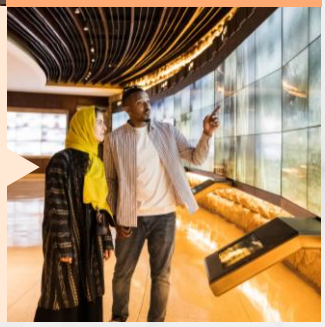
pwc

2026 Global AI Jobs Barometer

Two futures for Australian jobs in an AI era



Abstract

AI is not affecting all jobs equally: it is increasing the value of expertise in some roles, while shifting others toward less demanding work. That divergence is reshaping job growth, skill demand, and pay — and creating new choices for business leaders. This is the key finding from our analysis of over 1 billion job advertisements across six continents.

- **Demand for AI-skilled workers in Australia is accelerating –** job postings requiring AI skills doubled between 2024 and 2025, reversing four years of limited growth. That reflects a broader global pattern, with the most AI-exposed companies growing headcount at roughly double the rate of the least exposed.
- That growth is not playing out evenly: **'Professionalised' jobs are pulling ahead**. Advertisements for roles where AI automates routine tasks and requires more human expertise are growing twice as fast as 'Democratised' jobs — where AI takes on the more expert tasks — with 42% higher wage growth since 2021.
- **Wage premiums for AI skills continue to rise as competition for talent increases –** AI-skilled workers now command an average 62% premium, up from 57% last year. Locally, Technology, Media and Telecommunications, Manufacturing, Consumer Markets, and Financial Services industries pay the highest premiums.
- **Human skills are becoming more valuable, not less –** the occupations most exposed to AI are 2.5x more likely to rely on human-intensive abilities including empathy, judgement, and creativity.
- **AI is lifting skill expectations for entry-level work –** globally, the most AI-exposed junior roles are 7x more likely to require skills usually expected of senior workers.

Introduction

Last year's AI Jobs Barometer revealed a paradox that still holds: job numbers and wages are rising even in highly automatable roles. This year, we can explain why. What matters isn't how much AI automates, but which parts — the routine tasks or the expert ones. This distinction creates two very different futures for both global and Australian workers, and gives business leaders a clearer lens to act on.

Our analysis indicates that rather than replacing jobs, AI is reshaping them in fundamentally different ways. It is 'Professionalising' some roles and 'Democratising' others. The result is a growing divergence in job growth, skill demand, and wage outcomes.

This year's findings suggest two main shifts: First, Australian organisations are moving beyond AI experimentation and into execution. The rebound in AI hiring and rapid growth in demand for specialists point to rising confidence in how AI can be applied in practice.

Second, AI's biggest gains are likely to come not from automation alone, but from redesigning how work gets done. Globally, more AI-exposed businesses are seeing both stronger productivity growth and rising demand for specialist AI capability and human skills including judgement, creativity, and empathy. Together, these suggest the real opportunity lies in reinvention: reshaping roles, workflows, and business models to get the best from both people and technology.

01

A two-track jobs market is emerging

AI is Professionalising work, automating away routine tasks, elevating the importance of human expertise, judgement, and creativity. It is also Democratising work, taking on more complex tasks, leaving people with less demanding work. This divergence is creating two tracks in the labour market with markedly different outcomes.

Three types of jobs

All jobs globally fall into one of three categories:

01 **Low AI exposure jobs:** Jobs that include few tasks in which AI has capabilities, so AI is likely to have limited impact on the role

Examples: Chefs, construction workers, mechanics.

02 **Professionalised jobs:** Jobs reshaped by AI to demand more expertise.

Examples: Radiologists, employment recruiters, air traffic controllers.

03 **Democratised jobs**: Jobs reshaped by AI to demand less expertise.

Examples: Software developers, loan officers, finance managers.

See Methodology appendix for more information.

AI is having two different impacts on jobs depending on whether it is automating more or less expert tasks

Example: Inventory Clerk

More expert tasks	Manage inventory
AI automated	AI automated
Less expert tasks	**Move stock**
Remain	Remain

50% of jobs are being Democratised (shift toward less expert tasks)

10 examples of Democratised occupations

Interior designers	Software developers
Contact centre information clerks	IT service managers
Medical secretaries	Construction supervisors
Systems administrators	Web technicians
Accounting clerks	Process control technicians

Example: Recruiter

More expert tasks	Negotiate contracts
Remain	Remain
Less expert tasks	**Screen CVs**
AI automated	AI automated

24% of jobs are being Professionalised (shift toward more expert tasks)

10 examples of Professionalised occupations

Client information workers	Valuers and loss assessors
Research and development managers	Dispensing opticians
Religious professionals	Musicians, singers, composers
Environmental engineers	Personnel and careers professionals
Executive secretaries	Air traffic controllers

AI can increase the need for expertise in two fundamental ways. By taking on the routine tasks in a job, AI leaves the more complex and expert tasks to people. For example, AI helps lawyers with basic tasks like document summarisation, leaving people tougher challenges like building a case in court.

On the other hand, AI can take away the expert tasks in a role, leaving the less demanding tasks for people. Consider inventory clerks. AI now performs complex tasks like managing inventory, leaving people less specialised tasks like moving stock in warehouses.

