Connecting the Dots

Where compliance, risk management, digital innovation, and bottom-line growth intersect.

EDITION 4 · OCTOBER 2026



IN THIS EDITION

Education 5.0 is already here

And most of us are not ready

AI Impact Summit 2026

Innovation, employment and global equity

From prove-you-have-it to prove-it-works

The mindset shift behind outcome-focused standards

Fake agreements, stolen resources

How criminal minds are operating inside education and training

Seven levels of AI usage

And the skills you need at each

Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | Subscribe free on LinkedIn

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INTRODUCTION

Connecting the Dots: October 2026

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu

Edition 4 of Connecting the Dots: 7 pieces for October 2026.

Where compliance, risk management, digital innovation, and bottom-line growth intersect.

This edition brings together 7 pieces first published in Connecting the Dots on LinkedIn, each carrying the date it first appeared. Republished pieces appear as they were first published, with their original images; facts, figures and links are as they stood on that date.

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Thank you to every reader who subscribes, shares and responds.

Warm regards,
Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu
Author, Connecting the Dots

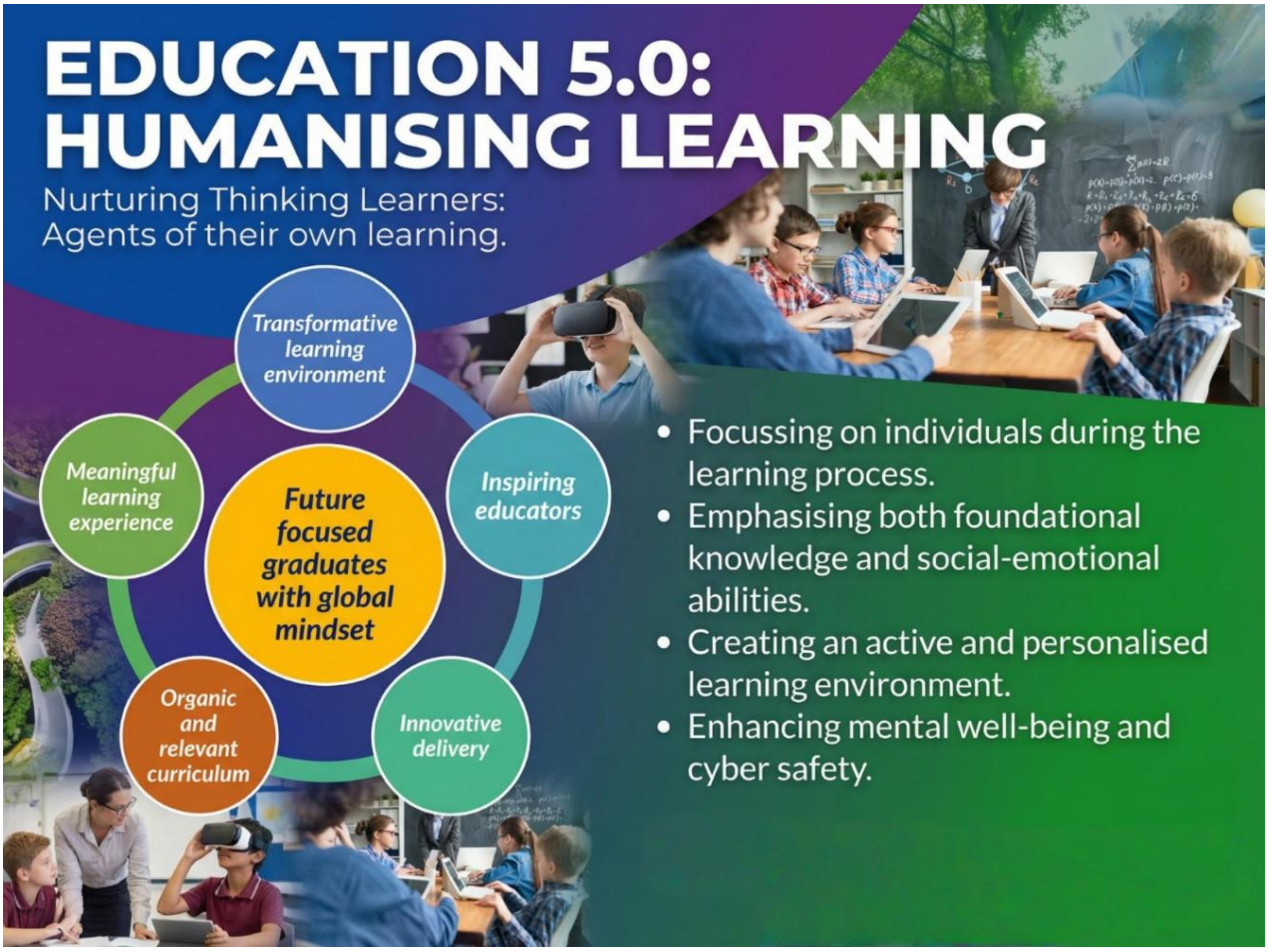
CONNECTING THE DOTS

Education 5.0 is not coming. It is already here. And most of us are not ready.

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 15 February 2026

We have spent decades optimising education for efficiency. We built systems that rewarded compliance over curiosity, rote memorisation over resilience, and standardised testing over the kind of thinking that actually changes industries.





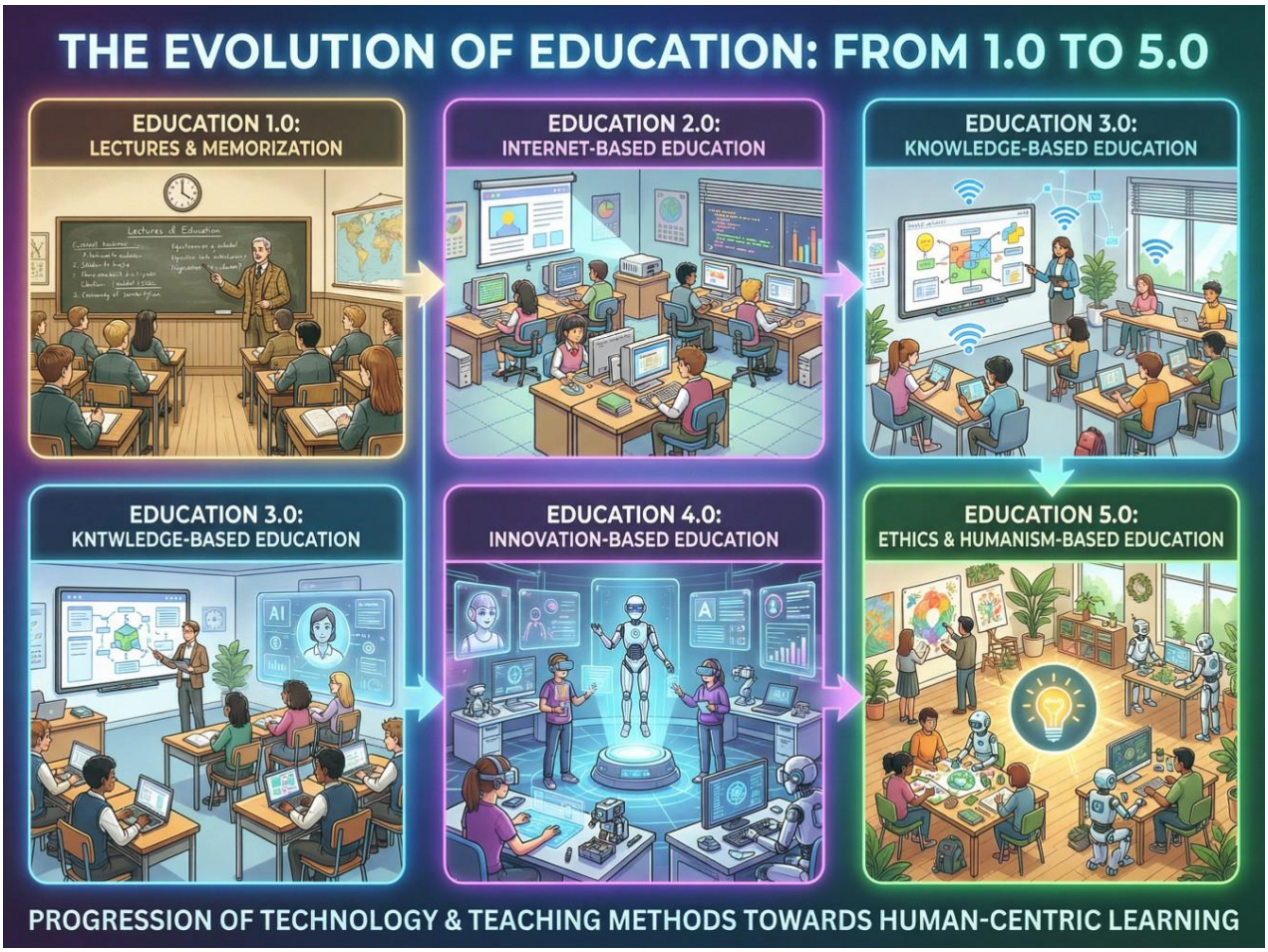
Let me be direct: that era is over.

The world no longer rewards efficiency alone. It rewards adaptability. Creativity. Ethics. The capacity to collaborate with machines without surrendering your humanity to them. And if our education and training systems cannot produce graduates who possess these qualities, then we are not preparing a workforce. We are preparing a generation for obsolescence.

This is precisely why Education 5.0 matters, and why every school principal, university vice-chancellor, training provider, educator, regulator, and policy maker in Australia should be paying very close attention to what it demands of us.


EDUCATION 5.0:
LEARNING IN THE AGE
OF AI & AUTOMATION

The Fifth Revolution: Understanding What Has Changed



Education 5.0 is a post-constructivist paradigm that puts the learner, not the technology, at the centre of the learning experience. It integrates advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and big data, but it does so with a fundamentally different purpose than Education 4.0 ever did.

Where Education 4.0 gave us powerful digital tools and personalised some aspects of learning, it also exposed serious fault lines: unequal access to digitisation, learner isolation from excessive screen time, and a gradual erosion of genuine human connection in the classroom. Education 5.0 corrects these imbalances. It is, in the truest sense, a rehumanisation of education in a technology-saturated world.

The numbers tell a compelling story. The global AI in education market was valued at approximately USD 5.88 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 32.27 billion by 2030, growing at a compound annual growth rate exceeding 31 percent. Global EdTech spending is on track to surpass USD 400 billion. These are not speculative forecasts. They represent investment decisions already being made by governments, institutions, and corporations that have recognised what many in our sector have not: the transformation is underway, and the cost of inaction will be far greater than the cost of adaptation.

Why This Matters Across Every Level of Australian Education

Education 5.0 is not the exclusive concern of any single sector. It demands transformation across the entire education ecosystem, from primary classrooms to doctoral programs, from vocational workshops to university lecture halls. Every level of education is already feeling the pressure, whether it recognises it or not.

Vocational and Technical Education

For those working in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, the alignment between Education 5.0 and the current reform agenda is striking. Many systems are shifting from prescriptive, compliance-focused regulation to outcome-driven standards that prioritise quality, flexibility, and innovation. This reflects a philosophical change that maps directly onto Education 5.0 principles. It is a recognition that the old model, where institutions demonstrated compliance through paperwork rather than genuine educational excellence, was never going to produce the kind of learners that Industry 5.0 demands.

