



ORGANISING WORKS REVIEW



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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, where we work and live. This paper was created on the lands of the Palawa/Pakana people of Lutruwita and we pay our respects to elders past and present. We celebrate the stories, culture, and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders of all communities who also work and live on this land.

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TRIBUTE TO TOM MCDONALD AND TAS BULL



We would like to pay a special tribute to Tom McDonald and Tas Bull. A review of *Organising Works* without Tom and Tas brings sadness to the hearts of the movement.

Tom and Tas had been there from the beginning shaping its content, direction and sharing their love of the movement with waves of trainees who came through the program.

Tom took all his experience from his groundbreaking leadership of the Building Workers Industrial Union and used it to develop the next generation of union activists and leaders. He never strayed from the struggle against injustice and inequality. He was a warrior and a comrade to us all. He may not have participated in this review, but his thoughts and ideas were never far away.

'From day one to the end of my union life there were always three fundamental values that I saw as central to the struggle – the dignity and rights of working people, the future of humanity, and empowering the working class. My very first organising tasks back in 1950 were about these three basic values. When I fought for building workers to have decent toilets it was about the dignity and rights of workers. When we fought for peace and to 'Ban the A-bomb' it was about the future of humanity. And when we recruited new members, it was about empowering the working class. These values must continue to be at the centre of the struggle. And that struggle will continue until we have a society that places people before profit.'

Tas Bull died on 13 June 2003. To many who had come through the program, Tas was a warrior in the struggle for working-class justice and the fight against inequality. Bull became a waterside worker in Hobart, joining the powerful Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and shortly after became a shop steward. Later he worked in Melbourne, then Sydney, becoming an experienced negotiator. In 1971 he was elected Federal Organiser, and later Assistant General Secretary. In 1984 he succeeded Charlie Fitzgibbon as General Secretary, a post he held until 1992.

He became prominent in the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) where he became Vice President in 1987, and Senior Vice President in 1991.

Bull led the WWF during the period of radical change on the waterfront. Technological change was greatly reducing the size of the workforce, while at the same time there was political pressure to reform waterfront work practices to make the Australian transport sector internationally competitive. In response, a process of waterfront reform was begun by the Hawke Labor government. Bull co-operated with the reform, while defending his members' interests. In 1993 the WWF amalgamated with the SUA to form the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA).

Bull was also active in international trade union affairs. From 1972 onwards he worked with the International Transport Workers' Federation, and for ten years until 1993 represented the Asia/Pacific region on its executive board.

Like McDonald, as he retired from his full time union roles, Bull saw the nascent Organising Works program as an opportunity to lend his time and experience so that future generations of organisers and workers could benefit. During the years of its establishment he was a fixture of the program, generous in his wisdom and insight to young trainees. Graduates of the program during the years of his involvement would remember the one-on-one interview with Tas at the completion of their year on the program, consolidating the lessons and including a straightforward question asked of everyone – 'how many members have you recruited?' – during the year. The Organising Works program, as he described it, taught 'enthusiastic and committed people ways and means of winning workers back to unionism and rebuilding the union movement in today's conditions'. He reflected that his involvement in the program had been one of his 'most rewarding activities'.



In late 1993 I was finishing my university degree, and I heard an interview on the radio with someone from the ACTU talking about a new program they were launching for trainee organisers. I stopped what I was doing and had one thought – there is nothing, absolutely nothing, I would like to do more. Being a union organiser meant taking on a critical role in the greatest movement in our country, the trade union movement. Not other movement has brought about more positive change

in Australia than unions and the opportunity to be part of that and to learn the skills of organising in the service of working people sounded like the best job ever. Whilst my dad was a union member, I had no contacts and wasn't even a member of a political party. I applied for the first *Organising Works* intake back in 1994 and was successful. A big part of the reason was because the ACTU insisted that 50% of the trainees be women.

I was 22 when I started, and it was an incredible privilege to be taught and mentored by such experienced and deeply committed unionists. Some of our mentors were recently retired union leaders who were legends. They instilled so much wisdom, many of the lessons I learnt from them I still adhere to now, like always being honest with workers and always remembering our movement is a 'we' not an 'I' movement. And of course, that members are the union and your job as an organiser is to assist them in making their union as strong as possible. *Organising Works* grounded me in union values.

The need to grow and to organise workplaces was a huge challenge and at some point, your enthusiasm and passion get bought down to earth as many unions did not understand or even support the importance of organising back then. But I loved being a union organiser – I still see myself as a union organiser. Passion, enthusiasm, and strength are sustained by working with union members. There is nothing more satisfying than growing a worksite, especially when you start from nothing, and you witness workers experience the power of the collective for the first time. The experience of power through collective organisation transforms not just people's working lives but the whole way they see the world. I've seen people grow from being afraid to stand up for themselves to being strong confident leaders. There is nothing better!

Organising Works injected new energy and ideas into our movement. The challenge then, is the same challenge now, growing our movement. Every generation needs to face these challenges and deal with it on their own terms. The union leaders of today must be committed to supporting and building the union leaders of tomorrow. This means investing in them, so they have opportunities and learn not just skills but also values. This is our obligation to our movement and to working people.

It's time for us to recommit to the next generation and launch the next iteration of *Organising Works*. We have spent nearly three decades mainly on the defensive. The challenge for us now as we look forward across a landscape of changing industrial relations will be to find the opportunities and grow our movement into the massive engine for change that we can once again be.

Organising Works needs to again be a key part of this growth and change. Part of our commitment to being as diverse as our membership and inspiring a new generation to take our movement forward.

Sally McManus

Secretary, ACTU and *Organising Works* Alumni 1994



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Organising Works has been a constant within the Australian trade union movement since the early 90s.

The program has played a pivotal role in the development of union staff throughout that time, educating and developing many of the movement's present leadership. The program has also changed the face of the movement's staff, bringing more women into the movement, and speakers of community languages. The success of the program has also influenced the world of Non-Government Organisations and political parties, as *Organising Works* alumni moved into different areas of social justice work, sharing their skills and organising expertise.

After 23 years the program went on hiatus in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This break in delivery created the opportunity to reflect on the program, to explore every crevasse, and assess what the program of tomorrow needs to look like.

During 2022, a review was initiated to evaluate the program and plan for future iterations of *Organising Works*. In carrying out this review we spoke with 54 practitioners, four academics, and representatives from across 30 different organisations and 10 countries.

To make sense of the responses, we had to establish the history and origins of the program, tracing it all the way back to its inception, and compare the program's historical aims to its state in 2019. We discovered a drift away from the core proposition of those early days. What began as a strategy to widen participation and create a pipeline of new and diverse recruits to our organising ranks, had become a training course for existing staff and officials. The lofty ambition to change the face of the movement was slowly diminishing.

Moving the discussion away from what had been to what might become, we found there is a growing need to focus on developing organising skills in the context of a changing work environment, taking into considerations the future of work, fragmentation, casualisation, privatisation, and outsourcing. Unions are grappling with the implications of this challenging environment and exploring how to tackle such challenges. All agree that the workers of tomorrow are the ones who should carry out the organising of tomorrow.

The review presented a range of options for the future of *Organising Works* in response to the challenges raised by affiliates.

What follows is an exploration of the research conducted to inform options for consideration on each of these elements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

The ACTU works with affiliates to engage their existing Organisers in the *Organiser Pathways* program.

Recommendation 2:

The ATUI implements recall days as part of *Organiser Pathways* courses to assist participants to embed their learning into their practical work, and curates an Organiser's journey through the pathway.

Recommendation 3:

Focus on external recruitment of a diverse cohort of trainees for *Organising Works*.

Recommendation 4:

Organising Works run as a 12-month traineeship.

Recommendation 5:

Organising Works is provided in a blended delivery mode, comprising three classroom intensives, a campaign clinic, self-paced online modules, and interactive online workshops and webinars.

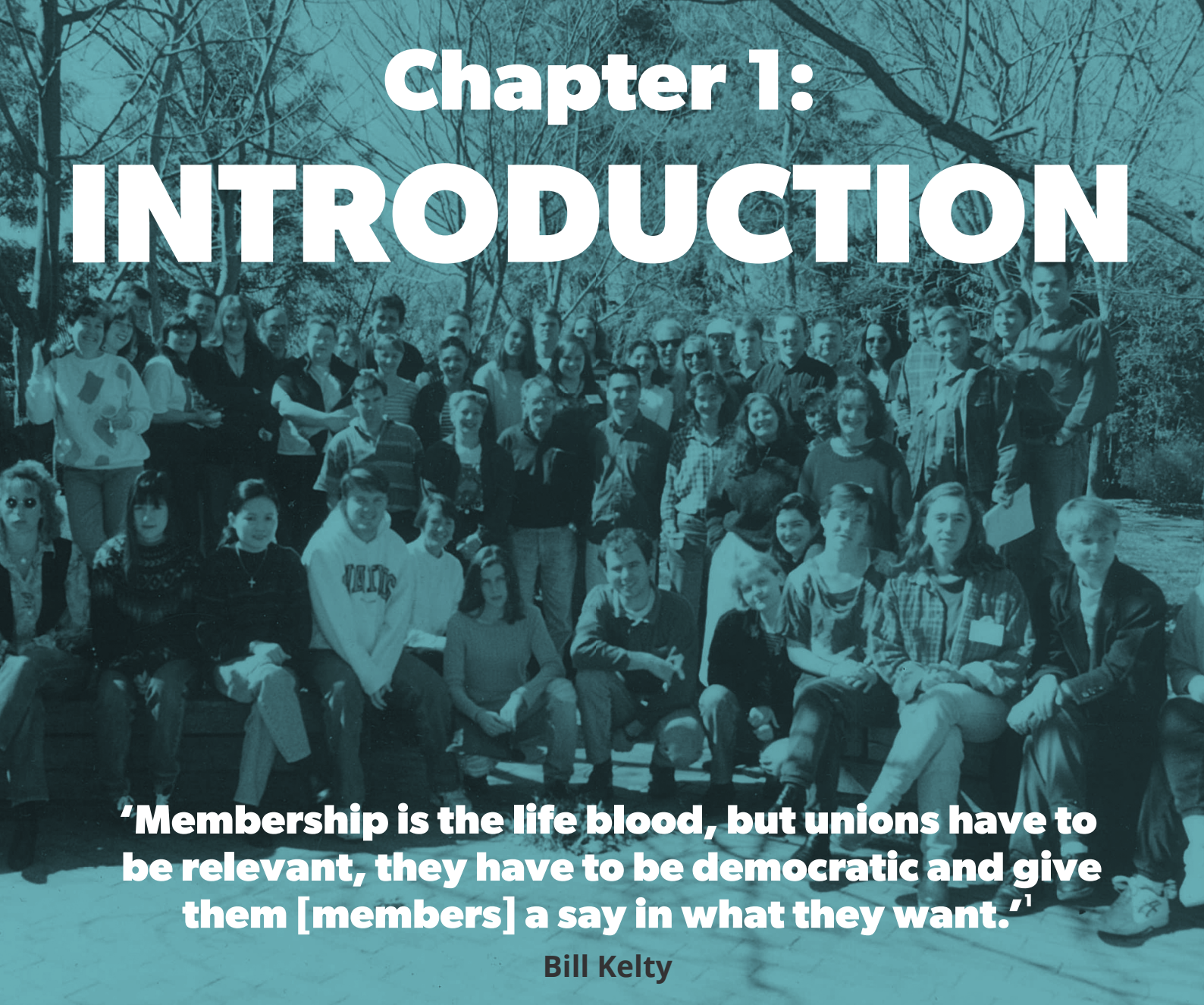
Recommendation 6:

Organising Works includes Campaign Clinic/s where trainees come together to work on an ACTU/Affiliate-led targeted campaign.

