

Article

A comparative study of workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia

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Abstract: Purpose: This study aims to explore the advanced and mature workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia. **Design/methodology/approach:** This study reports a comparative study of workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia based on document and policy analyses. **Findings:** The study mainly examined the similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies. The study also suggested the areas for changes for both Chinese and Australian businesses. The study found that workplace training topics in Chinese and Australian businesses differed with distinctive purposes and focuses. However, it was similar that both China and Australia had government and private training providers involved in the provisions of workplace training with varied training content. Moreover, China may align with Australian models to also develop systematic national qualifications framework and recognition framework to standardize various formal and non-formal training activities. **Originality:** The study may have significant implications for workplace training design and practices in China, Australia and other educational contexts.

Keywords: Australia; China; policies; systems; workplace training; comparative study

1. Introduction

Both China and Australia have advanced and mature workplace training systems and policies. How China and Australia could learn from each other and inform changes is a question worth exploring, based on systematic comparative studies.

The research reported in the UNESCO-UNEVOC newsletter has indicated the increasingly important roles of workplace training within the framework of vocational education and training in facilitating industrial transformation and technological development. Country reports about adult literacy and numeracy needs in Australia, formal and non-formal training in the manufacturing industry in Vietnam, Bangladesh, Laos and Philippines were available (Maurer et al., 2024). The research report indicates the urgent needs of upgrading and innovating workplace training systems and policies and incorporating experiences from countries with advanced vocational education and training practices.

The previous research reported in Xie (2014) examined a comparative study of workplace training programs in Hong Kong and Chinese mainland, without examining workplace training systems and policies. Moreover, the previous documented literature did not compare vocational education and training in China and Australia with advanced workplace training systems and policies. This study would address the research gap and discuss the similarities and differences of workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia based on document and policy analyses. Based on the comparison, the study could present how China

and Australia could learn from each other and inform changes on the existing workplace training systems and policies. This study aims to address the following two research questions:

1) What are the similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies?

2) How could the similarities and differences inform changes in the workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies?

This comparative study could summarize success experiences in workplace training, contribute to vocational education and training theoretical systems and enrich the workplace training case banks in both China and Australia, based on investigations of workplace training policies and systems in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies. These success experiences could lead to reforms and changes. This study enriches knowledge of workplace training systems and policies, under the broad vocational education framework. The following sections report literature review, theoretical framework, research methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

2. Literature review

2.1. Vocational Education and workplace training studies in the International Context

From vocational theories perspective, it is indicated that vocational education system is complex and diverse. Vocational education covers "school based vocational education, apprenticeship, technical education, higher vocational education, work-based learning, continuing education and lifelong learning" (Pilz & Li, 2020, p. IX). The field of vocational education is also interconnected with workplace training and human resources development, which still faces challenges in resource allocation and bridging the gap between research and practice (Moore & Cho, 2024).

Different countries adopt different vocational education and talent cultivation models, which are worth learning. It is indicated that due to the impact of industry 4.0 and automation, businesses are seeing the risks of workers getting unemployed. Therefore, leaders, enterprises, policymakers and educators should timely design task-oriented workplace training courses (Goh & Poon, 2023). The future workplaces are getting digital. Artificial intelligence technology would have important impact on the skills needed by professionals. This would also influence the design of education and training courses (Brown & Sadik, 2023). As a new normal, educators should pay attention to the important roles of non-formal education out of formal education, and technology-oriented online lifelong learning systems (Jackson, 2023).

In New Zealand, apprenticeship systems based on workplace practice including carpentry and engineering technician training programs could meet the needs of skills and job experiences from the workplaces. These ultimately create practitioners needed by the labor market (Vaughan, 2018). New Zealand vocational education systems use electronic portfolios to record non-formal learning, such as attending seminars, and online certificate training to track vocational learning process and recognize prior learning experiences (Chan, 2023).

In Japan, Pilz & Sakano (2023) investigate the training and lifelong learning systems in small and medium enterprises in Tokyo, Japan. Their research shows that small and medium enterprises did not have much formal and structured training, but more unplanned and informal learning without realizing it.