New standards often encourage training organisations to adopt more flexible, robust, and quality-driven approaches. They provide a clearer link between requirements and outcomes and give providers more room to innovate. But with that flexibility comes responsibility, and this is where the real challenge lies. Too many providers still treat technology as an add-on rather than a strategic enabler. They adopt AI tools without governance frameworks, invest in digital platforms without investing in the digital literacy of their trainers, and chase efficiency gains without asking whether those gains actually improve the learning experience. This is not Education 5.0. This is Education 4.0 with a fresh coat of paint.

Higher Education

Universities face their own reckoning. For decades, higher education has operated on a model that privileges research output and theoretical knowledge over the adaptive, interdisciplinary, human-centred learning that Education 5.0 demands. The rise of generative AI has exposed a fundamental tension: institutions that built their assessment frameworks around essays, exams, and individual written output now find themselves scrambling to respond to a world where students can produce technically competent work with minimal cognitive effort.

Institutions like Stanford University's Virtual Human Interaction Lab show what genuine Education 5.0 engagement looks like, investigating how virtual and augmented reality can transform human behaviour and improve the world. Similarly, adaptive learning platforms, such as those developed at centers like the Dearborn Artificial Intelligence Research Centre, monitor not just academic performance but also emotional wellbeing, enabling early intervention before a student disengages.

Universities worldwide need to move beyond treating AI as a plagiarism problem and start treating it as a pedagogical opportunity. This means redesigning curricula to emphasise critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and the kind of collaborative problem-solving that cannot be outsourced to a large language model. It means investing in immersive technologies that bring abstract concepts to life and recognising that a degree alone is insufficient if it does not equip graduates with the social-emotional intelligence and digital literacy to thrive in a rapidly shifting professional landscape.

School Education (K-12)

Perhaps the most consequential battleground for Education 5.0 is in our schools, because the habits of mind we cultivate in children determine the kind of learners, workers, and citizens they become. Most modern curricula already emphasise general capabilities such as critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, and digital literacy. Education 5.0 provides the pedagogical and technological framework to deliver on those ambitions in ways previous models never could.

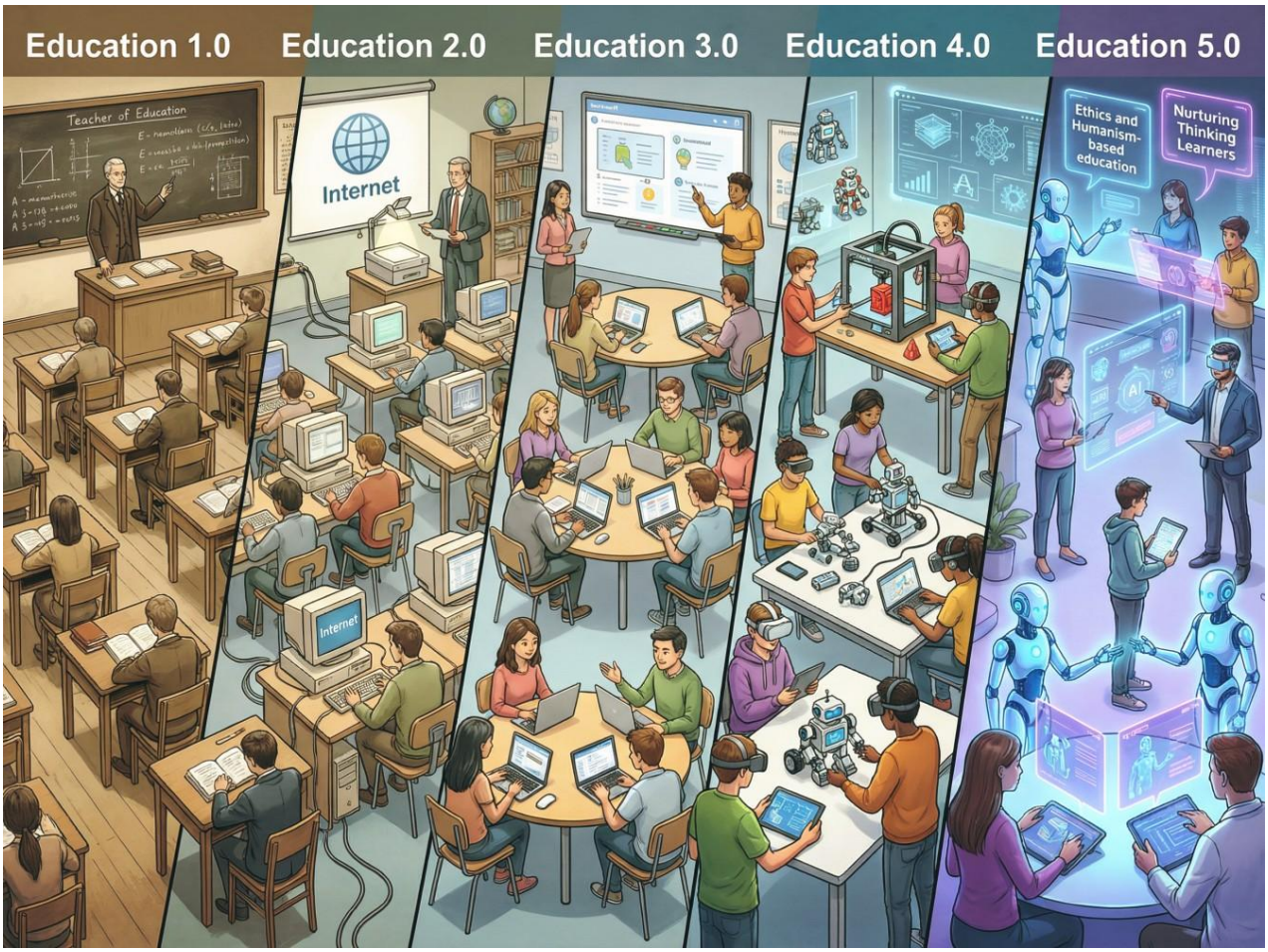
Project-based learning, gamification, flipped classrooms, and immersive virtual reality experiences are not luxuries. They are strategies that can be adapted to create meaningful, socially connected learning experiences for students at every level. Globally, we are seeing a push for early technology education. For example, some countries now mandate AI coursework for primary students, while others are introducing AI education from kindergarten. Initiatives like Estonia's AI Leap programme give thousands of students access to AI applications from their earliest years of schooling.

No country can afford to fall behind. If we want our school leavers to enter further education or the workforce with the foundational capabilities that Education 5.0 requires, we must start building those capabilities from the ground up. This means equipping teachers with the training, tools, and confidence to integrate technology purposefully, not as a substitute for good teaching, but as an amplifier of it.

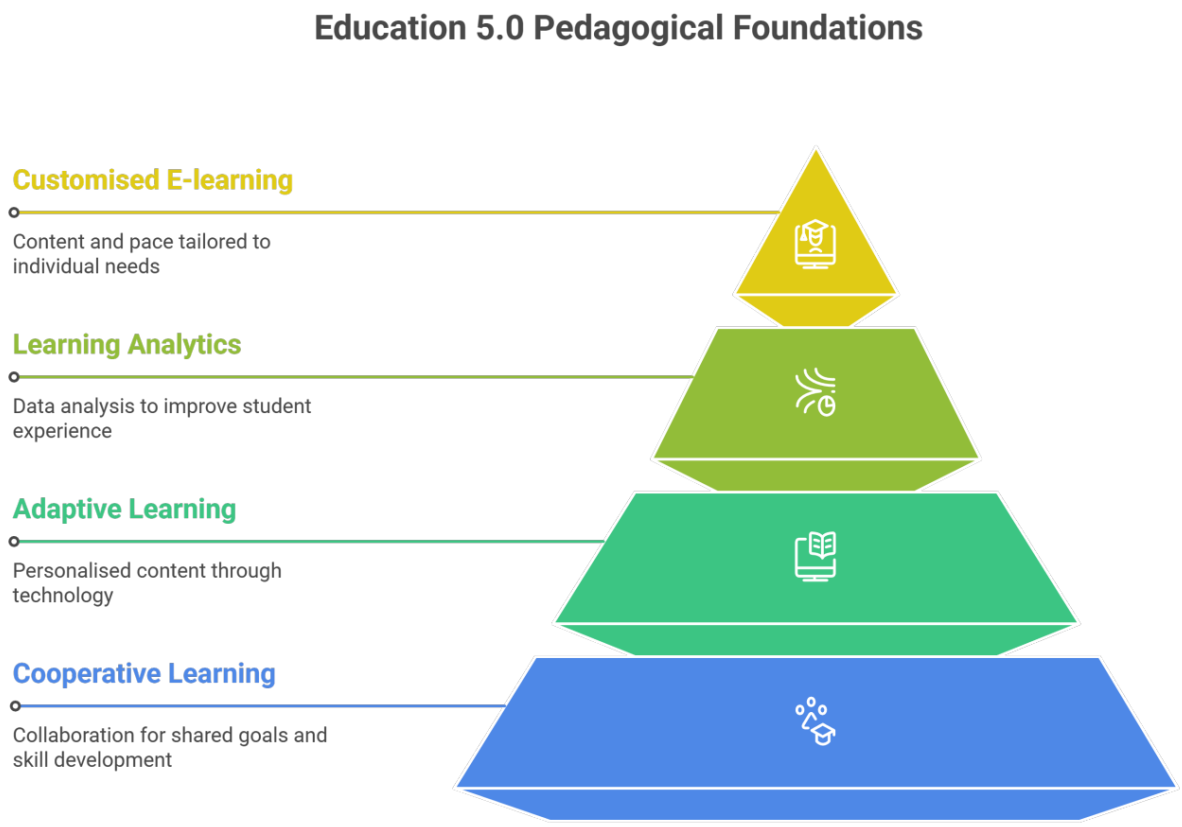
The Common Thread

Across all three sectors, the pattern is the same. Too many institutions are bolting technology onto outdated pedagogical models and calling it innovation. Education 5.0 demands something fundamentally different. It demands that we redesign the learning experience itself, placing the human learner at the centre and using technology to serve their development rather than to automate their compliance.

The Four Pillars That Define Education 5.0



Education 5.0 rests on four pedagogical foundations that every educational institution, whether it is a primary school, a university, or a registered training organisation, should understand and embed into their practice.



The first is cooperative learning. This is not simply group work for the sake of it. It is the deliberate creation of knowledge communities where learners collaborate to achieve shared goals, develop cognitive skills such as individual and group responsibility, and engage in strategies like peer tutoring, constructive controversy, and reciprocal teaching. In a VET context, this means designing assessment activities that mirror real workplace collaboration. In schools, it means moving beyond competitive grading to cultivate teamwork from the earliest years. In universities, it means breaking down disciplinary silos to foster the kind of interdisciplinary problem-solving that complex global challenges demand.