Recommendation 7:

Organising Works content to be reviewed and delivered in part by expert practitioners.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION



'Membership is the life blood, but unions have to be relevant, they have to be democratic and give them [members] a say in what they want.'¹

Bill Kelty

Members are the life blood of unions. What members have achieved is nothing short of miraculous. From the 8-Hour Day and the campaign for equal wages, to the protection of heritage buildings and the environment, as well as the attainment of Medicare and superannuation, workers have organised together, stood together, and transformed Australia. Internationally the picture is similar: health care, social housing, unemployment benefits, organised resistance to fascism and opposition to wars. Even contemporary democracy itself finds its origins in organised labour. But nothing won is won forever, and by the 1990s the forces of capital were in no mood to concede further ground.

The Keynesian policies of the post-war period were being dismantled. New monetarist and neoliberal policies were taking root.² To business and some political leaders, unions were seen not as partners to collaborate with, but barriers to be dismantled. For many in the union movement the signals internationally were loud and clear. The ACTU crafted two approaches in response, the first through the

Accords and Income Policy, and the second through a strategy to update the skills, activity and culture of Australian unions and build relevance through systematic engagement of the rank and file. In 1994 the ACTU established *Organising Works*.³

Twenty-eight years later, with the movement facing challenges both old and new, it is an ideal time to review the program and consider what future path it should take.

Chapter 2 looks at the objectives of *Organising Works*, and the historical context in which it was established.

Chapter 3 considers the outcomes of *Organising Works*.

Chapter 4 evaluates *Organising Works*.

And **Chapter 5** presents recommendations for the program's next steps.

¹ ABC Attitudes programme, 1995

² John Kelly (2015), Trade Union Membership and Power in Comparative Perspective, *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol 26(4) 526 – 544. pp: 527

³ Ed Heery (2015), Unions, and the Organising turn: Reflections after 20 years of *Organising Works*. *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol 26(4) 545-560.

Chapter 2:

BACKGROUND

Political Context

The seventies and eighties were a time of great industrial, economic, and social change. The social democratic policies that brought such significant benefits to the working class⁴ were now being challenged.⁵ A small but growing number of opponents revived a distant and destructive economic model and with the economic crisis of the 70s found a vehicle to bolster global capitalism.⁶

Neoliberalism opposed governments as agents of social change. Neoliberals opposed regulation, saw public services as opportunities for profit, and saw competition in the labour market as a tool in building individualised industrial relations systems. Standing in the way were unions, who the neoliberals were determined to take on.⁷ For the right of conservative parties this was music to their ears and, equipped with arguments from the likes of Milton Friedman and the 'Chicago School', they set to work attacking trade unions.

In the United States, President Ronald Reagan, at the beginning of his presidency, helped spread these ideas in Anglophone countries, sacking 11,350 air controllers and members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organisation (PATCO).

This signalled to employers that Government would no longer support trade unions.⁸ In Britain, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher followed suit, launching a vicious assault against the UK's militant and left-wing union⁹, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Over six years, 290,000¹⁰ NUM members would lose their jobs.¹¹ Communities collapsed, and as to attack the very culture of unionism, Thatcher declared 'there is no such thing as society'.¹² In the UK, inequality rose, and for the first time since WWII, life expectancy fell.¹³

The oil crisis of the early 1970s created a crisis for capitalism. As the academic David Harvey writes, 'capitalism can never solve its own crisis, it merely moves on'.¹⁴ Oil prices rocketed, sending waves of inflationary pressure through the global economy. Inflation hit 16% in Australia, 11% in the USA, and spiked at 24% in the UK.¹⁵ The response by unions was naturally to try and keep pace with the rising cost of living. Capitalism was in crisis. It needed an adversary to dig itself out of the crisis it had itself generated. Unions became the target, and neoliberalism the method capitalism would use.

“The effects of 30 years of neoliberalism have become so embedded in the psychology of workers that capitalism has shifted how many people think. We need Organisers skilled to counter the narrative of hyper-individualism.”

Trevor Gauld ETU

⁴ Richard Wilkinson (2005), *The Impact of Inequality*, New Pres.

⁵ George Monbiot (15.04.2016) *Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems*. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>

⁶ Guy Standing (2011), *The Precariat, The New Dangerous Class*. Bloomsbury. pp:5

⁷ Henry Giroux (2014), *The Violence of Organized Forgetting*, *Thinking Beyond Americas Dissemination Machine*.

⁸ Glenn Houlihan, (31/03/2022), *The Legacy of the Crushed 1981 PATCO Strike*, Jacobin.

⁹ Seamas Milne (1994), *The Enemy Within, The Secret War Against the Miners*. p13.

¹⁰ John Kelly (1989), *Rethinking Industrial Relations, Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*. Routledge. p1.

¹¹ John Prescott, (21/04/2013), *Margaret Thatcher Closed The Mines Out Of Sheer Political Spite*, *Mirror*, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/john-prescott-margaret-thatcher-closed-1844712>

¹² Margaret Thatcher, (8/04/2013), *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes>

¹³ Richard Wilkinson (2005), *The Impact of Inequality*, New Press (2005). See also: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/whats-happening-life-expectancy-england>

¹⁴ David Harvey (26 / 04/ 2010). *The Crisis of Capitalism*, RSA Lectures Office.

¹⁵ William Brown (2014). *The Australian Accord from an International Perspective*. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol. 46(2) 308-317.



The Accord

The 1980s were a time of great economic fear and uncertainty for working people. The Australian union movement saw a partnership with Labor as a way of steering through and avoiding the bleak period the working class experienced elsewhere. In February of 1983 the ACTU and the ALP agreed to work together and achieve agreement on shaping industrial relations to develop better economic conditions.¹⁶ The ALP was elected to government and the Prices and Incomes Accord was established by the end of the year. The Labor Government would stay in power until 1996, a period the Accord mirrored.

The period that we know as the Accord creates strong and emotive debate. For some it was a spectacular achievement in social democracy. For others, like Laurie Carmichael at the AMWU, what had been sacrificed for the social wage, had been a price too high.¹⁷ Tom McDonald was more melancholy in his reflections, writing that centralised bargaining 'disempowered workers to the extent that it took

away from them the right to struggle for higher wages and conditions.¹⁸ Tom also considered many unions had been ill equipped to gain outcomes above the Accord.¹⁹ What parties to the debate can agree on is that by the end of the Accord in 1996, the union movement had gone into steep decline and, with it, workplace activity and militancy. There were exceptions, but they weren't the rule.²⁰

The Accord is often seen as a single event; however, the Accord went through eight iterations²¹, with the last significantly different to the first. David Peetz²² sees the Accord falling into two periods. The first (Accord I to V) was a period of centralised wage fixing, where unions would moderate national claims.²³ The second period (Accord VI 1990 – 1996 VII), is that of decentralised bargaining and the introduction of bargaining by enterprise. The compromise made by the union movement would be rewarded by the 'social wage' improving disposable wages through superannuation, universal health care, income assistance and changes to taxation.²⁴

¹⁶ Stuart Macintyre (2004), *Arbitration in Action*, Cambridge University Press, p. 93.

¹⁷ David Peetz (1998), *Unions in a Contrary World, The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement*, Cambridge University Press p: 221.

¹⁸ Tom McDonald (1998) *Intimate Union: Sharing a revolutionary Life*. Pluto Press. P.289.

¹⁹ Tom McDonald (1998) *Intimate Union: Sharing a revolutionary Life*. Pluto Press. P. 287.

²⁰ John Buchanan, Damian Oliver, Chris Briggs (2014) *Solidarity Reconstructed: The Impact of the Accord on relations within the Australian union movement*. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol. 56(2). p:299

²¹ David Peetz, (1998), *Unions in a Contrary World, The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement*, Cambridge University Press p: 266

²² David Peetz, (1998), *Unions in a Contrary World, The Future of the Australian Trade Union Movement*, Cambridge University Press p: 265

²³ Chris Wright (2014) *The Prices and Incomes Accord: Its Significance, impact and legacy*. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol 56(2) pp: 264-272

²⁴ Chris Wright (2014) *The Prices and Incomes Accord: Its Significance, impact and legacy*. *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol 56(2) p: 266

The academic Michael Quinlan describes the second phase of the Accord and the introduction of enterprise bargaining thus:

[Enterprise bargaining] was the single biggest strategic error by the Australian union movement in at least 50 years. It harmed women and left weak unions even more vulnerable as well as accelerating membership decline and enabling neoliberalism.²⁵

Membership Decline

This period did not only witness the fall of union membership. Delegate structures fragmented and the number of active delegates also fell substantially. Other markers of union activity such as days lost to industrial action or member action also declined. Was this the direct result of the Accord? Or might the cause of this decline be found elsewhere?

Between 1986 and 2020, union density declined from 45.6%, to 14.3% in Australia; from 22% to 9% in the United States; and from 52% to 23% in the UK.²⁶ Unions were losing, and something needed to be done.

