Research Report

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Learning Creates Australia

Connecting Practice to Evidence

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About This Report

Learning Creates Australia (LCAust) launched in 2020 with the objective of convening an alliance of people and organisations that could systematically reform Australia's schooling, tertiary education and employment systems. Part of this work was designed to broaden recognition of learning by shifting the education system away from a narrow focus on traditional academic and vocational skills towards approaches that recognise and validate a wider variety of students' competencies and dispositions, regardless of whether they were acquired through formal or informal means (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015; Werquin, 2010). This effort is grounded in the belief that programmes of *broader recognition* may support all young Australians to become successful in school and in life (Werquin, 2010).

Between 2020 and 2023, in its first phase of work, LCAust facilitated the Learner's Journey Social Lab, convening participants to develop prototypes that explored alternative ways to design, assess and accredit learning.

In 2023, LCAust transitioned into Connecting Practice to Evidence, the second phase of its work. In this phase, LCAust aspired to expand on its work by engaging partners and curating evidence through a multiyear action research project. The organisation also continued the development of select prototypes that emerged from the Learner's Journey and supported local initiatives aligned with LCAust's mission.

The Paul Ramsay Foundation, which funded LCAust's activities during this period, engaged RAND researchers to conduct a mixed-methods evaluation study of its second phase of work. The intended audience for this report includes the Paul Ramsay Foundation and other organisations pursuing systems change.

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In the spirit of reconciliation, the authors of this report would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Summary

Learning Creates Australia (LCAust) launched in 2020 with the objective of convening an alliance of people and organisations that could systematically reform Australia's schooling, tertiary education and employment systems to better meet the goals of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. Part of this work aimed to broaden recognition of learning by shifting the education system away from a narrow focus on traditional academic and vocational skills towards approaches that recognise and validate a wider variety of student competencies and dispositions, regardless of whether they were acquired through formal or informal means (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015; Werquin, 2010). This effort is grounded in the belief that programmes of broader recognition may support all young Australians to become successful in school and in life (Werquin, 2010).

Between 2020 and 2023, in its first phase of work, LCAust facilitated the Learner's Journey Social Lab, convening participants to collaborate and iteratively develop prototypes that offered alternative approaches to recognise learning that the participants believed better reflected the diverse knowledge and dispositions of students (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022).

In 2023, LCAust transitioned into Connecting Practice to Evidence, the second phase of the work. The Paul Ramsay Foundation, which funded LCAust's activities during this period, engaged RAND researchers to conduct a formative evaluation that would offer feedback to the LCAust team and appraise the progress that the organisation had made over the second phase of its work.

LCAust's Second Phase: Connecting Practice to Evidence

In Connecting Practice to Evidence, LCAust had the goal of acting as a catalyst and intermediary supporting others and enabling change. Connecting Practice to Evidence primarily consisted of the following three activities:

- **Convene supporters** to transform the learning system. LCAust aimed to engage a variety of partners in convening activities, including two We Are More events and a series of expert panels. LCAust engaged the public through social media outreach to support this work.
- **Curate evidence** through the publication and dissemination of reports and The Power of Recognising More action research project. This project aimed to identify the potential benefits for young people that might emerge from programmes of broader recognition. Additionally, the project aimed to identify the enabling factors and barriers to programme implementation for schools, the community and, more broadly, the learning system.
- **Demonstrate solutions** by continuing the development of select Phase I prototypes or through iterative cycles of research and development LCAust referred to as *workstreams*. These workstreams contribute data to the action research project, help identify enabling factors and barriers to systemic adoption of broader recognition approaches, and

demonstrate potential positive effects on the lives of young people facing disadvantages. They also support local initiatives that align with LCAust's mission.

Planning for Connecting Practice to Evidence began in 2022, building from the groundwork that LCAust established through the Learners Journey Social Lab. Connecting Practice to Evidence activities took place between 2023 and 2025.

Study Approach

We sought to address five research questions in this formative evaluation, organised around the three focal areas of LCAust's work that are summarized in Table S.1. This report details our answers to these questions. We used a flexible, multiple-methods approach to address these research questions, consisting of interviews, a systematic literature review, bibliometric and sociometric analysis, and document review. Data collection took place between 2023 and 2025.

Table S.1. Study Research Questions Related to Each Focal Area of LCAust's Work

Focal Areas	Research Questions
Convene supporters	• How has LCAust as an intermediary convened stakeholders to pursue their goal of systems change?
Curate evidence	• How has LCAust contributed to and communicated evidence supporting broader recognition of learning? • To what extent have LCAust reports been referenced and cited in academic and grey literature and media sources?
Demonstrate solutions	• How did LCAust support implementation of the workstreams? • To what extent did the workstreams generate evidence of effects?

We conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with design partners, expert panellists, local workstream leaders, external policymakers, LCAust leaders and young associates (i.e. young people working with LCAust across its projects). We asked a set of common questions (e.g. the mission and goals of LCAust and its role in the overall ecosystem of education policy) to all interviewees, with additional questions tailored to specific areas of involvement (e.g. expert panels, action research, We Are More events, workstreams). We also analysed documents, such as agendas, attendance sheets, progress reports, presentation slides, photographs and videos of engagement outputs, publications, and policy submissions. We triangulated evidence across multiple interviews and documents to improve the validity of our qualitative findings.

We supplemented the interviews and document review with a bibliometric analysis and a sociometric analysis. Our bibliometric analysis quantified the number of times each LCAust report was cited and measured traction of the most-cited pieces. Our sociometric analysis involved a search of social media and other websites for mentions of LCAust, a list of phrases key to LCAust's work and LCAust stakeholders. We quantified the number of original content posts LCAust published and excluded any LCAust reposts, comments or likes. We then quantified the amount of engagement on each of LCAust's posts (including likes, comments or reposts) and aggregated the average engagement by month.

Findings

We summarize our findings by focal activity area.

Convening Supporters

- LCAust engaged stakeholders in a variety of convenings to support its goal of raising public awareness regarding the importance of broadening recognition of learning. These activities brought together a national network of actors from education, government and industry who are invested in broader recognition; elevated youth voices in policy spaces; and produced visible outputs that were aligned with the organisation's self-identified catalyst role.
- In our interviews, individuals noted LCAust could do more to engage more-diverse participants in their work, particularly regarding industry stakeholders and individuals who are less ideologically aligned with the LCAust mission. Some individuals we interviewed identified the limitations of endorsing a breadth of programmes and policies rather than a specific agenda.
- Although social media engagement is not a leading strategy for cultivating supporters, and engagement on most social media platforms has stagnated, LCAust saw increased engagement on LinkedIn between 2021 and 2025, which was consistent with its shift towards making LinkedIn its main channel of social media activity.

Curating Evidence

- Interviewees reported that LCAust's action research reports were accessible and engaging for making the case of broader recognition. The policy and practice examples identified by LCAust were varied and presented without a normative agenda for policy change.
- Individuals and organisations aligned with LCAust's mission to expand alternative recognition systems, especially for disadvantaged youth, have amplified LCAust's work.
- LCAust could do more to support the development of stronger causal evidence of how policies and programmes aimed at broadening recognition affect young people's transition to university or work.

Demonstrating Solutions

- LCAust's partners piloted four demonstration workstreams focused on different aspects of evidence-based practices to recognise broader learning outcomes for diverse youth.
- LCAust acted responsively to challenges in the workstreams by adjusting various aspects of the development process. This included changes to workstreams to address capacity, data access and recruitment challenges.
- None of the workstreams were fully implemented at a scale conducive to quantitative impact analyses during the evaluation period.

Although it is too early to assess whether LCAust was successful in catalysing systems change, we believe that it has made substantial progress in establishing and implementing a body of activities that align with the three focal areas of Connecting Evidence to Practice. Throughout

Connecting Evidence to Practice, LCAust built on many of the strengths it had demonstrated in its first phase of work, The Learner's Journey (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022).

However, in implementing these activities, trade-offs arose for LCAust in pursuing policy change and programme outcomes. These trade-offs centered on issues of tight coalition-building versus wider support in engaging policy actors, breadth versus specificity in defining a policy agenda, research accessibility versus strength of evidence, and responsiveness to implementation challenges versus prescriptiveness. We suggest that these trade-offs are inherent in the work of functioning as a catalysing intermediary and are important considerations for LCAust and other similar organisations pursuing systems change.

Recommendations

We conclude this report with four recommendations that apply to LCAust and other organisations pursuing systems change.

First, intermediary organisations that see themselves as catalysts like LCAust may consider cultivating relationships with individuals who bring more-critical perspectives and with strong supporters, such that these organizations develop a consistent and reliable body of advocates and generate a wide web of stakeholders. Second, such organisations may weigh the benefits of broad engagement and of lifting up varied grassroots approaches with the clarity of prescribed policy strategies and actions. Third, such organisations may weigh the benefits of presenting a fuller understanding of the evidence underlying their work and the different kinds of evidence that emerge. Fourth, such organisations may consider the role they hope to play in supporting implementation and, in areas in which this role is less hands-on, may consider the appropriate supports they could offer to implementing partners to build a recruitment and engagement strategy and a management and monitoring plan at the local level.

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Chapter 1

Background and Context

Broader recognition of learning is a term used to describe programmes or policies that acknowledge and validate skills, knowledge and dispositions beyond the academic and vocational skills traditionally taught in primary and secondary schools. These include a variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and such competencies as creativity, critical thinking, self-efficacy and empathy. Additionally, approaches that broaden recognition of learning often aim to legitimise the lived experiences of individuals by acknowledging and validating learning that occurs in both formal and informal spaces (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015; Werquin, 2010).

Government education agencies, vocational education and training providers, and universities in Australia have advocated for the importance of approaches that broaden recognition of learning for nearly half a century. The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration, released by the Council of Australian Governments Education Council, for example, recognised that critical and creative thinking—along with such skills as self-management, resilience, digital literacy and collaboration—may be key for promoting life satisfaction, workplace engagement and individual goal fulfilment (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). The declaration also aimed to create greater equity in educational access and opportunity by supporting historically underserved students at risk of educational disadvantage, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Department of Education Skills and Employment, 2019).

However, large numbers of young Australians are still not mastering the full array of skills necessary to become confident in their self and the future (Lamb et al., 2020). Additionally, disparities in educational opportunity and attainment in Australian schools based on social background are among the highest in countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), particularly relative to peer OECD countries (OECD, 2018b).

With initial support from the Paul Ramsay Foundation, PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia and the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), Learning Creates Australia (LCAust) facilitated a first phase (Phase I) of work between 2020 and 2023. This phase of work, referred to as the Learners Journey Social Lab, focused on convening stakeholders (including educators, young people, youth-serving organisations, representatives from tertiary education and representatives from industry) that LCAust believed could systematically reform the Australian education system to better meet the goals of the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration. LCAust tasked participants in the Learners Journey Social Lab with iteratively developing prototypes for initiatives that could, if adopted at scale, create new systems for tertiary education selection and senior secondary certification (i.e. alternative recognition systems) and offer an

alternative to established systems, such as the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), which is the country's primary assessment and accreditation mechanism.[1]

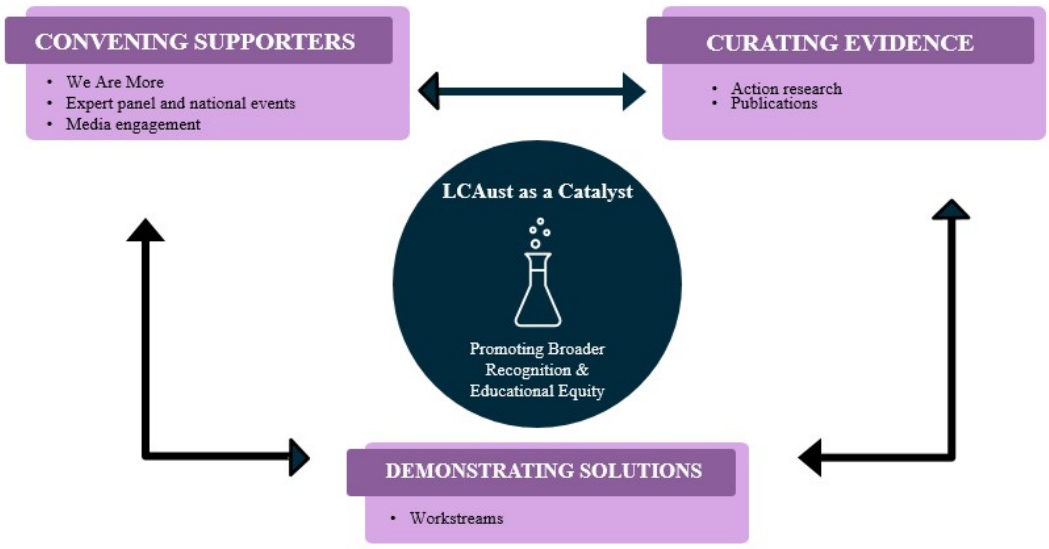
Beginning in 2023, with continued support from the Paul Ramsay Foundation, LCAust embarked on the second phase of its work, referred to as Connecting Practice to Evidence. In this phase of work, LCAust continued the iterative development of prototypes in four workstreams and endeavoured to expand their work as a convenor, promoting policy discourse and catalysing systems change.

LCAust and the Paul Ramsay Foundation invited RAND to conduct an evaluation study that would provide an assessment of the progress the organisation had made over the second phase of work. In the remainder of this chapter, we present a conceptual framework that describes the main activities of LCAust's Connecting Practice to Evidence work and organises our evaluation approach.[2]

A Conceptual Framework for Connecting Practice to Evidence

Figure 1.1 depicts a conceptual framework for LCAust's Connecting Practice to Evidence work that organises our analysis by situating LCAust's three primary focal areas (convening partners, curating evidence and demonstrating solutions) in the larger policy and research efforts in which the organisation has engaged.

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Model of Connecting Practice to Evidence



Adopting a conceptual metaphor from chemistry, LCAust conceives of itself as a catalyst, facilitating systems change without necessarily being directly involved in that change. One LCAust leader summarized this role as one that is somewhat temporary, agile and mission-focused:

[1] A 2022 RAND report provides more details on Phase I activities and outcomes (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022).

[2] The description of the Australian educational context presented in this section is drawn from a previous RAND report (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022, pp. 1–3), with minor adjustments.

> We definitely still see ourselves as a catalyst . . . on a few levels. We're not trying to exist in perpetuity and set ourselves up to be here forever. . . . [W]e're trying to exist for this particular period of time where we can have a significant impact on trajectory towards transformation. So, I think that's how it's most meaningful to us. . . .
>
> When you think about our work, because we're intentionally trying to exist in the background, be a small but mighty kind of team, that's a context in which people can have different conversations and be connected in different ways. We can demonstrate different models, we can fill evidence gaps, we can convene key people in the ecosystem to learn from each other. . . . I think all of that is still very much around creating a context in which we can catalyse change.

After reviewing documents and after discussions with LCAust staff members, we determined that the central premise for the Connecting Practice to Evidence phase of LCAust's work is as follows: *By **convening supporters, curating evidence** and **demonstrating the potential of policy solutions**, it is possible to promote broader recognition and better equip all young people with the well-being, skills, capabilities and knowledges required to thrive in the 21st century.*

First, Connecting Practice to Evidence endeavoured to **convene supporters** (including educators, young people, youth-serving organisations, representatives from government and representatives from industry) in a variety of activities, including two We Are More (WAM) events and a series of expert panels that involved leaders from departments of education, governmental agencies, universities, admissions centers and select nonprofit organisations. LCAust further supported this work by engaging the public through social media outreach.

Second, LCAust endeavoured to **curate evidence** through the Power of Recognising More, an action research project, and by authoring and disseminating reports on their work and related topics. LCAust designed the Power of Recognising More to identify potential benefits for young people that might emerge from programmes of broader recognition. Additionally, the project aimed to identify the enabling factors and barriers to such programme implementation for schools, the community and the learning system at large.

Finally, LCAust endeavoured to **demonstrate solutions** through iterative cycles of research and development (known as *workstreams*). These workstreams either continued the development of select Phase I prototypes or emerged from local initiatives that were aligned with LCAust's mission. The goal of developing these specific workstreams was to contribute data to the action research project and to identify enabling factors and barriers to systemic adoption of broader recognition approaches and demonstrate potential positive effects on the lives of young people facing disadvantages. By advancing work in these three areas, LCAust aimed to gain broader support for transforming the learning system to one that improves access to tertiary education or employment opportunities for young people.