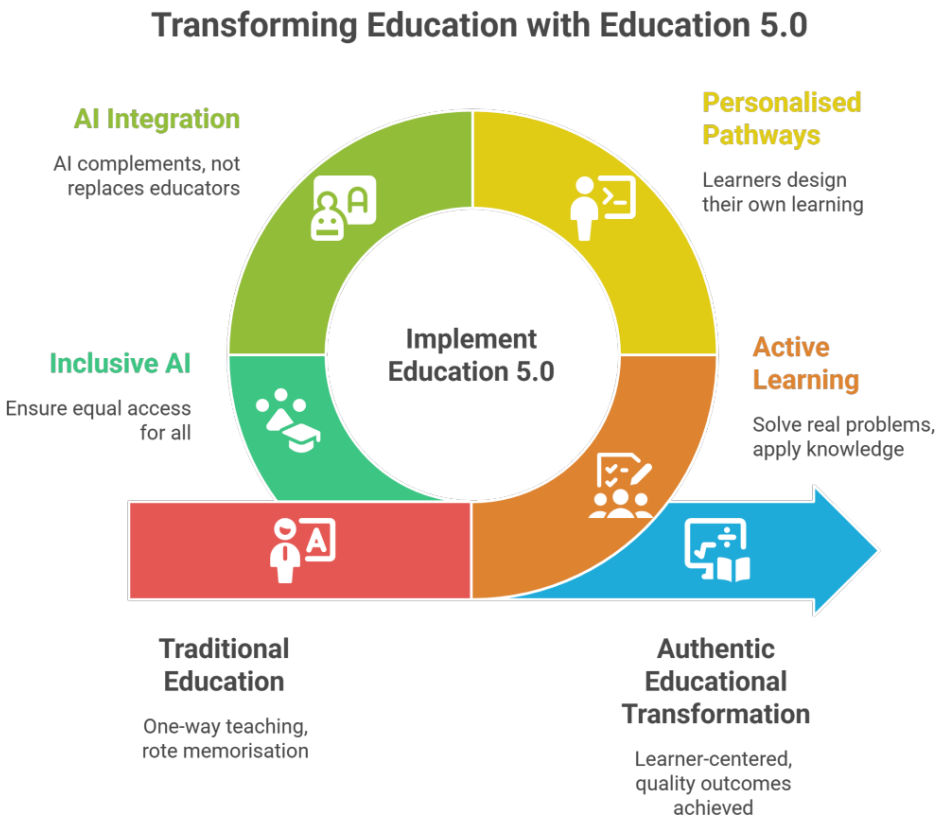
The second is adaptive learning. This involves personalising content through technology to address the individual needs of each student, using tools like personalised learning paths, immediate automated feedback, and data analysis. For RTOs, this means moving beyond one-size-fits-all delivery. For universities, it means leveraging AI-powered platforms to support students across vastly different entry points and learning trajectories. For schools, it means ensuring that no child is left behind simply because the curriculum cannot flex to meet them where they are.

The third is learning analytics, which is the systematic measurement and analysis of educational data to understand and improve the student experience. The OECD reports that over 75 per cent of teachers have observed improved student engagement when using AI-powered educational technologies. Across all sectors, from VET providers battling

dropout rates to universities seeking to identify at-risk students before they disengage, the intelligent use of data is not a luxury. It is a necessity.

The fourth is customised e-learning that adapts the content and pace of teaching to individual learner needs, interests, and abilities. Adaptive learning trajectories, learning management systems, diagnostic assessments, and branching scenarios all contribute to an approach that treats every learner as an individual rather than a statistic, regardless of whether they are a Year 7 student, a Certificate III apprentice, or a postgraduate researcher.

What Education 5.0 Frees Us From

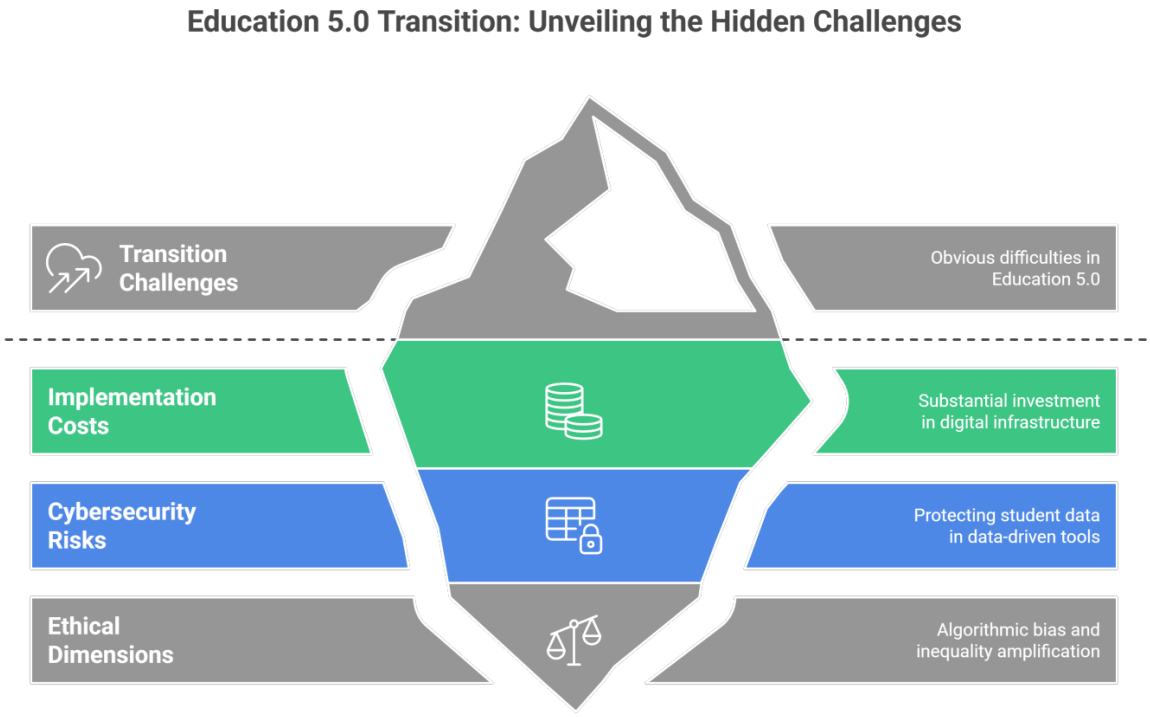


One of the most powerful aspects of Education 5.0 is not what it introduces, but what it eliminates.

It frees us from the one-way teaching and rote memorisation that characterised Education 1.0, replacing them with active, practical learning experiences where students solve real problems and apply knowledge to projects with genuine social relevance. It overcomes the curricular rigidity of earlier models by enabling learners to participate in the design of their own learning pathways. It corrects the technological dependence of Education 4.0 by ensuring that AI complements, rather than replaces, the human educator, and that data ethics are embedded into every activity. And it bridges accessibility gaps by using inclusive AI, immersive tools, and the Internet of Things to ensure that all learners, including the most vulnerable, can access education on equal terms.

For RTOs operating under the 2025 Standards, for universities navigating the TEQSA framework, and for schools implementing the Australian Curriculum, this alignment is significant. Education 5.0 provides a framework for achieving genuine quality outcomes, not through compliance theatre or regulatory box-ticking, but through authentic educational transformation that serves the learner first.

The Challenges We Must Confront Honestly



The transition to Education 5.0 is far from straightforward, with challenges that impact schools, universities, and training providers alike.

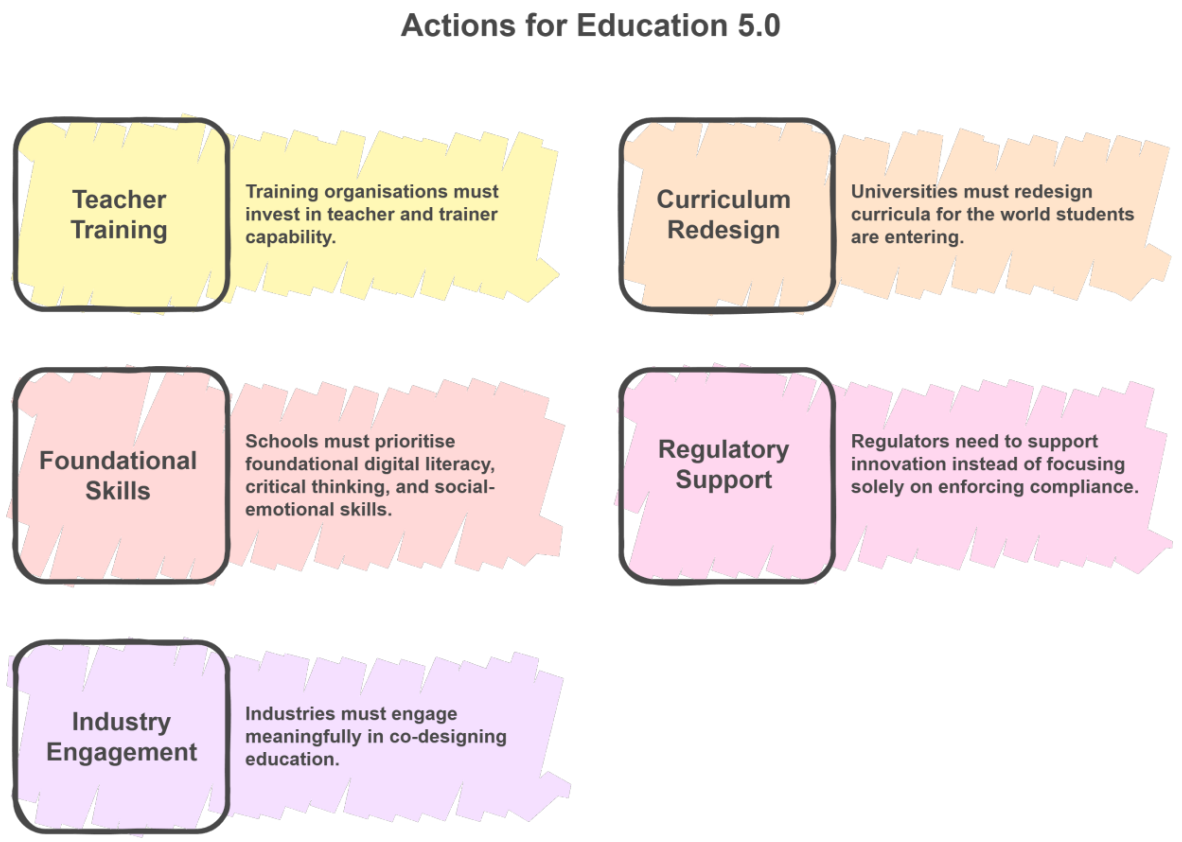
One of the primary obstacles is the substantial cost of implementation. Investments are required for digital infrastructure, hardware, software, and continuous professional development for educators. For smaller RTOs operating on tight margins, regional schools with limited connectivity, and universities already under financial strain, these costs can appear prohibitive. A practical approach involves phased implementation, scalable solutions, and fostering public-private partnerships to share costs without compromising quality.

Cybersecurity poses another significant challenge. As data-driven tools are increasingly integrated into education, the responsibility to safeguard student data becomes both critical and complex. Promising solutions, such as blockchain-based systems and zero-trust architectures, require expertise that many providers are not yet equipped to implement.

Additionally, ethical concerns surrounding AI in education must be addressed. Algorithmic bias is a tangible issue. Without rigorous audits, transparent governance, and consistent

human oversight, AI tools risk perpetuating or even exacerbating existing inequalities. This is particularly pressing in a diverse education system that serves a wide range of learners, from Indigenous students in remote areas to international postgraduates in metropolitan universities and apprentices on regional worksites. Addressing these challenges is both a practical and ethical imperative.

What Needs to Happen Next



The question is no longer whether Education 5.0 will reshape global education. The question is whether schools, universities, and training providers will lead that transformation or be dragged into it reluctantly.

We have the talent, the frameworks, and the institutional capability to lead this change. But leadership requires action, not just aspiration. It demands that training organisations invest in teacher and trainer capability as seriously as they invest in marketing. It requires universities to redesign curricula for the world students are entering, not the world their professors were trained in. Schools must prioritise foundational digital literacy, critical thinking, and social-emotional skills from the very beginning. Regulators need to support innovation instead of focusing solely on enforcing compliance. And industries must engage meaningfully in co-designing education that reflects the workplaces and communities of tomorrow, not those of the past.