In Australia, vocational education system did not have very high social status. Australian vocational education system has gradually transferred to be privatized and operated under the market systems (Billet et al., 2022). Australian vocational education system did not have the unified regulations, but was employer-led. The content of vocational education and training program would be decided by jobs and companies (Cooney, 2010). Cooney (2010) uses car industry's training practice as an example to show that Australian workplace training was job specific, not about generic skills. In education and training sectors, Australian needs to strengthen research on cross-discipline and cross-profession cooperation, to bring positive impact to learning in various stages (MacMahon & Carroll, 2023). Francisco (2020) mentions in the research on novel vocational teacher training, that the novel teachers should learn in practice. This research shows that the novel vocational teacher practice is affected by material arrangement, teaching language, industrial language and social and political arrangement. As one of the empirical studies on workplace training, 16 university students were interviewed. They took part in telephone crisis communication training and obtained information about the barriers in the training and the coping strategies (Gilmore, Saheb & Reis, 2022). The research shows that the transferability of Australian workplace training is affected by social support and employee identity recognition (Pidd, 2004). Though research in the international context is broad and wide-ranging, there is limited comparative research on workplace training systems and policies.

2.2. Vocational education and workplace training studies in the Chinese context

In China, Guo & Lamb (2010) and Wu & Ye (2009) explain the vocational education systems, including higher vocational education system, apprenticeship, training centers and continuing education. Researchers use vocational education reform in China's Guangdong province as an example, and indicate that vocational education reform is affected by public-private partnership policies, reforms in vocational schools, government, industrial association, research institutes and enterprises (Hardy & Liu, 2022). Researchers also investigate the vocational schools in China's Zhejiang province, and indicate that vocational and technical teacher's initiatives should be improved so that they could take part in policy making (Shi & Fernandes, 2021). Researcher in their case study in international vocational education college finds that international vocational education courses could bring students improvement in English skills, professional knowledge, cross-cultural abilities and personal and career development benefits. International curricula could also offer workplace experiences and design courses suitable for students' future development (Gao, 2019).

For Chinese studies on vocational education system in Australia, researchers find Australian vocational education teachers focus on practice teaching. There are national standards for vocational education entry, linked with qualification framework, and focus on university-enterprise cooperation (Hu & Luo, 2023). Another researcher studies higher apprenticeship system in Australia and mentions a few innovative measures (Xu, 2020). Moreover, Australian vocational education and training systems are getting digital. It is developing digital quality framework, innovating digital training models and teacher training (Yang, 2023).

It is indicated that Australia has advanced vocational education systems, which have important implications for China's vocational education development on quality assurance, evaluation standards and talent cultivation (Li, 2010, p.42). One

researcher compares the vocational education systems and cultures in China and Australia. The study finds that Australia has mature vocational education systems, including qualification framework, training package schemes and strict teacher entry, for China to learn from (Hu, 2014). Another research also indicates that Australian vocational education teacher system has very strict entry, higher professional standards and flexible teaching methods (Yan et al., 2014). Two authors compare the vocational talent cultivation models in China and Australia. They find that Australian qualification framework and quality framework are consistent throughout the whole vocational education systems. Enterprises and schools cooperate to develop vocational talents. The system is mature which is worth for China to learn (Li & Liu, 2006). Though studies in the Chinese context focus on vocational education and workplace training in both China and Australia, comparative studies on workplace training systems and policies were still limited. This study is to address the research gap, to comprehensively compare the workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia and identify what the two countries could learn from each other through the comparisons and inform changes.

3. This study

3.1. Theoretical framework

Australia has the world class vocational education systems (Wu & Zhou, 2019). However, the previous foreign vocational education book series only refer to UK, Germany and South Africa (Mi, 2022), without introducing the Australian vocational education and training. There also are no systematic comparisons on workplace training between China and Australia. In addition, prior studies in China and international contexts mainly focused on China and other areas or countries' vocational education systems.

The main multinational companies in Australia include BHP, Woolworths, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Westpac, ANZ Bank and Telstra etc. These companies have excellent corporate culture and focus on the construction of workplace training systems (Li et al., 2019), which is worth learning for Chinese workplaces. Chinese Fortune 500 companies include State Grid, Sinopec, China Mobile, Gree Electric, Midea and Alibaba etc. This study is developed based on Adamson & Morris (2007, p.277) and Xie's (2016, p.74) program evaluation system, to comprehensively compare workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies.