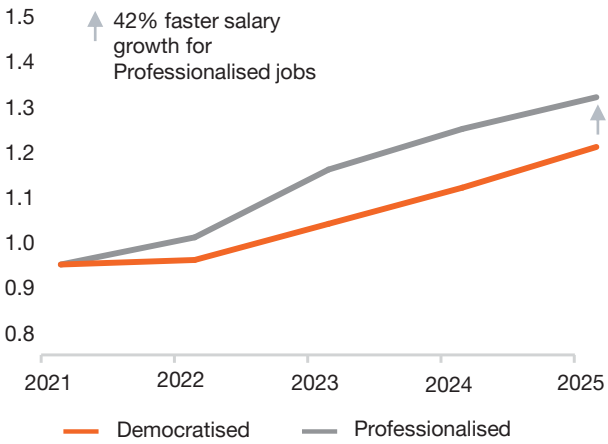
AI's impact on Professionalised and Democratised jobs will be widely felt. Half (50%) of advertised jobs in Australia are Democratised, while around a quarter (24%) are Professionalised and the remaining quarter (26%) have low exposure to AI.

Professionalised jobs are pulling ahead in skill growth, pay, and volume of job postings — while Democratised jobs are falling behind

Professionalised jobs across the world are adding new skills at twice the rate of Democratised jobs.

Professionalised roles have seen 42% faster growth in average salaries relative to Democratised roles since 2021

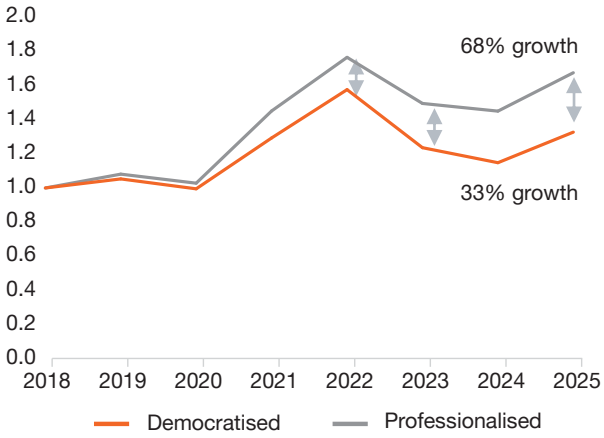
Growth in advertised annual salary, Democratised and Professionalised jobs, relative to 2021, global



Source: PwC analysis, Lightcast data, Teeselink and Carey (2026)
Notes: Due to data robustness, we only include the six countries for which Lightcast data is available from 2012 onwards.

Professionalised roles are demanding additional skills at twice the rate of Democratised roles

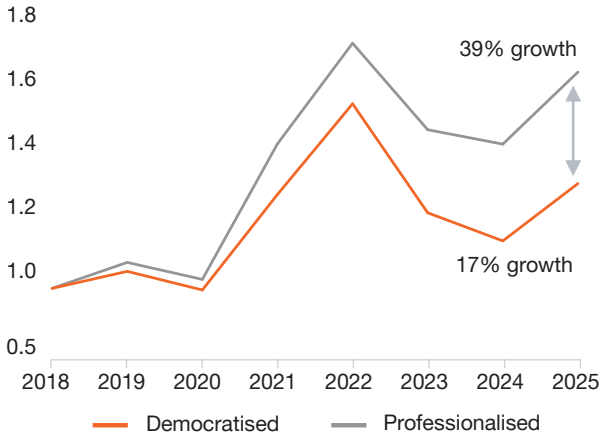
Number of skills demanded relative to 2018, Democratised vs Professionalised occupations, global



Source: PwC analysis, Lightcast data, Teeselink and Carey (2026)
Notes: Due to data robustness, we only include the six countries for which Lightcast data is available from 2012 onwards.

Professionalised jobs are growing more quickly than Democratised jobs, and the gap had widened since 2022

Number of job postings relative to 2018, 2018-2025, Democratised and Professionalised occupations, global



Source: PwC analysis, Lightcast data, Teeselink and Carey (2026)
Notes: Due to data robustness, we only include the six countries for which Lightcast data is available from 2012 onwards

The market is already reflecting this divergence. Professionalised roles are seeing 42% faster salary growth than Democratised jobs, with the gap widening since AI adoption accelerated. While both job categories are still growing, Professionalised roles are growing much faster — signalling a gradual labour market shift away from Democratised roles.

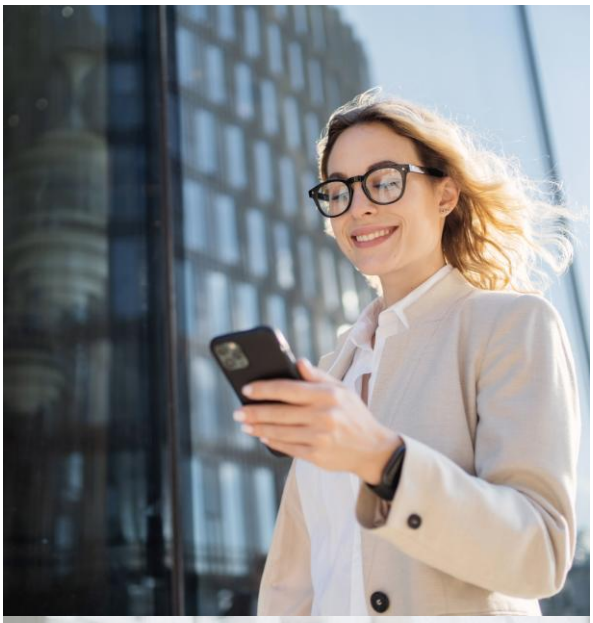
What's driving this Professionalised premium? Trust

What sits behind the premium on Professionalised roles is not just skill — it's trust.