Aims and Methods of the Evaluation

Five research questions (see Table 1.1) aligned with the conceptual model in Figure 1.1 guided our evaluation. To address these research questions, we used a multiple-methods approach that included interviews, a literature review, bibliometric and sociometric analysis, and document review. Data collection took place between 2023 and 2025.

Table 1.1. Guiding Research Questions for This Evaluation

Focal Areas	Research Questions
Convene supporters	• How has LCAust, as an intermediary, convened stakeholders to pursue their goal of systems change?
Curate evidence	• How has LCAust contributed to and communicated evidence supporting broader recognition of learning? • To what extent have LCAust reports been referenced and cited in academic and grey literature and media sources?
Demonstrate solutions	• How did LCAust support implementation of the workstreams? • To what extent did the workstreams generate evidence of effects?

A more detailed description of our methods, including details on our interview sample and analysis approach, our bibliometric and sociometric methods, and our approach to the literature review is available in the appendix.

Limitations

Over the course of the Connecting Practice to Evidence implementation, several aspects changed and evolved from their original conceptualisation that presented challenges for tracking and monitoring the successes and limitations of the work. For example, as opportunities arose, LCAust engaged with new policy leaders and innovators. LCAust also adjusted the structure and focus areas of action research cycles to respond to capacity and areas of need. Workstream participants adjusted timelines, samples and activities to adapt to implementation challenges. Although such changes are, on the one hand, the desired result of a positive and productive formative evaluation, they also complicate the summative aspects of our evaluation. In particular, we intended to characterise whether the four workstreams had positive effects for young people, secondary schools, tertiary admissions staff and employers; however, none of the workstreams were implemented fully during the time frame of this evaluation, and those that were implemented were not at a scale that was conducive to a quantitatively focused impact analysis.

A second limitation is that we interviewed a relatively small, nonrandom group of Social Lab participants and individuals from the larger ecosystem. The data collected from these interviews therefore may not represent the views of all the individuals engaged in work with LCAust. Finally, the design of this study allowed us to conduct in-depth fieldwork with participants in the workstreams, policy-convening activities and action research. However, it limited our ability to attend to negative cases. We were limited in our ability, for example, to interact with more-sceptical members of the communities that LCAust engaged (although we did include a few subsets of uninvolved observers). Our understanding of the strengths and accomplishments of LCAust and Connecting Practice to Evidence would be increased by searching for and analysing disconfirming evidence and negative cases (Patton, 2015).

Finally, although not a limitation, we remind the reader that this evaluation focuses on aspects of implementation. It was not feasible to collect evidence of LCAust's influence on policy and practice during the evaluation period for a variety of reasons, including the evaluation time frame and lack of access to outcome data and relevant benchmarks. Therefore, readers should interpret the findings we present here as evidence of the extent to which LCAust was successful (or not) in implementing activities that aligned with its conceptual model and *not* as evidence of the extent to

which LCAust was successful (or not) at catalysing systems change. This latter interpretation requires data on actualised outcomes (as well as data on benchmarks or counterfactual outcomes), which were not available. As implementation stabilises and such data become available, stakeholders should commission a summative evaluation to better understand the extent to which LCAust was successful in achieving its goals for effecting systems change.

Organisation of This Report

We organised the remainder of this report into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides background on the state of the evidence base supporting the notion that broadening recognition of learning improves tertiary outcomes (transition to tertiary outcomes and better employment outcomes) for young people. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 focus on the three main focal areas for LCAust's Connecting Evidence to Practice work. In each of these chapters, we provide a description of the specific activities associated with that focal area, a brief description of the methods and a reminder of the relevant research questions, and our analysis of the evidence we gathered that speaks to these research questions. Finally, Chapter 6 provides our reflections on key issues and challenges and our recommendations for LCAust going forward.

Chapter 2

Approaches to Broader Recognition

This chapter provides context on the global literature surrounding approaches to broader recognition of learning, recognition of prior learning (RPL) and experiential learning. As defined in Chapter 1, broader recognition of learning describes programmes or policies that acknowledge and validate skills, knowledge and dispositions beyond the academic and vocational skills traditionally taught in primary and secondary schools. These include a variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and such competencies as creativity, critical thinking, self-efficacy and empathy. Additionally, approaches that broaden recognition of learning often aim to legitimise the lived experiences of individuals by acknowledging and validating learning that occurs in both formal and informal spaces (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2015; Werquin, 2010).

In Australia, the Council of Australian Governments Education Council released the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration in 2019. Building on past work (see Australian Education Council, 1989; MCEETYA, 1999; MCEETYA, 2008), the declaration articulates two education goals: high standards for academic excellence and a recognition that such skills as critical and creative thinking, self-management, resilience, digital literacy and collaboration are essential for helping all young Australians become 'confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community' (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019, p. 1). The declaration also aims to promote greater equity in educational access and opportunity by supporting historically underserved students at risk of educational disadvantage, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019).

Regarding the declaration's goal of a broader recognition of learning, there is a growing global consensus that, as labour markets change and global economies become increasingly interconnected, success in young adulthood and beyond requires other skills above those traditionally addressed in formal academic and vocational settings (OECD, 2018a). These other skills, including those mentioned above, are often broadly categorised as '21st-century skills' (Nagaoka et al., 2015; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007; Saavedra and Opfer, 2012).

Regarding the declaration's goal of promoting greater equity in educational access and opportunity by supporting historically underserved students at risk of educational disadvantage, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that traditional approaches to university admissions and accreditation may reinforce opportunity gaps. In Australia, ATAR remains the primary mechanism for tertiary education selection and senior secondary certification. On one hand, research has shown that ATAR is a good predictor of first-year university performance (Dobson and Skuja, 2005; James, Krause and Jennings, 2010) and persistence (Coates and Ransom, 2011; Norton, Cherastidtham and Mackey, 2018; McMillan, 2005). On the other hand, research also suggests that reliance on such systems may inhibit progress towards a goal of creating greater equity in access and opportunity (James, Bexley and Shearer, 2009; Norton, Cherastidtham and

Mackey, 2018). According to one researcher, as long as the ATAR is the preferred selection method for universities, the university system is 'unlikely to ever achieve a student mix that reflects Australia's population' (Blyth, 2014, p. 269).

In general, there is little experimental or quasi-experimental evidence supporting the promise of programmes or policies that broaden recognition of learning. Drawing on our review,[3] we find that most of the global literature on broader recognition consists of either position papers, in which the authors use mainly theoretical evidence to try to persuade readers about the merits of broader recognition (e.g. Pilcher and Torii, 2018; Zahner, Dawber and Rotholz, 2022; Holdsworth, 2020), or case studies, which rely primarily on qualitative methods to describe specific programmes set in specific contexts (e.g. Dodd, Ellis and Singh, 2023, Werquin, 2010). A small number of studies leverage correlational evidence to demonstrate associations between a specific programme or policy and a particular outcome.

In the remainder of this chapter, we review the literature on broader recognition programmes and policies. Our review highlights the lack of high-quality, causally credible evidence testing the claim that policies and programmes aimed at broadening recognition of learning can and will yield positive individual and societal effects.[4]

Literature Related to Broadening Recognition Focuses on University Access and Programmes That Recognise Prior Learning

The literature we surfaced in our review focuses largely on broadening university access by improving recognition of learning or by building transitional pathways that support underserviced students. Many of these reports offer appraisals of Australia's senior secondary education system, including descriptions of progress on curricular reform, as well as both national and subnational efforts to improve outcomes for youth (Salter and Maxwell, 2016; Global Access Partners, 2019; Behrendt, Barber and Graham, 2019; Masters, 2020; Duignan, 2020). Other reports describe local efforts to develop programmes that support successful transitions from senior secondary education to university. For example, Olds et al. (2022) studied a programme at a single school-based enabling programme at an Australian university and intended to provide evidence of the potential positive effects that such a programme may have on tertiary participation, particularly among underserviced cohorts.

Other reports focus specifically on the importance of RPL in university settings (McCready, 2020; Dodd, Ellis and Singh, 2023; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2021; Aggarwal, 2015). For example, Dodd, Ellis and Singh (2023) describe a specific programme that focuses on nontraditional indicators of attainment with the goal of helping young people access and successfully transition from secondary school to university. McCready (2020) interviewed students and staff at higher education institutions throughout the United Kingdom to describe barriers that inhibit greater take-up of programmes that offer accreditation for prior experiential learning. Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2021) used a scan of public records to

[3] For a full discussion of our approach to the literature review, see the appendix.

[4] The description of broader recognition in the Australian policy context presented in this section is drawn from a previous RAND report (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022, pp. 1–3), with minor adjustments.

provide an overview of how institutions approached and implemented RPL programmes and policies globally.

Little Causal Evidence Exists on How Policies and Programmes Aimed at Broadening Recognition Affect Young People's Transition to University or Work

None of the studies we reviewed employed an experimental or quasi-experimental design that would support strong causal claims about the effects of efforts to broaden recognition,[5] and those that leverage correlational evidence showed mixed success. Some research shows that ATAR-alternative students performed comparably to students who followed an ATAR path (Olds et al., 2022; Walker et al., 2025). However, other research shows that ATAR-alternative students are more likely to drop out, particularly in their first year (Joseph, 2023; Koshy and Seymour, 2015; Norton et al., 2018). Other studies used quantitative methods to summarize awareness and adoption of ATAR-alternatives for tertiary admissions (Jackson, Lee and Carroll, 2023; O'Connell et al., 2022). Although O'Connell et al. (2022) found that awareness of non-ATAR pathways was limited, Jackson, Li and Carroll, (2023) found that engagement in pathways to higher education that do not rely on the ATAR system have increased, particularly among underrepresented groups.

Other studies focus on vocational education and training (VET), experiential learning and the use of digital badges as an alternative way to recognize student learning. Ranasinghe et al. (2019) found that VET had positive associations with employment by age 25. In a report commissioned by Australia's Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Joyce (2019) found that employment outcomes for VET students were generally positive and that students were generally satisfied with their training experiences, although satisfaction among employers has generally decreased. North et al. (2023) focused on experiential learning opportunities that were embedded in one university's health profession programmes, but they did not find any significant associations with these opportunities and student outcomes. Sullivan et al. (2023) focused on experiential learning opportunities in an undergraduate animal science course at a single university in the United States. That study also found no associations with student outcomes, including sense of belonging. Fanfarelli and McDaniel (2017) found a positive association between the number of digital badges earned and course performance.

Studies Employing Qualitative Evidence Speak to the Promise of Efforts to Broaden Recognition and Improve Outcomes for Young Adults

Although quantitative evidence that speaks to the promise of efforts to broaden recognition and improve outcomes for young adults is scarce, several notable case studies employ qualitative or research synthesis methods to evaluate policies and programmes.

[5] We did identify a small number of studies that used experimental or quasi-experimental methods, but these studies focused primarily on experimental manipulations of specific programme features (e.g. Paeßens, Ma and Winther, 2023) rather than manipulations of programmes or policies.

Using a multiple case-study methodology, Smith (2004) interviewed personnel involved with RPL at eight registered private training providers across Australia. Smith analysed each of the eight case studies and identified themes concerning the effective implementation and use of RPL. Smith reported two specific benefits of RPL. First, RPL could assist with student career planning by helping students understand their strengths, weaknesses and interests. Stakeholders perceived this as helping students map appropriate careers and strategize appropriate pathways for attaining their goals. Second, interviewed stakeholders observed that students experienced significant boosts to confidence because, through the RPL process, students often realized how much they know and how much they can already do. Stakeholders perceived this as building feelings of self-efficacy, which may ultimately be associated with individuals engaging in qualification or training programmes they otherwise might not have attempted.

Werquin (2010) summarizes education policies that aim to recognise prior learning in 22 OECD countries, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ireland and the United Kingdom. The report describes the major features of recognition of prior learning policies, highlighting key areas of commonality of the RPL-focused policy efforts in each of these countries, and provides policymakers with recommendations for best practices. The report synthesizes evidence of the benefits of RPL policies and programmes, including economic, educational and social benefits. Werquin also highlights two other important benefits that have emerged from research on RPL policies in these sixteen countries. First, RPL is a strengths-based approach that validates the experience and knowledge of individuals improving self-efficacy and self-esteem. Second, RPL can improve equity by growing access to further education and the labour market for disadvantaged groups that may not be thriving in traditional formal learning environments. Werquin also found that, despite evidence of a variety of benefits, many RPL practices are small-scale and face challenges with sustainability.

The U@Uni programme is designed to integrate key elements of widening participation, alternate entry and enabling schemes. It focuses on nontraditional indicators of learning and attainment to help young people prepare for access and transition from secondary to tertiary education. The U@Uni programme works with 300 high school students from partner high schools in southwestern Sydney. After employing a survey of more than 200 U@Uni participants, Dodd, Ellis and Singh (2023) found that young people who participated in U@Uni experienced improved self-confidence, belonging, well-being and citizenship. The authors concluded that programmes similar to U@Uni can empower underrepresented learners (including students experiencing poverty) to recognise and value their own learning successes.

Chapter 3

Convening Supporters

This chapter describes LCAust's work to **convene supporters** to engage government and build a diverse alliance of reform-minded individuals with a shared sense of purpose and a common language for influencing policy discourse. LCAust aimed to engage a variety of partners in convening activities and other education and learning forums, including educators, young people, youth-serving organisations, representatives from government and representatives from industry. This work to convene supporters largely took place through two key strategic activities (described below): the WAM events and expert panels. LCAust also engaged the media to broaden awareness of their efforts to facilitate systems change.

Through semistructured interviews, a document review and a social media analysis,[6] we sought to understand the progress LCAust made in establishing itself as an intermediary and the extent to which each of its strategic activities supported building a broad coalition that was positioned to potentially influence policy discussions.

We find that, in its primary convening activities (i.e. WAM, expert panels, national events), LCAust brought together a variety of stakeholders. In expert panels, LCAust regularly engaged high-level policy leaders, while WAM events supported direct interaction between young people and educational leaders, and national events brought together actors from across sectors. Although participants broadly regarded the quality of engagement as a strength, some participants noted that these events mainly involved those who already supported the goal of broader recognition rather than individuals with differing perspectives. Although social media engagement is not a leading strategy for LCAust, the organisation uses social media to support its other work, primarily through LinkedIn. Accordingly, we find growing engagement with LCAust's LinkedIn activity in recent years, although overall engagement with other media outlets remained static. On the whole, these findings demonstrate that catalysing organizations may face trade-offs in cultivating strong relationships with reliable advocates compared with engaging a wide web of stakeholders.

LCAust Used a Multifaceted Approach and Deeply Engaged a Variety of Stakeholders to Pursue Its Goals of Systems Change

We consistently heard about two key strengths of LCAust that set it apart in the broader education ecosystem in Australia. First, respondents discussed LCAust's focus on changing systems to better serve disadvantaged young people and its role in influencing the system from the outside, which respondents described as unique or uncommon. They discussed the importance of LCAust's understanding of the complexity of the system and approach to change. As one respondent summarized, 'We saw very clear sophistication of [its] programme logic and . . . that [it] understood that this was complex work and that [it was] looking at systems change.'

[6] See the appendix for additional methods details.

Respondents referred to LCAust's role as 'trusted provocateurs', as 'disruptors . . . in a way that's not critical [of actors/leaders of the system]', and as 'collaborators'. In fact, a few respondents suggested that LCAust did a good job of demonstrating its perspective on systems change in the way it worked with stakeholders. In the words of one respondent,

> The way that [LCAust] operate[s] demonstrates the way that systems should work. It's kind of like 'the medium is the message' in a way. [Its] ways of working show[s] people how the system could change through the experience that [it] provide[s], which is a really powerful experiential way for people to see that, if we work in these kinds of ways, then we can effect change.

Another respondent articulated this approach to influencing many actors and organisations that interact (and create) the system towards a singular goal:

> I think it's the fact that [LCAust] use[s] multiple streams to litigate this. [LCAust has] got a very clear remit about what [its] outcome is, but [its] not using one method to, I suppose, put the argument forward or have the debate. I know that [LCAust] will have one-on-one conversations with heads of education departments, with ministers, [and will] work with stakeholders like unions. [It] will convene through conferences, young people, or states and territories or employers. So, what I think works well is [LCAust is] very aware that there's just not one size fits all in terms of engaging stakeholders and the broader community in the conversation. But the one thing [LCAust] do[es] hold at the center is that what we are doing is not working for young people. So, we've got to do something different.

