Employer Index highlights the potential influencing role of public recognition schemes, even in the absence of legislative obligations. Such a scheme could have merit in the Australian context, noting that several organisations with operations in Australia already participate in the UK scheme. This opportunity is further explored in Chapter 5.
- **There are benefits to mutually reinforcing initiatives across the eco-system.** A key enabler of the Index is work done by the Social Mobility Commission to identify appropriate measures of socio-economic background. Further, while the Social Mobility Commission signals ongoing government interest in issues of social mobility, organisations like the Social Mobility Foundation can play a more active advocacy role and push employers towards greater practice change.

<sup>84</sup> The Social Mobility Foundation, [Social Mobility Employer Index](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>85</sup> American Opportunity Index, [Methodology](#) page, accessed 12 November 2024.

# 5 Opportunities to catalyse change in Australia

## 5.1 What action is needed?

As outlined in Chapter 3, a key finding of the report is that those fostering employer practice change in Australia rarely think of themselves as a community. There is little co-ordination or collaboration across the eco-system and little sense that it is working towards shared goals. In other words, the eco-system is not currently operating as a 'field'. Chapter 4 highlighted that overseas, employer practice change eco-systems are more developed, and there are initiatives underway contributing to the strength of the fields.

Building and strengthening a field addressing employer practice change in Australia is, in our view, a critical strategy in improving access to quality jobs for underserved groups.

In this Chapter, we identify the opportunities to strengthen the field and its impact in Australia, using the Bridgespan Strong Field Framework and the findings from our research. These opportunities are organised with reference to the five components of the Strong Field Framework.

Category	Description
<b>1. Shared identity</b>	Initiatives that build alignment around common purpose and values, and foster the community
<b>2. Standards of practice</b>	Initiatives that contribute to a shared understanding of how to do the work (e.g. practice guides) and access to ongoing professional development
<b>3. Knowledge base</b>	Initiatives that build the evidence of the efficacy of core practices. Ongoing knowledge development and dissemination
<b>4. Leadership and grassroots support</b>	Initiatives that strengthen leaders and exemplary organisations across the field
<b>5. Fundraising and supporting policy</b>	Initiatives that strengthen the policy and funding environment for the field

## 5.2 Opportunities

Sixteen complementary opportunities are outlined below, across the five categories.

1. Shared identity	
What good looks like	
Alignment around common purpose and values	
Current state of the field	
<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, organisations do not identify themselves as part of an overall movement to support more inclusive employer practices.</li> <li>• There is no clear articulation of a shared purpose or values.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been a high level of engagement with this work.</li> <li>• The Federal Government is actively considering how the employment services system might better support employers.</li> <li>• Many experts across the sector see the need for much greater demand side action.</li> </ul>
Opportunities moving forward	
<b>i. Bring eco-system actors together to build a community</b>	<p>Convening organisations and individuals working on employer practice change, is a critical first step to foster a shared identity in the eco-system.</p> <p>This could take the form of a conference or symposium, and provide a chance for participants to share experiences, identify common ground and coalesce around a shared purpose for the eco-system. It would also provide an opportunity to explore collaborations to further the opportunities outlined in this report.</p>
<b>ii. Develop shared language around employer practice change</b>	<p>A shared language to describe the work of employer practice change is important to building shared identity and reflecting core values. US stakeholders told us about the importance of a project to define and consolidate a common language, which is evident across their work. This ‘Words of the Workforce’ project is described in the <i>Spotlight below</i>. Compelling and persuasive common language helps raise public awareness and bring about mindset change.</p>

## Spotlight on The Words of the Workforce – Field Guide, USA

### What was it?

- In 2021 in the USA, a group of eight organisations involved in employer practice change came together to develop a field guide, described as ‘an overview of key terms and concepts related to workers and workforce development’. Participating organisations included many of the US actors mentioned in this report: JFF, Grads of Life and Talent ReWire, amongst others.
- The *Words of the Workforce: A Field Guide to the Terms and Ideas Shaping the World of Work* has been used to provide a common language to improve communications both within the field and with those that organisations in the field are seeking to influence, such as employers, journalists and politicians.<sup>86</sup>

For example, the *Field Guide*:

- Includes a definition of common terms used in the field, like ‘degree inflation’ (the practice of preferring or requiring a college degree [or other advanced degree] for positions that traditionally have not required that level of education)
- Emphasises strengths-based language. E.g., in place of what, in Australia, are described as ‘NEET’ – young people not in employment, education or training’ the guide refers to ‘Opportunity youth’. Employers who refine their practices to improve access for historically underrepresented workers are called ‘Opportunity Employers’.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

In the US, the development of common, strengths-based language through a field guide has been important in building a shared agenda amongst the field, in getting practice change (like skills-based hiring) onto the agenda of employers and governments. A similar project in Australia could reap similar rewards.