As AI takes on more of the execution, employers are placing greater value on the people who can apply judgement, navigate ambiguity, carry accountability, and be trusted on what happens next. In other words, AI is not devaluing expertise; it is concentrating value around trusted expertise.

> AI is not devaluing expertise; it is concentrating value around trusted expertise."
>
> **Peter Wheeler**

Professionalised roles are pulling ahead both in volume and wages as the premium is rising not just for what people know, but for how credibly they can apply it in the real world. AI is making human-intensive qualities more visible, not less.



Actions for business leaders

Diagnose your two-track exposure before you act. Half of advertised jobs in Australia are currently Democratised, a quarter are Professionalised. But most organisations are making workforce, hiring, and investment decisions without knowing their own split. Map your roles against the two tracks — where AI is elevating human expertise, and where it is absorbing it. This shapes everything downstream: which roles to redesign, where to invest in capability, how to unlock the real productivity opportunity, and where attrition risk is quietly building.

02

Entry-level roles are being rewritten for senior capability

Junior roles are also starting to diverge: some are shrinking, while others are being reshaped to demand capabilities traditionally associated with more senior workers.

In many of the entry-level roles most exposed to AI, such as junior data analysts, the skill bar is rising quickly. These jobs are increasingly demanding capabilities that were once expected later in a career, including judgement, emotional intelligence, leadership, and stakeholder management. In fact, roles with the highest AI exposure are 7x more likely to require skills traditionally expected of senior workers than those with the lowest AI exposure.

Did your first job require these skills?

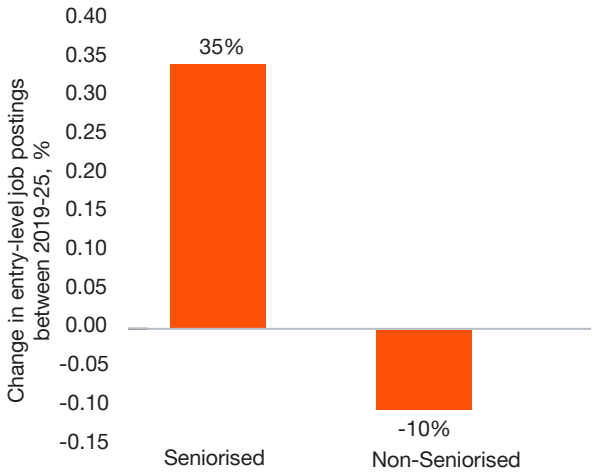
Examples of skills traditionally required in more senior roles that are now required in many AI-exposed entry level roles

- Motivational leadership
- Team building
- People management
- Stakeholder management
- Process management
- Mentorship
- Data-driven decision making

That rising skill bar is already showing up in job growth. Among the most AI-exposed entry-level roles, those requiring a larger number of new senior skills are continuing to grow strongly (35%), while other junior roles are declining (-10%).

AI-exposed entry level roles have very different job growth outcomes depending on whether they are being upskilled to demand more traditionally senior abilities

Change in entry-level job postings between 2019 and 2025, seniorised vs non-seniorised roles, top AI exposure quartile, US



Source: PwC analysis, Lightcast data
Notes: (1) An entry-level job posting is classified as "seniorised" if it contains ≥10 mentions of a skill that is both new and traditionally senior. A skill is defined as new for a given occupation if it has >10 mentions in entry-level postings in 2025 but ≤5 mentions in entry-level postings for the same occupation in 2019. A skill is defined as traditionally senior if, within the same AI exposure quartile, it had >50 mentions in experienced (non-entry-level) job postings in 2019 and ≤5 mentions in entry-level postings in 2019.

The data suggests AI is not eliminating junior talent — it is reshaping and seniorising it. In some organisations graduates are already running teams of AI agents. They are setting task priorities and interrogating outputs — work that looks far closer to orchestration and judgement than traditional entry-level execution.

This makes junior talent more valuable, more quickly. It also changes the employee value proposition: if graduates are contributing at a higher level earlier, they can no longer be treated as easily replaceable, or as part of a workforce model that relies on attrition.

Organisations will need to recruit more intentionally, invest earlier in capability, and rethink the traditional workforce pyramid model.

If AI is used for growth and reinvention — not just efficiency — some organisations may end up hiring more graduates, not fewer, because junior talent becomes a source of future advantage, rather than a cost line to manage.

That potential is not automatic; it requires organisations to invest in capability before the gap widens, and to do so early. For example, from 2027, all graduates joining PwC Australia's Early Careers Program will take part in a three-day immersive AI experience — combining hands-on work with real client scenarios, responsible AI practice, and the human skills that define professional readiness in an AI-enabled environment. The goal is to build trusted habits early, which will compound across their career.