The prior comparative literature focused on Chinese professionals' different perceptions of leadership in China and Australia (Liang et al., 2022). And there was one study which examined the causal relationship between workplace policies and training duration in Shanghai, China (Mishra & Smyth, 2015). However, so far there has been limited research which compared the workplace training and policies in China and Australia.

To address the gap, this study would investigate the similarities and differences of workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia while analyzing the influencing factors, which are key dimensions for a workplace training system. It includes analyzing workplace training topics in Chinese and Australian businesses. It also includes Chinese and Australian government training policy analysis. Based on the analyses of training topics and government policies, researchers could then understand differences in training provisions and solutions in China and Australia. As parts and basis of the government and corporate policies, we could also understand

the national qualification framework, and corporate competency standard in Chinese and Australian businesses and governments. The influencing factors interact to form the important foundations for understanding workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia. The analyses could lead to further improvement suggestions for training policies and development in China and Australia. The conceptual framework is in **Figure 1**, adapted from the workplace training program evaluation framework from Adamson & Morris (2007, p.277) and Xie's (2016, p.74).

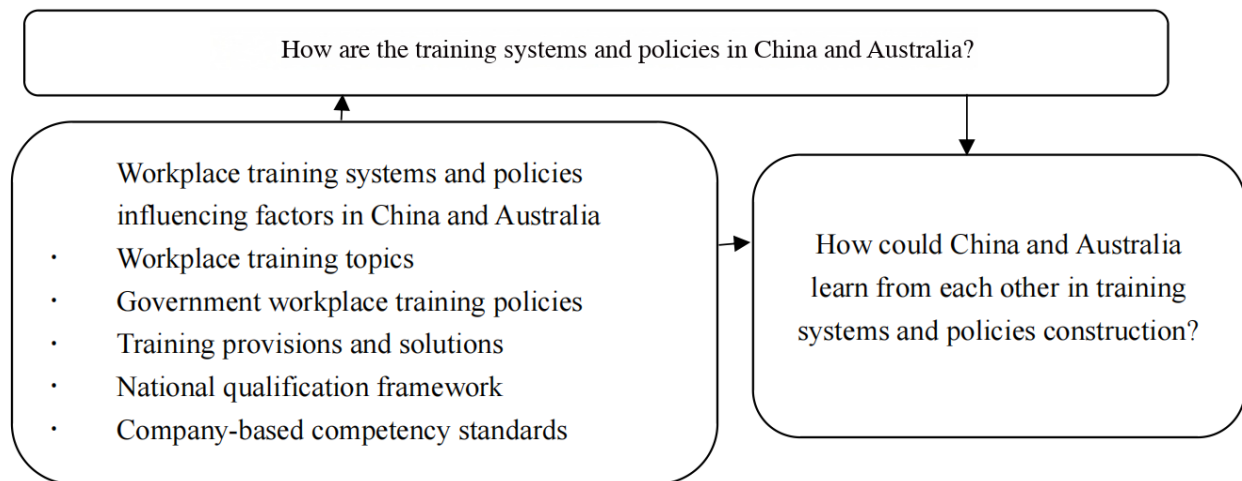


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The research design of this comparative study was based on qualitative research paradigm. The comparative study of workplace training systems in China and Australia would be based on policy document and workplace training website analyses. The selection criteria would center on the major themes of evaluation framework in **Figure 1**. The research data analysis would also follow the major themes in the framework. The data collection, data analysis and the process for ensuring trustworthiness of the data are explained in the following sections.

4.2. Data collection

For corporate human resources training and development policies, the researcher visited the official websites of the China Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinationals and examined the policy documents and updates about the workplace training schemes on various topics (see **Appendix A** for details). The selected Chinese companies were listed on the latest Fortune 500 Global ranking and they represented the major manufacturing and service businesses, including both state-owned companies and private companies. The selection of Australian multinationals was based on the recommendation in the work of Li et al. (2019) for their outstanding market performance, including mostly private companies. There were eight documents collected from Australian multinationals and six documents collected from China Fortune 500 companies. The documents were collected through key words search, including workplace training systems, policies and Fortune 500 companies. Moreover, government workplace training policies were gathered from Australia's Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and China's Ministry of

Human Resources and Social Security as well as Ministry of Education. Moreover, the researcher also investigated leading private training solution providers in China and Australia through official websites, including Cegos, and American Management Association based in China and Australian workplace training centers. In addition, the researcher also examined the national qualification framework documents and company-based competency development documents through government and corporate sources.

