

REVALUE-AU

Revaluing Work and Evaluating Labour-market Adjustment in Australia

A research programme on what happens after tribunals legally revalue historically undervalued work: how a decision on paper becomes, or fails to become, a change in wages, hours, employment, careers, organisations and services.

TEAM

Led by Sergey Alexeev, in collaboration with Robert Breunig and Nathan Deutscher.

STATUS

ARC Discovery proposal in development. Designed to remain Linkage-ready.

EVIDENCE BASE

Completed HILDA pilot study, a verified library of Australian wage-revaluation matters, and a defined data programme.

01

THE PROBLEM

A tribunal can re-set the price of work. It cannot dictate what follows.

For two decades, Australian tribunals have repeatedly found that work performed mainly by women in community services, disability support, children's services, dental assisting and aged care was historically undervalued, and have ordered large, staged corrections to its legal price. These are unusually large deliberate interventions in a modern labour market, and unusually well documented in law.

What followed is far less clear. Between a decision and a payslip sit classifications and pay points, operative dates and staged instalments, award reliance and over-award margins, and the capacity of employers and funders to absorb, pass on or resist a new wage floor. Existing knowledge is strongest in tribunal materials, expert reports and industrial relations scholarship, and much weaker in applied labour economics. Australia has run this intervention repeatedly, at scale, in the sectors where the answer matters most, and the worker-level evidence on its consequences remains thin.

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THE INTELLECTUAL MOVE

Three things that are routinely treated as one.

LAYER 01

Legal revaluation

The tribunal decision that finds undervaluation and sets new rates.

LAYER 02

Implemented treatment

The classifications, operative dates and instalments through which those rates reach payroll.

LAYER 03

Realised adjustment

Wages, hours, employment, retention, mobility, employers, funding and services.

Policy debate, and much research, collapses these three layers into one. REVALUE-AU keeps them apart, because the gap between them is where the economics happens. Legal timing in Australia is documented with unusual precision; economic exposure is not observed at all in standard worker data. Measuring across that gap is the programme's defining task, and it turns treatment measurement from a nuisance parameter into the research frontier.

Substantive	Undervaluation is studied as a labour-market intervention, not only as a legal finding or an equity principle. Its consequences unfold through wage-setting institutions, employer behaviour, funding systems and worker mobility.
Methodological	The programme develops methods for evaluating award and work-value interventions when researchers observe occupation, industry, hours and earnings, but not classification, pay point, award reliance, over-award margin or employer implementation.
Institutional	It builds a reusable legal-economic event architecture for Australian revaluation matters, separating decision dates from operative pay changes, proposed rates from implemented rates, and legal coverage from empirical exposure.

03

WHY
AUSTRALIA

A sequence of institutional revaluations that few countries can match.

The same research problem exists everywhere, but few countries supply the raw material to study it. Australia's award system, its federal and state tribunals, its explicit reasoning on work value and its classification-based wage schedules have produced a connected sequence of events, each with documented coverage, quantum and timing. Every matter enters the programme with an assigned role, and enters the empirical core only once its implementing instrument, operative date and classification schedule are verified.

2005–2009 STATE VALIDATION CASES	Queensland pay-equity matters in dental assisting, children's services, community services and disability support. The pre-federal lineage of gender-based revaluation, and the basis for state-based comparison designs once implementation is verified.
2012–2020 PRINCIPAL HISTORICAL ANCHOR	The national Social, Community and Disability Services Equal Remuneration Order. A large adjustment delivered in annual instalments to 2020: the best-documented historical event, and the case on which the programme's methods are already tested.

2018–2021

METHOD
BENCHMARKS

Pharmacy and teachers work-value decisions.
Where the Commission developed its reasoning on properly fixed minimum rates and benchmark classifications. Institutional comparators for the programme, not yet coded empirical shocks.

2022–2024

CONTEMPORARY
ANCHOR

Aged care work value, including an interim increase for specified direct-care classifications and subsequent decisions on invisible skills and classification alignment. Institutionally central, politically live, and the strongest case for higher-frequency data.

2024–2025

LIVE
IMPLEMENTATION

The priority-awards review, reaching dental assistants under the health services award and related feminised classifications. Revaluation as it happens, with final determinations and operative arrangements still to be established before empirical use.

04

PROOF OF
CONCEPT

The pilot changes the question from “did wages rise?” to “what can be established, and with what design?”

A completed study evaluates the 2012 equal remuneration order using HILDA, and it settles two things for the wider programme. First, feasibility: long-window, worker-level evaluation of these events is possible in data available now, with transparent event-study designs, care-sector comparators, explicit power analysis and honest reporting of what a design can and cannot detect.

Second, and more importantly, it identifies the binding constraint. Household panels never record award coverage, classification, pay point or over-award pay, so even a legally sharp intervention arrives at the analyst blurred, and plausible partial pass-through can fall below what such a design can distinguish from zero. That is not a reason for pessimism; it is the research agenda. Build the exposure measurement first, then estimate. The pilot also fixes the programme's standard of proof: these are quasi-experimental institutional events rather than random experiments, and each design states the causal claim it can support instead of assuming one.

05

PROGRAMME
OF WORK

Four work packages, in order of dependency.