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<sup>86</sup> The Words of the Workforce: A Field Guide to the Terms and Ideas Shaping the World of Work (2021)

## 2. Standards of practice

### What good looks like

Shared understanding of how to do the work (e.g. practice guides) and access to ongoing professional development

### Current state of the field

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are many ‘how to’ guides and toolkits aimed at employers. These tend to reflect specific parts of the challenge (e.g. disability focus). Some are not widely accessible (e.g. restricted to members).</li> <li>• Professional development opportunities are ad-hoc and fragmented.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths</b>	Across the various toolkits and ‘how to’ guides there are common themes and a starting point for a more coherent approach.

### Opportunities moving forward

<b>iii. Consolidate and catalogue practice change guides and identify gaps.</b>	There is a growing body of guidance material in Australia and internationally on employer practice change, but it sits across multiple sectors, organisations and jurisdictions, can be difficult to locate, and there are gaps. This work would involve reviewing key toolkits and other guidance material used by actors within the eco-system, cataloguing these resources for the benefit of the eco-system, and working with eco-system actors to identify gaps.
<b>iv. Work towards agreed practice frameworks</b>	<p>While there will continue to be variations in how organisations within the eco-system work, it should be possible to identify areas of shared practice which reflect evidence of what works and shared values and commitment to ethical practice. This work would involve actors working together to develop and/or endorse practice frameworks.</p> <p>International examples of toolkits that have received widespread support include the Sutton Trust's Social Mobility in the Workplace: An Employer's Guide (UK); and, in the US, Jobs for the Future's Impact Employer Model which outlines proven means of improving employer practice; and Grads of Life's impact measurement framework which helps businesses quantify the impact of changing employment practices.</p>
<b>v. Develop capability building and fellowships programs for professionals in the eco-system</b>	<p>The recent Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services identified a need to professionalise the employment services workforce. Similarly, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability found a need to address skills of those working in disability services – prompting the establishment of the Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.</p> <p>Those working with employers require specific skills and knowledge over and above the skills required to support individuals looking for work. If we</p>

are to shift focus towards quality employment with career progression, those working in the eco-system will need a wider understanding of human resources practices and of skills pathways. While peak bodies deliver some training to sub-groups within the sector, we suggest it would be appropriate to develop an offering that encompasses workers across the wider field. As the eco-system grows, an emerging leaders fellowship program could be developed to foster excellence, and incentivise people to stay in the sector. An example of an emerging leaders program for employment professionals is the Aspen Institute's Education and Career Mobility Fellowship outlined in Chapter 3.<sup>87</sup>

### 3. Knowledge base

#### What good looks like

Evidence of the efficacy of core practices.  
Ongoing knowledge development and dissemination

#### Current state of the field

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing evidence and research sits across multiple sectors, and is not always driving practice.</li> <li>There are evidence gaps, e.g. around drivers and inhibitors of employer action, or the business case for socio-economic diversity at work.</li> <li>There is no effective means to disseminate knowledge across the field.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths</b>	Organisations like the Good Work Research Group and the Diversity Council of Australia are generating useful research for the field.

#### Opportunities moving forward

<b>vi. Map existing research and identify and prioritise addressing research gaps</b>	There is a growing body of research on employer practice change, but there are critical gaps. This initiative would involve mapping existing research and identifying these gaps, as well as new research proposals (e.g. Australian Research Council Linkage Grant applications) aligned to addressing the needs of employers and the wider eco-system. Examples of research that has catalysed change overseas include: from the UK, the Social Mobility Foundation's annual <a href="#">Class Pay Gap Report</a> ; <sup>88</sup> and, from the US, the American Opportunity Index. <sup>89</sup>
<b>vii. Develop and implement new</b>	To make long-term change to employer practices, we need good data so we can measure and track our progress. At present, Australia does not

<sup>87</sup> The Aspen Institute, [Education and Career Mobility Fellowship](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>88</sup> Social Mobility Foundation (2023), [The Class Pay Gap 2023](#).