4.3. Data analysis

To analyze the policy documents and website generated reports, qualitative content analysis was adopted to compare the similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in companies in China and Australia, which informed the necessary changes. The policy documents and website reports were read and reread to prevent analytical bias, so that the researcher could conduct applied thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012) and identify the contents relevant to the major themes, mostly workplace training influencing factors in the conceptual framework shown in **Figure 1**. The contents related to the major themes were coded in the documents from China and Australia manually, so as to enable researcher to make parallel comparisons based on the structures of the conceptual framework. The results reported in the result section were then categorized according to different parallel themes for China and Australia, which are presented in the following section.

4.4. Ensuring trustworthiness

The results of the study were based on a comprehensive and systematic analyses of policy documents and website reports from official workplace training information sources. These included both government online portals, training provider portals and official media reports about training events, in the contexts of China and Australia, which ensured the completeness of information from diverse sources. The theme-based analyses also ensured the trustworthiness of the results, which followed the procedures in Levitt et al (2018). The results are presented by themes as the conceptual framework in the results section.

5. Results

5.1. Comparison of workplace training topics in China and Australia

A comparison about workplace training topics in China and Australia are shown **Table 1**, which demonstrate selected examples. It can be seen that most Australian multinationals' workplace training topics were related to workplace well-being, such as improving diversity in employees, gender relations, flexible working and experiences. On the other hand, workplace training topics in Chinese fortune 500 companies were more wide-ranging, including technical training, all-rounded development, leadership training and safety. It was also interesting to discover that ideological training topics were also available in most state-owned companies in China, such as Sinopec. It can be summarized that Chinese fortune 500 and Australian multinational companies have different focuses due to variations in both cultural and business contexts. In China, most of the public companies would not overlook ideological related training content, while in Australian private companies, this could not be the mandatory requirement in training. This could be due to the differences in governance systems and institutional cultures.

Table 1. Selected examples of workplace training topics in China and Australia.

Chinese Fortune 500 companies	Workplace training topics	Australian multinationals	Workplace training topics
State Grid	Electric engineering and pricing	BHP	Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Awareness Training in Minerals Americas
Gree	Elite training camp	ANZ	Risk training
Midea	Midea university with training topics of rotating, EMBA and leadership development	Telstra	Building a collaborative Office 365 experience
Sinopec	Hot courses on safety and emergency management, and ideological training topics	Westpac	Tailored Talent 2020 Program
China Mobile	High quality development	Woolworths	Develop talented individuals from all backgrounds

5.2. Comparison of government human resources training policies in China and Australia

Under the support of China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, there was a training division, which had access to big pools of trainers, including government officials, university professors and researchers in the research institutes, which can offer tailored training programs, human resources technical support, information consulting and social training programs. However, there were usually no compulsory assessment packages to ensure the quality of the training provisions, based on the sample analyses of this study. These training provisions were funded by both government and companies themselves.

In the context of Australia, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations also organized training resources for the needed individuals and businesses. There were training packages with the topics of "National Training, skills training in reading, writing, math and digital skills, as well as women in STEM and apprenticeship programs" (<https://www.dewr.gov.au/nci/training-packages>). Contemporary vocational education and training philosophies underpin the design of training resources for Australian businesses and potential employees. And there were usually clear assessment guidelines to guarantee the training quality and alignment with national qualification framework, based on the samples of the study. There could also be public (for strategically important programs) and private fundings for workplace training provisions.

It can be seen that both Chinese and Australian government and department have their own resources and systems to organize both national level as well as company and industry specific training activities.