Organisations that redesign their graduate models, rebuild their onboarding around senior capability development, and treat early-career investment as a strategic priority will build a talent pipeline that compounds in value over time. Those that default to the old pyramid — high volume at the bottom, attrition as the management tool — will find themselves short of the judgement, creativity and leadership they need precisely when competition for those capabilities is most intense. Getting this right is not a workforce planning question; it's a competitive one.

The equity challenge in an AI labour market

If AI is raising the bar for junior roles, the next question is: who gets the chance to clear it? This is where AI starts to become a social equity issue as well as a workforce one.

The workers most exposed to AI disruption are not evenly distributed across the labour market, and the risks are likely to fall hardest on those who already face barriers to opportunity. Women, for example, are disproportionately represented in administrative and clerical roles[1] — jobs more exposed to democratisation, where AI can take on more of the expert tasks and leave workers with less specialised work.

The risk compounds when access to AI training, career visibility, and new pathways into AI-enabled work is uneven. Countries such as Singapore[2] and Malaysia[3] are moving deliberately to address this, with free or subsidised national AI training programs. Australia will need to think just as seriously about how to make those opportunities visible and accessible to a broader group of workers.

Actions for business leaders

- **Reinvent early-career pathways. Reimagine work orientation and immersive learning** to help junior employees develop more advanced capabilities earlier, whilst building organisational context. Organisations that build more sophisticated context-based capability in junior talent faster will create a pipeline that competitors cannot easily replicate.
- **Target advanced skills from day one** including judgement, leadership, creative thinking, stakeholder management, and strategic decision-making. Map which entry-level roles are growing, and which are shrinking to guide where you recruit and invest.
- **Rethink the graduate model — not just changing the program but the value the organisation places on this talent pipeline.** The days of turnover complacency are gone. Your junior pipeline has become your valuable and invested asset; your employee value proposition has shifted.

1. WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard | Latest results employer reporting
2. https://www.gov.sg/explainers/how-singaporean-workers-are-supported-through-the-ai-transition/
3. Talent and Awareness | Malaysia National AI Office (NAIO)

03

AI is speeding up the skills race

Across the board, for both Democratised and Professionalised jobs, the ones most exposed to AI are changing far faster than those least exposed.

Globally, the skills required in the most AI-exposed roles are now changing at more than twice the rate of the least exposed roles, and that gap has widened sharply (up 75%) over the past year.

The same pattern is visible in Australia. Occupations with the highest AI exposure have added an average of 187 new skills per role, compared with 93 for the least exposed occupations over the past six years.

Along with the shift in skills, new tasks are also being added to AI-exposed roles globally, and they are 2.5x more likely to require human-intensive capabilities.

What kinds of capabilities are rising in value? Drawing on MIT's EPOCH framework[4] — which maps the human abilities most resistant to AI automation — five categories are pulling ahead:

- Empathy & Emotional Intelligence: Compassion, understanding, and building meaningful connections.
- Presence, Networking & Connectedness: Physical presence, networking, and navigating social contexts, crucial for building trust and collaborating.
- Opinion, Judgment & Ethics: Navigating open-ended, ambiguous, or ethical scenarios.
- Creativity & Imagination: Original thinking, improvisation, and generating novel ideas.
- Hope, Vision & Leadership: Grit, perseverance, initiative, and setting strategic direction.

Our data shows that AI is increasing the value of human skills, not reducing it. As more work is done in partnership with AI, the skills that matter most are increasingly the ones machines cannot easily replicate, such as empathy and judgement.

This creates a pressing challenge for organisations. Today, only 56% of workers say they are gaining skills that help their careers, while those who are supported to upskill are 73% more motivated than those who aren't."[5]

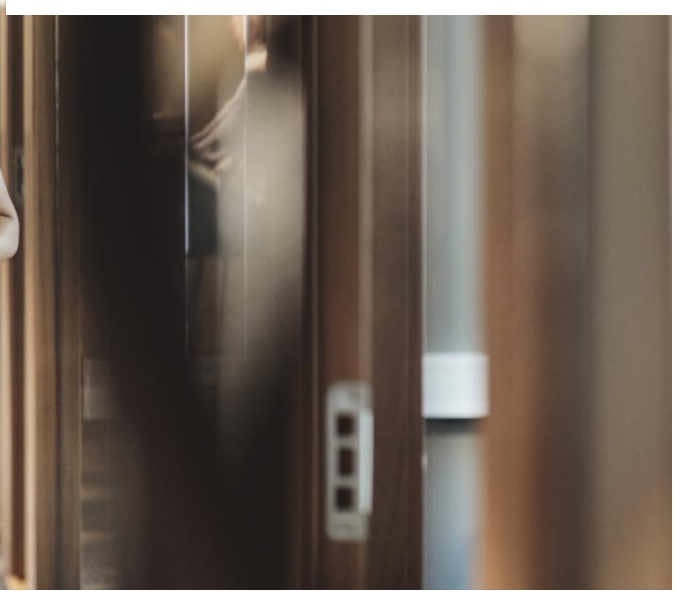
4. The EPOCH of AI: Human-Machine Complementarities at Work, Loaiza & Rigobon, MIT, 2025
5. PwC's Global Hopes and Fears 2025

Employers need to do more than deploy new tools — they need to build AI fluency and confidence across the workforce so people can use them regularly, safely, and well. That means making AI tools accessible and relevant in day-to-day work, offering practical training in their safe application, and creating the cultural conditions that make it safe to experiment, fail, and learn. A practical first step is to assess current capability across the workforce, including baseline AI skills, readiness, and responsible use.