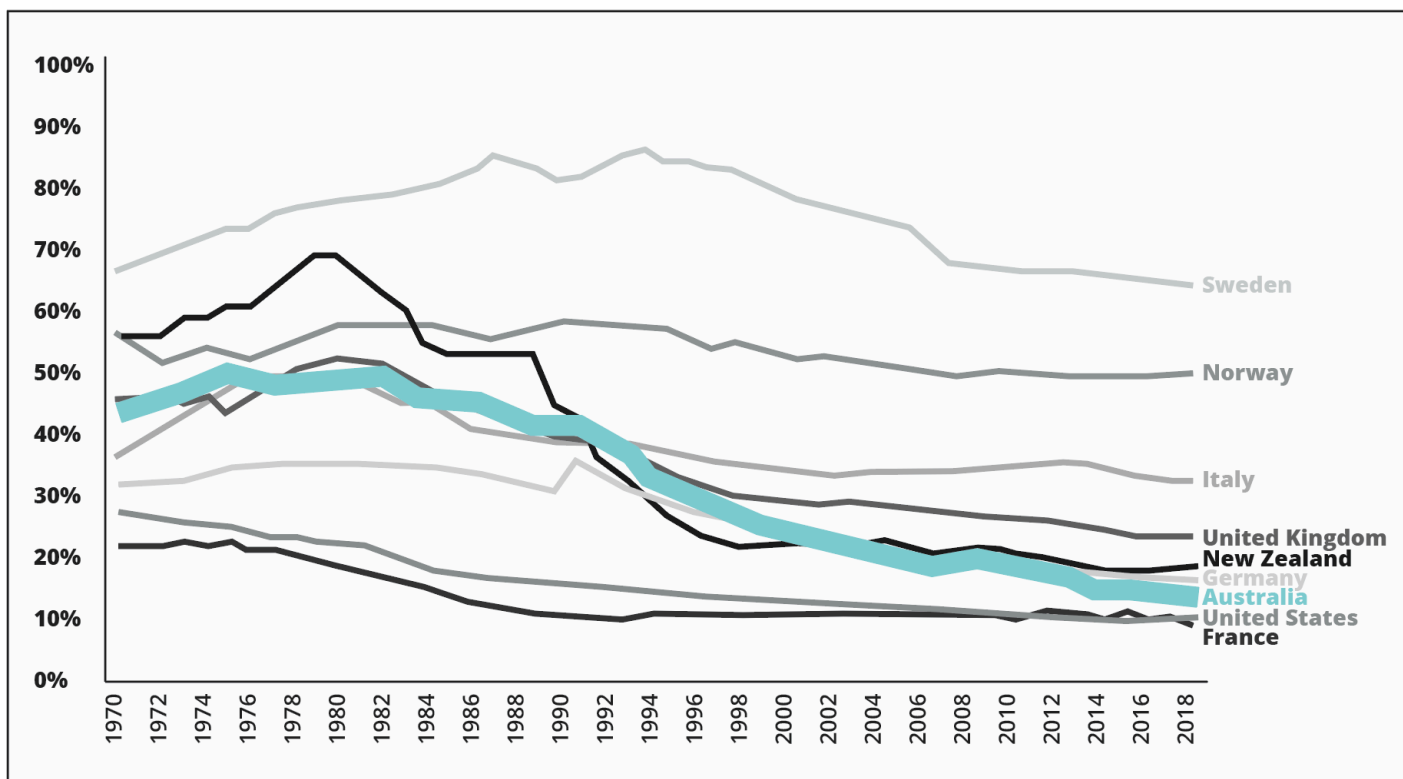
Figure 1 presents nine OECD countries, with union membership density data from 1970 through to 2018.

International comparisons provide a lens we can apply to this question. Union membership and union activity declined everywhere. Figure 1 shows the decline in union members across all nine OECD countries, the steepest of which can be seen in countries with higher levels of decentralised bargaining, like New Zealand. Conversely, some of the shallowest declines can be seen in countries with greater levels of centralised bargaining. The argument that centralised bargaining was responsible for the movement's decline is even more problematic when we consider that centralised bargaining had been a part of the industrial relations landscape since 1906²⁷ with the formation of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration.

Accepting that membership decline in Australia is part of a wider set of influences, supports consideration of the impact of global monetarist policies or neoliberalism. As with many other countries, a compelling argument for the cause of union decline during this period can be attributed to:

- » Removal of compulsory unionism, or *pre- and post-entry closed shops*.²⁸ The magnitude of this change simply can't be overstated – in 40% of workplaces workers had to join the union to obtain or stay in employment. This arrangement affected membership, as too did its removal.

Figure 1: Union Membership Density, 1970-2018, OECD



²⁵ Interview with Michael Quinlan, carried out on the 20 May 2020.

²⁶ Density figures were taken from the OECD website, Trade Union Dataset, <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TUD#> the numbers were cross-referenced with US and UK Government statistics offices.

²⁷ Stuart Macintyre (2004), *Arbitration in Action*, Cambridge University Press, p:55

²⁸ Stephen Dunn and John Gennard, (1984), *The Operation of the Closed Shop: The Union and the Individual Worker*.

- » Privatisation and outsourcing causing increasing competition between workers and placing wages into competition – competition is essential for driving down pay and conditions.
- » Changing workplaces from high-density working environments with strong union activity, to fragmented, smaller workplaces with profit driving the need to squeeze costs and therefore labour costs.²⁹

All these changes are central tenets of neoliberal policy, and commentators on both sides of the Accord debate agree that the Accord supported the liberalisation of the labour market, of which enterprise bargaining played a central role.

By 1991 unions and employers had become increasingly frustrated with centralised bargaining. A new wave of management – groomed through MBA programs – were looking for greater control, and equally so were some unions. In 1991 the Industrial Relations Commission facilitated the introduction of enterprise bargaining.³⁰ Enterprise bargaining would bring about significant challenges. Bargaining would take place in the workplace and unions would have to shift resourcing away from running cases in the arbitration commission to negotiating enterprise by enterprise.

In the 1993 Australian election, Liberal leader John Hewson went to the electorate with the *Fightback!* manifesto. This 650-page economic policy proposed major attacks on workers' rights including the abolition of Awards, gutting the social wage including unemployment benefits, Medicare Bulkbilling, and promoting privatisation of many public assets. The nightmare that was ravishing the US and the European union, was now firmly adopted by Australia's conservatives to challenge Australia's unions.³¹ Hewson lost the election to Paul Keating. However, ACTU Secretary at the time Bill Kelty saw *Fightback!* as a line in the sand. In Kelty's own words, the Australian union movement was in no place to resist these challenges.³² *Organising Works* would emerge as a response to the decline in density, and a way for the movement to respond to the fragmented bargaining system established in the latter years of the Accord.³³

'[Unions] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered'.³⁴



The Origin of Organising Works

In July 1993 a delegation of senior union officials from the Finance Sector Union, National Union of Workers, Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers Union, Australian Workers Union, Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, Australian Services Union and several Trades and Labour Councils departed for the United States. US unions had been at the forefront of the struggle against neoliberalism since the 70s. Forged in battle they had developed new and innovative ways to build power and influence.

Facilitated by the AFL-CIO, the delegation met with Richard Bensinger, the founding Director of the Organizing Institute. The Organizing Institute was delivering training and education to hundreds of member-organizers and union organisers every year, and its model would become a key component of the recommendations that would come out of the visit. Academic Richard Hurd described the Organizing Institute as the 'AFL-CIO's most innovative initiative on the external organising front'.³⁵ With Bensinger at their side, the delegation met a further group of union leaders and directors who were embedding the organising model in their unions.³⁶ Many of these leaders had emerged through activity with the anti-war movement of the 60s and 70s, others had come through the civil rights movement – all were committed to empowering and activating workers as the means to bring about change.

²⁹ Michael Crosby (2005), *Power At Work, Rebuilding the Australian Union Movement*. Federation Press. P. 29

³⁰ Stuart Macintyre (2004), *Arbitration in Action*, Cambridge University Press, p:120

³¹ Tom Bramble, 2008, *Trade Unionism in Australia, A History from Flood to Ebb Tide*, pp: 180.

³² Alison Barnes and Raymond Markey, 2015, *Evaluating the Organising Model of Trade Unionism: An Australian perspective*. P. 518.

³³ Sarah Kaine and Cathy Brigden, 2015, *Union responses to regulatory change: strategies of Protective layering*, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* 26(4) 614 – 630.

³⁴ John Buchanan, Damian Oliver, Chris Briggs 2014, *Solidarity Reconstructed: The impact of the Accord on relations within the Australian union Movement*, *Journal of Industrial Relations*. Vol 56(2) 288 – 307: 289

³⁵ Richard Hurd (2004) 'The Failure of Organizing, the New Unity Partnership, and the Future of the Labor Movement,' *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, September 2004, p. 7

³⁶ Gerard Griffin, Rai Small, Stuart Svensen (2003) 'Trade Union Innovation, Adaptation and Renewal in Australia: Still Searching for the Holy Membership Grail' in Peter Fairbrother, Charlotte Yates (2013), *Trade Unions in Renewal: A Comparative Study*, Routledge. P. 85.

A key part of the visit and one that would influence unions the world over was that of the Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaign. At the heart of the dispute sat a range of issues that embodied the neoliberal attack on workers – from outsourcing and wage competition, work intensification, to deregulation, casualisation, fragmentation and union-busting.

Between 1964 and 1984 union density across janitors in Los Angeles fell from 40% to 10%, in some cities wages fell by as much as 50%.³⁷ Organising employer by employer, or enterprise by enterprise, had failed. New tactics and strategies had to be developed.³⁸ The J4J campaign rethought and reshaped the market. Clients were leveraged into joining employers at the bargaining table. Leverage that came through the mass organising of workers and communities.³⁹ The union involved, the SEIU, developed new skills to doorknock thousands of workers, to organise communities, build alliances, find and develop leaders, and build the collective confidence to take action.⁴⁰ What the delegation found from the visit were the central tenets of the organising model.

On return, the delegation produced the strategy paper *United States Mission on Recruitment and Organisation: Summary Report*⁴¹ a paper that became the foundation to a congress resolution that would go on to form *Organising Works*.