<sup>89</sup> Schultz Family Foundation, Burning Glass Institute and Harvard Business School (2024) American Opportunity Index

<p><b>data collection and reporting measures</b></p>	<p>have an agreed way of measuring socio-economic background in the workplace, so it is not gathered routinely by employers. Nor is data on key employer practices like job quality, workplace training or use of unpaid internships readily available. There is no regular ABS reporting on economic mobility. Availability of this data has underpinned efforts in the UK and US to address economic exclusion (such as the Social Mobility Commission’s State of the Nation Report, outlined in Chapter 4).</p> <p>Work should be undertaken to develop and agree measures at both the population level (via the ABS) and workplace level.</p>
<p><b>viii. Develop a digital platform to facilitate sharing research, evidence and tools</b></p>	<p>Develop a digital platform to facilitate access to practice guides and as a means of supporting translation of research into evidence-based practice.</p> <p>An example of this type of approach can be found in the US’s ‘Opportunity Navigator’. The platform includes an assessment framework to understand employer practices, and then provides links to a set of tools and resources tailored to address employer challenges. A digital platform could also be of value to employers seeking to understand the range of organisations that they might partner with around practice change.</p>
<p><b>ix. Consolidate evidence on the relative strength of available policy options and leverage points, to inform further advocacy across the eco-system</b></p>	<p>Building on the research opportunities described above, this work would aggregate and synthesise evidence on the available policy options and leverage points in the system to address employer practice change, and assess the relative strength of that evidence. This could inform the future advocacy and mobilisation agenda of actors in the eco-system.</p>
<p><b>x. Pilot, incubate and evaluate new services and initiatives that advance employer practice change</b></p>	<p>Pilot or catalyse new initiatives in the sector to add to the growing database of ‘what works’. This could include further exploration and development of initiatives identified as having promise from the international context or raised in consultations. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an Australian variation of the Job Quality Centre of Excellence, drawing inspiration from the Aspen Institute’s initiative (<i>profiled above</i>), potentially building on a similar initiative in Australia</li> <li>• Improving capabilities of frontline managers to supervise diverse workers.</li> </ul>



## 4. Leadership and grassroots support

### What good looks like

Influential leaders and exemplary organisations with strong support from across the field

### Current state of the field

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is fragmentation across the eco-system. There are a number of peak bodies representing the employment services system and peaks, like Diversity Council of Australia, focussed on supporting practitioners within employing organisations.</li> <li>• Competition and fragmentation inhibit the development of exemplary organisations with strong sector support.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths</b>	<p>Peak bodies, the Federal Government and philanthropic funders are all potentially influential actors in the field.</p>
<h3>Opportunities moving forward</h3>	
<b>xi. Invest in field co-ordination and field-building</b>	<p>Given the current limited state of field development in Australia, there is a need to invest in better coordination and strengthening of the field. Initial steps should focus on bringing different actors together to build a sense of community and shared goals, as identified in opportunity.</p> <p>Over the medium term, there may be benefit in investing in a 'neutral' field-building actor to foster the development of the eco-system as a whole. Such an actor could shepherd the long-term vision and opportunities of the eco-system, or a sub-set of those opportunities.</p> <p>This could be initiated by an existing actor, or as a new initiative. The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence may prove to be an example of this in practice, for one part of the eco-system. This work could also be progressed by a collective, with shared governance comprised of representatives from across the field, overseeing work driven by a neutral entity.</p>
<b>xii. Build an alliance of employers who will advocate for employer practice change</b>	<p>Employer practice change requires strong partnership and engagement with employers. The promotion of leading employers is a critical piece of field-building work. This initiative would foster an alliance of employers who will advocate for employer practice change, encouraging other employers to follow their lead. It would build on, rather than displace, existing employer networks.</p> <p>Initiatives in the US, like Grads of Life's OneTen, and the Job Quality Center of Excellence's Good Jobs Champions Group (<i>profiled in Chapter 3</i>) are examples of employer-led networks whose activities are supported by NGOs in the field.</p>

## 5. Funding and supporting policy

### What good looks like

Policy and funding environment that supports and encourages model practices.