Many of the skills demanded in an AI economy, including judgement, adaptability, and communication, take time to develop. That means the response cannot sit with employers alone. AI is not simply reshaping work inside organisations; it is driving a broader economic and social transition. How Australia builds trust, skills and inclusion will shape whether the benefits are widely shared. That will require strong collaboration between business, higher education, government, industry, and unions — and a serious national conversation about how the gains from AI are shared across the workforce and the community.

Actions for business leaders

- **Amplify strategy** to guide decision-making and prioritisation. The pace of change has increased, and the organisational direction needs to be clear at every level.
- **Upgrade learning and development for the AI age** and equip teams with the human and tech skills needed to thrive. Embed AI into everyday learning to build fluency, with a focus on building curiosity, confidence, and responsible use.
- **Make AI fluency role-specific** and move beyond generic prompt training. Build practical AI playbooks for priority roles, showing where AI should be used, where human review is required, what risks matter, and how performance will be measured.
- **Shift from a cost-out conversation to one of growth and innovation.** This requires a more holistic strategy focused on longer-term outcomes, rather than creating short-term challenges. Organisations should consider how human oversight can unlock greater value and productivity.



04

AI is driving higher productivity, headcount growth, and wages – but not for every company

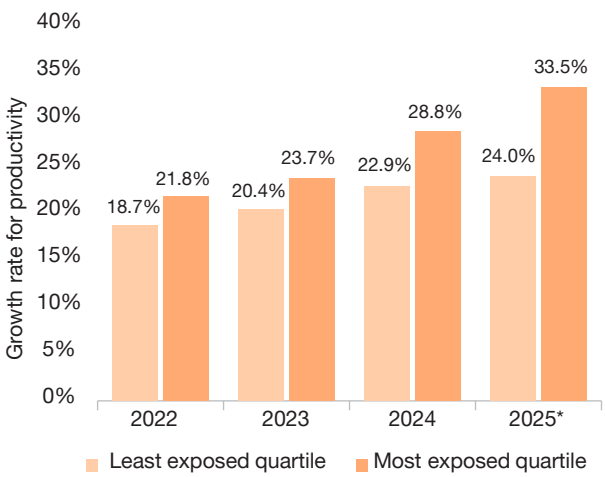
The most AI-exposed companies globally consistently achieve stronger productivity growth than their least AI-exposed peers.[6] The top 20% achieve growth that is around 5x higher than the average for AI-exposed companies overall.

We found the same pattern in our 2026 AI Performance study — the biggest rewards are accruing to a relatively small group of companies. It also revealed that those companies have moved beyond productivity gains and are using AI to reinvent their business model and grow into new sectors.

The story doesn't end with productivity. The most AI-exposed companies are also hiring and paying more. Since 2022 when AI use soared, their headcount growth has been roughly double that of the least AI-exposed companies. Among the top 20% by productivity growth, wages have increased by an average of 68%.

Since 2022 when AI adoption soared, the most AI-exposed companies have pulled ahead in topline productivity growth – tripling their lead over the least AI-exposed companies

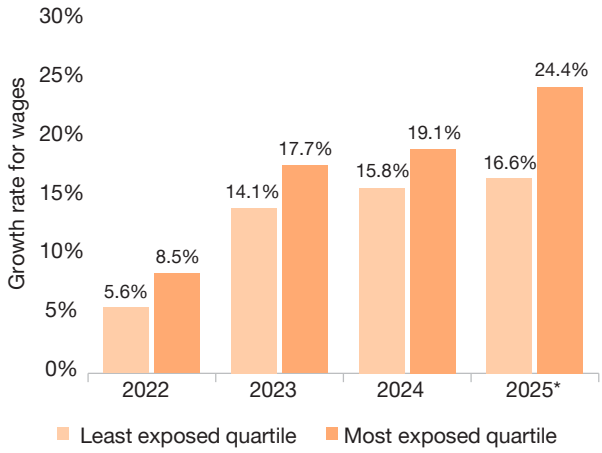
Average firm growth rate in productivity by AI exposure quartile (measured using a 2018 baseline)



Source: PwC analysis, ORBIS data
Notes: * Productivity is measured by turnover per employee 2018-2024/25. 2025 is data used for companies where available, we substitute missing coverage with 2024 data. Please see appendix for full list of sectors that sit in the least and most exposure quartiles. Company AI exposure is determined by the company sector (for example, is the company in high exposure architecture and insurance, or low exposure mining or waste treatment).

Wage growth at the most AI-exposed companies has accelerated as productivity rises, suggesting gains are shared with workers

Average firm growth rate in wages by AI exposure quartile (measured using a 2018 baseline)



Source: PwC analysis, ORBIS data
Notes: Wages are measured by total staffing cost per employee 2018-2024/25. 2025 is data used for companies where available, we substitute missing coverage with 2024 data. Please see appendix for full list of sectors that sit in the least and most exposure quartiles

6. Since adoption of AI accelerated in 2022, following the launch of ChatGPT

From AI activity to business value

Task-level AI is not a productivity story. For many organisations, it has been an expensive lesson.