In 1994 the ACTU established the *Organising Works Unit* and appointed Chris Walton as the Director. Chris was flanked by legends of the movement Tom McDonald and Tas Bull. Delivery of the education and training saw Chris team up with TUTA educators, like Anne Polis, Cathy Bloch, Kathleen Galvin, Don Sutherland, and Michael Newman.

Initially a nine-month program, training and education was delivered through a mix of regular face-to-face and residential courses, with experience gained through the sponsoring unions. A key recommendation from the report was that those brought into the program would reflect the changing demographic of society and work.

The ACTU advertised across a range of media outlets to attract 'bright, enthusiastic, young'⁴² applicants. Applicants were invited to assessments, where they were evaluated through problem-solving activities and conversational situations. Participating unions would then observe and interview the candidates they felt were a suitable fit for their unions. The first year drew 700 applications with 58 entering the program.⁴³ The average age of the group was 25. 60% were women, and nearly 30% were bilingual.

Objectives of Organising Works

Organising Works set out to change how unions operated. The program would promote a focus on growth through new member recruitment. Later, the program would champion the role of workplace activists, delegates and structures to facilitate grassroots, worker-led activity.

Training objectives included:

- » Recruitment conversations
- » Educating Organisers and activists through structured recruitment conversations
- » Adopting and developing tools that made the organising model manageable and understandable
- » Shifting sponsor unions and nudging union activity in an organising direction.

As the program matured and developed so did the objectives, with content shifting to place a greater focus on:

- » Identifying activists that could lead in their workplaces
- » Working with the activists through formalised and informal development
- » Creating activist structures like Workplace Organising Committees (WOC) that would facilitate activists supporting each other, planning, and building confidence
- » Shifting workplace issues from something the Organisers needed to fix, to opportunities to organise collective activity by the workers, within the workplace.

In many ways the program took us back to the days of early unionism, where members and workplace leaders were the priority for resource allocation and a shift away from the 'pinstriped proletariat'⁴⁴ emerging from centralised arbitration, conciliation, awards, and wage indexation. *Organising Works* reignited the struggle and delivered the skills to fight.

³⁷ Justice for Janitors: Making History (2010), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1zK_Dm8mEw

³⁸ Erickson, Fisk, Milkman, Mitchell and Wong (2003), Justice for janitors in Los Angeles, Lessons From Three Rounds of Negotiations, Loyola-LA Public Law Research Paper No. 2003-6

³⁹ Stuart, Mary (1993), United States Mission on Recruitment and Organisation: Summary Report, Australian Council of Trade Unions Congress, 1993. P. 20.

⁴⁰ Interview with Chris Walton February 2022.

⁴¹ United States Mission on Recruitment and Organisation: Summary Report. Presented to a discussion on Union Services and Membership Growth at the 1993 ACTU Congress in Sydney.

⁴² Organising Works History

⁴³ Alison Barnes and Raymond Markey (2015), Evaluating the Organising Model of Trade Unionism: An Australian perspective. P. 518

⁴⁴ Anthony Forsyth and Carolyn Holbrook, (2017) The Conversation, Australian Politics Explained, the Prices and Incomes Accord. April 24,

Outcomes of Organising Works

The challenge facing the nascent *Organising Works* program was an imposing one. Participants would have to learn and adopt new skills, and from limited positions of influence would have to drive change in their organisations. For some this would be a difficult and challenging task.⁴⁵

To date, the *Organising Works* program has trained more than 900 participants.⁴⁶ Over 60% of current union leaders participated in the program. Many other former participants have taken leading roles in political parties (the ALP and the Greens), NGOs and campaign groups.

Similarly, the Organising Academy in the UK generated this trend, with waves of Organisers ascending through their unions. Soon-to-be General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Paul Novak graduated in the first intake, as did Sharon Graham, General Secretary of the UK's largest union, Unite. Roz Foyer, now General Secretary of the Scottish TUC, entered the academy with Paul and Sharron in 1998.⁴⁷ The UK union movement has not only stemmed the decline of union membership; it is now experiencing its fourth consecutive year of growth.⁴⁸

While the story in Australia is a little more sombre, commentators⁴⁹ have credited *Organising Works* with slowing the decline of union membership. While the lack of movement-wide growth remains a focus of the movement, Australian unions (including the ASU, AEU, ANMF, and HSU) have delivered membership growth through workplace and industry organising. Across the country, unions and union leaders are engaging in innovative and exciting activity and, at the heart of this activity, are graduates of *Organising Works*.

The Australian union movement regularly demonstrates global leadership in effective strategic campaigning. The TCFUA developed a strategy of researching employer obligation breaches, and leveraging those breaches, for access to the workers. The TWU's *2035 Vision* creates a bottom-up and top-down approach to organising the industry through leveraging clients and mobilising workers.⁵⁰ The AWU and MUAs Offshore Alliance have deployed clever strategic activity in some of the world's most remote locations.⁵¹ Professionals Australia developed digital strategies to organise and deliver growth across a dispersed workforce of chemists at Chemist Warehouse.⁵² The ASU's 'We Won't Wait' campaign saw women service workers organise workers across unions and industries on an issue of social importance. The publication *Power at Work*, by the former President of United Voice Michael Crosby, became a seminal text and resource for European countries as they looked to respond to neoliberal attacks.

Different forms of membership models are being tested, for instance the UWU established arms-length organisations to mobilise non-traditional workers through Hospo Voice. Then there are unions like the ANMF who organise to control markets through professional development.

While growth continues to frustrate the Australian Trade Union movement there is much to celebrate.



⁴⁵ Moors 2002. Pp 11

⁴⁶ See table 2 on p.36

⁴⁷ TUC website, (21 / 12 / 2022), <https://www.tuc.org.uk/person/paul-nowak>

⁴⁸ Larry Elliot, (27 May, 2021) Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/may/27/membership-of-uk-trade-unions-rises-for-fourth-year-in-a-row>

⁴⁹ Kaine and Brigden (2015) Union Responses to Regulatory Change: Strategies of Protective Layering, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, p. 625.

⁵⁰ Kaine and Brigden (2015) Union Responses to Regulatory Change: Strategies of Protective Layering, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 2015, p. 621.

⁵¹ Interview with the International Transport Federation February 2022.

⁵² Interview with Chris Walton February 2022.



Chapter 3:

THE REVIEW

Context for the Review

Having occupied a central role within the Australian trade union landscape for so long, there was a feeling that the program had lost the prestigious status it once held, and had moved from something people aspired to be a part of, to something that Organisers were required to attend. Program alumni echoed these sentiments in later years, revealing a pattern of experiences, comments and feelings that would trigger the 2022 review.

The program review, established during the 2020-21 pandemic hiatus, arose out of a view that it was time to re-evaluate the objectives and the outcomes of the program in its current state, and explore ways it can adapt to the changing employment landscape, both now and into the future.

Methodology

The review focused on discussions with academics and movement practitioners through four phases:

1. The first phase involved discussions with participants and those who had taught on the program.
2. The second focused on discussions with union leaders to explore their expectations for the program.
3. The third included establishing a working group to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program.
4. The fourth comprised a series of discussions with academics and practitioners across the world to see what others are doing, and what they are looking to do in the future.

Phase 1

In the first phase we spoke with previous participants and past program educators. Reflections from this group largely fell into two identifiable areas of discussion.

The first area of discussion centred around the program's success equipping Organisers with the necessary skills to develop a strong career path within the trade union movement. This feedback was overwhelmingly positive, as below:

- » 'Org Works was so important to my development and how I developed as an Organiser and later as an educator'.
- » 'Without Org works I would not have been able to achieve what I have achieved in my union'.
- » 'Org Works really helped me develop skills to think critically'.
- » 'The program allowed me to access employment in the trade union movement, when traditional journeys would have been less likely'.

The second area of discussion identified concerns about the program, several of which had been contributing factors in the program moving to review. These concerns included:

- » 'It was sad to find yourself on such a high-level course, having to battle racist and sexist behaviour [from other participants]'.
- » 'Some Organisers who had not bought into organising and wanted to challenge the course itself'.
- » 'Several of the women on the course felt unsafe due to the behaviour of some male participants'.

"... the person [Organiser] must also have an inner drive for organising work – we really want that person to be able to stand up for themselves. The formal skills are not that important. Everything can be learnt, the most important thing is the inner drive!"

Terje Samuelsen, Fellesforbundet Secretary and ETUC Transport Secretary



- » 'It felt like we were being set up to fail, being taught great theory but then going back to where many of the ideas we developed in the class were not being supported by the mentor, lead, and branch'.
- » 'I would say over the years that I ran the program around 20% of participants were disruptive to the point that the learning for others was being hindered'.
- » 'There were people in my group who just didn't want to be there'.
- » 'One of our branches sent an Organiser who just shouldn't have been there. He had no interest in organising and was combative in making that point to others'.

Many of the comments were anticipated, for example:

- » Discussions around the fit of the program with day-to-day operational requirements of sponsoring branches.
- » Comments around the length of the program.
- » Analysis that the program was too theoretical, or conversely, noted by some, lacking theory.

Most surprising were the recurring comments around behaviour and discussions about race, Indigeneity, sex, gender, and sexual orientation. In one discussion a previous educator spoke of adapting sessions, wanting to create content that allowed the participants to spend more time discussing equality and diversity. According to the educator the sessions were met with objections and resistance.

This part of the review encouraged discussions with a wide range of previous participants and educators, and one of the strongest threads that emerged was that of behaviour around equality and diversity.

The themes identified in the second grouping of responses largely stem from the transition from *Organising Works* supporting a pipeline of keen and diverse new entrants to the movement, to participants largely being sourced from existing union employees. Union staff who didn't necessarily see the same value in the course, were already 'wedded' to their way of organising, and who struggled to balance the demands of an existing full-time organising load with course participation.

Phase 2

For the second phase we spoke with leadership across the movement to gain an understanding of their thoughts and expectations. These conversations gave an overall positive endorsement of the program, but again identified concerns rising from recent years. Most notably, concerns around the ability of sponsoring organisations to support the participant. Other challenges identified included:

- » Not being a formal qualification.
- » Course length potentially too long.
- » The difficulty of creating and delivering relevant content for a wide range of unions, each with distinct priorities and needs, was seen as a weakness.
- » Too much theory, without ample opportunity for application.
- » Organisers becoming too busy, seeing the program as competing for their time, and only participating because they were told to.