Second, respondents indicated that LCAust was unique in its ability to deeply engage a variety of stakeholders—in particular, young people, First Nations communities and influential government leaders—in conversation. LCAust developed consistent structures to engage young people throughout its work. It did so primarily through hiring and training young associates—school-aged and university students—to serve as coresearchers, codesigners and coleaders of various aspects of their work, such as the WAM convenings, Youth Cycle of the action research, and specific workstream tasks. LCAust helped to develop the capabilities of these associates in such skills as research, meetings facilitation, project management and additional soft skills. In contrast to typical internship roles, young associates took on a leadership role in the work, such as by leading research projects, identifying new communication opportunities (such as podcasts), and designing publication visuals. As one young associate shared,

> [I appreciate LCAust's] willingness and openness to working with young people—so the fact that [it] even employ[s] us and [uses its] time and energy and money and resources to train us up in the necessary skills so that we truly feel like we're part of the change—that is very different to every other organisation.

Participants observed young people engaging across all LCAust's activities, from the workstreams to the expert panel. As one respondent shared,

> The other significant thing that sets [LCAust] apart from everyone else was [its] close association with the young people and [its] employment of young associates, which is very clear in [its] ethos and in every way [LCAust employees] conducted themselves around truly valuing the voice of young people, both as stakeholders but as participants in the process and then, of course, also as leaders in the process.

Also apparent across the work of LCAust was a focus on promoting First Nations self-determination and leadership. By developing strong relationships with the National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition (NIYEC) and several First Nations academics and youth policy leaders, LCAust was able to hold the rights and needs of First Nations young people at the forefront of its work while ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Straights Islander leaders, in consultation with community, led the work. This focus was evident even outside of work specifically focused on First Nations youth. One expert panel respondent shared,

> I feel like [LCAust has] a sense of equity in terms of inclusiveness within education, but also inclusiveness extends to First Nations people. So that's really why I find [it] very open and friendly and community-led.

Finally, respondents praised LCAust's strong network of influential government leaders and innovators and the ways in which LCAust helped to bridge sectors, departments, industries and levels of the system. As one expert panel respondent shared, this kind of engagement helped to 'open doors' for potential action. Another respondent provided an example of hearing one senior leader share something they had learned in a LCAust event in another venue:

> I think it was also really great for the partners that we work with, who are all innovative thinkers in their own spaces, who see [and] recognise here community because they're working with people who believe in the same things in the same space. So, they were also exchanging ideas. Literally yesterday, I was in a webinar with somebody who wouldn't have known that I was there, but he was an attendee at this event, and he made reference to how at a recent Learning Creates event we talked about a need for governance, like people in authority to willingly lead and transfer power to communities for greater ownership. So, it was great to see, I think, personally, [that] the individual participants also were able to take some of these ideas and momentum back to whatever [in] their own work.

On the whole, respondents praised LCAust's role in meaningfully engaging a broad variety of policymakers, innovators, young people and the First Nations community, with the aim of bridging gaps and pursuing systems change. One respondent summarized this integrative role with a powerful simile:

> It's kind of like if you get that visual of . . . when mud is dried out, there's all the cracks. Learning Creates can be a little like the water that brings it back together a little bit. . . . Water filling in the cracks.

WAM Events

Beginning in August 2023 with a learning event in Adelaide that convened more than 150 stakeholders, including young people, educators, policymakers and community members from across Australia, LCAust initiated the WAM convenings to explore learning and assessment in Australia. Co-led by young people, the focus of the WAM convenings is on recognizing the diverse skills and capabilities that young people develop both inside and outside traditional classrooms, and on codesigning new approaches to credentialing and assessment that better reflect the full breadth of learners' strengths.

A second WAM event took place in Hobart in May 2024. Nearly 170 stakeholders attended, representing all states and territories in Australia. Each of these events consisted of full-day programming that provided opportunities for participants to hear from policy leaders, innovators

and young people and engage in systems mapping and systems-change thinking and planning activities. Activities varied from large group presentations to small group activities and table discussion to actively engage participants in thinking about systems change. LCAust engaged the media in conjunction with these events, including through radio and podcast interviews and local newspaper coverage.

WAM Events Helped to Consolidate a National Network of Actors Invested in Broader Recognition and Elevated Youth Voices in Policy Spaces

Analysis of data collected from our interviews revealed four key outputs associated with the WAM events. First, respondents recognised that the events brought together a broad and diverse ecosystem of stakeholders, including young people. Respondents viewed this diversity of voices as essential to advancing the national conversation on broader recognition of young people's capabilities. For instance, one participant shared,

> [T]he We Are More in Melbourne had vice chancellors from universities. It had secretaries of education present. It had ministers of education present, it had school principals. It had students. The full strata of people required to make change were in the room. So, I think [LCAust must have] got significant influence.

Second, participants emphasized the convenings' role in elevating youth voice and agency. Young people were not only present but often led discussions, shared personal experiences and engaged directly with system leaders, contributing to a notable shift in the tone of policy dialogue. For example, one participant observed, '[H]aving young people lead the conversation and then the others respond created a new balance of power and dynamics.'

Another described their own role as

> [K]ind of, I guess, to be a bridge between the organisation and young people. As young people ourselves, we can offer our own perspectives but also connect with other young people to find accurate information on what young people want and need.

Third, the events created an arena for sharing evidence, promising practices and lessons learned across jurisdictions and sectors. Attendees highlighted the opportunity to surface innovations and compare approaches across local and national contexts.

Finally, participants reported that WAM events helped foster a shared sense of purpose among those involved in educational reform. By connecting individual stories to broader systems change efforts, the convenings helped participants feel that they were unified around common goals and that there were opportunities for cross-sector collaboration beyond the events themselves. As one participant explained,

> I think they've helped us build some really strong relationships and helped demonstrate a lot of the system interventions that we believe in and talk about. I think they also help showcase how you can hold those broader principles tightly but then look at place and locate things in place as well. So, I think they've helped us do that well. I think they've helped us showcase what our role can be as a convener and catalyst.

Respondents Identified Challenges and Opportunities for Growth in Terms of WAM's Target Audience, Focus and Connection to Action

We also identified further opportunities and challenges for the WAM events. First, several participants raised concerns about whether the events included the right mix of attendees. They noted the underrepresentation of industry stakeholders and community members with divergent voices, which may have limited opportunities to expand the movement beyond education-focused actors. For instance, an interviewee mentioned,

> There is a little bit of preaching to the choir if you want to put it that way. I do tend to see the same people. I tend to see the same people that I see at other events as well. I'm not sure there's a lot of divergent opinion.

Second, some attendees described some sessions as fragmented, with multiple breakout discussions running in parallel and limited efforts to synthesize insights across groups. For instance, a participant shared the following:

> That session, that workshop, was quite fragmented. There was sort of 15 groups looking at individual bits that interested them. . . . But I don't know, it just sort of raises the question of is that enough?

Finally, participants consistently highlighted a gap between the inspiration the events generated and the mechanisms available to convert that energy into concrete action. Although the convenings sparked enthusiasm and affirmed shared values, attendees perceived little clarity on follow-up steps, ongoing collaboration or policy pathways to move ideas forward. As one participant noted,

> The big question for us now is probably where those go next, in the next phase of work and how that kind of movement moves forward.

As well, another participant said,

> I think the challenge is sort of the conversion into action. And I guess what's not visible to me is how much follow-up there is. So, what's happening on the ground, what interactions are there with individual education systems, how [has] that sort of school-level work . . . been tracked and brought back into the policy discussion?

Expert Panels

Starting in 2022, LCAust created an expert group of influential policy leaders, with the objective of advancing a shared ambition:

> By 2030, Australia has a single, unified national qualification approach for senior secondary school that will provide every school leaver with a trusted, useful, official representation of their levels of attainment across a broad range of learning (LCAust, 2024).

LCAust asked participants to join a one-hour meeting about every eight weeks. These meetings often featured guest speakers, who provided insight on a particular element of broader recognition, followed by discussion. Through this group, LCAust expected participants to share what they had learned and champion related policy efforts in their spheres of influence, offer advice and

collaborate with other group members of new policy initiatives, and provide input into LCAust-led policy documents related to broader recognition.

Led by key LCAust staff, the expert panel involved about 25 key leaders at the chief executive, executive director, secretary and director levels from state and territory departments of education, governmental agencies, universities, admissions centers and select nonprofit organisations. Average attendance at meetings was about 60 per cent.

LCAust Convened Expert Panellists Broadly Seen as Well-Respected, Influential Policy Leaders

As one panellist shared, 'I've been really impressed with the people who've been involved, the diversity of people—but they're all very credible'. Participants also viewed the breadth of specializations across these leaders as a strength of the panel membership. One participant explained the importance of this integration:

> I do see it as an endeavour to break away those somewhat artificial wars between school and tertiary [education], between VET and higher education, between states, between state and federal government.

Respondents who participated in the expert panels were generally very positive about the potential of the group and the usefulness of information shared and discussed in the group.

Echoing feedback on the WAM convenings, a few respondents identified that they would like to see LCAust and its expert group translate the credibility and power of its participants into action to pursue larger-scale policy efforts. In the words of one such respondent,

> [LCAust] built the social capital and the partnerships and connections and so on, across many years, to now being in a place where [it] can really influence at the federal and state level around education. I feel like [LCAust has] got the impetus now to be able to pick up some of the programmes . . . and be able to then get behind those and . . . push them out as beyond just pilots, but as kind of phases of a broader recognition that . . . have efficacy, proven efficacy, but can then actually be scaled.

LCAust Could Improve the Value of Panels by Engaging More Experts with Critical Perspectives and Mid-Level Managers

Of note, respondents identified two areas in which they would like to see expansion of the expert group's work together. First, respondents from the expert group stated that the participants were primarily already supportive of LCAust's goals. One respondent noted that the group 'suffer[ed] from the usual suspects problem', with few new faces or dissenting perspectives. Another respondent shared that, because of the composition of the group,

> [the expert panel is] not really grappling with the barriers, and you'd almost want some provocation again used a bit differently of people who were talking about the difficulties or kind of why this won't work and so on.

Another issue that arose was a perception that the expert group engaged very senior officials but did not engage mid-level managers or government staffers who might be well-positioned to consider implementation and move this kind of policy work forward. One respondent shared,

> There's a kind of missing middle here that we have youth voice and engaging youth and then a demographic of quite senior people, but maybe a number who are on the downward slope of their career, which is fine. But . . . is there some sort of missing middle [in] there of maybe emerging leaders or people who are just coming into those influential positions? Again, principals? Or deputy secretaries at the government level? Or maybe even some younger academics in the field?

National Convenings

In addition to these regular expert panel sessions, LCAust also hosted events with a more national audience: a two-day national gathering of a broader group of education innovators, policymakers and young people in conversation about making change and a Learning Council small group convening of senior policymakers and industry leaders. In the national gathering sessions, the participants worked together on designing potential projects in LCAust's five key action areas: broader recognition of learning success, relationship between learning and well-being, future of the teaching profession, digital transformation of the learning experience, and power-sharing and power-shifting with people and places (LCAust, 2024). For example, after demonstrating how these areas might represent in (and might overlap as they manifest as) 'seriously transformational actionable realities', participants worked in small groups on what was referred to as a 'starshot' project to make change in these areas. This involved ideating on the project trajectory, including its context and potential constraining and enabling conditions, project design, and start-up requirements, resources and personnel.

In this national gathering, participants appreciated the broader engagement of leaders from a variety of youth-supporting organisations across multiple sectors. In the words of one participant,

> [LCAust] look[s] very broadly rather than just within the vertical of school. [It] look[s] into how schooling and education [connect] with health and with industry and with community. And so, I see [LCAust] as kind of a connector and a partnership broker, essentially, between those different parts of society, which then means that [LCAust is] able to . . . have a much more meta view of what's happening.

Another participant noted the importance of working together across sectors:

> I think people have very much a shared intent, in terms of driving better outcomes for Australia and particularly with young people. . . . So, my observation is you've got people coming at this from a health background who are saying, unless you work on people's well-being and health, then they're not ready to do learning. . . . Then clearly, you've got people who are working very closely with marginalized populations, whether they're Indigenous and they're dialing in remotely from the Northern Territory, or people who are working every day, [such as] the guy from the Salvation Army or other areas like that [that] are very much in touch with people. Then you've got academics and then you've got leaders of schools and then leaders of business. . . . I think that's what's fantastic is that you are convening this broad ecosystem where there's many players. [LCAust's] team [has] done well to convene a real range of perspectives.

Submissions to Policy Reviews

Informed by their discussions with leaders and experts in the expert panels, national gathering and Learning Council, LCAust submitted proposals to parliamentary inquiries seeking public input on senior secondary and tertiary education. LCAust submitted proposals to the *Independent Review of Education in Tasmania* (2024), Western Australia's Pathways to Post-Secondary Success Review (2024), Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (2023), National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024), Australian Universities Accord (2023), Development in Higher Education Admissions Discussion Paper (2023) and the National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters (2023). LCAust was specifically mentioned and cited several times in three of these final reports: seven mentions in the Western Australia's *Pathways to Post-Secondary Success Review* (Government of Western Australia, 2024), nine mentions in *Independent Review of Education in Tasmania* (Tasmanian Government, 2024) and three mentions in the *National Trend of School Refusal and Related Matters* (Commonwealth of Australia Senate Education and Employment References Committee, 2023).

Media Engagement and Outreach

LCAust used social media as a supplementary activity to promote awareness for the systems change work that it supports. For example, LCAust promoted the WAM podcasts, which emerged from the Hobart WAM event, through social media platforms, including Instagram, X, Facebook and LinkedIn. LCAust posted photographs and event summaries from the WAM events to social media and engaged with traditional print media outlets.

We conducted a social media analysis using the social media analysis tool Brandwatch to document and describe the extent to which LCAust was mentioned or its work was shared. Although we cannot assess the extent to which LCAust's media engagement strategy shaped national conversation or influenced the development of support for systems change, we are able to describe trends in engagement with LCAust through public social media. We consider these analyses as important preliminary information about the extent to which LCAust's work in this area might be positioned to influence public sentiment on the topic of broader recognition. Specifically, we quantified the number of posts that mentioned LCAust as an organisation (as well as key staff members, reports and authors) and analysed posts related to LCAust's work.[7] Because Brandwatch does not track data from LinkedIn, we used LinkedIn to monitor activity on LCAust's public LinkedIn profile.

Engagement with LCAust Through Most Public Social Media Accounts Is Modest and Has Stagnated Since 2023

We identified 131 social media posts made by 61 unique authors mentioning LCAust from January 2021 to June 2025.[8] Figure 3.1 displays the trends in both the number of social media

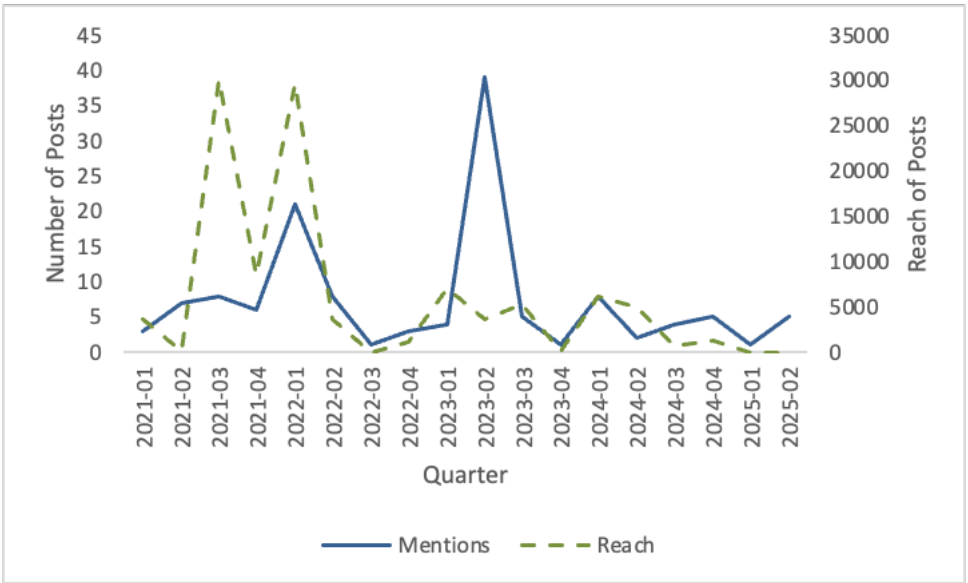
[7] In 2022, Ember Advisors conducted a sentiment analysis for LCAust that found growing interest in a variety of topics aligned with LCAust's mission, including educational assessment, greater frustration with ATAR and increasing exploration of postschool pathways that do not use ATAR. The focus of our social media analysis differs from this prior analysis in that it is specific to the organisational reach of LCAust rather than its mission more broadly.