Education 5.0 is not about replacing teachers with technology. It’s about using technology to empower educators at every level, allowing them to focus on what they do best:

connecting with learners, fostering critical thinking, nurturing creativity, and developing the human skills no algorithm can ever replicate.

For too long, we have optimised education systems for efficiency. Now, it’s time to optimise for humanity.

The future of education is not something that happens to us, it’s something we build together. From the first day of school to the final moments of a doctoral program, and throughout every training workshop, apprenticeship, and lecture in between, this is our collective responsibility.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

AI Impact Summit 2026: A Defining Moment for Innovation, Employment and Global Equity, Updates from the first 2 days!

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 17 February 2026

The AI Impact Summit 2026 is more than just another technology conference; it's a defining global conversation about how artificial intelligence will reshape economies, employment structures, and access to opportunity worldwide.



Why this summit matters globally

- It is the first major AI summit explicitly framed around "impact" rather than only "safety" or "principles", following the UK Bletchley Park (2023), Seoul (2024) and Paris AI Action (2025) meetings.
- Over 100 nations, major tech firms (e.g. OpenAI, Google) and multilateral bodies are using it as the main venue to debate rules for responsible AI and its real-world uses.
- It is expected to produce a Leaders' Declaration and multi-country working group outputs that will influence future AI policy, standards and regulatory coordination.

AI's Impact on IT and BPO: Redefining Jobs for the Future

One of the most powerful discussions emerging from the Summit centres on the IT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sectors, which employ millions of young professionals globally and indirectly support countless families. AI is no longer a distant concept. It is actively transforming automation, customer service, analytics, software engineering, and knowledge-based work. With that transformation comes both extraordinary potential and very real employment disruption.

The Summit acknowledges this reality directly. AI may significantly reduce traditional roles in organised employment sectors. However, the bigger question isn't whether AI will change jobs, but whether leaders, governments, and education systems are prepared to redefine them.

What stands out is the Summit's clear ambition to foster a global hub for AI services. This is not rhetoric. Seven dedicated working groups have been established to focus on resilience, innovation, computing access, datasets, algorithms, and operational frameworks. There is a strong emphasis on equitable access to computing power and AI infrastructure. Democratizing AI capability is central to ensuring it does not become a tool of concentration, but one of empowerment.

The Summit also highlights AI's transformative impact on healthcare and education. If implemented strategically, AI can dramatically improve affordability, accessibility, and efficiency across these sectors. In education particularly, AI has the potential to personalise learning, support multilingual delivery, and close regional access gaps. In healthcare, predictive analytics and intelligent systems can enhance diagnostics, preventative care, and rural health delivery.

However, the message is clear: AI adoption cannot be passive or gradual. It must be guided by defined objectives, workforce transition planning, and explicit links to job creation. The challenge is not simply to deploy AI, but to align it with economic strategy and human capital development.

Another critical theme is regulation. Over-regulation risks stifling innovation, while under-regulation risks harm and inequity. Nations are now real-world case studies in balancing innovation with governance. The success of global digital payment infrastructures demonstrates how strategic development can scale globally and drive inclusive growth.

For those of us working in education, compliance, governance, and digital transformation, the lessons are clear. AI is not just a technology conversation. It is a workforce conversation, a policy conversation, and an ethics conversation.

Most importantly, it is a leadership conversation.

It is essential to ensure that AI reduces inequality rather than exacerbating it. AI adoption must be aligned with employability, reskilling, and future-ready qualifications. Building digital infrastructure should focus on empowering communities rather than replacing them.

The AI Impact Summit 2026 highlights an important truth: technology alone does not transform nations. Vision, regulation, education, and inclusive strategies are the driving forces behind meaningful change.

The future of AI will not be decided by algorithms. It will be decided by the values of those who lead it.

#AIImpactSummit2026 #ArtificialIntelligence #DigitalTransformation #FutureOfWork #InnovationLeadership #EducationReform #GlobalAI #EthicalAI

CONNECTING THE DOTS

From Prove-You-Have-It to Prove-It-Works: The Mindset Shift Behind Outcome-Focused Standards

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 25 February 2026

The 2025 Standards do not stop at asking whether you have the right policies.*They ask whether those policies produce competent graduates, satisfied employers, and genuine quality. That distinction is reshaping every RTO in Australia.*



By Sukh Sandhu, Director of CAQA | Editor-in-Chief, VET Sector Magazine

For the better part of a decade, compliance in Australia's vocational education and training sector operated on a particular logic. If you could show a regulator that you had the policy, the procedure, the document, and the signature, you were broadly considered compliant. The system rewarded thoroughness of documentation. It rewarded the ability to produce folders, templates, and signed-off strategies on demand. What it did not always reward, and what it struggled to measure, was whether any of it actually worked.

The Standards for RTOs 2025 represent the most significant philosophical departure from that model since the creation of the national VET regulatory framework. The shift is simple to describe and profoundly difficult to execute: from proving you have systems to proving those systems deliver genuine outcomes for learners, employers, and industry. From

showing the regulator your paperwork to showing the regulator your results. From compliance as documentation to compliance as demonstrated performance.

This is not a cosmetic revision. It is a fundamental change in the relationship between RTOs and their regulators, between training providers and the industries they serve, and between compliance teams and the organisations they support. It demands a cultural transformation that goes well beyond updating policies to reference new standard numbers. It requires RTOs to ask themselves a question that many have never been required to answer with evidence: does what we do actually work?

The Architecture of the Shift

The 2025 Standards framework is built around three components: Outcome Standards, Compliance Requirements, and a Credential Policy. The Outcome Standards are organised into four Quality Areas, covering training and assessment, student support, VET workforce, and governance. Each Quality Area contains outcome-focused requirements that define what good looks like in terms of results rather than processes.

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has described the Standards as providing a clearer and more direct link between the requirements RTOs are expected to meet and the outcomes they are expected to deliver. That language is deliberate. Under the 2015 Standards, specific clauses dictated documents, policies, and procedural steps. Under the 2025 Standards, fewer prescriptive clauses exist. Expectations are expressed at the outcome level, with practice guides offering non-binding examples and self-assurance questions rather than compliance checklists.

This restructuring has practical consequences that every RTO in the country is now grappling with. The four Quality Areas replace the scattered clause structure of the previous framework, making it explicit that quality is systemic rather than a collection of isolated tasks. Training, support, workforce capability, and governance are presented as interconnected elements of a single quality system, not separate compliance silos to be addressed independently.

For RTOs accustomed to mapping individual clauses to individual policies, this integration is both liberating and disorienting. The prescriptive detail that once told you exactly what document to produce and what process to follow has been replaced by outcome statements that give you flexibility in how you achieve results but demand proof that you achieve them. The safety net of "we followed the prescribed process" no longer exists. In its place is the far more demanding question: what did your process actually produce?

Self-Assurance: The Engine of the New Model

At the centre of the 2025 framework sits a concept that was peripheral under the previous Standards but is now foundational: self-assurance. ASQA defines self-assurance as providers evaluating their own performance against standards and expectations, taking ownership of quality outcomes, and improving without being prompted by audits. It represents a shift from reactive compliance, where quality activity is triggered by regulatory scrutiny, to proactive quality management, where improvement is continuous and internally driven.

ASQA's Smart Regulation model, which provides the regulatory architecture for the 2025 Standards, describes this as outcome-focused regulation. Providers are given flexibility in the evidence they use to demonstrate compliance, but they must prove that their processes lead to real quality improvements. The regulator's role shifts from checking documents to assessing whether the provider's own quality systems are functioning effectively.

For RTOs, self-assurance means building internal monitoring systems that continuously test whether training is producing competent graduates, whether student support is reaching the learners who need it, whether the VET workforce is capable and current, and whether governance is managing risk and driving improvement. These are not questions to be answered once during audit preparation. They are questions that should be part of the organisation's daily operating rhythm.

The practice guides published alongside the Standards reinforce this expectation. Each guide asks providers to consider questions that probe the effectiveness of their systems rather than the existence of their documents. How do you know your training is engaging and leads to competence? How do you know your student support is reaching the learners who need it most? What evidence shows your governance and leadership are managing risk and driving improvement? These are not compliance questions in the traditional sense. They are quality questions that require RTOs to look honestly at their own performance and respond to what they find.

What Is Actually Changing on the Ground

The philosophical shift from prescriptive to outcome-focused standards is producing tangible operational changes across the sector. Some of these changes are structural. Others are cultural. All of them reflect a fundamental reorientation of how RTOs think about quality.

The most visible structural change is in evidence requirements. Under the previous model, long policy manuals and compliance checklists carried significant weight in demonstrating that an RTO was meeting its obligations. Under the 2025 Standards, those documents carry far less weight without accompanying evidence of impact. RTOs now need outcome metrics such as completion rates, progression data, employment outcomes, and employer satisfaction. They need quality indicators drawn from validation findings, support service uptake, and complaint resolution patterns. And they need case-based evidence of improvement: specific, documented examples of how feedback, data, or review findings led to changes in practice that produced better results.

Internal audits and validation processes are being redesigned as continuous feedback loops rather than periodic compliance events. The question driving these processes is shifting from "do we have a policy for this?" to "is our process working, and how do we know?" This is a subtle but critical distinction. The first question can be answered by pointing to a document. The second requires data, reflection, and honest self-assessment.

CEOs and governing bodies are expected to engage with quality at a level that goes well beyond signing off training and assessment strategies and policies. Leadership meetings are increasingly expected to include student outcomes, complaint trends, industry

feedback, and improvement actions as standing agenda items, with documented decisions and follow-through. Quality Area 4 of the 2025 Standards places explicit responsibility on leadership to foster a culture of quality rather than leaving compliance in a back office managed by a single compliance officer.

The compliance function itself is being redefined. Compliance managers are evolving from document custodians into internal quality assurance and performance improvement partners. Their role is no longer primarily about ensuring policies exist and are current. It is about connecting standards to data, data to practice, and practice to outcomes. They are becoming the people who help the organisation understand whether its systems are working, not just whether its documents are filed.

Quality You Can See

One of the most useful ways to understand the cultural shift behind outcome-focused standards is to look for what might be called visible quality markers: observable, everyday practices that indicate whether an RTO has internalised the new model or is still operating under the old one.

In meetings, a visible quality culture means that leadership discussions routinely address student outcomes, complaints, industry feedback, and improvement actions. These are not occasional agenda items raised when an audit is approaching. They are standing items that generate documented decisions and accountable follow-through. The difference is not in the meeting itself but in what it produces: not minutes for a file, but decisions that change practice.

In training delivery, the shift is equally observable. Trainers in outcome-focused RTOs plan deliberate time for practice, feedback, and contextualisation rather than racing to cover content within compressed timeframes. They bring workplace examples, industry data, and current case studies into their sessions because relevance is not an add-on but a core expectation. The emphasis on structured pacing and sufficient time for instruction and practice under Standard 1.1 reflects this directly: quality delivery requires time, and time requires planning.

In the way RTOs listen to their students, the change is significant. Outcome-focused providers collect and use learner feedback and outcomes data as part of their own self-assurance systems rather than relying solely on external surveys or treating feedback as a box to be ticked. Student voice becomes a genuine input to quality improvement, informing decisions about delivery modes, support services, assessment design, and learner engagement strategies.