When discussions turned to what the course might need in future, conversations identified the need for:

- » Increased digital skills training.
- » Online-to-offline skills and knowledge.
- » Knowledge and skills for Organisers to develop deeper political understanding.
- » Management skills and the ability to manage others and own time.
- » Organiser-focused leadership skills.
- » Understanding how to build delegate structures, find the right delegates, and bring new delegates onboard.

Table 1: Feedback from the Working Group

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Program has delivered organising skills and frameworks to a range of Organisers, who have pushed this within their own unions and encouraged others in their unions towards organising » A clear pathway was opened for workers to find careers in the union movement (this came up a lot but was contested) » The program delivered a deeper level of education that was perceived as unmatched by other union courses. » The program delivered organising and growth in areas that would not have developed without the program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Dropping the qualification – there was strong range of comments expressing concern at the removal of the qualification. That for many workers the qualification represented something of pride and contributed to the prestige of the program » Mentoring was a concern: it was difficult for those who agreed to carry out mentoring to deliver this in practice » There was often a clear separation between what was being taught and the idiosyncratic way specific branches organised their tactics, strategy and culture, leaving participants little opportunity to apply the theory they were learning » Participants struggled to balance the demands of having worksites with that of being on the course all day for week-long blocks each month.

Many of these issues point to challenges that arise from the shift away from *Organising Works* being a pipeline for new entrants to the movement and towards a comprehensive Organiser development program for existing and senior Organisers.

Clarifying this point will be essential for any form *Organising Works* takes in future.

Phase 3

The next phase brought together key persons from the unions including educators, leads, and those in leadership positions – a group seen as driving change in their unions. The working group met for two hours and assessed the program through group discussion, based on the program’s strengths and weaknesses. Table 1 below highlights the working group’s feedback.

When we looked at the strengths and weaknesses, we witnessed similar sentiments to those raised in the first and second phase discussions, including:

- » Concerns continued around the recruitment process and where the participants had come from – their motivations and commitment to social justice and social movements
- » Concerns that some participants exhibited sexist, racist and homophobic attitudes inconsistent with union values
- » Structural problems in the fit between what was being taught and what was expected or being supported in the union.

Of particular importance for the formation of a way forward is to note that these issues were more concentrated in recent years where all the participants were joining as existing Organisers from affiliated unions.

Phase 4

In our final phase we reached out to union practitioners and academics from across the globe, from Norway to the US, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Korea, and the Caribbean. Our interviews focused on five key questions.

We have removed repeated or similar contributions – the following represents the synthesis of those discussions:

1. *What's your expectation of an entry level intensive Organiser course?*

- » Organisers need to develop a deep political understanding and analytical capability.
- » To develop Organisers as educators, disseminating skills to build and activate membership.
- » To understand, build and prioritise distributive leadership models.
- » Learn the fundamentals of organising and adopt a theory and practise model.
- » Identification and development of workplace leaders.
- » Develop an understanding for the discipline required to be an Organiser.
- » Ability to motivate and lead workers in action.
- » Action an analysis of colonial history, and commit to fight racism.
- » Ability to create a vision for the fight.
- » Develop understanding for influencing and controlling markets.
- » Understand of how to build triggers into organising strategies.


2. *What are the main skills and qualities that you are looking for in a good Organiser?*

- » Creative problem solving.
- » Self-motivated.
- » Ability to agitate.
- » Good values committed to opposing discrimination.
- » A leader.
- » Skills in running meetings.
- » Ability to work collectively.
- » Deep listening skills.
- » A political understanding and analysis for anti-racism and skills to organise anti-divisional activity.

- » Understanding and ability to organise around cultural awareness.
- » A clear understanding that the Organiser's role is to develop workplace capacity, NOT BE the capacity.

3. *What trends in either skills gaps or increased capacity within Organisers have you noticed that have either enabled or inhibited Organisers to grow and win on issues/campaigns?*

- » Lack of ability to design campaigns.
- » Reluctance to have a go, to try something different.
- » The need for the participants to have a fulfilling experience.
- » Briefing and de-brief skills.
- » Decline of critical thinking, replaced with short-term training objectives.
- » Organisers need to understand how they take an issue and turn it into worker-led collective activity.
- » Seeing Organisers drawn in and replacing workplace delegate/activist activity.
- » Inability to resolve issues or take on issues.
- » Organisers struggle to write and develop documents.
- » Core organising skills are missing.
- » Need for Lead Organisers development.
- » Lack of knowledge around escalating issues.
- » Lack of hope.
- » Growing tensions between bottom up and top-down strategies.
- » Lack of knowledge on how to organise unorganised workplaces.
- » Lead Organisers micromanaging rather than developing skills and knowledge to empower.
- » Need to understand and support union staff, so that we don't burn them out, therefore taking advantage of the of the institutional knowledge that has been secured over time.



4. *What does your union need more of, or start doing in your organising and growth work?*

- » Develop a fear of what could happen if we don't organise.
- » Skills to build community alliances.
- » There need to be more confident delegates, organised in groups and running their workplaces.
- » More work needs to be done to segment members and potential members, and speak to them about the issues and activity that will activate them.
- » More education – education that replaces training.
- » Need for more local leaders who can run their own yards.
- » Need to start trusting delegates and activists.
- » We need to have a greater level of development for lead Organisers,
- » Avoid rote learning of frameworks, and embrace a conversation where the person feels listened to and valued.
- » Need to start changing the culture in our union, away from churn and burn, away from robotic conversations that leave the workers feeling puzzled and undervalued. Need to have meaningful conversations delivered through delegates, but supported by Organisers who are enthused by their work, rather than compelled.
- » Creating more safe space for Indigenous peoples to participate and feel accepted.
- » Need Indigenous staff in unions.
- » Need to build more solidarity between unions, and greater solidarity across workplaces – creating union communities.
- » Need to create space to try different things and to experiment.
- » Deliver skills for Organisers to develop in others the skills and knowledge to take leadership roles in local political activity, like local councils.
- » Union requires greater collaboration with other unions.
- » Need to be better in linking negotiations/ bargaining and organising.

5. *How will the role of an Organiser change in the next ten years in your union? What training and education will be required for those Organisers in ten years to be able to grow membership, build power, and win?*

- » Greater use and engagement around technology.
- » Need to develop skills to counter impacts of climate change and far right activity.
- » Ability to speak multiple languages.
- » Strategic campaigning.
- » Understanding the use of technology so that contact and communication can be automated with engaging workers journeys.
- » To understand how unions fit to workers rather than expecting workers to fit the union.
- » Online to offline skills and knowledge.
- » Need to be involved in social and political movements. Our reach must be greater than nickel-and-dime campaigns.
- » Organising migrant workers.
- » Skills and knowledge to engage in workers capital campaigns.
- » Preparing for greater levels of militancy from employers.

“The AWU is a union with large workplaces, with a heavy concentration of members and potential members in one area. As we look to the future, we know this will change. We are going to have to look for different ways to organise workers, workers who will be spread across many workplaces and multiple locations.”

Kade Wakefield, National Growth and Campaigns, AWU National Office

Chapter 4:

ANALYSIS

Challenges and tensions

Throughout all the phases of the review, the working group and discussions, a consistent pattern of tensions emerged. It is important to explore these tensions as they inform our analysis of the program as well as support the development of future iterations. The following identifies and seeks to unpack such tensions.

Praxis

Organising that is separated from education, and thus from real leadership development, becomes mobilising rather than true organising... education programs that are not linked to organising are just as problematic ... we are not talking simply about changing the education programs to make them participatory, but about transforming them into action-orientated campaign-based education programs.⁵³

Cornrow and Delp explore an important discussion in union education, and it's a global discussion. It begins with the discussion around the role of union education, what is union education for?:⁵⁴

- » To give the individual improved opportunities?
- » To provide workplace reps/delegates with a generic set of skills to deal with workers' concerns? and/or,
- » To drive the strategic objectives of an organisation focused on building worker power?

Cornrow and Delp highlight the contradiction of unions that organise but fail to have education units that deliver to the strategic objectives. They argue that union education should, as Jane McAlevey agrees, focus on 'deep organising', where workers involved in campaigns are given education as opposed to training. Education that provides critical thinking, political education, commitment to building worker power, courage to act, and the skills to empower and activate workers.

While this is a contested discussion, it is an important one, as it speaks to the genesis of *Organising Works*, and the path it takes in the future.

Training versus education

Henry Giroux, one of the leading academics in the genre of critical pedagogy describes the difference between training and education as:

Pedagogy is not about training, it is about critically educating people to be self-reflective, capable of critically addressing their relationship with others and with the larger world. Pedagogy in this sense provides not only important critical and intellectual competencies; it also enables people to intervene critically in the world.⁵⁵

Adopting this analysis from Giroux and applying the lens of Jane McAlevey's work⁵⁶, a picture emerges of union 'education' that has drifted to training, jettisoning the capacity of workers to understand and participate in their unions. Crosby spoke to a similar assessment: that he had seen Organiser training produce robotic, structured organising conversations, with Organisers unable to have a meaningful conversation that valued the person they were speaking with. This was echoed in conversations with interviewees at the SEIU International, SEIU locals, and UWU. Interestingly, organisations that had been so central to, or influenced by, the turn to organising had unanimous agreement that we had to educate workers if we truly wanted them to fight.

The drift from education to training is also highlighted in the growing chorus of calls for political education. The review encountered this throughout all phases of discussions, and across almost all unions. There was a clear concern that the lack of political education was creating a fertile vacuum for far-right messaging and organising. This was also identified by the ACTU Combating the Far-Right working group, which thought the lack of education left union members vulnerable to far-right groups.

Our conversations with people in the Korean trade union movement reinforced the Australian experience. The KPTU have sought to address this problem by moving all new Organisers through a program of political-economy education.

⁵³ Cornrow and Delp (1999), Teaching Organising Through Workers Experiences | Labour Studies Journal | Spring,

⁵⁴ Dave Spooner (2017), Reconnecting Trade Union Education, Politics and Self Reliance, Trade Union Education Transforming the World, p:129

⁵⁵ Henry Giroux, (8/12/2007), Henry Giroux: Figures in Critical Pedagogy, Freire Project. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvCs6XkT3-o>

⁵⁶ Jane McAlevey, (2014) Raising Expectations, (and Raising Hell) My Decade Fighting for the Labour Movement

“We used to recruit Organisers mostly from student politics, so they came to the unions with campaign skills, politically motivated and hungry to fight. But students are less political and politically engaged today. So, we have developed education to politicise our Organisers.”