WORK PACKAGE 01

The legal-economic event platform

A verified national dataset of equal remuneration, pay-equity and work-value matters, coding mechanism, covered classifications, decision date, implementing instrument, operative pay date, staging, quantum, affected occupations, award-reliance proxies, funding context and verification status. Infrastructure and a research output in its own right.

WORK PACKAGE 02

Adjustment under imperfect exposure

Worker-level analysis across verified events: earnings, hourly wages, hours, part-time work, employment, retention, occupational mobility and household adjustment. Exposure is modelled as a graded score rather than a treated/untreated dummy, with power, staging, comparator validity and over-award absorption treated as first-order design questions.

WORK PACKAGE 03

Higher-frequency identification

Designs that would sharpen measurement using larger and more frequent data around implementation windows, improving sample size, timing and the observation of wage-setting arrangements. Specified now and pursued subject to access, linkage, item availability and approvals.

WORK PACKAGE 04

Employers, funding and services

How the cost of revaluation is absorbed: staffing mix, vacancies, turnover, fees, cost pass-through, government funding responses and service availability. Strongest where sector or organisational data become available, and the natural core of a later partnership-based programme.

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DATA AND IDENTIFICATION

Start from what is available. Design towards what would sharpen the evidence.

HILDA

AVAILABLE

Long worker-level panel covering earnings, hours, employment, retention and mobility, with pre-periods deep enough for older matters. Limits are decisive and known: annual frequency, small cells for narrow occupations, and no observation of award or classification.

Legal-economic event platform

IN BUILD

The project's own asset: verified decisions, instruments, operative dates, staging and coverage, mapped to occupation, industry, state and employment arrangement. The bridge between legal text and empirical exposure.

PLIDA Longitudinal Labour Force Survey

PROSPECTIVE

A rotating panel offering substantially larger samples, higher frequency and, in some months, direct information on wage-setting arrangements around implementation. Subject to access, approvals, item availability and design.

Single Touch Payroll and sector data

PROSPECTIVE

Payroll-frequency evidence on earnings continuity, worker flows and the distribution of payment changes for recent determinations, complemented where possible by organisational data on staffing, funding and service delivery. Payments are observed; hours, rates and legal coverage are not, so any alignment to award rates requires validation.

Identification is matched to each case rather than forced into a single template: event-study and pooled pre-post designs with care-sector comparators for the national order; state-based difference-in-differences where the Queensland matters support it; and implementation-window designs for contemporary events where higher-frequency data can be obtained. Identification is strongest where the legal shock is large, the operative date verified, the exposure mapping credible, pre-trends testable and concurrent policy change measurable. Where those conditions weaken, the claim weakens with them, explicitly.

07

OUTPUTS AND REACH

A platform, a method and a body of evidence.

- A diagnostic paper on what household panels can and cannot establish about staged pay-equity orders, already drafted.
- A documented national event dataset, register and codebook for Australian wage-revaluation matters, released as a research resource.
- Cross-case worker-level evidence on pass-through, hours, employment, retention and occupational mobility.
- A methods contribution on treatment measurement for legally defined wage interventions under imperfect exposure.
- Contemporary implementation evidence on employers, funding and service delivery, where data access and partnerships allow.

The work speaks at once to labour economics, employment relations, human resource management and public policy, and its audiences include tribunals, governments, employer and sector bodies, unions and the care sectors themselves. The impact logic is cumulative rather than grand: better measurement produces better evidence; better evidence improves how future wage-setting decisions are designed, staged, funded and evaluated.

08

CAPABILITY
AND POSITION

What the programme has, and what it still needs.

The project is led by Sergey Alexeev, in collaboration with Robert Breunig and Nathan Deutscher. It draws on applied labour economics and causal inference, industrial relations and labour law, scholarship on pay equity and care work, secure administrative-data practice, and sector knowledge of aged care, early childhood, disability and community services. Its remaining needs are stated plainly rather than hidden: primary-source legal verification capacity, award-to-occupation mapping, measurement of award reliance and over-award pay, and a data-access strategy for the administrative extensions.

An ARC Discovery proposal is in development. The core contribution is academic and methodological, and does not depend on partners; the programme is nonetheless built so that partnership-based work on implementation, funding and services can be added without redesigning the foundations. Nothing here assumes secured data access, institutional commitment or partner participation.

PILOT

Complete and drafted as a diagnostic study of the 2012 national order, establishing both feasibility and the measurement problem the programme is built to solve.

EVENT LIBRARY

Ten matters and leads documented from tribunal materials, with decisions separated from implementing instruments and a verification queue defined for each.

NEXT

Primary-source verification, exposure coding, data-feasibility scoping for the administrative extensions, and an ARC Discovery proposal in development.

THE INVITATION

Australia has revalued its most undervalued work, repeatedly and at scale. What that did is still largely unmeasured.

REVALUE-AU exists to measure it, and to leave behind the infrastructure that makes the next revaluation legible while it happens. The programme is at the stage where its institutional home, its collaborators and its data pathways are being decided, which is the most useful moment for a conversation.

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Working name and current framing, 2026. Cases, coverage and operative dates are drawn from a local library of tribunal materials and remain subject to primary-source verification before empirical use. Prospective administrative and sector data are described as design pathways, not secured access.