While it may be tempting to apply AI to individual tasks or plug capacity gaps, the gains are modest — once the costs of tools, governance, and implementation are factored in.

In our conversations with business leaders, those companies pulling ahead are focused on connecting AI activity — pilots, tools, and use cases — to value, and the outcomes that matter most: growth, revenue, cost and risk. AI is being used to transform entire functions across areas such as finance, marketing, and operations.

Those achieving the greatest gains are thinking bigger still. Rather than asking, "How can we do what we do more efficiently?" They are asking, "How can we do things differently?" They are using AI to reimagine their business and operating models more broadly, with a focus on value creation and associated growth through new products and services, personalised customer experiences, and entering new markets.

This shift from efficiency to reinvention may help explain why a small group of AI companies are pulling away from the pack.

> Organisations chasing the sugar hit of cost reduction are walking past the real opportunity. Some of what looks like AI-driven restructuring is not transformation at all — it is AI washing, using the language of AI to justify decisions rooted in past inefficiencies. The cuts get made. The reinvention never arrives."
>
> **Emma Hardy**

Actions for business leaders

- **Use AI to pursue growth, not just efficiency** by identifying new revenue streams, entering new markets, and creating new forms of value. Ask AI to help uncover some of those opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden.
- **Move beyond task-level AI to agentic AI that multiplies the impact of your best people** — deploying it where judgement, creativity, and expertise create the greatest value. This is the lever that separates organisations achieving outsized productivity gains from those running expensive pilots.
- **Fund workflows, not pilots** — stop approving AI experiments that cannot identify the value pool. Prioritise end-to-end workflow redesign in the areas where AI can materially shift revenue, margin, risk, customer experience, or capacity.
- **Track whether AI is creating reinvention or just activity** — measure realised value, adoption, quality, risk, employee impact, and customer outcomes. If an AI initiative cannot show how work, roles, or business economics have changed, it is activity — not transformation.

05

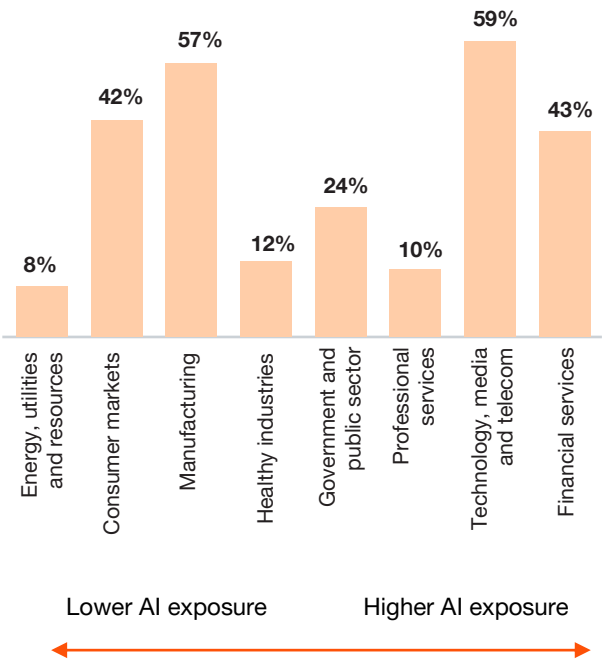
Australia's industries place dramatically different values on AI skills

Earlier, we saw that the most AI-exposed companies are paying higher wages overall. This data reveals another dimension of that story: the market is placing vastly different values on AI skills depending on the industry.

Australia's AI wage premiums follow a U-shaped pattern. At one end are industries such as Manufacturing, where the wage premium for AI skills is 57% higher than for similar workers without AI skills, and Consumer Markets (42%). This likely reflects the scarcity of AI-capable talent in sectors that are earlier in their AI adoption journey. At the other end are sectors such as Technology, Media and Telecommunications, and Financial Services, where AI is already deeply embedded, and competition for skilled talent is intense (59% and 43% premiums, respectively).

AI wage premiums in Australia are strongest at both ends of the exposure spectrum

Wage premium by sector, Australia, 2025



Source: PwC analysis, Lightcast data
Notes: AI user and AI developer job roles are determined as jobs requiring Tier 0 or 1 skills (AI literacy and applied AI skills) for AI user jobs and Tier 2 skills (advanced AI skills) for AI developer jobs. AI developer jobs are tagged as such if there are any skills in the job postings data requiring Tier 2 skills for a specific job role.

> The industries adopting AI fastest are often the industries feeling the strongest competitive pressure. As a result, they're competing hard for talent and paying a premium for the AI skills that can help them create and sustain an advantage."
>
> **Amy Lomas**

A talent migration risk for Australia?

This creates a potential challenge for sectors where AI premiums remain relatively low. Workers can see where their skills are most highly valued, and over time this may encourage talent to migrate towards sectors offering stronger rewards for AI capability.

This matters because some of Australia's largest employers sit among the lower-premium sectors. Government and Public Sector, and Health, account for a significant share of national labour demand (almost 23% and 17% of total job postings, respectively) yet offer some of the weakest AI wage premiums. As competition for AI talent intensifies, attracting and retaining these skills may become increasingly difficult.