SungHee Oh (KPTU)

Organisers substituting rank and file activity

For workers to develop a political education we would need to start with the Organisers, emphasising the educational aspect of an Organiser's role. But the Organiser has a myriad of tasks that they are expected to juggle from a position of conflicting priorities. A branch that needs to grow may place the short-term need for membership growth over the development of workplace activity.

In the work undertaken by Jane Holgate looking at the TUC organising Academy (United Kingdom), Jane highlighted what she called 'recruitment masquerading as organising'.⁵⁷ Apart from Barnes⁵⁸, few academics pick up on this, but it is a significant problem that does more than undermine organising – it is the antithesis of organising.

Organisers who regularly enter the workplace without a significant plan to present to the workplace delegate, and workplace union structure, risk being seen as the union, as opposed to the workers themselves being the union. In doing so we take from the workers both their ability and agency to organise. In the UK, Unite make it very clear to Organisers that they only go in 'when it's going to kick-off'.⁵⁹ This tactic signals to the employers, as well as the members, that the Organiser enters the site only when the situation is 'hot', while the real work of building power is carried out by the workplace representatives.

In locations where union membership is initiating for the first time, having Organisers making daily contact with workers on the ground is essential to building momentum. But once momentum has been built, or workplaces have established membership, the Organiser role changes to that of developing worker activity.

When Clarke, Peetz and Pocock published *Delegates are Diamonds*⁶⁰ they highlighted the importance of workplace activists and delegates, being the only people who can build power in a workplace. John Kelly's pivotal work and framework mobilisation theory⁶¹ places the role of the workplace leader as the central agent to growth and renewal.

⁵⁷ Jane Holgate (2021) *Arise, Power, Strategy and Union Resurgence*. Pluto Press.

⁵⁸ Alison Barnes and Raymond Markey (2015), *Evaluating the Organising Model of Trade Unionism: An Australian perspective*.

⁵⁹ Interview with TUC educator June 2022.

⁶⁰ Jane Clarke, David Peetz, and Barbara Pocock, (2005), *Delegates are diamonds: learning from union delegates' experiences in Australia*. Adelaide: Labour Studies, University of Adelaide.

⁶¹ John Kelly, (1998), *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism, and Long Waves*. Routledge.

Organiser KPIs smothering activists

An additional point that came up in discussions, and links to several points above, is that of the requirements placed on Organisers to deliver key performance indicators (KPIs). The use of KPIs is a much-debated tactic for unions across Australia. In a world where everything is measured it might seem smart that union campaigns also have measures to track against. The problem comes when KPIs are introduced without consideration of how they may negatively impact other, long-term organising tactics.

For example:

1. An Organiser who has the KPI to visit 4 workplace locations a day, and/or;
2. To recruit 10 new members per week.

The KPI for visits may leave Organisers entering any workplace, simply to comply with the KPI. The lack of purpose risks third-partying the union, and painting the union as something that comes in from time to time and is external to the workplace.

There are challenges too with recruitment KPIs. The KPI may work against the development of workplace activism. For example the induction that the Organiser can't risk the delegate being involved in; the group of new workers the Organiser can't quite hand over to the delegate to recruit; the campaign activity or survey that needs to be performed by the Organiser.

A focus on short and immediate outcomes can create KPIs that directly undermine the development of workplace activism. KPIs alone will not deliver union growth.

Educational content not fitting with workplace priorities

From new and old participants to union leaders, and those who set the program up, the problem of disconnect between what was being taught in the room, compared to what was expected in an Organiser's role, came up again and again. For the content covered in the classroom to be relevant and informative, participants must have an opportunity to apply the theory into their practice. Often the participant's work allocation in their union has not presented an opportunity to apply the theory at the relevant time.

Frameworks over substance

The discussions with those unions who have been the most committed to the structured organising conversation revealed some interesting reflections. All of the conversations with persons from the US unions (SEIU local and International, ILWU, AFLCIO) spoke of the need to have meaningful conversations to listen to the worker, to understand what they are saying, and value the person.

This was also reinforced through our conversations with Catarina Cinnani and Andrew Jones at the UWU who spoke of moving away from 14-step conversations, to having genuine and meaningful conversations. This is a significant shift from the 60-second elevator, sign them, or move-on conversations, which epitomised the organising model through the noughties.



CASE STUDY - STRATEGIC KPIS

Through this review we spoke with Andrew Jones at the United Workers Union who confronted this challenge and turned the problem round.

In the Early Childhood Care Sector, Organisers had previously operated under a KPI for their direct recruitment. This shaped Organiser behaviour, increasing visits, visits without purpose, and leaving the union seen as external to the workplace shaking the bucket. KPIs have not been removed, but have been altered to measure the recruitment by workplace activists. In many ways, it's a subtle change, but one that has changed the behaviour of the Organisers. The focus now for the Organiser is activist identification, activist development and training.

Organisers can only claim recruitment as a KPI when that membership is delivered by a workplace activist. This has resulted in a significant change in the way Organisers visit workplaces, how they engage with the activists, as well as the formal and informal training activists receives. Organisers are now spending less time with workers and more time with activists. Childcare workers are being empowered; workers are now seeing themselves as the union.

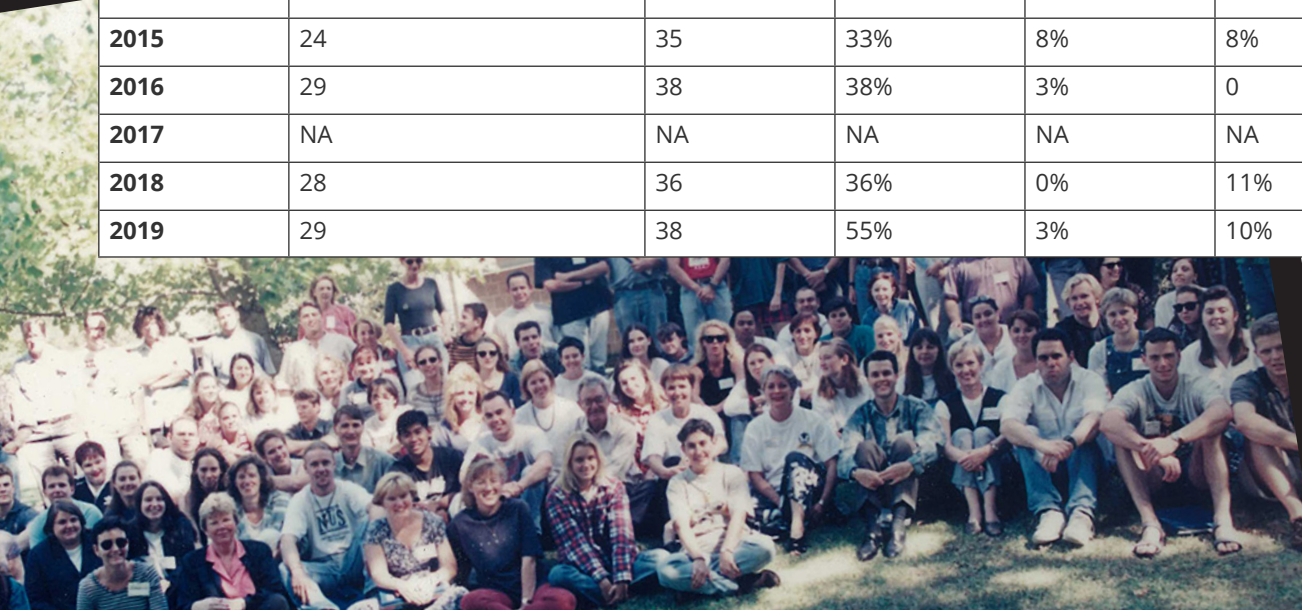
Declining diversity

The workplaces of today and tomorrow look and feel very different to the workplaces of the past. Workers of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities, along with workers with disabilities, expect more from the organisations that seek their participation. We see high concentrations of young workers in the gig economy, and industries such as hairdressing, hospitality, and computer programming. We must be inclusive organisations that young and diverse workers feel they can be part of, taking action around issues that inspire them.

Yet since 1994, when *Organising Works* first began, the diversity of *Organising Works* participants has been in decline. Table 2 shows participation by gender, age, speakers of other languages and, only very recently, identifying Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander peoples.

Table 2: Statistics recorded from the start of *Organising Works*

Year	Participants Commenced	Average Age	% Female	% ATSI	% LOTE
1994	58	25	60%	NA	29%
1995 (1)	86	24	61%	NA	12%
1995 (2)	52	26	54%	NA	30%
1996	41	28	49%	NA	24%
1997	27	28	46%	NA	23%
1998	23	28	48%	NA	17%
1999	26	30	46%	NA	8%
2000	40	28	55%	NA	10%
2001	42	31	51%	NA	5%
2002	38	30	45%	NA	8%
2003	41	30	51%	NA	13%
2004	37	NA	46%	NA	NA
2005	51	NA	43%	NA	NA
2006	38	28	47%	NA	26%
2007	45	30	55%	NA	20%
2008	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2009	45	34	31%	NA	18%
2010	50	34	38%	NA	18%
2011	58	34	38%	NA	34%
2012	37	30	35%	0%	0%
2013	52	33	37%	2%	6%
2014	18	36	8%	0%	11%
2015	24	35	33%	8%	8%
2016	29	38	38%	3%	0
2017	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2018	28	36	36%	0%	11%
2019	29	38	55%	3%	10%



Key data trends

Comparing the first five years of the program against the last five years, and creating an average, we find:

- » Over the first five years 24% of participants could speak another language, representing greater cultural diversity. Over the last five years this figure fell to a participation rate of just 8%
- » Participation by women over the first five years stood at 53%, over the last five years it stood at 34%
- » The only number that has risen since the start of *Organising Works* is that of age – over the last five years the average age of the *Organising Works* participants rose by ten years.

If we apply the principle of *like-recruits-like* we are, today, more likely to be recruiting activists who are older, white, and male. There is no fault to be attributed here. This decline is a product of the shift away from recruiting external participants to the program, and the move to draw on participants that have emerged internally within our movement.

