

Niche Audiences

Education in Australia

What's changing, what matters and what to watch by 2026

Australia's education sector is evolving fast. From early learning all the way through to universities and vocational training, schools, TAFE and universities are dealing with big shifts in student expectations, government funding, technology, and global competition. If you're marketing in this space or helping an institution grow, here's what you need to know.

Media Precinct

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Early Childhood Education

Demand is booming

Young families are keen to get their children into early learning, and enrolments are rising. Almost half of all Australian children aged 0–5 attend formal care or preschool, boosted by a post-COVID mini baby boom.

And thanks to more subsidies and government support (NSW, for example, plans to build 100 new public preschools by 2027) combined with cost-of-living pressures on households, that number is growing. Nearly 89% of children in the year before school are enrolled in a preschool program.

That said, some families (especially in regional or low-income areas) still struggle to access affordable care. Waitlists are long in larger cities and workforce shortages are biting. Educators are in high demand, and quality is being watched closely.

Looking ahead:

If the government follows through on its plans for universal low-cost childcare, we'll see even higher demand by 2026. Expect growing focus on quality, staff training, and inclusion.

Primary and Secondary Schools

Private Growth, Public Pressure

Here's the big headline: private schools (especially independents) are booming. They've grown nearly 19% in the past five years, while public schools have barely shifted. Why? Parents perceive private schools to be better resourced and disciplined, even if they're stretching to pay fees.

Meanwhile, both sectors are dealing with teacher shortages, especially in maths, science and rural areas. The Federal Department of Education projected a shortfall of around 4,100 teachers by 2025. The good news? More young Australians are applying to become teachers again and teachers are high among New Zealand immigration which could see a workforce bounce back by 2026.

Integrating technology is another trend: most primary classrooms now use digital devices regularly, and the experience of remote learning in 2020–21 accelerated schools' adoption of e-learning platforms.

Looking ahead:

Public schools are fighting back. New funding agreements, better facilities and updated curricula could help turn things around. And with cost-of-living biting Australian households, some families are rethinking high-fee schools.

The VET Sector

Skills, Trades and Free TAFE

Vocational education is having a moment. The Australian government has poured funding into fee-free courses and skills training to help plug labour shortages – think construction, aged care, IT.

TAFE and private RTOs are both seeing enrolments rise, and apprenticeships are making a comeback. However, completion rates still need work, and the drop in international student numbers (due to tighter visa rules) has hit some private vocational education sectors hard.

Another trend is the rise of micro-credentials and short courses. Both universities and VET providers are increasingly offering micro-credentials – short, focused training modules often related to specific skills (like a cybersecurity fundamentals course, or a barista skills certificate). This blurs the line between vocational and higher education.

Looking ahead:

The VET sector will keep growing for domestic students. International VET? Not so much, at least for now. Providers will need to focus on quality and compliance to stay in the game.

Universities

Reform, Reputation and Recovery

Australia's universities are still recovering from the pandemic shock. Domestic student enrolments fell 2.4% in 2022 and 2023 to about 1.08 million, the lowest level since 2017. Young people jumped straight into jobs – many deferring or skipped university to work.

This is expected to rebound by 2026 as the labour market cools and more young people come of age. We're also seeing more micro-credentials, hybrid learning models, and better integration of technology in teaching. Lifelong learning is becoming a big play.

International students bounced back fast in 2023, but visa changes and housing shortages mean growth is slowing. Still, Australian universities are optimistic.

Looking ahead:

Expect more marketing focused on student support, employability, and outcomes – because today's students and their families are asking: is this degree worth it?

How families are thinking about Education

Parents are weighing costs, values, outcomes, and support. School decisions are increasingly driven by things like:

- Class sizes and facilities
- Academic results
- Student wellbeing and safety
- Extra programs (languages, arts, sport)
- Qualifications for future employment opportunities

At post-school level, students want flexibility, job-readiness, and clear career outcomes. They're mixing university and VET pathways more than ever. International students and parents care about safety, cost, and migration pathways – but education quality is still key.



Marketing Watchouts through to 2026

- ❑ **Prove value:** Whether it's school, university or TAFE – you need to show families and students why your education offering is worth it. That means clear outcomes, strong support, and a point of difference.
- ❑ **Talk affordability:** Promote subsidies, scholarships and flexible payments. Don't assume people know what's available.
- ❑ **Back up the buzz:** If you're claiming student wellbeing or outcomes, you need evidence. Word of mouth and online reviews matter.
- ❑ **Get digital right:** Gen Z and Gen Alpha want short videos, virtual tours, and easy online info. Don't ignore mobile-first content.
- ❑ **Mind the global market:** International recruitment is more complex now. Target emerging markets, support genuine students, and adapt to policy shifts.
- ❑ **Be ready to pivot:** Policy can change fast. Keep an eye on government reforms, housing issues, and visa settings. Agility will be key.



RESOLVE

The Media Precinct and Resolve Content are experts in media strategy, creative, content development, community management, and targeted campaigns that deliver. Australia's education sector is changing fast. From early learning to vocational training, schools, TAFE and universities are facing big shifts. If you're marketing in this space or helping an institution grow, we can help. Contact Glenda Wynyard to discuss your needs.

Get in touch