These wage premiums provide one of the clearest market signals of where organisations believe AI is creating the greatest value — and where competition for AI talent is likely to be most intense.

Actions for business leaders

Compete for AI talent across sector boundaries — AI-skilled workers will move to where their capability is most valued. Benchmark against the broader AI talent market, focus on a compelling employee value proposition, create hybrid career paths for AI-enabled domain experts, and give them the tools and authority to deliver real outcomes.

06

Hiring of workers with advanced AI skills is accelerating, as organisations move from experimentation to execution

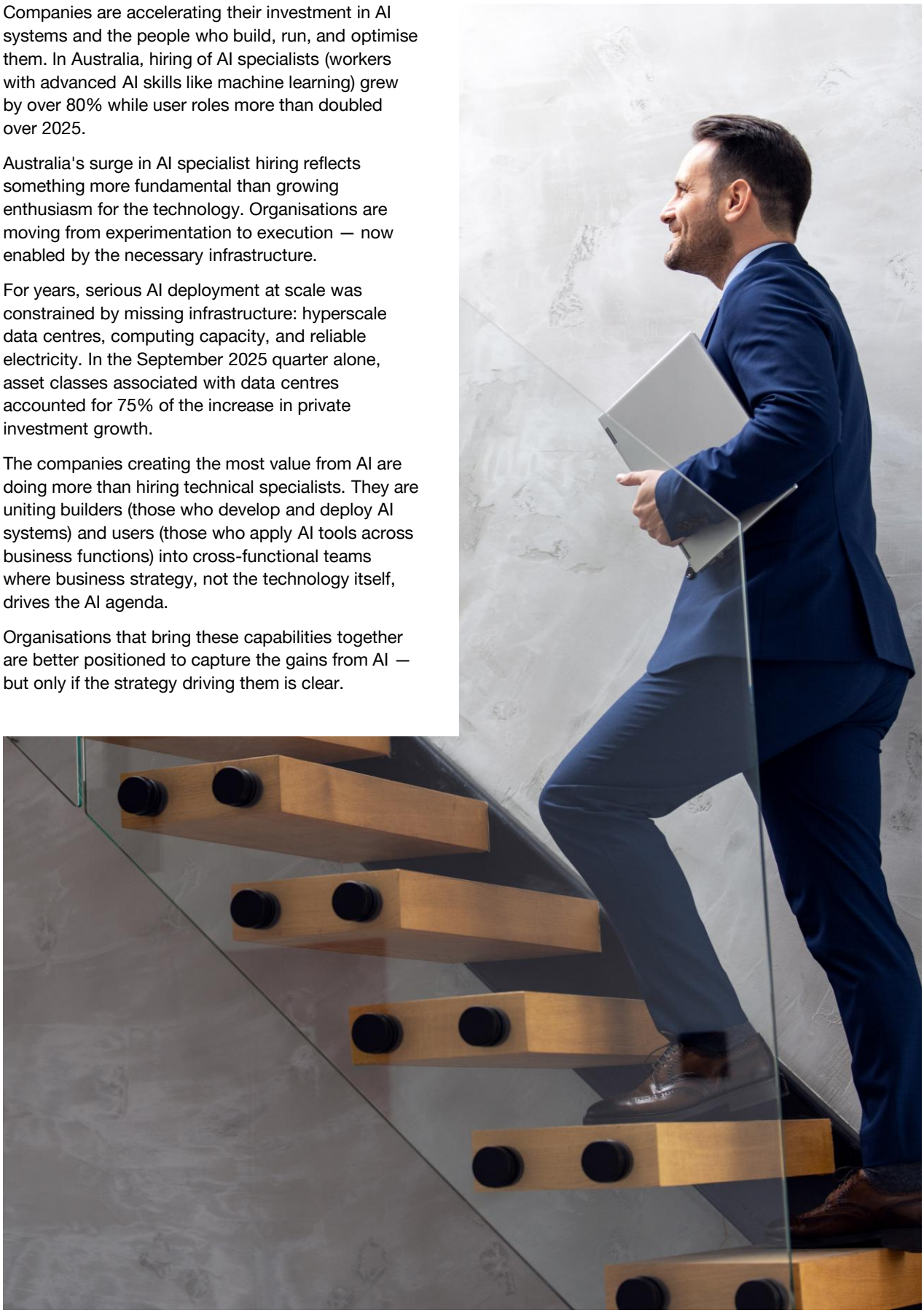
Companies are accelerating their investment in AI systems and the people who build, run, and optimise them. In Australia, hiring of AI specialists (workers with advanced AI skills like machine learning) grew by over 80% while user roles more than doubled over 2025.

Australia's surge in AI specialist hiring reflects something more fundamental than growing enthusiasm for the technology. Organisations are moving from experimentation to execution — now enabled by the necessary infrastructure.

For years, serious AI deployment at scale was constrained by missing infrastructure: hyperscale data centres, computing capacity, and reliable electricity. In the September 2025 quarter alone, asset classes associated with data centres accounted for 75% of the increase in private investment growth.

The companies creating the most value from AI are doing more than hiring technical specialists. They are uniting builders (those who develop and deploy AI systems) and users (those who apply AI tools across business functions) into cross-functional teams where business strategy, not the technology itself, drives the AI agenda.

Organisations that bring these capabilities together are better positioned to capture the gains from AI — but only if the strategy driving them is clear.