Diversity and representation are core values of the trade union movement, and the *Organising Works* program presents an important opportunity to increase diversity and representation. Attention to cultural awareness, and culturally safe content and delivery, must be features of the *Organising Works* program moving forward.

Organiser Shortages

One of the challenges raised by affiliates was the difficulty branches face recruiting passionate Organisers, leading to a lack of trained Organisers. The next iteration of *Organising Works* should support unions/branches to fill positions and train new entrant Organisers.

Balancing priorities over the physicality of education

Educators have long and woeful stories of trying to control phones, laptops, and the ever-pressing urgency of now. From passing buckets around and collecting phones, to imposing 'fines' for the use of such equipment, none has achieved the objective of muting this digital trend. The reality for Organisers, if they have been an Organiser more than two years, is that they are busy. They have calendar invites piling up in their diaries, members calling about safety vests, their line manager calling and expecting that they answer immediately. Add to these distractions the use of laptops and iPads, of course for taking notes, but no doubt leading to distractions from arriving emails, the challenge of spending five days each month disconnected and focused is a significant one.

For existing Organisers joining the program, there is the challenge of workload being a distraction from learning. Several Organisers spoke of how at the start a small number of worksites were assigned to them, but this number increased while they were still engaged in *Organising Works*, and many spoke of struggling to do justice to both.

Organisers, while under pressure from workloads, are often under pressure from KPIs. KPIs that reduce essential organising activity like identifying activists, developing activists, and organising collective activity around issues related to recruitment, constantly chasing membership cards, as several commented. Often at the expense of developing activists and sustainable workplace structures. Indeed, Holgate's first study of the Organising Academy in the UK, showed only 20%⁶² of participating unions put any resources into developing workplace structures.

Then there is the declining diversity – if we are to organise content creators, for example, we need to look like them, we need to speak like them, we need to think like them. In many instances existing trade union officials do not come from the communities they seek to organise, a problem – as shown above – that is getting worse.

Some of these tensions we just need to be aware of, while others require more substantial attention as a matter of priority.

“I made my journey from electrician to organiser and now I’m the secretary of the CEPU. Organising Works was essential in developing my skills and knowledge, allowing me to lead my organisation today.”

Michael Anderson, CEPU



Chapter 5:

ORGANISING WORKS TO DELIVER GROWING UNIONS

Training and education for existing Organisers employed in affiliates

Whatever direction *Organising Works* takes, there will always be education and training to facilitate the development of current Organisers. The ATUI's *Organiser Pathway* program, developed in recent years, presents an excellent journey for Organisers, taking into consideration the need to balance membership organising activity and existing Organisers' own development. The *Organiser Pathway* presents a program of four courses⁶³ taking Organisers on a journey from:

- » ***Organising Foundations*** – providing new Organisers with a grounding in our values and purpose as they develop their confidence to work with union leaders and activists, and hold conversations that engage and recruit workers into the union.
- » ***Building Union*** – designed to increase the capacity of Organisers to work with workplace leaders, to engage workers and act collectively to resolve issues, and to build union organisation in their workplace.
- » ***Organising for Change*** – created to ensure Organisers apply critical thinking on complex issues and confidently develop leadership and organisation in difficult situations.
- » ***Craft of Organising*** – designed for proficient Organisers to develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to take responsibility for planning and implementing campaigns that develop leadership and structure for the long term.

The *Pathways* program speaks to many of the concerns raised by affiliates. Pathways delivers educational outcomes over a shorter period, allowing Organisers to balance job demands with their own development. Existing Organisers can more flexibly access the Pathways course and are not expected to jam the full Pathways program into 12 months, rather tracking through the pathway as they develop on their organising journey in the field.

⁶³ Jane Clarke, *Organising Pathway: Resources Paper*, ACTU organising Centre 2018.

This is a program built around sound pedagogical principles with the purpose of providing existing Organisers a pathway of education that develops critical thinking and couches the theory in the plan to act. When we compare the objectives for each course, we see how the Pathways course delivers similar objectives, but objectives that fit the needs of an established Organiser, rather than a trainee new to the movement.

Table 3: Current Learning Objectives

Organising Works	Organiser Pathways
<p>The following learning objectives for <i>Organising Works</i>:</p> <p>Organising Works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Explore the role of an OW trainee within the union movement. » Explore the changing nature of work and the challenges facing workers and their unions. » Develop an understanding of organising, contemporary debates around organising, and how to build power. » Explain and demonstrate the key communication skills of active listening and open questioning. » Develop a high level of confidence in the use of a range of conversation frameworks, including handling objections and closure. » Identify the legal sources of workers' rights. » Outline the basic structure of the IR system. » Develop key research skills, to evaluate employer strengths and weaknesses. » Explore the theory related to workplace leaders. » Identify frameworks to develop workplaces leaders. » Explore pedagogical principles in the education of workplace leaders. » Identify the importance of planning and the basic processes involved in planning. » Explore techniques to use bargaining as a vehicle for growth. » Link the current situation to the history of the union movement. » Relate the work of the Australian union movement to international unionism and the struggle against poverty (including APHEDA). 	<p>Learning objectives for the <i>Pathways</i> courses include:</p> <p>Level 1 – Organising Foundations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Articulate and discuss the values and purpose of unionism. » Take part in conversations about power at the industry, national and international level. » Conduct effective and strategic mapping and analysis. » Develop and implement a robust organising plan. » Describe and demonstrate the steps in a structured organising conversation. <p>Level 2 – Building union</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Develop the skills necessary to use workplace issues to recruit new members. » Have the skills required to develop the capacity of union delegates and workplace activists to participate in dispute resolution and collective negotiations. » Gain an in-depth awareness of the process of industrial relations bargaining in Australia and how this has changed over time. <p>Level 3 – Organising for change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify the purpose and power of health and safety representatives, both from an organising and a WHS perspective. » Build effective workplace organising committees that maximise the effectiveness of diversity in a workforce. » Develop campaign strategies effective across a range of contexts. » Demonstrate a sound understanding of how social media can be used to effectively communicate, network, and mobilise. » Develop workplace leaders' capacity to build unity in the face of division. <p>Level 4 – Craft of Organising</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Apply organising theory and traditions successfully to practice. » Create opportunities for building lasting, positive change in workers' lives. » Develop abilities to teach workers to take action and build power. » Develop own and other's leadership skills. » Motivate themselves and others to make progressive change happen.

It is recommended that the ACTU work with affiliates to engage their existing Organisers in the *Organiser Pathways* program.

This program of development should be promoted to a greater extent as a way of supporting affiliates, to understand and guide the journey of Organisers through the four courses, in line with the objectives.

A key driver of the shift towards the *Organising Works* cohort being made up of existing union employees is the view that the *Organising Works* program can be a 'one stop shop' of union education. The full breadth of this content can be achieved through the *Organisers Pathway* program where the content is more appropriately directed towards an Organiser's level of experience and therefore more relevant and deeply embedded in their craft.

By directing existing Organisers into the pathways program, we address a number of concerns that review participants identified including:

- » Duration of course
- » Applying theory and lessons to application in work at their union
- » Relevance of course content
- » Political and social discussion
- » The challenges of balancing an existing organising patch and expectations with course participation.

Assisting affiliates and participants to navigate each Organisers' journey through the *Pathway* will be necessary for the Organiser to access the full breadth of pathway content that is currently being sought through participation in *Organising Works*.

Recommendation 1:

The ACTU works with affiliates to engage their existing Organisers in the *Organiser Pathways* program.

Recommendation 2:

The ATUI implements recall days as part of *Organiser Pathways* courses to assist participants to embed their learning into their practical work, and curates an Organiser's journey through the pathway.

Organising Works Traineeships

The next journey for *Organising Works* must begin with its purpose. As noted at the beginning of this report, at its foundation, *Organising Works* was 'intended to change how unions operate'. This was a relevant consideration when the unions of the 1990s adopted organising models. In 2022, with organising as the general approach of Australian unions, is the intention 'to change how unions operate' still relevant?

Australian unions need union Organisers who represent the workers of today and tomorrow in terms of age, gender and cultural diversity. The nature of organising and union members' and potential members' work is evolving: online organising, community campaigning, cutting edge communications, and modern mobilisation activities are more important than ever. *Organising Works* still presents a great opportunity to strive to achieve its original objectives of changing how unions work.

This review has consolidated discussion and contributions from a wide range of unions, academics, and allies, all of whom are committed to turning the tide on employer militancy, the culture of anti-unionism, and the decline of membership. As Teresa Conrow made clear in her interview:

Organising at the workplace is done by workers. So, focusing most of the training resources on staff is not sufficient. We need to identify workers with an interest in organising and provide ongoing informal and formal organising training opportunities. Workplace leaders need to be part of formal strategic campaign training along with elected leaders and staff (a vertical slice of the union organisational structures). We can use formal organising training spaces to create our strategic organising campaign plans together. That's how we win.

To paraphrase Jane McAlevey, we don't need more union staff, and union staff alone will not build our movement.⁶⁴ We need to build workplace activism, find and develop workplace leaders, develop delegates and health and safety reps. We must create strong, vibrant structures activists can own. We must reimagine the potential of workplace democracy led by union activists.

As Kelty said during the formation of *Organising Works* '[unions] have to be democratic and give workers a say'.

⁶⁴ Laura Flanders Show, September 3, (2012). <https://lauraflanders.org/2012/09/jane-mcalevey-we-cant-labor-without-our-lives/>

The review highlighted some essential themes that the program should consider, including:

- » Identifying leaders
- » Developing leaders
- » Educating leaders
- » Politicising our movement, from leaders to rank-and-file members
- » Trusting and empowering workers
- » Giving workers agency through workplace democratic structures
- » Seizing the organising opportunity presented through workplace health and safety issues and legislation.

For the next steps of *Organising Works*, decisions need to be made around three characteristics of the program:

1. Recruitment to the program and cohort
2. Content
3. Mode of delivery

Recruitment to the program and cohort

Perhaps more than any other factor, the nature of the target grouping for program participants will determine its shape and the extent to which it fulfills its purpose into the future. It is essential to consider from where participants are drawn, how the program is advertised, and the selection criteria. A focus on bringing diverse workplace leaders and new entrants into the movement is recommended.