In industry engagement, the shift mirrors what industry-embedded RTOs have always known: industry conversations are strategic inputs that reshape training and assessment, not letters collected for an audit folder. Under the 2025 Standards, the distinction between authentic and performative engagement is sharper than ever, and RTOs that treat industry engagement as a compliance activity rather than a quality input will find themselves increasingly exposed.

Practice Guides as Culture-Change Instruments

ASQA's practice guides for the 2025 Standards deserve particular attention because they represent something genuinely new in the regulatory landscape. They are explicitly described as non-prescriptive. They do not tell RTOs what to do. Instead, they provide key concepts, example activities, common risks, and self-assurance questions that help providers interpret Outcome Standards within their own context.

This is a significant departure from the compliance culture that developed around the 2015 Standards, where providers often sought prescriptive guidance on exactly what documents to produce, what processes to follow, and what evidence to collect. The practice guides deliberately refuse to provide that kind of direction. They signal a shift from "tell me what to do" to "ask yourself how you know it works."

For some RTOs, this is liberating. It means they can design delivery models, evidence systems, and quality processes that reflect their specific context, learner cohort, and industry setting without being constrained by one-size-fits-all process prescriptions. For others, particularly those that have relied heavily on prescriptive guidance to structure their compliance efforts, it creates uncertainty. Without a clear template to follow, how do you know you are doing enough?

The answer, which the practice guides consistently reinforce, is that "enough" is defined by outcomes rather than processes. If your training produces competent graduates who meet industry expectations, if your support systems reach the learners who need them, if your workforce is capable and current, and if your governance drives continuous improvement, then your systems are working regardless of how closely they resemble a template. Conversely, if your documentation is impeccable but your graduates are not competent, your systems are failing regardless of how comprehensive your policies appear.

The Tensions Within the Shift

The move to outcome-focused standards creates real tensions that the sector needs to acknowledge and navigate honestly.

The first tension is between autonomy and accountability. RTOs have greater flexibility to innovate in delivery modes, technology use, assessment design, and learner support. But that flexibility comes with a corresponding requirement to prove that innovative choices deliver consistent, high-quality outcomes. Innovation without evidence is not rewarded under the 2025 framework. It is scrutinised. This means RTOs need better data collection capability, stronger internal evaluation processes, and more sophisticated governance systems than were required under a prescriptive model.

The second tension is between simplicity and depth. The 2025 Standards are shorter and less prescriptive than their predecessors. They contain fewer clauses and less procedural detail. On the surface, this looks simpler. In practice, it is more demanding. A prescriptive standard tells you what to do and lets you demonstrate compliance by doing it. An outcome standard tells you what to achieve and requires you to design, implement, monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve the processes that get you there. The compliance effort has not decreased. It has shifted from documentation to demonstration.

The third tension is between the regulator's expectations and the sector's readiness. Not every RTO has the data systems, governance maturity, or quality culture needed to operate effectively under an outcome-focused model. Small providers with limited resources face particular challenges in building self-assurance systems, collecting meaningful outcome data, and maintaining the continuous improvement cycles that the Standards expect. The risk is that the philosophical shift rewards providers who are already strong while creating additional barriers for those who are developing.

The fourth tension is in the compliance workforce itself. Professionals who built their careers around prescriptive compliance, who excelled at policy writing, document management, and clause-by-clause mapping, are being asked to develop fundamentally different capabilities. The outcome-focused model needs people who can analyse data, evaluate systems, facilitate improvement, and advise leadership on quality strategy. This is a professional development challenge that the sector has not yet fully addressed.

What the Shift Demands From RTO Leaders

For RTO leaders, the outcome-focused model demands three things above all.

The first is honesty. Self-assurance only works if the self-assessment is honest. An RTO that collects outcome data but ignores inconvenient findings, that conducts internal reviews but fails to act on the results, or that treats self-assurance as another compliance exercise rather than a genuine quality tool is worse off than one that never collected the data at all. The 2025 Standards reward honest engagement with quality, including the willingness to identify problems, acknowledge gaps, and make visible changes in response.

The second is curiosity. The practice guide questions, those deceptively simple queries about how you know your training works, how you know your support reaches the right people, and how you know your governance drives improvement, require leaders who are genuinely curious about their own organisation's performance. Leaders who ask these questions not because a regulator might ask them but because they want to know the answers will build stronger organisations than those who treat self-assurance as a pre-audit checklist.

The third is commitment to visibility. Quality under the 2025 Standards is not something that happens behind closed doors or inside compliance folders. It is something that should be visible in how meetings are run, how trainers prepare, how students are supported, how feedback is used, and how decisions are made. Leaders who make quality visible, who talk about outcomes in leadership meetings, who share data with their teams, who celebrate improvements and address failures openly, create the cultural conditions in which outcome-focused standards become not just achievable but natural.

A Sector in Transition

The Australian VET sector is in the early stages of a cultural transformation that will take years to fully realise. The 2025 Standards provide the framework, but frameworks do not change culture on their own. Culture changes when people change how they think, how they work, and what they value.

The RTOs that will thrive under the new model are those that embrace self-assurance as a genuine tool for improvement rather than a new form of compliance documentation. They are the providers whose leaders ask "does this work?" before they ask "does this comply?" They are the organisations where quality is visible in daily practice, not hidden in policy folders. They are the teams where compliance professionals are valued as quality partners rather than document managers.

The RTOs that will struggle are those that attempt to apply the old logic to the new framework: rewriting policies to reference new standard numbers without changing the underlying approach, collecting data without analysing it, conducting self-assessments without acting on findings, and treating practice guides as new checklists to be ticked rather than as invitations to reflect.

The shift from "prove you have it" to "prove it works" is not a regulatory technicality. It is a challenge to the sector to take quality seriously in a way that goes beyond compliance. To build organisations that are genuinely curious about their own performance, genuinely responsive to their learners and industries, and genuinely committed to getting better. The Standards provide the direction. The culture must provide the will.

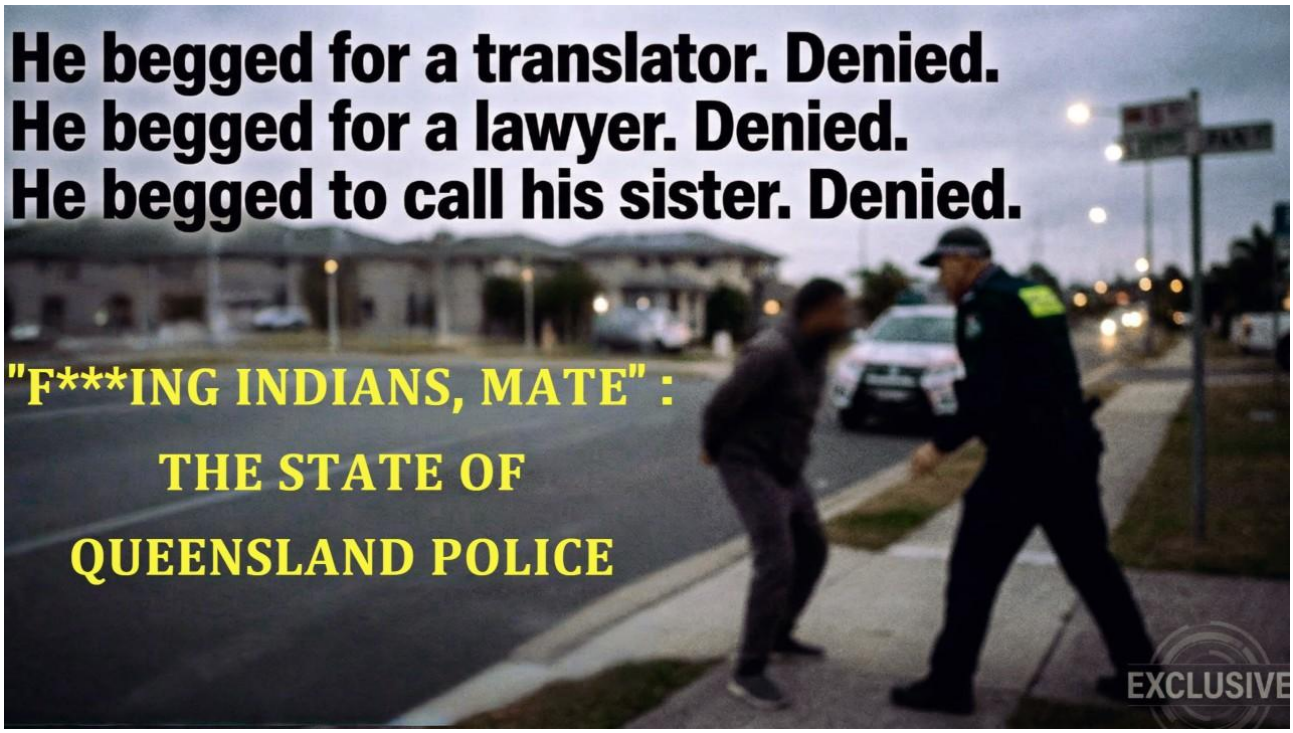
*Sukh Sandhu is the Director of CAQA and Editor-in-Chief of VET Sector Magazine, with 30 years of experience in Australia's vocational education and training sector. For more resources on the Standards for RTOs 2025, visit [*caqa.com](http://caqa.com/)*.*

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Queensland Officers Called Indians "a Bunch of F***ing Perverts" on Body Cam.

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 18 March 2026

A resident in Lawnton, north of Brisbane, accused a Punjabi rideshare driver of masturbating in his car. That same resident screamed: *"You fin' Indian dog! You shit on my country! He's a paedophile. Get him the f off our street."*



The driver had been on the phone to his sister in India for 59 minutes. His hands were gesturing as he spoke. His car had tinted windows.

His Uber trip log proved he was working in the area.

That resident later refused to give evidence.

Both witnesses refused to attend court. The charges collapsed after 12 months.

But before any evidence was examined, before any investigation was conducted, this is what happened on that street:

He begged for a translator. Denied.

He begged for a lawyer. Denied.

He begged to call his sister. Denied.

He stood on a street in Queensland, barely able to understand the language being spoken at him, accused of something so vile it would make anyone's stomach turn, stripped of every right that was supposed to protect him, while a stranger screamed, "You f***in' Indian dog! You shit on my country!"

And the officers who were supposed to help him? They got back in their car and said this:

"F**ing Indians, mate, they are a bunch of f**ing perverts."

Then they charged him. And prosecuted him for an entire year.

His name is Singh. He is a Punjabi rideshare driver. He came to Australia to study and to build a life. And this country, through its officers, through its prosecutors, through its institutions, *crushed* him.

Not because of what he did. Because of what he looked like.

Sit with that. Do not scroll past it. Sit with it.

The evidence that should have ended this before it started:

Singh showed the officers his phone on the spot. His Uber trip log proved he was working. His call log proved he had been speaking to his sister in India for 59 consecutive minutes. The complainant alleged his hands were in the air; if that were true, he physically could not have been doing what he was accused of. His car had tinted windows, making it questionable whether anyone could even see inside.

Every piece of evidence pointed to innocence. The officers saw all of it. They charged him anyway. The prosecutor saw all of it. They *upgraded* the charge to a more serious indictable offence.

The complainant who made the allegation? Refused to give evidence. Both witnesses? "Did not wish to attend court." The charge? Dropped after 12 months. Dismissed. Gone.

But Singh's life? That was already destroyed.

Let me tell you what 12 months of false prosecution does to a human being.