[8] Brandwatch captures posts from public Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, Threads, Bluesky, Reddit and Tumblr accounts, as well as public blogs and some news outlets. See the appendix for more details.

posts mentioning LCAust (mentions; blue solid line) and the number of unique people who see these posts (reach; green dashed line). We grouped these counts by calendar-year quarter. Peaks in posts mentioning LCAust occurred in the first quarter of 2022 and the second quarter of 2023, and reach was highest from July 2021 to April 2022. During this time, *The Guardian* published an article on alternatives to the ATAR and cited LCAust's work (Black, 2021), reaching nearly 5,000 people. Furthermore, LCAust partnered in releasing multiple new reports, including a commissioned collection of case studies discussing testing (Milligan et al., 2021) and RAND's first report on LCAust's Learner's Journey Social Lab (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022).

Since the end of 2023, both LCAust mentions and reach have remained low relative to earlier periods. This is consistent with an organisational shift to use LinkedIn as a main channel for social media activity. However, social media posts mentioning LCAust often include language aligned with LCAust's mission, including advocating for educational reform, redefining success in education, broadening learning recognition, exploring innovative education models and supporting student transition and development.

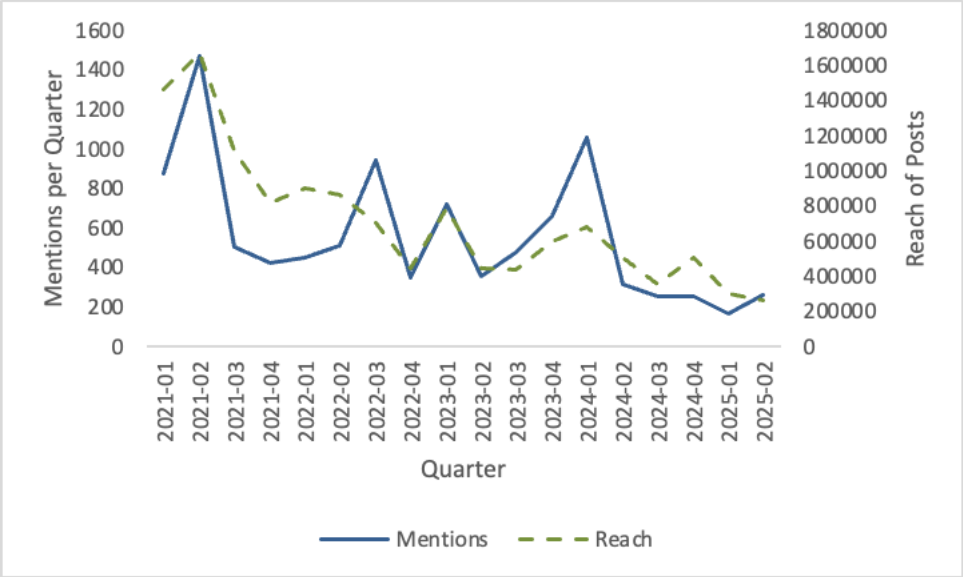
Figure 3.1. LCAust Social Media Mentions and Reach, 2021–2025



NOTE: Using Brandwatch, we calculated the number of posts mentioning LCAust and the number of people who were expected to view or engage with those mentions.

An additional search of key LCAust stakeholders, including their executive team and report authors, added more than 10,000 posts in relevant topics, such as redefining the purpose of education, bottom-up education reform, transformative shifts in educational paradigms and preparing education for artificial intelligence (AI) (Figure 3.2). Although mentions and reach have generally decreased between 2021 and 2025, posts in 2025 have still reached more than 200,000 people.

Figure 3.2. LCAust Stakeholders' Mentions and Reach, 2021–2025

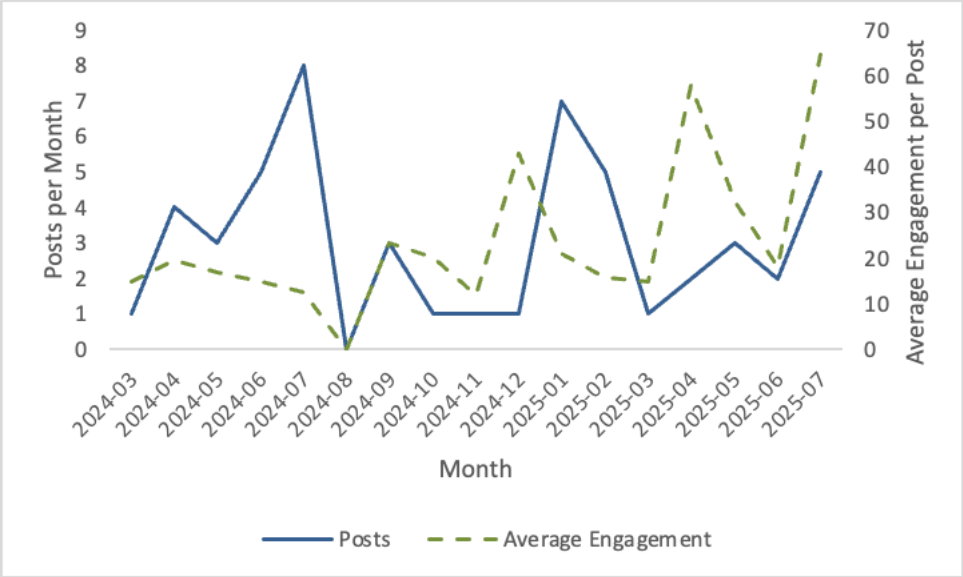


NOTE: Using Brandwatch, we calculated the number of posts mentioning LCAust administrative staff or report authors and the number of people who were expected to view or engage with those mentions.

LinkedIn Engagement with LCAust Has Increased Steadily over Time

Over time, LCAust has shifted its social media strategy to focus on using LinkedIn as the main channel for social media engagement. LinkedIn is not captured on Brandwatch as a social media platform. As of July 2025, the LinkedIn page has more than more than 2,500 LinkedIn followers, and post engagement is increasing (Figure 3.3). In July 2024, LCAust posts had an average of 9 likes and 4 reposts; in July 2025, engagement had an average of 51 likes and 11 reposts. Much of this engagement occurs with report releases and short videos from experts. For example, LCAust's *Whole Learner Research Report*, released in January 2025, garnered nearly 50 likes and 15 reposts. Videos from Martin Westwell, the chief executive of the Department for Education in South Australia, and Professor Sharon Goldfeld, the director of the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital, received 30 reposts and more than 150 likes.

Figure 3.3. LCAust LinkedIn Engagement, 2024–2025



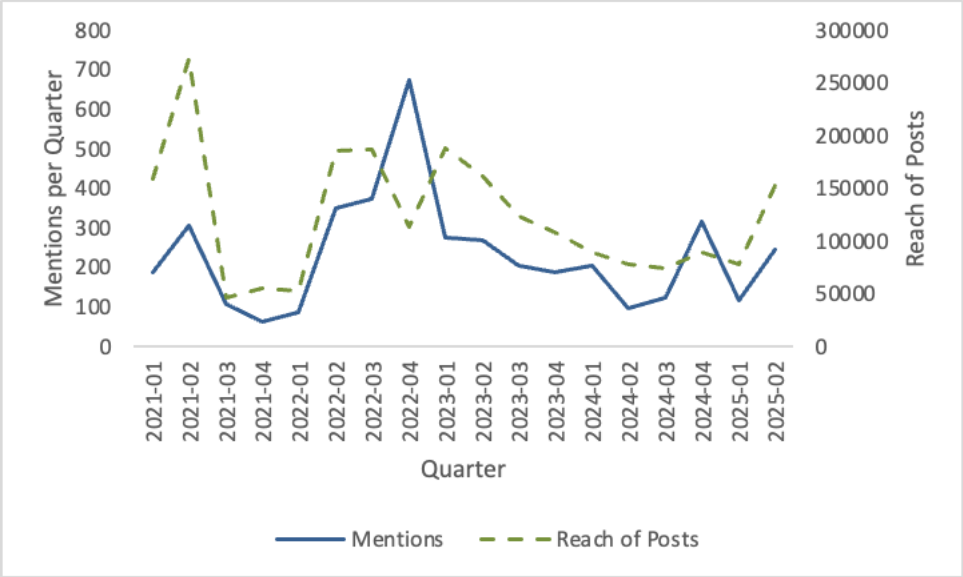
NOTE: We calculated the engagement from LCAust's public LinkedIn page (LinkedIn, undated). *Posts* are defined as original content posted by LCAust, which does not include reposting of individuals' or organisations' content on LCAust's LinkedIn page. *Average Engagement per Post* is the average number of likes, comments and reposts for LCAust's posts per month.

LCAust's Mission Aligns with Popular Topics That Have Broad Public Support

We tracked social media engagement in topics related to LCAust's mission. Using the LCAust website, we created a list of common themes, focusing on two in particular: a commitment to transformative educational reform and a commitment to First Nations self-determination. We chose these themes because of their particularly strong alignment to LCAust's mission and focus and workshopped them with members of LCAust's executive team. The purpose of this analysis was not to attribute this broad public support to LCAust's influence but rather to situate LCAust's work in the broader public policy context. Understanding public interest in topics that are core to LCAust's mission helps the organisation adjust dissemination and improve public engagement.

Between January 2021 and June 2025, nearly 4,000 social media posts across platforms discussed transformative education in Australia (Figure 3.4). Posts reached an estimated average of 120,000 people per quarter and discussed such topics as reforming educational systems to ensure equitable access to quality education, education as a catalyst for social change and economic development, and digital transformation in education.

Figure 3.4. Transformative Education Mentions and Reach, 2021–2025

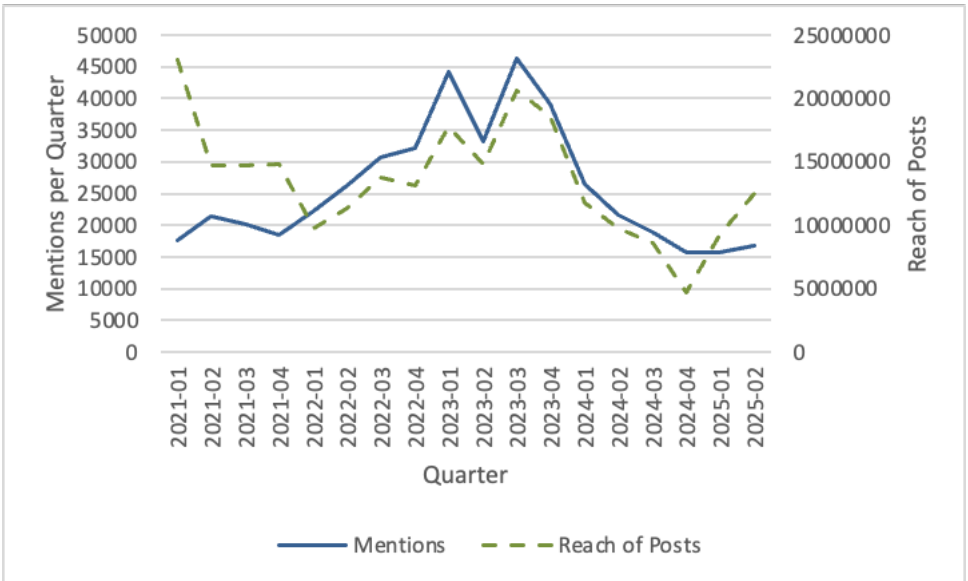


NOTE: Using Brandwatch, we calculated the number of posts discussing transformative education in Australia and the number of people who were expected to view or engage with those mentions.

First Nations education was even more popular in this period; more than 450,000 posts from 72,000 authors mentioned First Nations, Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander education in Australia, reaching more than five million people each month (Figure 3.5).

This engagement peaked in the third quarter of 2023, in which more than 45,000 posts reached more than 22 million people. Conversation topics included recognition of rights, the closing of education gaps, culturally relevant curricula, engagement with history and reconciliation, cultural heritage and identity, and environmental stewardship.

Figure 3.5. First Nations Education Mentions and Reach, 2021–2025



NOTE: Using Brandwatch, we calculated the number of posts discussing First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander education in Australia and the number of people who were expected to view or engage with those mentions.

Taken together, although LCAust has seen modest engagement on most social media platforms, it has seen an increase in engagement on LinkedIn, particularly when reports are released or expert videos are posted. Topics aligned with LCAust's mission and focus are widely discussed on social media, which suggests public interest in these issues.

Chapter 4

Curating Evidence

This chapter describes LCAust's work to **curate evidence** that furthered the development of a research-based foundation to support the organization's case for systems change. This work to curate evidence broadly used two strategic activities, which we describe below: the Power of Recognising More action research study and the publication and dissemination of a series of research-based white papers that address a variety of topics. Topics included alternative certification systems, the potential economic benefits of broadening credentials, and improving pathways to tertiary education and work.

Through semistructured interviews, focus groups and a bibliometric analysis, we sought to understand LCAust's work to curate and disseminate evidence, with a particular focus on the extent to which LCAust's efforts to curate evidence helped support a growing movement to embrace the kinds of systems change that the organisation was advocating for.

We find that action research study participants supported the need to curate the evidence on policies and practices related to broader recognition of student learning. The action research study produced accessible, engaging reports that emphasized the importance of broader recognition and presented a variety of example programmes and practices without a specified policy agenda. Our bibliometric analysis indicated that individuals and organizations that are aligned with LCAust's mission amplified LCAust's work. Our findings surface trade-offs for catalysing organizations in uplifting varied grassroots approaches to change with the clarity of a prescribed policy agenda, as well as trade-offs regarding the benefits of promoting different kinds of evidence (e.g. case studies of promising practice versus systematic evaluation of effectiveness).

The Power of Recognising More Action Research Project

LCAust designed and implemented the Power of Recognising More action research project in collaboration with Nous Group, an international management consultancy. Three key domains underpinned the project: understanding effects for young people; school and community arrangements that support positive effect; and understanding learning system conditions, enablers and barriers. One respondent summarized the action research study as follows:

> [T]he focus on understanding the impacts for young people reflects Learning Creates's concern [of making] sure that . . . the systemic actors are focused on what we deliver for and with young people and that we change the way we think about young people's learning.
>
> The question about school and community arrangements is about understanding that those school and community [places] are the places that most directly affect young people's learning opportunities and outcomes, but they're also potential agents changed in and of themselves, and obviously teachers and schools are busy places. If we can't demonstrate what a broader recognition of learning looks like

and see if it's embraced by teachers or relevant to teachers or workable for them, then you haven't really got a case. So that's why that part's important.

And the third [key domain] . . . that focus on learning system conditions, enablers and barriers was important because there are wider system constraints that affect what happens in schools. And . . . in order to bring the change about that Learning Creates is seeking, part of the change needs to be by policymakers, by researchers, by others. So, I guess the research scope was expected to be comprehensive.

Table 4.1 elaborates three key principles that ground the action research project.

Table 4.1. Action Research Principles

Principle	Description
'Centres young people'	'We [LCAust] embed young people's voice and agency across all aspects of our work, particularly those excluded or disadvantaged by the system. We believe that by giving young people access to power and decision making about the future, our ability to design systems fit for purpose expands.'
'First Nations self-determination'	'We [LCAust] are committed to First Nations leadership and self-determination as we work towards an equitable learning system that values, respects, and trusts Indigenous learning aspirations and draws from generations of wisdom and teaching.'
'Focussed on equity and inclusion'	'We [LCAust] are working to dismantle inequity in the existing system. We work to shift power to those who stand to benefit most and who are usually excluded from the design and decisionmaking process in education, and more broadly.'

SOURCE: Adapted from LCAust, 2023a, p. 8.

An overarching research question guided the action research project: *Can evidence of each learner's broader skills, capabilities and attributes be trusted and used to enable young people's transition to further learning and employment?*

The Power of Recognising More project took place over five cycles, shown in the following box. Each cycle consisted of an iterative research process in which design partners (i.e. organizational leaders engaged in ongoing work to promote broader recognition) collected information, examined emerging issues, generated practical outputs and produced a report to disseminate learnings and amplify the benefits of broader learning recognition.