5.3. Comparison of private training provision in China and Australia

In this section, leading private training providers in China and Australia are examined, based on real-world and practice-based cases. In the context of China, the Paris-based Cego's China office offered comprehensive training solutions and services to various China-based businesses. The tailored training courses ranged from communication, production, marketing, negotiation, learning and development to supply chains etc., with tailored content. There were also case studies and digital

learning resources, including live-streaming programs on Bilibili for interested individual learners and businesses. Moreover, the U.S.-based American Management Association in China was offering leadership training, coaching, action learning, and assessment services based on its comprehensive in-house training systems, serving Chinese businesses and executives.

In the context of Australia, Australian Workplace Training Center (<https://awt.edu.au/short-courses/>) offered various specific skills and theme based short courses. The topics included “First Aid, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, Driving, Manual handling, Business Services, Transport and logistics and healthcare” etc. Australian Professional Institute (<https://apsi.edu.au/>) provided skills-based training courses such as hospitality and cookery, and aged care etc.

It can be seen that the private training providers in both China and Australia are mostly active and could offer unique and excellent training solutions, to cater to the varied training needs of businesses and individuals.

5.4. Comparison of qualification framework in China and Australia

Qualification framework is critical in ensuring the standardization of training quality, for both government sponsored programs and private training provision. According to China’s Education News Network (2023), the Chinese government, particularly Ministry of Education was still developing the qualification framework, which could align education and training standards between higher education and vocational education. The purpose was to ensure the consistency of educational content and curriculum standards in different kinds of educational activities and disciplines.

On the other hand, the Australian Government (<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/acts-and-standards/australian-qualifications-framework>) has established the Australian qualification framework to align higher education with vocational education standards. There were 10 levels in the qualification framework, specifying the knowledge and skills, and the application of knowledge and skills in different educational contexts.

It can be summarized that China could refer to the Australian experiences in completing the design and implementation of qualification framework, to standardize various public and private workplace training activities.

5.5. Comparison of company-based competency standards in China and Australia

In the Australian workplaces, according to Griffin & Gillis (1998), there was the Australian Recognition Framework, which made it possible to assess the workplace skills training standards. This guaranteed the effectiveness of workplace training and learning activities.

In Chinese workplaces, company-based competency standards relied on the support and solutions of Human Resources consulting company such as Mercer’s talent assessment tools (<https://www.mercer.com.cn/solutions/talent-and-rewards/assessment-tools/mercmettl>).

And there was limited information about Chinese Fortune 500 company’s development of competency standards for different positions in the businesses based on the samples of this study.

It is also suggested that Chinese companies align with the Australian businesses in developing competency standards and recognition framework, to standardize various human resources training and development activities.

6. Discussion

6.1. The similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies

It can be seen that the workplace training in China's Fortune 500 businesses tended to focus on safety, technical skills as well as ideological content. On the other hand, the workplace training in Australian multinational companies tended to focus on more generic skills, enhancing workplace experiences and tailored talent development. The differences show the varied focuses and purposes of organizing workplace training programs. The differences of ownership of Chinese and Australian companies could partly explain this distinction in training focuses. The results of the study confirm the previous literature by Billet et al. (2022) and Hardy & Liu (2022) for diversity of workplace training in both Australian and Chinese contexts.

For government human resources policies, it is similar that both Chinese and Australian government offered training packages on different needed topics and had full support of training provision personnel from various backgrounds and institutions. For private training providers and solutions, it is also similar that both China and Australia had powerful training companies offering various tailored workplace training courses, to complement the government training provision. The results of the study align with the findings in Hardy & Liu (2022, p.1) with the concept of "public-private partnership" in training provision.

For qualification framework, China was still proposing to establish the framework while Australia has already had the 10-level qualification framework. For the company-based competency standards, Australia also had the Australian Recognition Framework to assess the competencies while Chinese companies still lacked a unified framework for alignment. The results of this study confirm the findings of Hu & Luo (2023) with compliments on the Australian qualification framework and recognition framework, which standardize workplace training activities.

6.2. How similarities and differences inform changes in the workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies

For China, the most important task is to develop the qualification framework and the company specific competency standards, which makes the training activities more standard and aligned. This also makes it possible to organize standard workplace skills assessment. The results of this study support the previous workplace training research results of Xie (2016). The workplace training framework and standards should not be confined to language training, but also include a broad range of topics needed by the businesses.