In Punjabi and Indian culture, an accusation of this nature does not sit quietly in a courtroom. It burns through everything. Family. Community. Friendships. Reputation. People do not wait for a magistrate to decide your innocence. They step back. They whisper. They vanish from your life to protect their own name.

Singh went from a wide circle of friends to complete isolation. Total. He had no one.

He was forced to abandon his studies because every dollar he had went to defending himself against charges built on nothing. That decision now threatens him with deportation. The country he believed in is now trying to remove him from it.

His own words: "I was robbed of all dignity and made to feel dirty and worthless. All the plans and dreams I had in coming to Australia have vanished before my eyes."

Read that again. Slowly. Dirty. Worthless. Vanished.

Those are not words of frustration. Those are words of a man who has been hollowed out from the inside by a system that was supposed to protect him.

His lawyer called it "soul-destroying." I call it something worse. I call it *predictable*. Because when officers carry racial hatred into their work, this is exactly, precisely, inevitably what happens.

Now let me ask the questions that Queensland Police do not want answered.

Why is the body cam footage being hidden?

The Guardian sought access to the video under Queensland's Right to Information Act. They were denied. The reason given? "An individual's right to privacy" and because releasing it might "discourage the sharing of information and cooperation with police."

Pause on that. The officers were caught on their own body cameras making racist statements about an entire nationality while investigating a man from that nationality. And the system's response is to protect the *officers*' privacy?

Whose privacy is being protected here? Not Singh's. His life, his reputation, his name, his community standing have all been torn apart in public. He is the one who suffered. He is the one whose dignity was stripped away.

But the officers who called Indians "a bunch of f***ing perverts"? Their identities are shielded. Their faces are hidden. Their careers, as far as we know, continue.

This is not privacy protection. This is *evidence* suppression. This is an institution closing ranks around its own while a man it wronged fights for his life in Federal Court.

And the claim that releasing the footage would "discourage cooperation with police"? That is an extraordinary statement. It tells you everything about what the institution values. It is more concerned about protecting the comfort of officers who express racial hatred than it is about the public's right to see how those officers behave when they think no one is watching.

If the footage exonerated the officers, it would have been released. It has not been. Draw your own conclusion.

What kind of people are being recruited into these roles?

This is a question every single Australian should be asking. Not just about Queensland. About every police force, every prosecution office, every public institution that gives individuals power over other people's lives.

These officers did not whisper their views. They did not hesitate. They did not lower their voices. They spoke about Indians the way you would speak about something you find disgusting, casually, comfortably, as part of everyday conversation with a colleague who clearly shared the sentiment.

That level of comfort does not develop overnight. That is not someone having a bad day. That is someone whose racism is so deeply embedded, so normalised within their workplace, that they do not even register it as something to hide.

So here is what I want to know:

- What screening processes exist to identify racial bias in recruits before they are given a badge, a weapon, and authority over people's lives?
- What ongoing psychological and cultural competency assessments exist for serving officers?
- When an officer is caught expressing open racial hatred on camera, what actually happens to them? Are they reassigned? Retrained? Promoted? Or does the institution simply bury the footage and hope no one files a Freedom of Information request?
- How many complaints from Indian, South Asian, First Nations, African, Middle Eastern, and Pacific Islander Australians have been filed against these same officers? Have those complaints been investigated with the same vigour that was used to prosecute Singh on charges built on nothing?
- If these officers believe Indians are "a bunch of perverts," how many investigations involving Indian Australians have they handled? How many of those were tainted by the same bias we now know they carry?
- How many other body cam recordings contain similar remarks that have never been reviewed, never been flagged, never been disclosed?

We do not know the answers. And that is not an accident. That is by design.

How is racism still acceptable in public roles in 2026?

We live in an era where a social media post can end a career. A poorly worded email can trigger an investigation. A single complaint can lead to suspension.

But an officer can call an entire race "a bunch of f***ing perverts" on a government-issued body camera, during a government-funded investigation, while exercising government-granted power over a vulnerable person, and the institution's response is: "We are unable to comment."

If a teacher said this about their students, they would be fired before the end of the day. If a doctor said this about their patients, they would lose their licence. If a corporate employee said this on a company device, they would be escorted from the building.

But a police officer says it while actively investigating and charging a person from the community they are degrading, and we are told this is a matter of "privacy"?

There is no privacy in prejudice when that prejudice carries a badge.

There is no "unable to comment" when the comment is on camera.

There is no "professional policing services" when the officers delivering those services see an entire people as subhuman.

The hardest questions no one is asking:

- If these officers had not accidentally left their body camera running, would Singh still have a criminal record today?
- How many people *do* have criminal records right now because officers with identical biases were more careful with the "off" button?

- What message does it send to every international student, every migrant, every person of colour in Queensland that this footage exists, the magistrate called it "racist," and the institution's response is silence?

- What message does it send to other officers who share these views? That the institution will protect them? That body cam footage will be suppressed? That they can say whatever they want and face no consequence?

- Why was the prosecution not immediately discontinued the moment the body cam footage was discovered? Who made the decision to continue? Who approved the upgrade to a more serious charge? And are those individuals still making charging decisions today?

- If Queensland Police truly has "a broad range of programs, policies and initiatives that support professional and ethical practice," how did two officers with open racial contempt for an entire nationality pass through every single one of those safeguards?

Every one of these questions demands an answer. "Unable to comment" is not an answer. It is a wall. And walls protect the people behind them, not the people outside.

Singh is suing in the Federal Court for $493,488 plus aggravated and exemplary damages. His lawyer described what happened as "soul-destroying" and said Singh "came to a country with a reputation for fairness and tolerance but received the opposite."

I hope the court does what the institution refused to.

And to every officer, prosecutor, or public servant who carries this kind of hatred into their work:

You took an oath. You were given authority not because you earned it through superiority, but because the public trusted you to use it without prejudice. Every time you look at a person and see their race before you see their humanity, you betray that oath. Every time you dismiss evidence because the accused does not look like you, you betray the law you swore to uphold. Every time you deny someone a translator, a lawyer, a phone call, because you have already decided what "kind of person" they are, you betray the most fundamental principle of justice.

You are not protectors. You are the threat.

And the body cameras are always rolling. Even when you think they are not. The truth recorded itself while you were too comfortable in your contempt to notice. It did it for Singh. It will do it again.

The community is watching. The courts are listening. And the days of hiding behind "unable to comment" are numbered.

Justice for Singh. Accountability for every officer who hides behind a badge. Reform for every institution that protects them.

#JusticeForSingh #PoliceAccountability #RacialDiscrimination #Australia #SystemicRacism #PoliceBias #HumanRights #IndianCommunity #MigrantRights #InstitutionalRacism #Queensland #FederalCourt #BodyCamFootage #TransparencyNow

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Broader

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

Sukh Sandhu Featured Alongside Modi, Sadhguru, Kotak, and Bajaj on the Cover of AsiaOne's Greatest Brands & Leaders 2026

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 30 March 2026

Some moments arrive quietly.



And then some arrive so loudly that they silence every doubt you ever carried.

Being featured on the cover of AsiaOne **Magazine 's Greatest Brands** & **Leaders 2026** (Asia, Americas, Africa) edition is one of those moments.

This is not just any publication.

AsiaOne is the **only Pan-Asia business and news magazine** with a presence across 16+ countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Americas, and Australia.

Its Greatest Brands & Leaders television series holds the **World Book of Records** (**London, UK**) title for being the **Most Broadcasted Business Brands** & **Leaders TV Series**, honoured not once but **twice** in 2021 and 2022.

Over 82 original episodes and 82+ repeats. More than 9,000 minutes of television and digital content. Broadcast across ET NOW , Zee Tv & **APAC**, Zee USA & **Canada**, **Colors USA**

& **Canada**, and **CNBC Africa**. Viewership of over 50 million on television and another 100 million through digital platforms across 81 countries.

AsiaOne was also awarded **Best International Media House** & **Research Company 2022** (Asia) by AI Global Media London UK, and recognised as one of the **30 Most Innovative Brands of the Year 2023** by The Silicon Review, USA.

Over 12,000 pages of original content. 36+ magazine issues and world-class coffee table books. 20+ international business and social summits held across London, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Bangkok, New Delhi, and Mumbai. Over 5,000 global awardees recognised across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and the Americas.

What does it mean to be on this cover?

It means being placed among the greatest brands and leaders of our time, not by self-proclamation but through an internationally recognised, research-based selection process scrutinised by eminent jury members. It means your name, your brand, and your work are broadcast to 150 million viewers across 81 countries. It means you stand in the company of individuals who have shaped nations, industries, and millions of lives.

This cover features **H.E. Shri Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister of India who has reshaped the nation's global standing and driven one of the world's largest digital and economic transformations; **Sadhguru**, Founder of the Isha Foundation, a globally revered spiritual leader whose movements for environmental sustainability and inner wellbeing have reached hundreds of millions worldwide; **Uday Kotak**, Founder of Kotak Mahindra Bank and one of India's most respected financial leaders who built a global institution from the ground up; **Rajiv Bajaj**, Managing Director of Bajaj Auto and the visionary behind one of the world's largest motorcycle manufacturers; **Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber**, CEO of ADNOC and President of COP28 who presided over one of the most consequential climate summits in history; **Savitri Jindal**, Chairperson Emeritus of the OP Jindal Group and among the wealthiest women in the world; **Ananya Birla**, next-generation entrepreneur championing financial inclusion for millions; **Dr. Christina Rahm**, Cornell and Harvard-credentialed scientist and wellness pioneer; **Dr. J.C. Chaudhry**, Founder of Aakash Educational Services who built one of India's largest education empires impacting millions of students; **Shekhar Natarajan**, Founder of Orchestro.AI with 207+ patents and Fortune 500 leadership at Walmart, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Disney, and Target; **Ashish Monpara**, Chairman of Modern Group who has invested over $850 million in Uganda's economy; and many more extraordinary leaders from business, governance, healthcare, technology, and education across multiple continents.

These are not ordinary names. These are the architects of modern economies, the builders of institutions, the voices that move markets and inspire millions.

And there, among them, is **Sukh Sandhu**, Director of CAQA and Career Calling International, from Melbourne, Australia.

That is what this cover means.

This recognition belongs to Compliance and Quality Assurance (CAQA) . It belongs to Career Calling International . It belongs to every single person who believed in what we were building when the world hadn't noticed yet.

To my Mamma and Papa: everything I am started with you. Your sacrifices, your discipline, your quiet belief in education and hard work planted every seed that grew into this moment. I carry your lessons in every decision I make.

To every teacher, Guru, and mentor who has ever shaped my thinking, challenged my limits, or handed me a lesson I did not yet know I needed: you are woven into every achievement that carries my name. From classrooms in India to lecture halls in the United States and Australia, every person who took the time to teach me how to live and how to learn gave me a brick that built this foundation. I owe you more than gratitude. I owe you the promise that I will keep passing it forward.

To all my managers and colleagues across my career, especially Sushma Gurung, Wade Keenan, Vikas Dhingra, and Ashok Chopra Lion: you shaped how I lead, how I think, and how I hold myself accountable. To my colleagues from ASQA, the Department of Education and Training, Navitas, Australian Catholic University (ACU), TAFEs, universities, and every organisation I have had the privilege of working with across Canada, the USA, India, and my home Australia: each of you contributed something to this journey, and I carry those experiences with me every day. Thank you.

To our Mamma Sweden, Anna Haranas: you saw something in me before the world did. Your unwavering support, your wisdom, and your love have been a guiding force in my life and in building what CAQA is today. No words will ever be enough.