### Current state of the field

<b>Weaknesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy settings have tended to focus on the ‘supply side’ of the employment challenge, with little attention to the role of employer practice.</li> <li>• Overall, neither government nor philanthropic funding has supported long-term work with employers that supports employer practice change.</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both the Federal Government and some philanthropic funders are increasingly interested in employer practices and how employers might be encouraged and supported to create better workplaces.</li> <li>• Policies like social procurement, while not without problems, have generated real demand from employers for support to engage underserved groups.</li> </ul>

### Opportunities moving forward

<b>xiii. Identify new funding for employer practice change and/or field-building</b>	<p>To realise the opportunities outlined in this report, new dedicated funding is required. This report has found that lack of access to funding for long-term work with employers limits the development and growth of organisations and initiatives focussed on employer practice change.</p>
<b>xiv. Develop measures that build the impetus for employer engagement, incentivise action and create public accountability</b>	<p>Public measures could increase accountability and improve incentives for employers to adopt innovative employment practices. Such measures have been effective both in Australia and overseas and take several forms.</p> <p>Examples of measures worth further exploration, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing an opt-in company benchmark on measures of social inclusion (see Social Mobility Foundation Employer Index <i>outlined in Chapter 4</i>),<sup>90</sup> or expanding the scope of similar existing Australian initiatives</li> <li>• Developing awards for organisations with great inclusion practices. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)’s Employer of Choice for Gender Equality<sup>91</sup> citation is an example of an existing initiative, albeit contained to gender, while some Australian</li> </ul>

<sup>90</sup> Social Mobility Foundation, [Employer Index](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [Employer of Choice for Gender Equality](#), accessed 12 November 2024

industries already have such awards (for example, Chemistry Australia's [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Award](#)<sup>92</sup> sponsored by Jobbank).

**xv. Government takes steps to foster the authorising environment**

The Federal Government has a significant role as a participant in the employer practice change eco-system. It holds many of the levers to influence practice outlined in Section 3.2, including through policy development, regulations, funding and financial incentives and through its power to convene and communicate with the sector.

The Government should consider steps to foster an authorising environment for employer practice change, legitimising that is an important issue and recognising the importance of developing the eco-system. It should consider what levers it can pull to catalyse change, and re-orient the system towards recognition of the importance of demand side factors in generating opportunity. This could include the establishment of a high-profile initiative to lead or contribute to some of the initiatives outlined in this report.

**xvi. Develop and launch a targeted public awareness campaign**

Employers are not capitalising on available talent for their workforce, due to unintended barriers in the recruitment and retention of staff. These include how jobs are designed, the qualifications and capabilities expected of people, and the recruitment process itself. Many of these can be overcome, but mindsets and attitudes of organisations are holding employers back.

A public awareness campaign could help shift the hearts and minds of employers and the public, to help catalyse change and realise the unique skills that diverse talent can offer. It could be led by a coalition of organisations in the eco-system, and be accompanied by resources that employers could access to help shift their practice. Such a campaign could take inspiration from similar initiatives overseas, such as Grads of Life's '[7-Second Resumes' campaign](#)' *profiled below*. A campaign alone could not achieve large-scale change, but could serve as one component in a broader movement building exercise together with other opportunities identified in this chapter.

<sup>92</sup> Chemistry Australia, [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

## Spotlight on Grads of Life, 7-Second Resumes campaign<sup>93</sup>

### What was it?

- Launched in 2014, the 7-Second Resumes campaign showcasing youth from diverse backgrounds to employers, to inspire employers to reconsider their recruitment methods.
- The campaign featured a video in which young people without university degrees described their skills and experience in up to 7 seconds. It was based on the premise that HR professionals typically spend 7 seconds reviewing a resume, and that in that short time they rely on university degrees as a screening tool.
- The campaign was viewed over a billion times, led to a 12% increase in general awareness about the possibilities of hiring untapped talent from 2014 to 2017, and preceded a \$10 billion investment from the US Government in youth employment and skills training. It generated significant demand from employers looking to change their practice, which led to the establishment of Grads of Life, featured in Chapter 3.