For training provision from the government or private agencies, there could be more communication and exchanges on the design and implementation of various training courses and programs between China and Australia, to serve well the specific business needs in different cultural contexts. There is more space for further development in the creative design of various training programs, either in the short-term or long-term periods. The findings of this study align with prior studies such as Yan et al. (2014) and Li and Liu (2006).

7. Conclusion

This study examines the similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in China's Fortune 500 companies and Australian multinational companies. Due to differences in culture, institutional strategy, governance structure and labor market, the workplace training policy and system show variations in both China and Australia. The study also suggests the areas for changes for both Chinese and Australian businesses. This study is based on the adapted workplace program evaluation framework, to compare the workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia. The research perspective is new and addresses the research gap, using the adapted evaluation framework. It makes contributions to the country-based study on vocational education, workplace training and human resource development, which particularly helps with China and Australia's workplace training reform and innovation. The perspectives gained from the comparative study could inform changes in workplace training systems also in other cultural and business contexts. For human resources practitioners, the comparative study informs workplace training and human resource development program design and implementation, which addresses the challenges in practice.

The research methods combine document analysis and policy analysis. From different perspectives, this study discusses similarities and differences in workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia. Based on multiple research methods, the study could comprehensively explore the workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia.

The limitations of the study lie that the study used only document and policy analyses as the data source. There could be the risks of self-presentation bias in corporate websites. In particular, though several documents were derived from news reports, training-provider websites, or third-party platforms rather than official organizational documents, the analytical approach following the conceptual framework identified the critical information of workplace training systems and policies in China and Australia. Moreover, there is also the lack of primary data such as interviews with Human Resources managers or trainees. And it is difficult to assess actual training effectiveness or transfer from policy documents alone. Moreover, the sample size is limited. Future research can conduct more empirical investigation to gather first-hand information and gain insights into the actual design and implementation of workplace training in China and Australia.

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Appendix A

List of documents as data sources

Company name/Country	Document name	URL	Date accessed	Document type
State Grid (China)	State Grid Jiangsu Technical Training Center Holds Training for Electricity Pricing Estimation	http://www.js.xinhuanet.com/20240531/3958449362b549749ce8e0a99da830c7/c.html	May 31, 2024	Online news
Gree (China)	2023 Gree Hunan Air-conditioning Training	https://www.sohu.com/a/717049897_121117461	September 2, 2023	Online news
Midea (China)	Midea College Profile	https://www.midea.com.cn/zh/careers/career-path/training-program	May 28, 2026	Online corporate profile
Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, China	Corporate Training Introduction	http://edu.mohrss.gov.cn/info/1116/1204.htm	June 3, 2016	Online government portal
Sinopec (China)	Sinopec College Introduction	https://sia.sinopec.com/page/#!/college/index	May 28, 2026	Online corporate profile
China Mobile (China)	China Mobile Holds Training on Improving High Quality Productivity	https://www.10086.cn/aboutus/news/groupnews/index_detail_49688.html	April 30, 2024	Online corporate profile
BHP (Australia)	Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Awareness Training in Minerals Americas	https://www.bhp.com/news/case-studies/2020/09/training	September 18, 2020	Online corporate news
ANZ (Australia)	Risk Training	https://www.smartsparrow.com/demos/financial-services/	May 28, 2026	Online news
Telstra (Australia)	Workplace Training	https://purple.telstra.com.au/services/workplace	May 28, 2026	Online corporate profiles
Westpac (Australia)	Westpac Training	https://www.westpac.com.au/about-westpac/careers/tailored-talent/	May 28, 2026	Online corporate portals
Woolworths (Australia)	Employee Support	https://www.wowcareers.com.au/page/Careers/Indigenous_Opportunities/	May 28, 2026	Online corporate training portal
Australian Government	Australian Qualifications Framework	https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/acts-and-standards/australian-qualifications-framework	May 28, 2026	Governmental portal
Australian Government	Australian workplace training	https://awt.edu.au/short-courses/	May 28, 2026	Governmental Portal

Continuation Table:

Company name/Country	Document name	URL	Date accessed	Document type
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government	Training packages	https://www.dewr.gov.au/ nci/training-packages	May 28, 2026	Governmental Portal