To my wife, Rajkiran Sandhu, Nurse Practitioner (NP): you are the strongest person I know. A Nurse Practitioner who saves lives by day and holds our family together with grace and love every single day. None of this would exist without your patience, your strength, and your partnership. You are the foundation behind every achievement with my name on it.

To my children, Shaan and Simo: you two are the reason Papa works this hard. Everything I build, every late night, every early morning, it all comes back to you. I love you both more than any words on any page could ever capture. You are my greatest pride and my deepest purpose. The world is yours, and I will spend every breath making sure you know that.

To my younger brother, Raminder (Deepak): before there were teams, before there were clients, before there were awards, there was you. My biggest support system growing up. You stood beside me when no one else understood the path I was choosing. A brother like you is not something everyone gets, and I have never forgotten that. This moment is yours too.

To my sisters Sanya, Harneet, Beena didi, and Mati didi, and to my dear friends Money, Manpreet, Lucky, and everyone who has walked alongside me through the years, and to all my relatives near and far: you have been my greatest support system. Your love, your belief, and your presence have carried me through moments no one else saw. This belongs to all of you.

To my Patwari Mama and Mami ji: you have been like parents to me. Your guidance, your warmth, and your unconditional love gave me a second home and a strength that no distance could ever diminish. I am forever grateful.

To our CEO, Michelle Newman: your leadership, your relentless standards, and your vision have shaped CAQA into the organisation it is today. You don't just manage, you elevate everything and everyone around you.

To Stuart Newman, our Business Development Manager: your energy, your commitment, and your ability to connect with people have been instrumental in taking our reach to where it stands today.

To our entire team: Aman Plaha, Vijay Patel, Rukman Sangha, Rishabh Arora, Chanpreet Singh, Harneet Randhawa, Sahiba Aqdas, Nia, Mani, Dewan, Rebecca, Iqbal, Sibtain Jan, Ahsan, Arit Mangal, Purushottam, Steve Sutherland-Tomey, and every single person who has poured their talent, their time, and their heart into CAQA, Career Calling International, CAQA Resources, CAQA Systems, CAQA Digital, and Online Media Solutions. You are not staff. You are the reason we stand here today.

To our clients: you trusted us with your dreams. You trusted us with your compliance, your registrations, your audits, your futures. Every five out of five rating we have earned is because we treated your success as our own. That trust is something we will never take for granted.

To our partners and third-party suppliers: eSkilled, Compliant Learner Resources, VETR, Precision Group, and every industry colleague and expert who has collaborated with us, shared knowledge, and raised the bar alongside us. Excellence is never built in isolation. Your partnership has been instrumental in delivering the quality our clients expect and deserve. Thank you for walking this road with us.

This cover represents 30 years of work across VET, higher education, AI, compliance, risk management, migration law, property law, and research.

Thousands of audits. Ten Master's degrees, including an LLM from Golden Gate University completed with **Highest Honours**. A doctoral journey at Golden Gate University. Fluency in 12 languages. Over 35,000 poems written. 550+ stories. VET Sector Magazine, whose editions and newsletters now reach thousands of readers through the world's biggest newsstands. ISO auditing across industries. Forbes Business Council. United Nations platforms. The Forttuna Education Council. And a team that refused to accept anything less than excellence.

But more than any credential, this cover represents one simple truth:

You don't need anyone's permission to build something that matters.

Thank you, AsiaOne Magazine and URS Media, for this extraordinary honour. Thank you, Mr. Rajat Raj Shukal, Alisha, and the entire AsiaOne team, for building a world record-holding platform that gives Asian leaders a global stage they have always deserved.

This is not the destination. This is fuel.

Here's the cover page of the edition:



Regards,

Sukh Sandhu

Director, CAQA | Editor-in-Chief | ISO Auditor | Poet and Writer

Forbes Business Council Member | United Nations Speaker

Top 100 Global Educator | RTO/AI/HE/ISO Expert

Global Advisory Board Member, Forttuna Education Council

#AsiaOne #GreatestBrandsAndLeaders2026 #CAQA #CareerCallingInternational #WorldBookOfRecords #Leadership #VET #HigherEducation #Compliance #AI #GlobalRecognition #AsianExcellence #VETSectorMagazine #Family #Grateful

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Fake Agreements. Stolen Resources. Fabricated Evidence. This Is How Criminal Minds Are Operating Inside Australia's Education and Training Industry

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 31 March 2026

🚨 **Fake Agreements. Stolen Resources. Fabricated Evidence. This Is How Criminal Minds Are Operating Inside Australia's Education and Training Industry**



ASQA is now asking RTOs for **paid invoices** and **licence agreements** to verify who actually owns the training and assessment resources being used.

And what they are finding is alarming.

Multiple initial registration applications have been rejected recently, all linked to the same pattern: a consultant submitting **nearly identical** documentation across different applicants. Same student handbooks. Same policies and procedures. Same training and assessment strategies. Same business plans. Same organisational charts. Word for word.

CAQA Resources is one of the intellectual property holders directly affected.

Our learning and assessment materials were identified by ASQA in these applications. The regulator contacted us to verify ownership and confirmed that **no licensing arrangements** existed between us and the consultant distributing them. No permission had been granted. No fees had been paid. We confirmed this directly to ASQA.

What the consultant did instead was create **fabricated EULAs** and service agreements to make it appear as though legitimate access had been secured. Invoices were issued by the consultant's own entities for resources that belonged to us and other organisations.

This is not incompetence. This is **deliberate**, **calculated**, **and unethical** conduct by individuals who have turned the registration process into a money-making factory at the expense of every legitimate provider, every genuine student, and every resource developer who has invested years of expertise into building quality materials.

The applicants themselves were often unaware. During closing meetings with ASQA, several CEOs confirmed they did not know the intellectual property of another organisation had been used without authority in their applications. They paid a consultant. They trusted a consultant. And that consultant used stolen materials and forged documents to assemble their entire submission.

These are not isolated incidents. ASQA has identified this as a **systematic pattern** across multiple applications, all receiving an overall risk rating of **Severe**, all rejected without an opportunity to rectify.

The findings go beyond intellectual property theft. False MOUs with aged care providers who confirmed no agreement existed. Photographs of equipment sourced from overseas websites and presented as the applicant's own. CEOs who could not answer basic questions about their own operations because the entire submission had been constructed by the consultant. Financial documents with identical figures across completely different organisations. Interview responses so similar across applicants that ASQA concluded the CEOs had been coached.

This is what a **criminal operation** inside the education sector looks like.

Someone is forging documents, stealing intellectual property, fabricating evidence, coaching applicants, and collecting fees for applications they know are built on lies. And the people paying for this service are losing their application fees, their time, and their credibility.

ASQA is tightening its verification processes. The regulator is now cross-referencing submissions, contacting original IP holders like us directly, and verifying the authenticity of every agreement and invoice. We welcome this. We have always cooperated fully with the regulator and will continue to do so.

If you are an RTO or an applicant working with a consultant, ask yourself three questions:

Where did these resources come from?

Is there a genuine, signed, and dated licence agreement with the actual copyright holder?

Can you produce a legitimate invoice showing payment to the original author?

If you cannot answer all three with confidence, you have a problem.

We have spent years developing resources that support quality training outcomes. We will not stand by while unethical operators profit from our work without permission, and we will not tolerate fabricated agreements being used to misrepresent access to our intellectual property.

The VET sector deserves better than this. Students who enrol in good faith deserve better than this. And the legitimate consultants who do the right thing every day deserve better than being grouped with people who operate like criminals.

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We will protect our intellectual property. We will work with the regulator. And we will hold those responsible to account.

Sukh Sandhu

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

Seven Levels of AI Usage, and the Skills and Knowledge You Need at Each.

By Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu | First published 27 April 2026

The regulators have caught up with the technology. Across every major sector, the rules for how organisations deploy AI are no longer optional reading.



The European Union's **AI Act** (Regulation 2024/1689) entered into force on 1 August 2024. Prohibited practices and **AI literacy obligations** have applied since 2 February 2025. General Purpose AI obligations took effect on 2 August 2025. The full obligations for high-risk systems apply from 2 August 2026 (just over three months away). Penalties reach **€35 million** or **7 per cent** of global annual turnover for prohibited practices, **€15 million** or **3 per cent** for high-risk non-compliance.

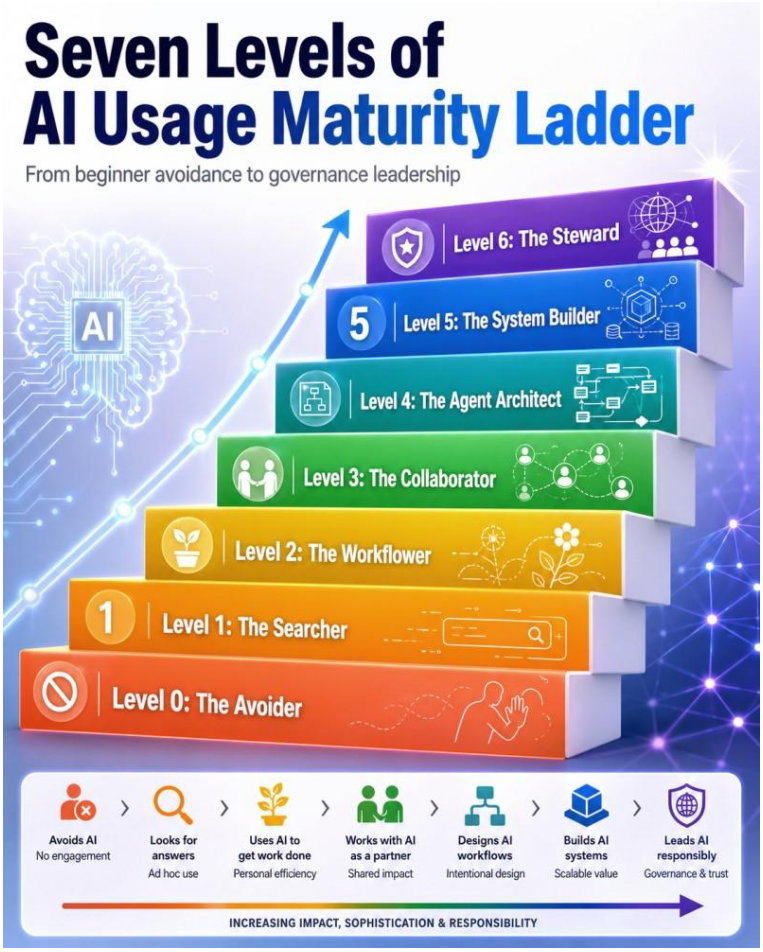
In December 2023, ISO and IEC published the world's first international AI management system standard, **ISO/IEC 42001:2023**. Microsoft, AWS, Google, IBM, Cognizant, and dozens of others have certified against it. The US Department of Labour released its national **AI Literacy Framework** in February 2026. The **NIST AI Risk Management Framework** has been the operating manual for responsible AI in the United States since January 2023, with a generative AI profile added in July 2024. Australia's **Voluntary AI Safety Standard** (10 guardrails) was published in September 2024 with a mandatory version in drafting.

The **OECD AI Principles** were updated in May 2024. UNESCO's **Recommendation on the Ethics of AI** (193 member states) has been in force since November 2021.



DataCamp's 2026 survey of more than 500 enterprise leaders found **88** per cent now rank basic data literacy as important for day-to-day work and **72** per cent say the same for AI literacy. Gartner places most organisations at the bottom of its five-stage maturity model. The MIT CISR study finds only **13** per cent have moved past basic awareness.