Conclusion

Two futures are forming. Which one are you building toward?

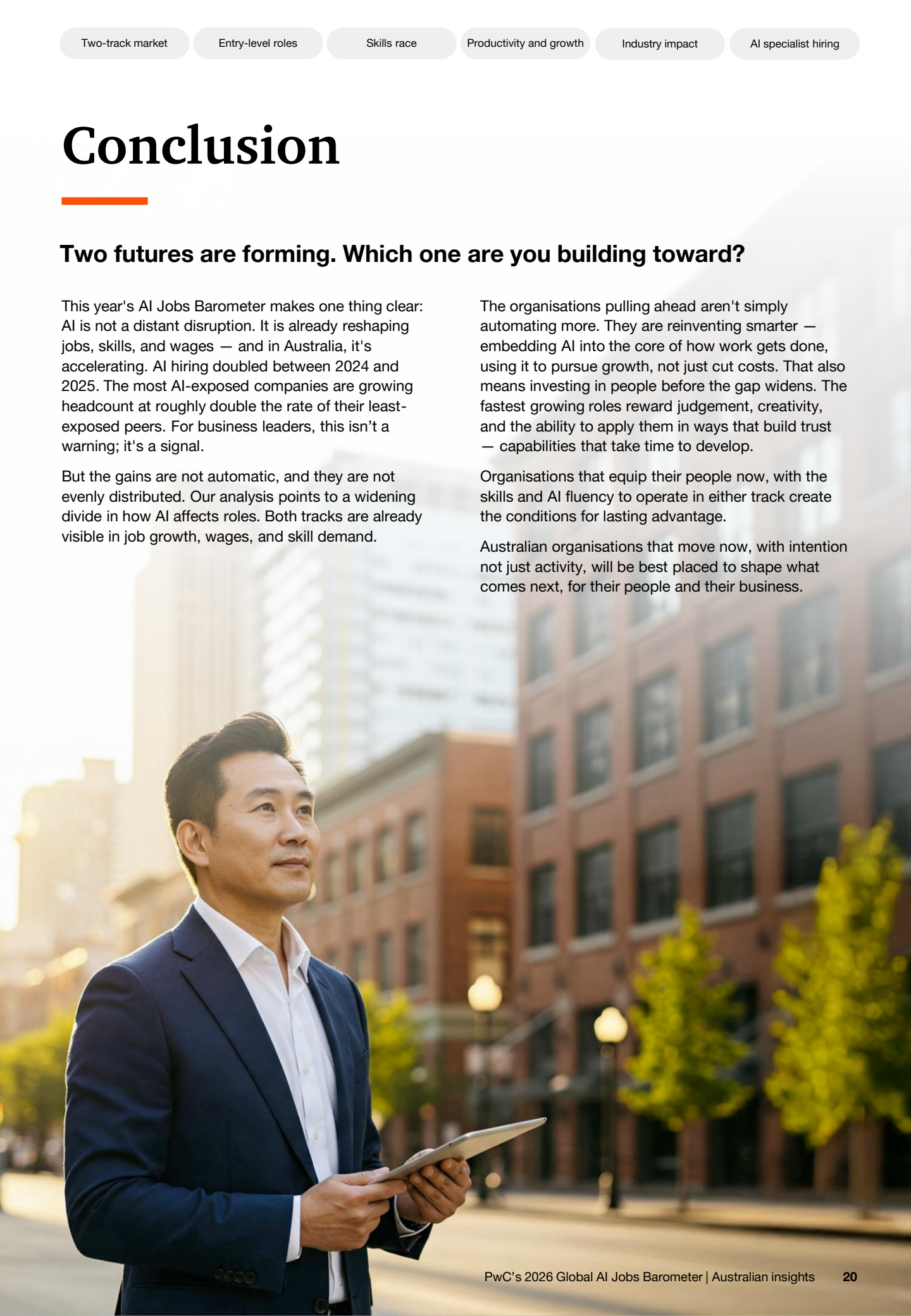
This year's AI Jobs Barometer makes one thing clear: AI is not a distant disruption. It is already reshaping jobs, skills, and wages — and in Australia, it's accelerating. AI hiring doubled between 2024 and 2025. The most AI-exposed companies are growing headcount at roughly double the rate of their least-exposed peers. For business leaders, this isn't a warning; it's a signal.

But the gains are not automatic, and they are not evenly distributed. Our analysis points to a widening divide in how AI affects roles. Both tracks are already visible in job growth, wages, and skill demand.

The organisations pulling ahead aren't simply automating more. They are reinventing smarter — embedding AI into the core of how work gets done, using it to pursue growth, not just cut costs. That also means investing in people before the gap widens. The fastest growing roles reward judgement, creativity, and the ability to apply them in ways that build trust — capabilities that take time to develop.

Organisations that equip their people now, with the skills and AI fluency to operate in either track create the conditions for lasting advantage.

Australian organisations that move now, with intention not just activity, will be best placed to shape what comes next, for their people and their business.



Authors

Emma Hardy

Workforce, Partner,

PwC Australia

Amy Lomas

Chief Economist,
Advisory Partner,

PwC Australia

Peter Wheeler

Advisory Workforce & Change
Managing Director,

PwC Australia