The Five Cycles of the Power of Recognising More

Cycle 1. Illuminating Common Purpose: Learning Beyond Limits

The participants in this cycle investigated institutions across Australia supporting educational equity through recognising a broader set of young people's skills. Participants aimed to describe systemic barriers to equity, identify case studies of where and how work is already taking place, and collate early evidence of benefits to young people and educators.

Cycle 2. The Whole Learner

Co-led by young people and with the University of Western Sydney Young and Resilient Research Centre, this cycle focused on young people's experiences and desires for an education system that moves beyond narrow academic results to better recognise their whole selves. The aim of the cycle was to explore how broadening recognition for students from disadvantaged backgrounds can reduce stigma and boost resilience and self-esteem.

Cycle 3. Notes from the Field

This third action research cycle brought together leading practitioners to explore effective practices, persistent barriers and key needs for lasting change. Their insights are shared in three notes, highlighting learner agency, trusted recognition of complex capabilities and how broader recognition supports young people in making informed pathway decisions.

Cycle 4. First Nations Action Research Cycle

This First Nations–led cycle was intended to collate insights on the different approaches that local communities and jurisdictions are taking in recognising and supporting Indigenous perspectives of well-being and student belonging in school. From these insights, the action research study illuminated common themes and methodologies being employed to understand the rationale behind why such approaches are being employed in particular contexts.

Cycle 5. The Economics of Effective Transitions

The fifth and final cycle aimed to explore broader recognition in education through an economic lens. Participants explored how trusted, inclusive credentials can improve transitions, boost employment outcomes and potentially generate large economic gains.

SOURCE: LCAust, undated-a.

Participants Unanimously Supported LCAust's Efforts to Curate Varied Examples of Broader Recognition

LCAust designed the Power of Recognising More action research study to gather and curate evidence of the success of broader systems of recognition and to address a limited research base. Respondents who participated in the action research project unanimously affirmed the importance of developing this kind of evidence to build support for their work. One respondent shared,

> The biggest barrier for us is that people could say, 'Well prove it! How do you know this is going to work? . . . How do you [think you] can prove that it'll apply to the whole system?' So, what [LCAust is] doing, which I think is really valuable, is . . . creating an evidence base that's across multiple perspectives to starting that narrative. . . . So, what we're doing is we are trying to tell the community that things need to change, and that this is the right way, and it's possible.

With this in mind, LCAust identified the audience for the Power of Recognising More as primarily the participants (as in the design partners) themselves and government and statutory bodies. Secondary audiences included funders, policymakers and stakeholders that design partners might need to engage to build their support, as well as a general audience of young people, parents and employers.

In designing the Power of Recognising More, respondents consistently described the approach as one designed to be open to studying and illuminating many solutions to broadening recognition rather than specific approaches. As one respondent summarized,

> A really key principle that Learning Creates put in the sand from the beginning was that the action research study would not be aiming to say one approach to broader learning recognition is better than the others or more viable. . . . They're wanting to give space to surface different views and experiences.

The Power of Recognising More participants studied a variety of approaches to pursuing broader recognition as examples of the work in progress in communities. For example, the report resulting from the first action research cycle, titled *Learning Beyond Limits* (LCAust, 2023b), highlighted example programmes, such as learner profiles, rubrics for measuring capabilities and complex competencies, digital recognition systems, and microcredentialing.

Some participants also expressed concern that the broad scope of the action research and, in the words of one respondent, 'lack of specificity about what it is we're trying to demonstrate', led to a lack of clarity on the end goals. Furthermore, a few participants suggested that there were inadequate connections between example programmes and the overarching policy agenda, citing lack of clarity on goals and lack of variety in design partners. One respondent summarized the need to determine the effectiveness of policies, programmes or practices and the need to select specific approaches to endorse as follows:

> The instinct to really empathize with the grassroots is great, but we've got to back a couple of horses. At some point, we've got to aggregate some stuff into a clear story of, 'This is what we know to have been effective. This is where we've seen it play out.'

Action Research Reports Helped Make the Case for Broader Recognition Accessible and Engaging

The action research work resulted in a concrete set of outputs meant to contribute to the evidence supporting broader recognition of learning. Respondents expressed strong appreciation for these reports. Most respondents noted the engaging writing style and clear and accessible visual presentation of reports. In several cases, the young people working with LCAust took an active role in the design and visual presentation of these reports. One respondent summarized their appreciation for this approach as follows:

> [LCAust has] really fantastic looking . . . content-rich [materials], whether it's the reports they do or the way they do the forms or the way they promote activities—I just think because they use young people again to help them do that in a very contemporary creative, lively style.

Respondents also noted the usefulness of the action research reports in highlighting not just their own activities but evidence of a broader movement happening across Australia. A few respondents

noted that these reports were useful in demonstrating and reaffirming the importance of their work to their governing bodies and to their communities.

The action research reports primarily functioned to present a case for the importance of broader recognition and to highlight examples of programmes, tools and organizations engaging in this work rather than providing evaluation of the effectiveness of these approaches. Although these publications made an accessible and engaging case for broader recognition and related issues of learner agency and well-being, the evidence presented was mainly descriptive and included case studies and narratives of success.

Publication and Dissemination

To understand the extent to which there is awareness of LCAust's work among policymakers, practitioners and academics, we conducted a bibliometric analysis. We analysed government documents to see the extent to which reports were appearing in state or federal legislation, government meeting minutes and news articles.[9] Notably, this analysis cannot tell us whether LCAust's publication strategy influenced policy or practice. However, as with our sociometric analysis above, characterising awareness and diffusion of LCAust's work provides important preliminary information about LCAust's activity in this area.[10]

LCAust uses its website to disseminate several report series (shown in the box below), including those published by the Centre for Strategic Education and those authored by the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).[11]

[9] More detail on our bibliographic methods is available in the appendix.

[10] Future evaluations could conduct comparative analyses to make stronger claims about the extent to which LCAust changed policy or practice.

[11] Established in 1999, FYA is a national nonprofit organisation focused on empowering young people to drive policy change (FYA, undated). In 2020, LCAust emerged from FYA.

LCAust Report Series

The New Economics of Education (3 reports, 2 fact sheets)

These reports provide models that estimate the potential economic benefits of policies and programmes focused on broadening how LCAust recognises young people's learning and success in senior secondary education.

The Power of Recognising More (4 reports, 1 action plan)

Published from 2023 to 2025, this series highlights educational institutions that prioritize alternative recognition. Reports center action research from the perspectives of young people and practitioners, as well as contextualize the economic benefits to broadening recognition.

The Learner's Journey (3 reports)

The Learner's Journey Social Lab is a national social lab designed by LCAust to broaden recognition for learning and uplift students' diverse sets of knowledge, skills and dispositions. Commissioned by the University of Melbourne, this series presents a framework for broadening learning recognition, case studies of organisations implementing different forms of assessments and qualifications, and suggestions for new regulations for senior secondary schooling certification.

The Future of Education (3 discussion papers)

The Future of Education discussion paper series focuses on the structures of Australia's policy environment and learning system and their effects on equitable learning.

Learning and Work (1 paper)

Shifts and Flows in Learning and Work is a discussion paper that explores relationships between young people and work, especially those transitioning into employment. LCAust surveyed and interviewed employers about these relationships and reviewed 17 reports and research studies, concluding that regular interactions between young people and employers are essential to smoothing transitions.

Leading Education (27 reports)

'Commissioned by Learning Creates Australia co-chair Anthony Mackay . . . and published by Centre for Strategic Education, [t]he Leading Education series has enabled Learning Creates to situate [LCAust's] work within an international education reform agenda. The papers demonstrate international best practice and suggest methods for measuring and assessing change across learning systems' (LCAust, undated).

New Work Order (as FYA) (7 reports)

FYA's New Work Order research series has published seven reports since 2015 analysing 'how disruption to the world of work has significant implications for young Australians' (LCAust, undated-a). As a result of emerging themes in this series, LCAust was established in 2020 to build equitable learning opportunities at the intersection of schooling and work.

SOURCE: LCAust, undated.

The New Work Order Series Is the Most Widely Cited Body of Work on LCAust's Website

Takeaways from FYA's seven-report New Work Order series led to the founding of LCAust. This series includes the most-cited and most-tractable reports currently available on LCAust's website. Five of the reports have an average of 20 citations across journals, books and reports related to vocational education and training, higher education, alternative pathways for young people, and education management. To contextualize this average number of citations, we also looked at traction for the work that cited LCAust's reports. Works that cite the New Work Order series are, in turn, included in many more articles aligned with LCAust's mission. Some of these works have more than 100 additional citations, which we interpret as suggesting interest in how the shifting world of work affects young people in Australia.

Although Some of LCAust's More Recent Publications Have Received Interest from Academic Audiences, This Interest Appears to Have Decreased over Time

Initial reports in LCAust's Centre for Strategic Education Leading Series received similar or more traction than the New Work Order series, in which the first report has been cited more than 100 times. These citations align with LCAust's mission, generating conversation related to student achievement and perspectives on teaching. However, later reports are either not found in academic literature or have very limited traction. LCAust's most recent reports, which are unaffiliated with a series, rarely appear in academic journal articles, books or reports. Using a broader academic search for 'Learning Creates Australia', we identified 14 additional texts that refer to LCAust. These texts related to holistic and transformational education, school leadership, and higher education. Most of the texts mentioned LCAust staff and surveys or were written by LCAust staff and other report authors.

Government Reports and News Outlets Recognise LCAust's Work

In a search of nonacademic sources, we identified multiple government reports citing LCAust's work, including an expert panel review on senior secondary pathways for the Western Australian Government and the Minister for Education (Government of Western Australia, 2024), a report commissioned by the Australian Government's Productivity Commission on recommendations for the National School Reform Agreement (LCAust, 2022), and a report on education policy reform addressing equity and segregation (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2023a). LCAust has also submitted discussion papers and policy notes to Job and Skills Australia, the Australian Universities Accord, the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania (Tasmanian Government, 2024), and the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2023b). Some local news outlets and platforms have mentioned LCAust's work, including *The Educator*, *SchoolNews Australia*, EducationHQ and Education Matters. LCAust is explicitly mentioned on the websites for the Department of Education Western Australia and the South Australian Certificate of Education (South Australian Certificate of Education, undated; Government of Western Australia, 2024). Finally, LCAust's WAM gatherings have included engagement from multiple states' and territories' Departments of Education.

Individuals and Organisations Aligned with LCAust's Mission Have Elevated LCAust's Work

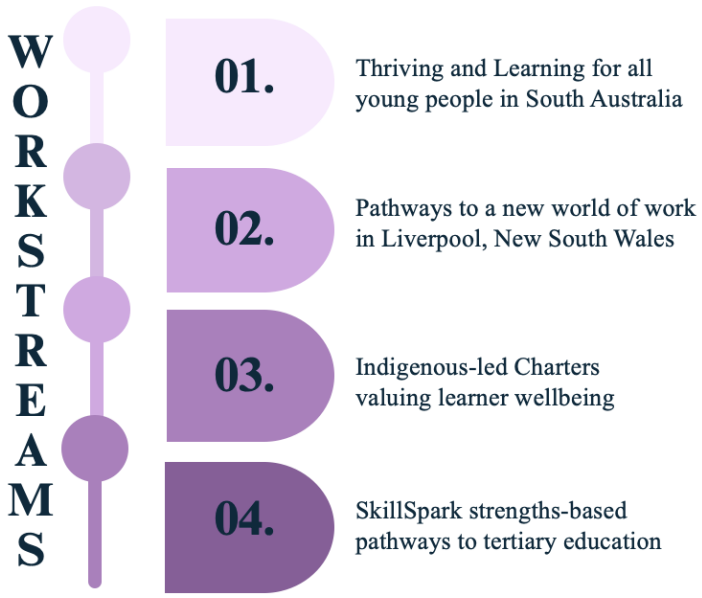
LCAust has a tight-knit circle of champions that carry the organization's mission forward. The authors of LCAust reports generate much of the academic traction we identified, including citing other LCAust reports in their work and widely sharing their own reports and others. Direct and indirect citations of LCAust reports seem to align with LCAust's mission, implying that reports clearly articulate the benefits to considering alternative recognition, particularly for disadvantaged youth. We found discussions about testing and 21st-century skills in nearly every source we examined, and scholars and organisations cited focus on educational opportunity and equity, learning recognition, and school leadership. However, there is limited academic and nonacademic pick-up for some of LCAust's work. Academics, news outlets and government appear to not pick up some reports that also align with LCAust's mission.

Chapter 5

Demonstrating Solutions

LCAust aimed to **demonstrate solutions** through the continued development of select Phase I prototypes in four workstreams, in which these place-based and systems-level approaches to broadening recognition were tested and refined. These workstreams, outlined in Figure 5.1, aimed to engage diverse communities, prototype new tools and build pathways that recognise learning beyond traditional academic credentials. Each workstream operated in a distinct context but all shared a common goal: to improve young people's transitions through school and into further education, employment or community life by recognising their full breadth of skills, capabilities and experiences.

Figure 5.1. LCAust's Four Demonstration Workstreams



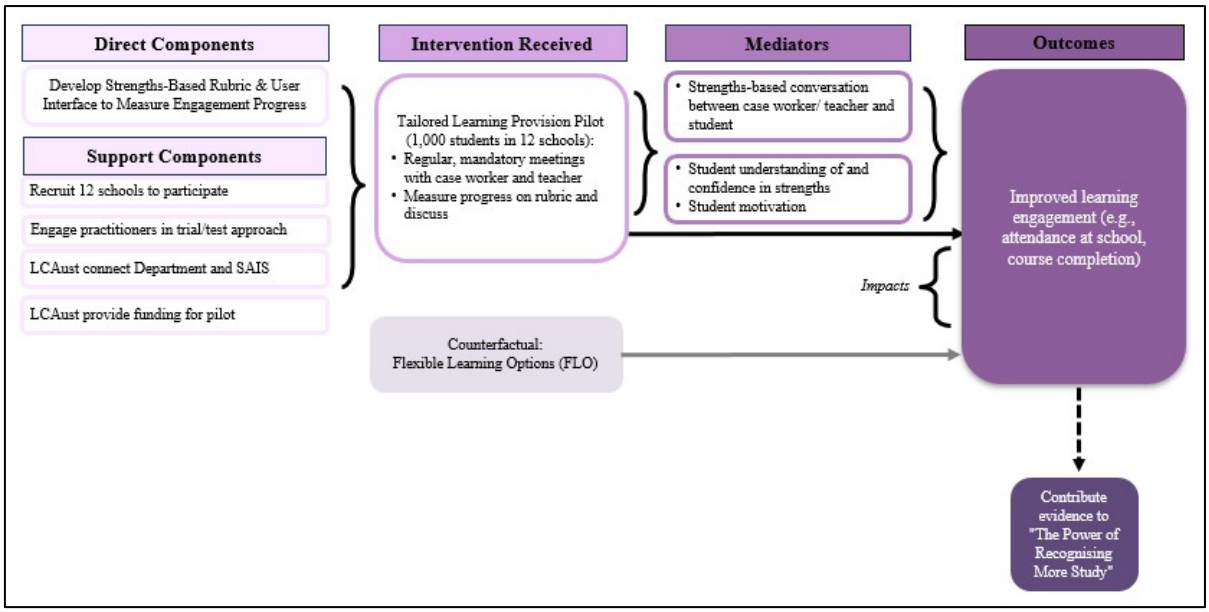
To assess the progress and reach of the four demonstration workstreams, we conducted semistructured interviews with individuals directly involved in their design, implementation or data contributions. In addition to interviews, we reviewed project documents and slide presentations shared by LCAust and its partners. To examine how workstream design changed from the planning to implementation phases, we conducted initial design interviews with involved LCAust staff and developed logic models for each intervention. We then used the final interviews to compare planned versus implemented activities, timeline and outcomes. Here, we describe each workstream's implementation and outcomes—including the adaptations made in response to local conditions or emergent challenges—and the tangible results produced.

We find that LCAust's partners piloted four distinct workstreams focused on varied approaches to recognising broader learning outcomes for young people and that LCAust acted responsively to challenges in the workstream progress. These changes addressed challenges in capacity, data access and recruitment. At the time of this study, none of the workstreams were fully implemented at a scale conducive for quantitative impact analysis. Our findings suggest potential trade-offs for catalysing organizations in identifying the role they wish to play in implementation and, where this role is less hands-on, identifying the appropriate ways to monitor and manage implementation in ways that can help build an evidence base.