Recommendation 3:

Focus on external recruitment of a diverse cohort of trainees for *Organising Works*.

Recommendation 4:

***Organising Works* run as a 12-month traineeship.**

The review proposes that the ACTU reverts to the original model where recruitment to the program targeted workers from outside the labour movement. In reaching beyond the movement, participants would be targeted from workplace leaders' ranks and communities that are more likely to reflect the workplaces and union members of tomorrow. This approach would aim to recruit more women, more people of colour, people with disabilities, and people from the LGBTIQ+ community.

This option would further benefit from implementing a similar approach to that adopted by Unite in the UK⁶⁵, where workplace activists who led collective workplace activity would also be targeted and recruited to the program. As Michael Crosby⁶⁶ noted in his interview: *'It was true at United Voice that former delegates who became Organisers stayed longer'*.

Organising Works Recruits would be identified and interviewed by the ACTU and participating affiliates. They would then be employed by a sponsoring affiliate and undertake a 12-month (July to July) traineeship-style program of education and development. Over time we should strive to develop the *Organising Works* program into an accredited formal traineeship program.

With a focus on employing a more diverse cohort of participants we must ensure that *Organising Works* is a culturally safe program and one that drives increased cultural awareness across the whole movement. Exploring partnerships with community-led, not-for-profit union ally organisations such as Democracy in Colour could assist with both participant recruitment and program content delivery. We must also set a future program for First Nations people as a priority for the movement.

Mode of delivery:

Since 1994, *Organising Works* has traditionally been delivered in blocks of 10-11 courses of mostly 4-5 days duration. With developments in learning and opportunities provided by advances in technology, is this mode of delivery the most efficient and beneficial means of delivering the program? What digital platforms and enhancements could an *Organising Works* fit for the future take most advantage of? Should the model of placement of trainees in individual host unions with mentors in that union be the best environment for Organisers to learn their craft, or are there other possible models for the 'on-the-job' component that should be explored? A traineeship model that combines online self-paced learning, 2-3 classroom intensives, centralised campaign clinics on specified campaigns, and on-the-job learning in their sponsoring affiliate, supported by a mentor, is recommended.

As outlined, trainees undertaking *Organising Works* have traditionally been in the classroom for around forty-five days in a calendar year, over ten to eleven courses – generally fitting a regular pattern of around a week of in-person education each month.

⁶⁵ Interview with Andy Snoddy, UniGlobal, Director Global Campaigns March 2022.

⁶⁶ Interview with Michael Crosby, February 2022.

Throughout the history of the *Organising Works* program, there have been significant developments in how adult education is delivered. Almost all training offered by universities or colleges now feature a substantial online component. Furthermore, over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, courses were adapted and shifted to an online delivery mode. Through this necessary shift, we observed a greater willingness to participate in online delivery. Around 900 staff and officials per year now complete their required Federal Right of Entry training online, and around 350 elected officials with financial responsibilities complete the self-paced on-demand Union Governance course through the ATUI.

In recent years we have demonstrated that it is well within the capacity of the ATUI to produce high-quality online education.

However, self-paced on-demand delivery in isolation is not suitable for teaching many organising skills, for which there is no substitute for learning-by-doing, repetition and practice, which must be facilitated in person.

Recommendation 5:

***Organising Works* is provided in a blended delivery mode, comprising 3 classroom intensives, a campaign clinic, self-paced online modules, and interactive online workshops and webinars.**

As an alternative to 45 days of face-to-face delivery, it is recommended that an analysis of the curriculum be undertaken to identify which components are suitable for self-paced delivery; and which would likely include modules from on-demand components of courses, such as Industrial Foundations or the online union history course, both of which are being developed concurrently.

A future delivery model for the core program could comprise a mix of three 'classroom intensives', 2-3 weeks of campaign clinic, and a program of on-demand (self-paced) learning throughout the year supplemented by interactive online workshops and webinars. The curriculum would be reviewed and the best mode of delivery for each type of content determined.

Information-heavy sections such as industrial law, union history, and political education could be delivered primarily in on-demand format supplemented by webinars.

The three intensives would still provide the advantages associated with development of a 'cohort effect', in line with graduate feedback that building lasting professional relationships was a core strength of the program.

The campaign clinic would provide participants the opportunity to embed theory in practice and acquire campaign skills and collateral from pioneering priority campaign techniques.

It should be emphasised that on-demand education will not suit all potential streams or elements of the *Organising Works* suite of programs.

Content:

The curriculum provides a solid foundation in organising principles and the organising cycle, along with the skills of the job of Organiser, the industrial framework, and political, social, and historical education including issues of equity. Having been subject to several major reviews since 1994, the content has been updated along the way to include input from affiliates that retain currency.

A general view expressed by the reference group, and in interviews, is that the content and structure of the *Organising Works* curriculum remains fundamentally sound. Notwithstanding this, the job of an Organiser is very different now than it was in 1994 and will be different again a decade from now. There remain questions around how to review and update the content of the program:

- » How does the program need to now evolve to give sufficient attention to areas of skills and knowledge that are required of today's Organisers? Potential areas may include online organising, social and digital tools, and use of CRMs and databases.
- » Are there areas where political education and education around current issues (such as climate change) need more thorough attention in the program?

It is recommended that we draw on the skills of Expert Practitioners across our movement to assist in delivery of content from their field of expertise.

This review makes recommendations for the *cohort, mode of delivery* and *content of the program*. They have been shaped to include the ideas of review participants and respond to concerns or limitations of the current *Organising Works* program that review participants identified. They are intended to meet the needs of ACTU affiliates to attract and retain highly skilled Organisers with skills to grow their union and develop and support robust workplace organising structures that draw on diverse skill sets in emerging organising practice. They present an opportunity to attract a new, diverse cohort of Organisers into our movement, who are representative of members and potential members, both now and into the future, and provide them with a supported, fulfilling, and highly developmental experience.

Recommendation 6:

Organising Works includes Campaign Clinic/s where trainees come together to work on an ACTU/ Affiliate-led targeted campaign.

The focus of the campaign clinic would be to provide trainees with a hands-on experience in all elements of a target campaign, including strategy development, campaign planning, implementation (on the ground, digital, communications etc.), debrief and review. This would provide all trainees with the opportunity to gain experience in the full breadth of campaign organising, meeting the identified need for skill development in campaign planning and implementation. The campaign clinic (or clinics) would be of 2 – 3 week duration and based in the ACTU or an affiliate on a strategically important campaign such as the YES campaign, IR reform campaign, a multi-employer bargaining campaign etc. The campaign clinic host organisation would provide mentoring and support to trainees and provide them with skills and campaign collateral that they can take back to their employing union. This would meet the *Organising Works* foundational objective of participants driving change amongst the movement.

It would further address the concern raised by both former participants and union leaders, that *Organising Works* participants often don't receive an opportunity to apply what they are learning, at the time that they are learning it, because it does not align with the priorities in their current work allocations. A Campaign clinic would overcome this current challenge by ensuring all *Organising Works* participants have an opportunity to apply the theories they have been exploring.

Recommendation 7:

Organising Works content to be reviewed and delivered in part by Expert Practitioners.

Union Organising is an evolving field of practice. As the tactics of employers and business change and develop, the political context varies, and our members' and potential members' workplaces and communities evolve and change, so too must organising strategies and practices. *Organising Works* content should always be timely and draw upon the expertise of those delivering strong organising outcomes across our movement in various fields. It is recommended that the ACTU form an Expert Practitioners Advisory Panel made up of leaders in their respective fields. One of the roles of this panel should be to provide input into biennial course content reviews. They should also be drawn upon to develop and deliver content in the *Organising Works* program from their field of practice.

“Organising works is a chance for the next generation of young and diverse organisers to join the ranks of the movement and gain the crucial training and experience to grow our movement with the next generation of workers. Twenty plus years on from my time in org works I still believe the foundation of skills I learnt in training still supports my work today, now leading a team of organisers at the AEU Vic branch.”

Eleisha Mullane, AEU Victoria



Chapter 6:

SUMMARY

The workplaces of tomorrow will be more diverse. Jobs will change, become more fragmented, and decentralised employment will continue. COVID has turned our kitchens and living rooms into workplaces and with it the challenge only builds. When we look at the capacity in our movement, we might feel unready for this challenge.

When *Organising Works* sprang into life in 1994, it did so with the aims of building capacity and power in response to neoliberal attacks on bargaining and declining membership.

What was achieved by the likes of Tas Bull, Tom McDonald, Chris Walton and others in establishing the program was extraordinary and influenced the union movement not just here but across the world.⁶⁷ It was a program that would address decline by seeding a model of organising that championed growth, activity, activists, and action. When the program began, Bill Kelty spoke of the need for unions to be relevant, democratic, and to see members as their life blood. This review has shown that the narrative of organising permeates our organisations, yet there are times when that activity we call organising runs contrary to our objectives and we veer towards mobilising instead of organising.

The next iteration of *Organising Works* must speak to these challenges and position unions as capable of and willing to build worker's power. We must ensure that the education program delivers not just training but education. We must ensure that the sponsoring union can support the classroom education of building workplace activists, structures, democracy, and activity. We must avoid attempting to create a program for everyone that delivers for no-one. We must see the program not only deliver education and training, but also encourage the participating union to evolve and become the fighting union required to turn the tide.

Unions were born out of struggle. Our greatest victories have come through struggle and our future can only be secured through struggle. To build the struggles of tomorrow we must build workplaces with teams of activists who are networked, educated, politicised, active, and committed to building membership through the discourse of power. Organisers have a role to play, but we must be mindful that the Organiser's role is to build workplace activism, not substitute, or mimic, such activity'. It is to identify, support, develop, mentor and build the activism in those who work in those workplaces.

The recommendations presented emerge from the wide range of discussions that took place through this review, options that addressed participation, as well as map to campaign activity, new and emerging industries and internal challenges and capacity gaps.

Organising Works pivoting to a traineeship model aimed at recruiting and supporting new entrants into the movement presents an opportunity to significantly increase the diversity in our movement.

Organising Works ran from 1994 – 2019. It was a bold and brave experiment that delivered significant outcomes. The program that runs for the next 23 years must be equally bold and brave.

⁶⁷ Ed Heery (2015), Unions, and the Organising turn: Reflections after 20 years of Organising Works. *Economic and Labour Relations Review*, Vol 26(4)

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