### What are the lessons for Australia?

The campaign illustrates that a short and simple message can have a catalysing effect on employer practice.

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<sup>93</sup> Grads of Life, [About Grads of Life & Our Work](#), and [7-Second Resumes Gallery](#), accessed 30 October 2024.

## 6 Where to from here?

### 6.1 Catalysing the field

#### **Addressing complex policy problems requires different ways of working. It's time for a more collaborative and systemic approach to catalyse employer practice change**

There are many problems that can be diagnosed and resolved through straightforward action. However, problems like entrenched disadvantage, climate change and social mobility, are complex or 'wicked'. They feature interconnected elements and actors with their own interests, motivations, and feedback loops.<sup>94</sup> It's long been recognised that to address complex problems, we need to work differently. We need to see and leverage the whole system and work collaboratively to address it.<sup>95</sup>

The *Water of Systems Change* framework, outlined in Chapter 3, suggests that systems change is created by shifting all the conditions that hold a social problem in place.<sup>96</sup>

This report has identified that the employer-practice change eco-system is lacking an identity, cohesion, a shared goal, and collaborative efforts and work to sustain it. We believe there is an opportunity for more systemic work, and intentional efforts to foster the development of the field. The opportunities outlined in Chapter 5 we believe will help. However, driving it forward will require concerted work and investment.

### 6.2 Next steps

Chapter 5 identifies a range of possible opportunities and initiatives. These are presented as a starting point for discussion. The precise shape of measures to strengthen the field and their relative merit should, in our view, be determined through ongoing discussion within the field.

As an actor within this field, SVA has an interest in its future. The research conducted for this report will inform our thinking about our role in the field. However, we have prepared the report to inform the development of the field. We hope its public release will also provide valuable information and inspiration for others.

On our part our next step will be to explore the possibility of bringing a group together from across the sector to hear from experts, to network, and to start to build a shared identity.

We welcome feedback on this report and interest from others in future collaboration on these issues.

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<sup>94</sup> The Omidyar Group (2017), [Systems Practice Guide](#)

<sup>95</sup> On systems change, see for example Stanford Social Innovation Review (2016), *Three Keys to Unlocking Systems-Level Change*. On collaboration, see Alford & O'Flynn (2012); Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary (2005); Lovan et al (2004); O'Leary & Bingham (2009)

<sup>96</sup> Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P., *The waters of system change*, 2018, accessed 14 October 2024. FSG

# Appendices

## Stakeholder list

Over 35 different organisations were consulted for this work, through interviews and workshops. The Federal Government departments and agencies consulted are outlined below.

### Federal Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

- Business and Industry Engagement Branch
- Employment Policy Branch
- Employment Systems Strategy Branch
- Industry Skills Policy and Performance Branch
- Net Zero Priorities and Partnerships Branch
- Strategy and Engagement Branch
- Workforce Australia for Business
- Workforce Solutions Branch

### Federal Department of Social Services

- Disability Employment Policy Branch
- Disability Employment Services Branch

### National Indigenous Australians Agency

- Business and Economic Branch
- Community Development Program Branch
- Remote Employment Branch

### The Net Zero Economy Agency

- Worker Transition Branch

Other organisations engaged are outlined here, and include contracted employment services providers, employment program providers and international organisations with a focus on advancing equitable employment outcomes.

ABCN	FSG (US)	Paul Ramsay Foundation
Ability Options	Generation	Productivity Bootcamp
Achieve Foundation	Grads of Life (US)	Shoreline
APM	Australian Human Rights Commission, IncludeAbility	SYC
Aspen Institute, UpSkill America (USA)	Jobs Australia	System 2
Asuria	Jobsbank	Westgate Community Initiatives Group
Brotherhood of St Laurence, National Youth Employment Body	Jobs for the Future, Employer Mobilization (USA)	White Box Enterprises
CareerSeekers	Macquarie Foundation	Workskil Australia
CoAct	MTC Australia	Workskills Tasmania
CVGT Employment	National Employment Services Association	Xceptional
Disability Employment Australia	OCTEC Ltd	Youth Projects



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