Workstream 1: Thriving and Learning for All Young People in South Australia

This workstream supported young people at risk of disengagement from education by shifting the focus from deficits to strengths. As shown in Figure 5.2, the direct component of Workstream 1 focused on developing a strengths-based rubric and a digital user interface to measure student engagement progress. This tool was designed to guide regular mandatory meetings between students, their case workers and their teachers, ensuring structured, strengths-based conversations and the ongoing monitoring of student progress.

Figure 5.2. Planned Design for Workstream 1—Thriving and Learning for All Young People in South Australia



To enable this pilot, LCAust supported four key actions: (1) recruiting 12 schools to participate, (2) engaging practitioners in trialling and testing the approach, (3) facilitating connections between the Department of Education and the South Australian Information System and (4) providing funding for the pilot's implementation. Essentially, LCAust intended for this workstream to reach pilot phase (in the 12 target schools) during our evaluation period, followed by full scaling.

The underlying theory of change assumed that this approach would improve the experience of students when compared with the existing Flexible Learning Options model, which had historically focused on behavioural or attendance-based metrics without meaningfully engaging students in self-reflection or capability-building. Design partners expected this kind of student engagement and reflection to help teachers and students better understand the students' strengths and to motivate students to improve their engagement in school (e.g. attendance, course completion). They also designed the workstream to contribute evidence to improve learning engagement.

Workstream 1 Produced and Piloted a Social-Emotional Progress Tool That Was Ready to Scale

Workstream 1 focused on the codesign and refinement of a strengths-based tool to measure student engagement progress. The workstream leaders at the South Australia Department of Education collaborated with students and teachers to ensure that the tool's language and format were constructive, inclusive and accessible. It was piloted in 12 schools, engaging approximately 1,000 students, and was adapted in response to feedback on better capturing social-emotional capabilities, such as self-regulation. As one school leader reflected,

> The principals we've shown this to are just like, 'Oh my God, can we have this for all of our kids right now? Because this is amazing. This is the gap that we've had for such a long time.'

Following this initial pilot, the workstream leaders rolled out the tool as a component of a structured process for regular mandatory meetings between students, case workers and teachers, in which the tool was used to guide strengths-based conversations. Students identified their strengths, set goals and monitored progress in these sessions. As one case manager explained,

> It's important that students sit there and provide input [to] reflect and provide their own view of how they think their strengths are and what they think they need to focus on more.

Additionally, one participant noted,

> It really changes the conversation. Instead of focusing on what's wrong, we start with what they're good at, and that opens the door to everything else.

One issue that arose in the development of this tool concerned the protection of student privacy. The workstream leaders addressed critical data access and security challenges to enable external case managers from nongovernment organisations to use the tool while maintaining student confidentiality. Once these privacy concerns were addressed, the tool was rolled out to all secondary schools in South Australia for students in tailored learning, expanding its availability far

beyond the pilot sites. This expansion increased the potential reach from 1,000 students in the pilot to more than 6,000 students annually in about 130 schools.

Finally, the workstream integrated Power BI reporting, Microsoft's data visualization tool, to support more data-informed decisionmaking. School leaders and system administrators could track implementation fidelity, identify patterns in student engagement and target support where it was most needed. This capability not only strengthened local practice but also provided robust evidence to inform LCAust's broader national agenda for recognition reform. One participant reflected,

> We've taken what was a pilot in a small number of schools and made it something that is available to every high school in the state for those students who need it. That's a big deal in terms of scale and impact.

The workstream leaders also engaged an external evaluator to conduct user experience research on the tool. The evaluator's report found strong support among users for the usefulness of the tool and quality of conversations it helped to support. This report also suggested some technical improvements (such as enhanced accessibility or ease of navigation of the tool for student use, fixing small bugs and glitches, and providing training to support educators in leading meaningful conversations with students). As of this writing, we have no data on changes to student attendance or course completion.

Workstream 2: Pathways to a New World of Work in Liverpool, New South Wales

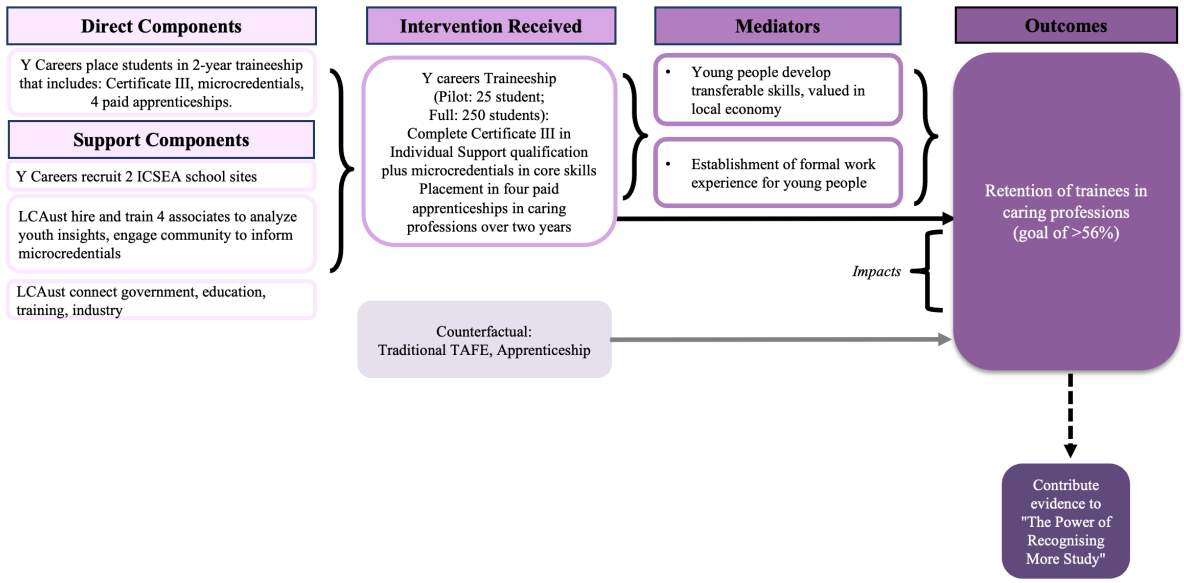
This workstream aimed to strengthen school-to-work transitions for young people in Liverpool, New South Wales, by creating clear, supported pathways into local industries. As shown in Figure 5.3, the direct component of Workstream 2—led by a youth workforce development organization called Y Careers—was intended to place students in a two-year traineeship programme in care work. Developers intended this programme to combine a Certificate III qualification, a set of targeted microcredentials, and four short, paid traineeships, providing participants with both accredited training and hands-on industry experience while still in school.

To enable this pilot, LCAust planned to support three key actions: (1) Y Careers recruiting two Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) school sites to participate in the programme, (2) LCAust hiring and training four associates to analyse youth insights and engage the community to inform the design of relevant microcredentials, and (3) LCAust facilitating connections between government, education, training providers and industry partners to ensure alignment with local workforce needs and to create sustainable collaboration channels.

The underlying theory of change assumed that offering an integrated package of formal qualifications, microcredentials and paid work placements—codesigned with youth and industry—would increase student engagement, improve employability skills and provide tangible postschool pathways. The workstream was also intended to generate evidence on how place-based multisector partnerships can drive equitable employment outcomes for young people.

At its core, this workstream was deeply embedded in the idea of using a place-based approach to programme design. In this way, the workstream responded to the needs and opportunities that local educators and young people saw for their community and to the solutions developed by local stakeholders for local young people.

Figure 5.3. Planned Design for Workstream 2—Pathways to a New World of Work in Liverpool, New South Wales



NOTE: TAFE = Technical and Further Education.

Early Challenges in Developing Traineeship Led to Change in Programme Design

The programme encountered early challenges in identifying trainee supervisors, which led to a strategic pivot in focus. In practice, it seemed, employers did not express adequate interest in facilitating shorter-term, rotating traineeship opportunities. Given the importance of place-based design, LCAust, youth leaders and local educators responded to these challenges by reassessing the needs of young people and pivoting programme design. Specifically, young associates (young people hired, trained and supported by LCAust) facilitated workshops with students from the two participating Liverpool schools to identify gaps between students' mindsets about care work and the actual opportunities available. This process not only surfaced misconceptions about caring roles but also resulted in a series of student-led workshops that created a platform for young people to articulate their views and shape the design of relevant career pathways.

LCAust also engaged data strategy consultancy Ember Advisors to analyse typical pathways and career progression for caring roles. This analysis provided the evidence base for crafting communications that presented alternative pathways into the care sector, emphasizing career diversity, growth opportunities, and alignment with students' skills and interests. The resulting report and communications became a resource for schools and community partners seeking to broaden students' perceptions of the sector and understandings of their potential pathways.

Finally, local educators and LCAust staff collaborated to initiate the development of an AI-driven tool to build on the schools' existing skills-based assessment model and produce reports on capabilities. As part of this process, school staff in Liverpool received ongoing support to explore the potential of AI tools for career planning and curriculum integration. LCAust expected this emerging work to generate a sustainable mechanism for mapping student capabilities to local employment opportunities, strengthening the link between education and labour market needs.

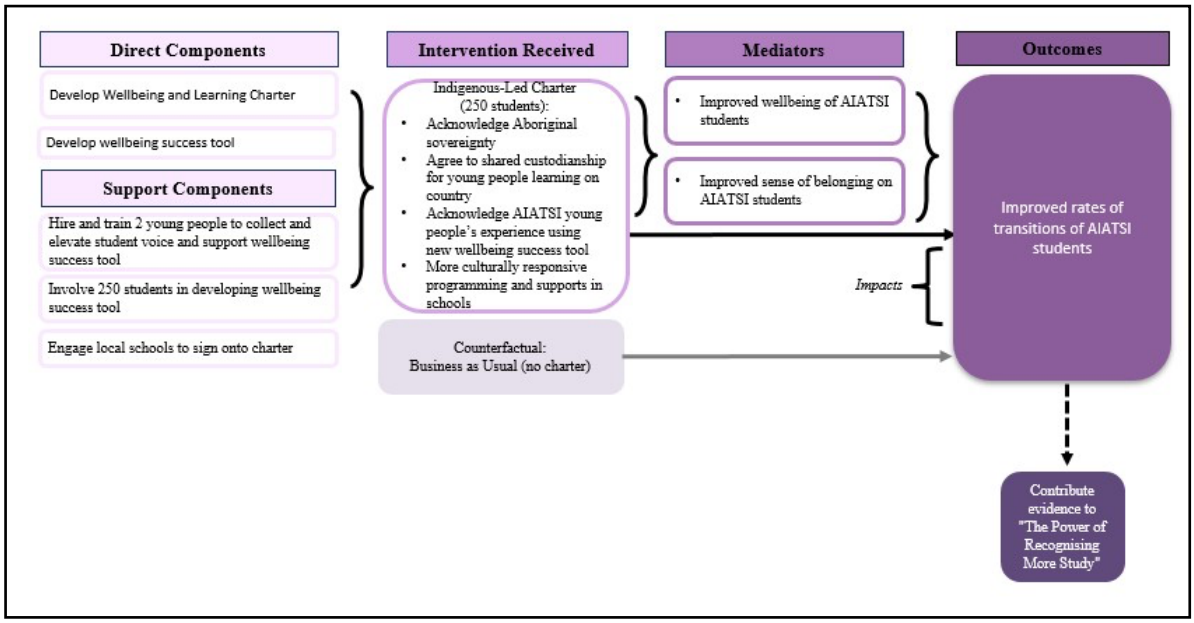
Given the shift in work and timeline resulting from the programme design shift, we observed no effects on student outcomes during our evaluation. Nonetheless, LCAust saw this workstream as illuminating the process of place-based design and a useful first step in developing supports for young people in Liverpool. As one LCAust staff member shared,

> The Liverpool work obviously came out of the [Phase I Social] Lab conceptually, but then it's being delivered in place, which creates a different context for application than the work that came out of the lab, which was still more at that framework kind of level. So, what you learn from a depth of implementation in place [is it] probably gives you a different perspective on the kind of flexible type . . . of dynamic, but you'd probably need to do a couple of other places to really understand the depth of that, I think, because it has only been applied in that one place at this stage of the work.

Workstream 3: Indigenous-Led Charters Valuing Learner Well-Being

This workstream strengthened recognition of learning and well-being for First Nations young people through Indigenous-led processes that reflect community priorities and cultural values. Rooted in the principles of self-determination and Indigenous leadership, the NIYEC fully designed and led this workstream. As shown in Figure 5.4, the direct components of Workstream 3 focused on two core deliverables: the development of a Wellbeing and Learning Charter and the creation of a well-being success tool. The workstream leaders intended for the charter to first acknowledge Aboriginal sovereignty and agree to shared custodianship for young people learning on Country; to then capture community-defined indicators of learner success, grounded in cultural identity, connection to Country and holistic well-being; and, finally, to support more culturally responsive programming and supports in schools. The well-being success tool provided a practical mechanism for schools and communities to track progress against these indicators in ways that were culturally safe and meaningful.

Figure 5.4. Planned Design for Workstream 3—Indigenous-Led Charters Valuing Learner Well-Being



NOTE: AIATSI = Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

To enable this pilot, LCAust supported three key actions: (1) hiring and training young people to collect and elevate student voices and contribute to the design of the well-being success tool, (2) involving 250 students in codeveloping the well-being success tool to ensure that it reflected young people's lived experiences and aspirations, and (3) engaging local schools to formally sign onto the charter, embedding its principles in their practice and creating a foundation for sustained community-school collaboration.

The underlying theory of change assumed that centering Indigenous voices—particularly those of young people—in defining and measuring well-being would improve both engagement and educational outcomes. By embedding locally developed frameworks in school practice, the workstream aimed to create culturally grounded systems of recognition that could influence both local implementation and broader policy.

Strengthened Local Engagement Contributed to the Creation of Well-Being Measurement Tools and Heightened Local School Engagement

Workstream 3 progressed through three interconnected steps that not only marked implementation milestones but also generated visible results for schools and communities. Drawing on their work in the Phase I Social Lab, Darumbal elders and NIYEC collaborated to cocreate an Indigenous-led Wellbeing and Learning Charter and convene a growing community of practice across diverse schools. This milestone was pivotal in centering Indigenous voices and aspirations in education, enabling collaboration across sectors and school types. As one implementor reflected,

> What the charter model has provided was a way of outlining what Darumbal aspirations are for education and learning on our Country.

Another noted,

> We want to care for you. [We want to m]ake sure that you leave school feeling strong and proud in who you are, and that these kinds of things that you do matter. They matter and they matter to us.

Second, NIYEC developed and piloted a physical well-being recognition tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This tool, tested in two schools with 30 to 40 students, allowed learners to document and reflect on cultural, community, and out-of-school experiences, connecting them to Indigenous pedagogical principles and domains of well-being. The physical prototype included about 20 entries and sticker sheets to visualize progress over time. One implementor explained,

> We're piloting that tool this [academic school year of 2024–25] to see how we can recognise and value those cultural determinants of learner well-being.

Finally, the project provided workshops and sustained guidance to a school staff community of practice. Working with these staff members, NIYEC helped bring educators into the conversation about the strengths of Aboriginal students and ways to support them in school. This connection to educators was a crucial step in extending the ongoing charter work; as one leader shared, 'We're really trying to connect that recognition between the schools, the students themselves and the community.'

These workshops also provided opportunities for educators to learn about the tools and consider how to adapt the tools to their school's context and readiness. This tailored approach ensured that the work remained community-led and place-based rather than a one-size-fits-all rollout. As one participant described,

> We really did incorporate having the time for them to think through how they would go about embedding or using the tool within their existing everyday school processes and practices. . . . [W]e haven't just given the tool but guided them through how they might implement it.

This phase of the workstream was focused on (1) engaging the local community and a community of practice of educators, (2) developing the charter and well-being assessment tools and (3) piloting of these tools in local settings. Therefore, because of the timeline, the effects on student experience or outcomes were not yet available during this evaluation.