In other words, the bar has been raised across every industry. Most of the workforce is still standing under it. The skills gap is no longer a productivity issue. It is a measurable governance, legal, and competitive risk.



Here are the seven levels of AI usage that actually matter, with the skills and knowledge required at each, and the standards and guidelines that apply across sectors.

Level 0: **The Avoider**. The professional who has not engaged. Either dismissive ("a fad") or fearful ("it will replace me"). **Skills**: the willingness to begin. **Knowledge**: none required. The block is mindset, not capability. The 2025 Australian Productivity Commission and ABS data show fewer than half of Australian workers have used generative AI for work in the last twelve months. Most workplaces in 2026 still start here. From manufacturing floors to legal partners, healthcare administrators to construction site managers, this is the largest single cohort.

Level 1: **The Searcher**. AI used as a fancier Google. Quick questions, simple summaries, occasional fact checks. **Skills**: basic prompting, phrasing a clear question. **Knowledge**: which tool to open, that AI can be wrong, and (critically) the rule that client data, patient records, financial information, and trade secrets do not go into a free public chatbot. ChatGPT alone reports more than **800 million** weekly active users. A receptionist looking up a flight schedule, a junior accountant summarising a meeting, a marketing intern drafting a social caption are all here. Saves you minutes per week.

Level 2: **The Workflower**. From one-off questions to repeatable tasks. Drafting client emails, tightening a contract clause, reformatting a 100 page report, generating meeting notes. **Skills**: iterative prompting, tool selection, basic prompt structure (role, context, task, constraints). **Knowledge**: the relative strengths of **Claude**, **ChatGPT**, **Monica**, **Gemini**, **Copilot**, **Perplexity**. Lawyers reviewing contract redlines, HR managers drafting policy,

financial advisers preparing client briefings, real estate agents writing listings, journalists summarising press releases. Saves you hours per week.

Level 3: **The Collaborator**. You stop typing one-line prompts and start feeding the AI ***real context***. Briefs, datasets, project history, your own writing samples. You ask it to think, challenge, and critique, not just type. **Skills**: context engineering, critical evaluation, fact checking, asking the AI to argue against itself. **Knowledge**: how large language models actually work (**context windows**, **hallucination**, **token limits**), source quality, when AI is the wrong tool. Modern context windows now run from 200,000 tokens (Claude) to over 1 million tokens (Gemini), the difference between feeding the AI a chapter and feeding it the whole book. Consultants stress-testing strategy, doctors reviewing complex cases, lawyers analysing thousands of pages of discovery, financial analysts digesting earnings transcripts, engineers reviewing technical specifications. Saves you hours per day.

Level 4: **The Agent Architect**. You stop chatting and start building. Agents that perform whole chains of work for you. **Skills**: workflow design, tool integration (**Zapier**, **Make**, **n8n**, **APIs**), trigger logic, error handling. **Knowledge**: agent frameworks, where humans must stay in the loop, basic data security and access control. McKinsey's 2025 State of AI report identified agent-based deployments as the fastest growing AI category in the enterprise. Marketing teams running automated campaign workflows, customer service centres triaging tickets, insurance claims teams pre-processing documents, IT helpdesks resolving Tier 1 issues, recruiters screening applications (subject to bias audit obligations, see below). Saves you days per week.

Level 5: **The System Builder**. You stop building one agent and start running a ***team*** of them. One researches. One drafts. One fact checks. One formats. One files. Memory files hold your brand voice, terminology, and standards every single time. **Skills**: system architecture, memory file design, multi-agent orchestration, version control, observability. **Knowledge**: cost management at scale, failure modes, prompt versioning, evaluation methods. Algorithmic trading desks, multi-agent legal discovery pipelines, content production studios, drug discovery and clinical research workflows, defence and intelligence analysis platforms. Multiplies your output by an order of magnitude.

Level 6: **The Steward**. The level the popular framework leaves out, and the most important one in 2026. You stop optimising **your** work and start shaping how **others** use AI. You write the policy. You train the team. You audit the outputs. You sign off on the governance framework. You are accountable when an AI tool gets it wrong on someone else's behalf. **Skills**: governance design, risk assessment, training delivery, ethical review, vendor evaluation, change management, third-party assurance. **Knowledge**: the regulatory landscape (full map below), privacy law, sector-specific compliance, model evaluation methodology, ethical frameworks. CEOs, Boards, Chief Risk Officers, Chief Audit Executives, Chief Information Officers, Chief Medical Officers, Chief Compliance Officers, General Counsel, Heads of HR, Directors of Quality, Editors-in-Chief. **Not optional**.



The standards and guidelines that now apply, mapped by sector.

Cross-sector (applies to everyone). EU AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689). ISO/IEC 42001:2023 (AI Management Systems). ISO/IEC 23894:2023 (AI Risk Management). ISO/IEC 22989:2022 (AI Concepts and Terminology). ISO/IEC 38507:2022 (Governance Implications of AI). NIST AI Risk Management Framework 1.0 with the July 2024 Generative AI Profile. Australia's Voluntary AI Safety Standard (10 guardrails, September 2024). Australia's AI Ethics Principles (8 principles). OECD AI Principles (updated May 2024). UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of AI (November 2021). G7 Hiroshima AI Process Code of Conduct. Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI (May 2024). The Bletchley Declaration and the Seoul Declaration on Frontier AI Safety. The General Data Protection Regulation and equivalent national privacy laws (**Australia's Privacy Act 1988**, the **CCPA**, the **UK Data Protection Act**) all apply whenever AI processes personal data.

Financial services. The Financial Stability Board's November 2024 report on AI in finance. The Basel Committee's principles for the sound management of operational risk (extended to AI). Singapore Monetary Authority's **FEAT** principles (Fairness, Ethics, Accountability, Transparency) and the **Veritas** toolkit. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority's GenAI guidance (August 2024). The Bank of International Settlements' AI guidance. In Australia, **APRA's CPS 230** (Operational Risk Management) and **CPS 234** (Information Security) apply directly. ASIC's regulatory expectations for AI in financial advice. The EU AI Act classifies most credit scoring and insurance underwriting as high-risk under Annex III.

Healthcare and life sciences. WHO's **Ethics and Governance of AI for Health** (2021) and the **LMMs** guidance for large multi-modal models (January 2024). The US **FDA's AI/ML Software as a Medical Device** (**SaMD**) Action Plan and the Predetermined Change Control Plan guidance. The EU Medical Device Regulation (MDR) and In Vitro Diagnostic Regulation (IVDR) for AI-enabled devices. Australia's **TGA** software-as-medical-device framework. The **NIST AI RMF** healthcare profile. The EU AI Act treats most AI medical devices as high-risk.

Human resources and employment. EU AI Act Annex III classifies AI used in recruitment, performance evaluation, promotion, termination, and task allocation as high-risk. **New York City Local Law 144** (in force since July 2023) requires annual independent bias audits of automated employment decision tools. The **US EEOC's** guidance on AI in employment (2023 to 2024). The UK **ICO's** employment AI guidance. Australia's **Fair Work Act** obligations and Privacy Act exposure. Illinois **AI Video Interview Act**. Colorado AI Act (effective February 2026).

Legal services. The UK **SRA's** risk outlook on AI in legal practice. The Law Society of England and Wales guidance. The American Bar Association Formal Opinion 512 (July 2024) on generative AI. Australia's Law Council guidance. Multiple state Supreme Court orders on AI use in court filings (in part driven by hallucinated case citations submitted in 2023 and 2024).

Public sector and government. The Australian **DTA's** AI in Government policy (mandatory across non-corporate Commonwealth entities since September 2024). The US OMB Memo M-24-10 on AI use in federal agencies. The UK Government's Generative AI Framework. Canada's **Directive on Automated Decision-Making** and Algorithmic Impact Assessment.

Education and training. UNESCO's AI competency frameworks for teachers and students (2024). The **Digital Education Council** AI Literacy Framework (March 2025). The OECD **AILit** Framework. The US Department of Labour AI Literacy Framework (February 2026). Australia's **Framework for Generative AI in Schools** (December 2023). The TEQSA expectations for AI in higher education. ASQA expectations for AI in vocational education and training.

Defence and national security. The US **DoD Responsible AI Strategy**. The **NATO** AI Strategy (revised 2024). The UK MOD's Defence AI Strategy. Australia's Department of Defence AI ethics framework. The Bletchley Park (November 2023) and Seoul (May 2024) frontier AI safety declarations.

Cybersecurity and information security. NIST AI RMF Generative AI Profile. ENISA AI threat landscape reports. The OWASP Top 10 for LLM Applications. The MITRE ATLAS framework for AI threats. ISO/IEC 27001 (information security) read together with ISO/IEC 42001.

Insurance. The US **NAIC** Model Bulletin on the use of AI by insurers (December 2023). State-level AI insurance laws (Colorado, Connecticut, New York). The EU AI Act high-risk classification of life and health insurance underwriting.

Marketing, media, and publishing. The EU AI Act transparency obligations on AI-generated content (Article 50). The Australian **ACMA** disinformation framework. The UK **ASA** guidance on AI-generated advertising. Reuters, AP, BBC, and major newsroom guidelines on

generative AI use in journalism. The **Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity** (**C2PA**) standards.

Critical infrastructure and energy. The EU AI Act high-risk classification of AI in critical infrastructure management. CISA's secure AI development guidelines. Australia's **SOCI Act** obligations for critical infrastructure operators using AI.



A note that every formal framework agrees on, and the popular one ignores. There is a thread running through every level from 1 to 6 that decides whether AI ***helps*** your work or ***damages*** it. That thread is **judgement**. Critical evaluation. Ethical use. Knowing when ***not*** to use AI. Recognising bias. Protecting client confidentiality, patient privacy, financial data, trade secrets. Avoiding plagiarism. Citing sources. The DEC, OECD, NIST, UNESCO, and ISO frameworks treat these as foundational from day one. The popular productivity-focused framework treats them as advanced extras. They are not. The Level 1 user who pastes client information into a free public chatbot has done more damage than the Level 5 user who has not yet built their fifth agent.



In every sector (**finance**, **healthcare**, **law**, **education**, **government**, **manufacturing**, **mining**, **construction**, **transport**, **agriculture**, **media**, **defence**) the gap is widening every week. Professionals who reach Level 4 and Level 5 in the next twelve months will deliver the same work in a fraction of the time, with sharper quality. Those who reach Level 6 will be the people writing the rules everyone else has to follow.

The technology is here. Most of it is free or close to it. The barrier is the **mindset**. Stop thinking of AI as a search bar. Start thinking of it as a team of specialised staff you have just been hired to manage, with regulators in Brussels, Washington, Canberra, London, Singapore, and Beijing watching from the next room.

What level are you operating at. Which skill do you need to build next. Which standard applies to your sector. And who in your team has to reach Level 6 before the next audit, inspection, or board meeting.

#AI #AILiteracy #AIGovernance #Leadership #FutureOfWork #Compliance #RiskManagement #ISO42001 #EUAIAct #NISTAIRMF #DigitalTransformation #FinancialServices #Healthcare #LegalTech #HRTech #PublicSector #Defence #Cybersecurity #CAQA

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Author: Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu

Publisher: Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu

Edition: 4, October 2026

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Connecting the Dots is published on LinkedIn by Dr Sukh Rashpal Sandhu. This edition collects the pieces in the order they were first published, with their original images.