Workstream 4: SkillSpark Strengths-Based Pathways to Tertiary Education

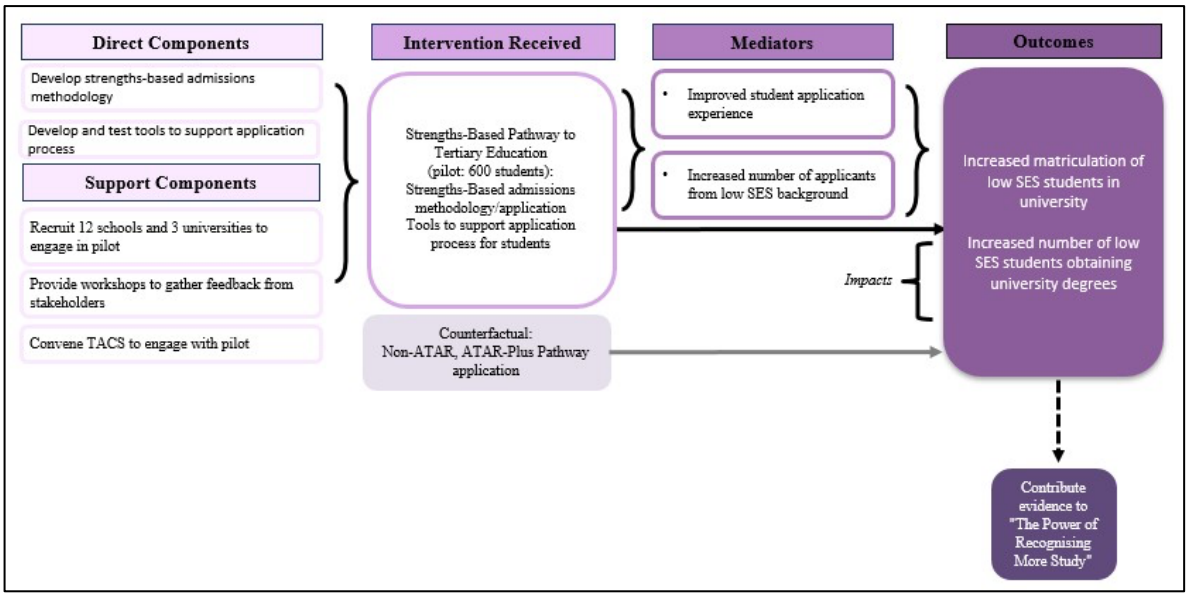
Building on work in the Learner's Journey Social Lab, this workstream was designed to pilot a new approach to tertiary admissions that recognises the broader variety of skills and capabilities young people develop during their schooling. As shown in Figure 5.5, the direct components of Workstream 4 focused on developing a strengths-based admissions methodology and creating tools to support the application process. These tools were intended to help students present their strengths—academic, personal and community-based—in a structured and credible way that could be understood and valued by tertiary admissions teams.

To enable this pilot, LCAust supported three key actions: (1) recruiting 12 schools and three universities to participate, ensuring representation from diverse educational contexts; (2) providing workshops to gather feedback from students, educators and tertiary partners, refining both the methodology and tools; and (3) convening state-based Tertiary Admissions Centres (TACs) to

engage with the pilot, explore feasibility for integration and ensure alignment with existing admissions processes.

The underlying theory of change assumed that shifting admissions processes from a narrow focus on traditional academic credentials towards a more holistic strengths-based model would create more equitable access to higher education. By engaging schools, universities and TACs in codesign and testing, the workstream aimed to generate evidence on how to operationalize such a model at scale, with the potential to influence tertiary policy and practice nationally.

Figure 5.5. Planned Design for Workstream 4—SkillSpark Strengths-Based Pathways to Tertiary Education



NOTE: SES = socioeconomic status.

Recruitment Challenges Led Team to Pivot to Enhanced Rubric and Tool Testing

The delivery of Workstream 4 unfolded through three major stages, each generating both practical outputs and strategic lessons for future scaling.

First, the team developed a series of prototype rubrics and tools designed to assess students' broader skills and capabilities—such as learner agency, collaboration and engaged citizenship—as alternative or supplementary pathways to university admission. Together, these prototyping projects were called SkillSpark. The team codesigned the resources with schools, students and tertiary partners to ensure that they were accessible, relevant and feasible for use by careers practitioners and admissions teams. As one implementor explained,

> The whole idea was to bring the various stakeholders like schools, young people, universities, tertiary admission centers, government and policymakers together to drive collective effort regarding broader recognition of skills and capabilities.

This collaborative process also surfaced the need for careful language choices; for example, the team had to reword a rubric item on 'grit' when students associated the term with sand rather than perseverance.

Initially, LCAust intended for 12 schools to pilot SkillSpark alongside the typical Educational Access Scheme (EAS) to support university admissions for students who have experienced significant educational challenges (with the ultimate intention of replacing the traditional process). The SkillSpark tool aimed to provide a strengths-based application process that reframed challenges to provide young people with a less stressful application process and universities with a more holistic sense of students' strengths. The workstream leaders developed a comprehensive communications and branding strategy that included a mascot for the tool and videos and brochures about SkillSpark. Despite these supports, no student in the 12 pilot schools chose to complete SkillSpark in addition to their EAS applications.

The limited testing in this phase led to a shift in the project's focus from an initial aim of reframing student experiences to avoid the retraumatisation of existing alternative application processes towards a more technical ambition of creating a psychometrically valid measure of capabilities. Although this represents a more complex and resource-intensive pathway, it also reinforces the potential value of a robust, scalable alternative to the ATAR for widening access to tertiary education. As one stakeholder explained,

> [This refocused project is] basically exploring the question of whether we can measure students' strengths and capabilities in such a way that we can use these as a pathway into tertiary study. So, as an alternative or supplement to the traditional academic measures like the ATAR, we're trying to see whether instead . . . strengths like learner agency, collaboration, engaged citizenship . . . can be measured and collected in a way that is sufficiently robust and scalable that it might work as a way of increasing access to tertiary courses, particularly for students where the ATAR at the moment is not necessarily getting them into the courses they might succeed in.

In response, the workstream leaders and their LCAust partners pivoted to conduct a pilot of the SkillSpark tool with 99 newly matriculated students at the University of Technology Sydney who had been admitted on EAS. These students attended an introductory session on SkillSpark and then completed the tool. The workstream leaders engaged researchers to extend this piloting phase so that they may examine how well the tool might measure attributes predictive of success in university. In addition, workstream leaders considered the feedback from these pilots to refine the content and structure of the tools. They also made a strategic shift to subsequently pilot the tool with Year 11 students rather than Year 12 students, who at the time needed to balance final exams.

Chapter 6

Summary and Recommendations

In this report, we addressed five research questions focused on the three primary areas of LCAust's Connecting Practice to Evidence work. Below, we summarize our findings in the three primary areas:

- **Convening supporters**
  - LCAust engaged stakeholders in a variety of convenings to support its goal of raising public awareness on the importance of broadening recognition of learning. These activities brought together a national network of actors from education, government and industry invested in broader recognition; elevated youth voices in policy spaces; and produced visible outputs that were aligned with the organisation's self-identified catalyst role.
  - In our interviews, individuals noted that LCAust could do more to engage diverse participants in its work, particularly industry stakeholders and individuals who are less ideologically aligned with the LCAust mission. Some interviewees identified the limitations of endorsing a breadth of programmes and policies rather than a specific agenda.
  - Although social media engagement is not a leading strategy for cultivating supporters, and engagement on most social media platforms has stagnated, LCAust saw increased engagement through LinkedIn between 2021 and 2025, consistent with a shift towards making LinkedIn its main channel of social media activity.
- **Curating evidence**
  - Interviewees reported that LCAust's action research reports were accessible and engaging in making the case for broader recognition. The policy and practice examples identified by LCAust were varied and presented without a normative agenda for policy change.
  - Individuals and organisations aligned with LCAust's mission to expand alternative recognition systems, especially for disadvantaged youth, have amplified LCAust's work.
  - LCAust could do more to support the development of stronger causal evidence regarding how policies and programmes aimed at broadening recognition affect young people's transitions to university or work.
- **Demonstrating solutions**
  - LCAust's partners piloted four demonstration workstreams focused on different aspects of evidence-based practices to recognise broader learning outcomes for diverse youth.

- LCAust acted responsively to challenges in the workstreams by adjusting various aspects of the development process. This included changes to workstreams to address capacity, data access and recruitment challenges.
- None of the workstreams were fully implemented at a scale conducive to quantitative impact analysis during the evaluation period.

Overall, LCAust's Connecting Practice to Evidence phase offered a systems change approach that built on many of the strengths—such as its networks of policy leaders, meaningful engagement of young people and responsiveness in implementation support—that it demonstrated in the first phase of work, the Learner's Journey (Bush-Mecenas, Schweig and Opfer, 2022). However, this approach also brought specific trade-offs in pursuing policy change and programme outcomes. These trade-offs centered on issues of breadth versus specificity, responsiveness versus prescriptiveness, research accessibility versus strength of evidence, and tight coalition-building versus wider support. We suggest that these trade-offs are inherent in the work of a catalysing intermediary and are important considerations for LCAust and similar organisations pursuing systems change. Below, we discuss each of these trade-offs and offer recommendations for future practice. These recommendations are relevant not only to LCAust but to other organisations that position themselves as catalysts for systems change.

Organisations that see themselves as catalysts, similar to LCAust, may consider cultivating relationships with individuals who bring more-critical perspectives alongside building relationships with strong supporters, such that these organisations develop a consistent and reliable body of advocates and generate a wide web of engaged stakeholders. LCAust brought together influential policy figures, innovators and young people to form a strong coalition of like-minded leaders and community members. Many individuals involved with LCAust participated in multiple activities over several years because of their strong support for the organisation and its mission. There was less evidence of intermittent, temporary or issue-specific engagement among a broader span of individuals, some of whom might even dissent on certain issues. These kinds of weaker ties, however, can be powerful in extending the reach of coalitions (Carpenter, Esterling and Lazer, 1998; Uhlik, 2011; Kirkland, 2011).

Such organisations may weigh the benefits of broad engagement and lifting up varied grassroots approaches with the clarity of more-prescribed policy strategies and actions. LCAust took the approach of embracing broad goals of systems change to benefit disadvantaged young people, with a focus on some subsets of general, interrelated policy areas, including broader recognition, learner agency and well-being. In addition, the organisation took the approach of using a set of principles to guide choices about the programmes, policies or practices it values but did not systematically review and select a specified policy agenda. This approach allowed LCAust to embrace grassroots approaches to addressing deep issues of inequity and to build a broad group of supporters for this work. There was also consensus, among participants, around the importance of the main goals and aims.

There was less clarity, however, on the specific policies that LCAust would be researching, supporting or advocating for. As a result, there was not a prescribed set of policies and related action steps for the policymakers, practitioners and community members to carry forward from their engagement with LCAust. It is unclear whether this might have slowed potential progress in policy change; research on policy agenda–setting indicates that specified agendas can clarify social values, expose disconnections between the priorities of government and the public, and focus policy choices (Halpin, Fraussen and Nownes, 2018; Zahariadis, 2016).

Such organisations may weigh the benefits of different kinds of evidence when presenting a fuller understanding of the evidence underlying their work. Stakeholders praised LCAust for its highly engaging, visually appealing and broadly accessible reports that supported the importance of addressing systems change in its key areas of interest. These reports were engaging and well received; individuals we spoke with said that these reports provided evidence of bright spots of promising practice, a clear rationale for pursuing this work and case studies of programme success.

Although this modality was useful, the credibility of the evidence base may be enhanced by richer and broader kinds of evidence, such as studies of the implementation, effectiveness and effects of programmes, policies and practices (Davies, 2012; Sanderson, 2002). These varied understandings of what works, for whom and in what contexts may help sharpen the focus on useful approaches to systems change.

Such organisations may consider the role they hope to play in supporting implementation and, in situations in which this role is less hands-on, may consider the appropriate supports to build a recruitment and engagement strategy and a management and monitoring plan at the local level. In its workstream activities, LCAust sought to responsively support programmes and encourage ownership at the local level rather than provide project management functions or monitor programme work for effective implementation. On one hand, responsiveness to local needs allowed for grassroots determination of programme activities and quick pivots to changing needs or conditions. On the other hand, this also meant that programme activities changed, sometimes substantively, during the workstream.

In addition, LCAust mainly allowed local leaders to manage implementation with limited intervention or monitoring from it. This approach might leave room for uneven or incomplete implementation, in part because of the limited local capacity to take on management or monitoring roles. Programme implementation often requires careful attention to how to incentivize, motivate and monitor activities to ensure access, interest and use by the target population (Neumann, Robson and Sloan, 2018; Turner et al., 2021).

Appendix

Details on Methods

Interview Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews with 34 respondents: LCAust leaders, design partners, expert panellists, local workstream leaders, external education policymakers, and leaders and young associates. Most of these respondents were involved with multiple areas of LCAust's work. We used a modularized interview protocol, such that we asked a set of common questions (e.g. the mission and goals of LCAust, its role in the overall ecosystem of education policy) for all interviewees, with additional questions tailored to specific areas of involvement (e.g. expert panels, action research, WAM events, workstreams).

We recorded and transcribed all interviews prior to coding them in the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software using a deductive coding scheme, organising data into the key areas of work and constructs of interest (e.g. progress and implementation, work dynamics, satisfaction, outcomes or evidence produced). Following coding, we conducted thematic analysis in each area of work to unearth key themes regarding design, implementation, influence and effect, and recommendations for improvement. For each of the workstreams, we compared our endpoint analysis with logic models outlining the original design of the workstreams, which were developed following in-depth meetings with LCAust leaders at the beginning of the evaluation period.

We also analysed documents related to each area of work, including agendas, attendance sheets, progress reports, presentation slides, photographs and videos of engagement outputs, publications and policy submissions. We triangulated evidence from interviews and documents to improve the validity of our qualitative findings.

Literature Review

Our review of literature included academic articles (those that appeared in peer-reviewed journals), government publications and grey literature (e.g. white papers, working papers, policy literature) that were accessible in (1) Advanced Google, (2) the Education Resources Information Center, (3) the OECD iLibrary, (4) Scopus and (5) Web of Science. We restricted our search to focus on literature published between 2010 and 2024 and published in English from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States and Western Europe. We systematically searched these five databases and augmented our list of sources by snowballing additional sources from key papers' references. We conducted all searches between February and June of 2024.

We defined search syntax by employing Boolean logic and search terms specifically for each database (Table A.1). For each database, we searched both titles and abstracts to find combinations of key terms that we grouped. For simplicity, we grouped them into five categories: learning methods, education recognition, education assessment, nontraditional pathways, and policies and programmes. We generated specific search terms using an iterative process involving

RAND researchers and LCAust stakeholders. Our goal with the search was to capture as much of the literature as possible, so we defined our search terms broadly.

Our searches yielded a total of 1,067 sources. Snowballing added another 14 sources, and we added 38 sources from the bibliographies of LCAust white papers, for a total of 1,119 sources. The majority of sources (899) came from academic literature; approximately 20 percent (220) came from grey literature.

Table A.1. Search Keywords and Syntax

Category	Syntax	Filters
Education Resources Information Centre (101 results)		
Learning methods	**TI**("learning portfolio*" OR "learner profile*" OR (accredit* AND ("experiential learn*")) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR "strength* based model*") AND (assess*)) OR **AB**("learning portfolio*" OR "learner profile*" OR (accredit* AND ("experiential learn*")) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR "strength* based model*") AND (assess*))	Date of Publication: 20100101–20240131; Peer Reviewed; Language: English
Education recognition	**TI**("RPL" OR "Recognition of Prior Learning" OR "improv* recog* learn*" OR "learn* success* for all" OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND ("prior learning" OR learn*))) OR **AB**("RPL" OR "Recognition of Prior Learning" OR "improv* recog* learn*" OR "learn* success* for all" OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND ("prior learning" OR learn*)))	
Education assessment	**TI**(((alternative* OR holistic* OR nontraditional* OR "non-traditional*" OR "competency-based" OR "competency based" OR "skills-based" OR "skills based" OR perform* OR authentic* OR portfolio* OR formative* OR "outcome-based" OR "outcome based" OR "student-centered" OR "student centered" OR "multiple measur*" OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR "21st-century skill*" OR "21st century skill*" OR "learner agency" OR "inquiry-based" OR "inquiry based" OR "reflective practic*" OR "student ownership*") AND (assess* OR measur* OR method* OR "assessment method*" OR "measure* of success*") AND (education OR learning OR learner OR student* OR "school* education"))) OR **AB**(((alternative* OR holistic* OR nontraditional* OR "non-traditional*" OR "competency-based" OR "competency based" OR "skills-based" OR "skills based" OR perform* OR authentic* OR portfolio* OR formative* OR "outcome-based" OR "outcome based" OR "student-centered" OR "student centered" OR "multiple measur*" OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR "21st-century skill*" OR "21st century skill*" OR "learner agency" OR "inquiry-based" OR "inquiry based" OR "reflective practic*" OR "student ownership*") AND (assess* OR measur* OR method* OR "assessment method*" OR "measure* of success*") AND (education OR learning OR learner OR student* OR "school* education")))	
Nontraditional pathways	**TI**(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR "micro-credential*" OR "experiential learn*" OR "digital badges" OR "vocation* education" OR "vocation* train*" OR "vocational education and training" OR (practic* AND apprentice*)) OR **AB**(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR "micro-credential*" OR "experiential learn*" OR "digital badges" OR "vocation* education" OR "vocation* train*" OR "vocational education and training" OR (practic* AND apprentice*))	

Policies and programs	**TI**(policy OR policies OR program* OR strategy OR strategies OR guideline* OR methodology OR legislation* OR survey* OR rule* OR principle* OR procedure* OR governance OR administration*) OR **AB**(policy OR policies OR program* OR strategy OR strategies OR guideline* OR methodology OR legislation* OR survey* OR rule* OR principle* OR procedure* OR governance OR administration*)
Advanced Google (78 results)	
Learning methods	**any of these words:**(alternative OR recognition OR holistic OR nontraditional OR competency-based OR outcome-based OR reflective OR inquiry-based OR skills-based OR "prior learning") AND **this exact word or phrase:**(tertiary education) AND **all these words:**(assess* policy program strategy guide*) AND **none of these words:**(AI "artificial intelligence" refugee "learning difficulty" disability) AND **site:**(.au OR .org OR .edu OR .uk OR .nz)
Education recognition	**any of these words:**(alternative OR recognition OR holistic OR nontraditional OR competency-based OR outcome-based OR reflective OR inquiry-based OR skills-based OR "prior learning") AND **this exact word or phrase:**(tertiary education) AND **all these words:**(measure* policy program strategy guide*) AND **none of these words:**(AI "artificial intelligence" refugee "learning difficulty" disability) AND **site:**(.au OR .org OR .edu OR .uk OR .nz)
Education assessment	**any of these words:**(alternative OR recognition OR holistic OR nontraditional OR competency-based OR outcome-based OR reflective OR inquiry-based OR skills-based OR "prior learning") AND **this exact word or phrase:**(tertiary education) AND **all these words:**(method* policy program strategy guide*) AND **none of these words:**(AI "artificial intelligence" refugee "learning difficulty" disability) AND **filetype:** PDF AND **site:**(.au OR .org OR .edu OR .uk OR .nz)
Nontraditional pathways	**any of these words:**(alternative OR recognition OR holistic OR nontraditional OR competency-based OR outcome-based OR reflective OR inquiry-based OR skills-based OR "prior learning") AND **this exact word or phrase:**(tertiary education) AND **all these words:**(enact* policy program strategy guide*) AND **none of these words:**(AI "artificial intelligence" refugee "learning difficulty" disability) AND **filetype:** PDF AND **site:**(.au OR .org OR .edu OR .uk OR .nz)
Policies and programs	**all these words:**(Australia* secondary educat*) AND **this exact word or phrase:**(alternat* recog*) AND **any of these words:**(policy policies program*) AND **none of these words:**(AI "artificial intelligence" refugee "learning difficulty" disability) AND **site:**(.au OR .org OR .edu OR .uk OR .nz)
OECD iLibrary (15 results)	
Learning methods	**abstract:**(alternative OR holistic OR nontraditional OR "non-traditional" OR "competency based" OR "skills based" OR "performance based" OR authentic OR "outcome based" OR "student centered" OR "multiple measures" OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR "21st century skill" OR "learner agency" OR "inquiry based" OR "reflective practice" OR "student ownership") AND **abstract:**(assess* OR measur* OR method* OR "measure* of success*") AND **published:**(between 2010 and

	2024) AND **theme:**(Education) AND **country:**(Australia OR United Kingdom)	
Education recognition	**abstract**:(“nontraditional education” OR “prior learning” OR apprentice* OR microcredential* OR “micro-credential*” OR “experiential learn*” OR “digital badges” OR “vocation* education” OR “vocation* train*”) AND **abstract**:(policy OR program OR method*) AND published:(between 2010 and 2024) AND theme:(Education)	
Education assessment	country:(Australia) AND theme:(Education) AND published:(between 2010 and 2024) AND search within:(assessment OR policy OR policies)	
Nontraditional pathways	**title**:(alternative OR holistic OR nontraditional OR “non-traditional” OR “competency based” OR “skills based” OR “performance based” OR authentic OR “outcome based” OR “student centered” OR “multiple measures” OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR “21st century skill” OR “learner agency” OR “inquiry based” OR “reflective practice” OR “student ownership”) AND **title**:(assess* OR measur* OR method* OR “measure* of success*”) AND published:(between 2010 and 2024) AND theme:(Education)	
Web of Science (149 results)		
Learning methods	**TS**=(“learning portfolio*” OR “learner profile*” OR (accredit* AND (“experiential learn*”)) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR “strength* based model*”) AND (assess*)))	
Education recognition	**TS**=(“RPL” OR “Recognition of Prior Learning” OR “improv* recog* learn*” OR “learn* success* for all” OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND (“prior learning” OR learn*)))	
Education assessment	**TS**=(((alternative* OR holistic* OR nontraditional* OR “non-traditional*” OR “competency-based” OR “competency based” OR “skills-based” OR “skills based” OR perform* OR authentic* OR portfolio* OR formative* OR “outcome-based” OR “outcome based” OR “student-centered” OR “student centered” OR “multiple measur*” OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR “21st-century skill*” OR “21st century skill*” OR “learner agency” OR “inquiry-based” OR “inquiry based” OR “reflective practic*” OR “student ownership*”) AND (assess* OR measur* OR method* OR “assessment method*” OR “measure* of success*”) AND (education OR learning OR learner OR student* OR “school* education”)))	
Nontraditional pathways	**TS**=(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR “micro-credential*” OR “experiential learn*” OR “digital badges” OR “vocation* education” OR “vocation* train*” OR “vocational education and training” OR (practic* AND apprentice*))	
Policies and programs	**TS**=(policy OR policies OR program* OR strategy OR strategies OR guideline* OR methodology OR legislation* OR survey* OR rule* OR principle* OR procedure* OR governance OR administration*)	
Scopus (655 results)		
Learning methods	**TITLE-ABS-KEY**(“learning portfolio*” OR “learner profile*” OR (accredit* AND (“experiential learn*”)) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR “strength* based model*”) AND (assess*)))	PUBYEAR > 2009 AND PUBYEAR < 2025 (**LIMIT-TO** (**LANGUAGE**, “English”))

Education recognition	**TITLE-ABS-KEY**(“RPL” OR “Recognition of Prior Learning” OR “improv* recog* learn*” OR “learn* success* for all” OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND (“prior learning” OR learn*)))	**#9** AND (**LIMIT-TO** (**LANGUAGE**, “SOCI” OR “PSYC” OR “MULT”) (**LIMIT-TO** (**AFFILCOUNTRY**, “Canada” OR “United Kingdom” OR “Australia” OR “United States” OR “Germany” OR “Netherlands” OR “Italy” OR “Ireland” OR “New Zealand” OR “Switzerland” OR “Spain” OR “Undefined” OR “Greece” OR “France” OR “Portugal” OR “Norway”))
Education assessment	**TITLE-ABS-KEY**(((alternative* OR holistic* OR nontraditional* OR “non-traditional*” OR “competency-based” OR “competency based” OR “skills-based” OR “skills based” OR perform* OR authentic* OR portfolio* OR formative* OR “outcome-based” OR “outcome based” OR “student-centered” OR “student centered” OR “multiple measur*” OR qualitative OR personalized OR personalised OR “21st-century skill*” OR “21st century skill*” OR “learner agency” OR “inquiry-based” OR “inquiry based” OR “reflective practic*” OR “student ownership*”) AND (assess* OR measur* OR method* OR “assessment method*” OR “measure* of success*”) AND (education OR learning OR learner OR student* OR “school* education”)))	
Nontraditional pathways	**TITLE-ABS-KEY**(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR “micro-credential*” OR “experiential learn*” OR “digital badges” OR “vocation* education” OR “vocation* train*” OR “vocational education and training” OR (practic* AND apprentice*))	
Policies and programs	**TITLE-ABS-KEY**(policy OR policies OR program* OR strategy OR strategies OR guideline* OR methodology OR legislation* OR survey* OR rule* OR principle* OR procedure* OR governance OR administration*)	
Policy File Index (69 results)		
Learning methods	**title**(“learning portfolio*” OR “learner profile*” OR (accredit* AND (“experiential learn*”)) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR “strength* based model*”) AND (assess*))) OR **abstract**(“learning portfolio*” OR “learner profile*” OR (accredit* AND (“experiential learn*”)) OR ((perform* OR portfolio* OR authent* OR “strength* based model*”) AND (assess*)))	Date of Publication: 20100101–20240131; Language: English; Subject: Education OR Labor Force/Employment
Education recognition	**title**(“RPL” OR “Recognition of Prior Learning” OR “improv* recog* learn*” OR “learn* success* for all” OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND (“prior learning” OR learn*))) OR **abstract**(“RPL” OR “Recognition of Prior Learning” OR “improv* recog* learn*” OR “learn* success* for all” OR ((recog* OR improv* OR success*) AND (“prior learning” OR learn*)))	
Nontraditional pathways	**title**(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR “micro-credential*” OR “experiential learn*” OR “digital badges” OR “vocation* education” OR “vocation* train*” OR “vocational education and training” OR (practic* AND apprentice*)) OR **abstract**(apprentice* OR microcredential* OR “micro-credential*” OR “experiential learn*” OR “digital badges” OR “vocation* education” OR “vocation* train*” OR “vocational education and training” OR (practice* AND apprentice*))	

Coding the Literature

We created a matrix with all 1,119 identified sources from our literature search. This matrix included the title, publication date, full text, abstract and URL for each paper. Drawing on this information, we created three codes for every source: relevance (highly relevant, moderately relevant or not relevant), focal topic and strength of evidence.

Relevance

We classified sources as not relevant if they focused on populations, policies or interventions that were not aligned with LCAust's theory of action. For example, we excluded all sources that were focused on graduate-level training in health and medicine, engineering, teacher training, and military and defence. Drawing on this first coding, we determined that there were 53 highly relevant sources, 277 moderately relevant sources and 789 sources that were not relevant. We subsequently removed those 789 sources from further coding. Of the remaining moderately and highly relevant sources, 190 were from academic literature and 141 were from grey literature.

Topic

For all sources we retained, we used two codes to characterize the focal topic and subtopic of the article, shown in the box below.

Topics and Subtopics

Ways for students to show learning:

- accreditation of prior learning
- performance assessment
- portfolio assessment
- authentic assessment
- strengths-based models of assessment
- learning portfolio
- learner profiles

Nontraditional forms of recognition in education:

- RPL
- improving recognition of learning
- learning success for all

Nontraditional pathways to tertiary or work:

- experiential learning
- microcredentials
- digital badges
- apprenticeship
- vocational education and training

NOTE: *Experiential learning* generally refers to learning experiences in which individuals learn by doing. Experiential learning provides learners with an opportunity to participate in an experience, reflect on it, and develop new skills, attitudes or ways of thinking (Lewis and Williams, 1994). *RPL* describes the granting of credit towards a qualification based on previously completed formal, informal or nonformal learning (Commonwealth of Learning, 2024).

Strength of Evidence

We used the U.S.-based Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Tiers of Evidence (Institute for Education Sciences, undated) as a heuristic for evaluating the strength of claims in a study regarding the effectiveness of a policy or programme. ESSA was enacted in the United States in 2015 by President Obama as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act as the federal law governing K–12 education policy. ESSA mandated that states use evidence-based interventions to improve student learning outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2025).

As a part of that mandate, ESSA established a four-tier framework to categorize the strength of evidence-supporting claims about the effectiveness of education programmes and practices. Tier I is defined as strong evidence based on a study employing an experimental design that includes random assignment. Tier II studies employ quasi-experimental designs and are considered moderate evidence. These studies do not use random assignment and contrast outcomes across treatment; comparison groups use statistical techniques to ensure that the two groups are equivalent at baseline. Tier III studies are correlational in nature and can be interpreted as evidence of promise. Tier IV studies do not provide direct evidence of effect; rather, they focus on developing or articulating a research-based rationale to believe that an intervention will have a desired effect (Institute for Education Sciences, undated). We supplemented the ESSA Tiers of Evidence with two additional codes: one that indicated whether a source was a meta-analysis or a systematic review and another that indicated whether a source was focused on measurement (including psychometric evaluations of new assessments, instruments and scales).

Bibliometric Analysis

We conducted a bibliometric analysis of LCAust's work in four steps. First, we searched for each of LCAust's reports (see the box titled 'LCAust Report Series' in Chapter 4) on GoogleScholar, the Institute for Education Sciences's Education Resources Information Center, and Primo, RAND's proprietary literature and report search engine. Second, we conducted a broad search for LCAust on GoogleScholar to capture any academic traction that contained the organisation's name but not its work. For both steps, we quantified the number of times each report (or LCAust itself) was cited. We also quantified the number of times each citation was cited to look at secondary traction of LCAust and its work. Third, we measured nonacademic traction of LCAust and its reports using advanced Google searches and Hansard, a United Kingdom Parliament database of members' contributions, debates, petitions and divisions for more than 200 years. Finally, we created a collated list of references from LCAust reports, grouped them by theme or author, and measured traction of the most-cited pieces.

Sociometric Analysis

We searched social media and other websites for mentions of LCAust, a list of phrases key to LCAust's work and LCAust stakeholders using Brandwatch and LinkedIn. Brandwatch enables organisations to monitor, analyse and engage with online conversations across a variety of social media channels and digital sources. Brandwatch houses more than 1 trillion mentions and gathers data using proprietary web crawlers, search APIs, data streams from third-party data providers and direct partnerships with social media platforms. We completed analysis in the Brandwatch software using a variety of search terms (queries in Table A.2). Brandwatch collects posts containing the search terms (mentions) from public Facebook, X, Instagram, Threads, Bluesky, Reddit and Tumblr accounts, as well as public blogs and some news outlets. It categorizes *reach* as the expected number of people who engaged with post content.

Table A.2. Brandwatch Search Terms

Topic	Query
Social media mentions of LCAust	"Learning Creates Australia" OR "LCAust"
Social media mentions of LCAust stakeholders	"Foundation for Young Australians" OR "Michael Fullan" OR "Professor Bill Lucas" OR "Charles Fadel" OR "Valerie Hannon" OR ("Charles Leadbeater" AND education) OR ("Michael Bunce" AND education) OR ("Tracey Burns" AND education) OR ("Michael Stevenson" AND "OECD") OR "Professor Geoff Masters" OR ("Chris Harte" AND education) OR "Summer Howarth" OR ("Professor David Hopkins" AND education) OR "Nicholas Conigrave" OR ("Penelope Brown" AND Australia AND leadership) OR "Professor Sandra Milligan" OR "Rebekah Luo" OR "Toshiko Kamei" OR ("Suzanne Rice" AND Melbourne) OR "Thida Kheang" OR "Eeqbal Hassim" OR "Professor Peter Noonan" OR "Anthony Mackay" OR "Annette Cairnduff" OR ("Bronwyn Lee" AND education) OR "Hayley McQuire" OR ("Jan Owen" AND Australia) OR ("Edward Vong" AND education)"
Social media mentions of transformative education reform	"(transform* NEAR/5 educat*) AND reform AND australia"
Social media mentions of First Nations education	("First Nations" OR indigenous OR aborig* OR "Torres Strait") AND education AND australia

NOTE: LCAust stakeholders include LCAust administrators and report authors. We identified a list of topics aligned with LCAust's mission and website via RANDChat, RAND's private OpenAI, and then selected transformative education reform and First Nations education as topics with significant interaction and alignment. We discussed these topics with LCAust administrators to confirm alignment.

We also conducted an analysis of engagement with LCAust on LinkedIn via LCAust's public LinkedIn profile. This analysis begins with posts in March 2024—because public LinkedIn pages only store 8 months of content—and continues through July 2025. We quantified the number of original content posts published by LCAust and excluded any reposts, comments or likes by LCAust. We then quantified the amount of engagement on each of LCAust's posts (including likes, comments or reposts) and aggregated those numbers to average engagement by month.

Abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LCAust	Learning Creates Australia
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NIYEC	National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RPL	recognition of prior learning
TAC	Tertiary Admissions Centre
VET	vocational education and training
WAM	We Are More

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