

Weapons Companies in Education: A Progress Report

April 2025 | Prepared by Teachers for Peace

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Introduction

This report provides a summary of progress on the issue of weapons industry influence in Australian STEM education, and identifies opportunities for further action.

A 2021 report, *Minors + Missiles*, published by the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), described the growing problem of weapons companies' interference in Australian education. The second edition of *Minors + Missiles* (2022), showed why and how weapons companies interfered in education, and suggested actions to protect school children from their harmful influence.

Since 2022, many groups and individuals have taken up the issue at local, state, and national levels. This report shows they have made significant progress.

There are more conflicts today than at any time since 1946, and awareness of our core argument— that the weapons industry is responsible for, and profits from, significant harm - has grown exponentially.

The horrific war on Gaza - a war that plausibly meets the definition of genocide - has drawn global attention to the weapons industry's role in enabling, prolonging, and intensifying global conflicts. At the same time, intense and intractable conflicts in Yemen, Ukraine, Myanmar, Syria, Sudan, West Papua - and beyond - have also continued to claim civilian lives, destroy essential infrastructure, displace

people en masse, and cause severe environmental damage.

More people than ever are repudiating any association with an industry that profits from so much conflict and such extreme human suffering, and have been motivated to take action.

Thanks to the efforts of people around the country, since 2022 several Australian states have adopted or enacted policies that recognise the harmful nature of the weapons industry. Questions have been raised in state and federal parliaments. Education unions have taken principled positions, and rank-and-file members have withdrawn their participation from programs associated with weapons companies. Students around the country have forced their universities to reckon with the ethical dimensions of partnerships with weapons companies. And in every state and territory, groups of people have organised themselves and taken up this issue as a key concern.

We've found that, compared to 2022, there are fewer individual STEM programs clearly associated with weapons companies in 2025.

Some programs are no longer operating, some programs' partnership arrangements have changed, some partnership arrangements were no longer clear. (No program responded to inquiries about their commercial arrangements by date of publication.)

This is a welcome development. Education programs that continue to accept money from weapons companies, and allow these companies to advertise themselves to children,

will continue to face pressure to change their commercial arrangements.

On the other hand, the effect of AUKUS (the Australia, UK, and US security partnership) on Australian education is more apparent in 2025.

It's likely the promises of AUKUS will never be fulfilled. However, the push to develop a specialised STEM workforce aligned with AUKUS priorities has led to the introduction of various state and federal initiatives aimed at shaping children's perceptions of the weapons industry.

These initiatives pose a challenge to our campaign, but also reinforce one of our core arguments: the weapons industry lacks public support *to such an extent* that it must manufacture its social license in primary schools.

This report shows that, today, more people actively reject the weapons industry's attempts to use STEM education to normalise its business, gain social legitimacy, influence children, and secure commercial advantage. We will continue to make progress through sustained action at schools, in unions and groups, on campus, at home, in parliament, and on the street.

Key National Targets

The following are high profile national programs with enduring relationships with major weapons companies.

National Youth Science Forum (NYSF)

Lockheed Martin, the world's biggest weapons company, is the major partner of the NYSF, a prestigious national science program. Lockheed Martin brands the event, and its staff participate directly, including as career mentors.

Students, teachers, families and groups have raised concerns about NYSF's partnership with Lockheed Martin since 2022, but NYSF has not given any response. Since 2024, Teachers for Peace has also attempted to engage with Rotary Australia - a key enabling partner for the NYSF. There has been no response from Rotary clubs or leaders.

FIRST Australia

FIRST is a US-designed program that is licensed and delivered by Macquarie University under the brand of FIRST Australia. FIRST Australia runs national programs including FIRST LEGO League, FIRST Robotics Competition and FIRST Tech Challenge. Sponsors have included Boeing, RTX (Raytheon), and BAE Systems. The event has carried weapons company branding on learning resources, certificates, and trophies; the 2023 event finals featured a video message from a RTX executive. In 2025, the FIRST Tech Challenge is branded by RTX.

*In correspondence with **Teachers for Peace** in January 2024, FIRST Australia initially denied having any connection with weapons companies. In March 2024, FIRST Australia said*

it was "in the process of consulting... about the third-party sponsors and relationships that may be associated" with the FIRST program. Since March 2024, FIRST Australia has not responded to any further communication.

Science and Engineering Challenge (SEC)

The SEC is a national program run out of the University of Newcastle. Boeing and Lockheed Martin are listed as current sponsors.

*Teachers for Peace and **No Weapons for Genocide**, a group based in Newcastle, lobbied the SEC and the University of Newcastle throughout 2024. The University Vice Chancellor dismissed all concerns.*

List of Programs

The following programs were **clearly associated** with weapons companies in February 2025. Clear association means:

- The program or organisation websites carried weapons company branding or acknowledgement and/or;
- Media releases, funding announcements, annual reports or other public documents confirm a relationship.

Beacon *BAE Systems*

Code Quest *Lockheed Martin*

FIRST Australia (FIRST LEGO League, FIRST Robotics, FIRST Tech Challenge) *RTX*

F1 in Schools Primary Challenge (REA Australia) *Boeing, SAAB*

ME Program *Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Thales, BAE Systems*

National Youth Science Forum *Lockheed Martin*

Port Adelaide Power of STEM *SAAB*

Science and Engineering Challenge *Boeing, Lockheed Martin*

STEM Day Out, Science Alive *Lockheed Martin*

STEM Racing (REA Australia) *Boeing, SAAB*

Subs in Schools (REA Australia) *Boeing, SAAB*

Space in Schools (REA Australia) *Boeing, SAAB*

Programs funded under the 2025 Department of Defence Schools Pathways Program:

Scitech Discovery Centre (Western Australia)

MEGT (National)

AVISTA School Pathways Program Delivered by Australian Remote Operations For Space and Earth and Fizzics Education (National)

Forge your Future Delivered by WithYouWithMe and Year 13 (South Australia)

Next Gen STEM Delivered by University of Newcastle (National)

LaunchBox Delivered by Fleet Space Technologies and Robinson Aerospace Systems (National)

RDA Hunters ME Program Delivered by Regional Development Australia - Hunter (NSW)

The following programs have **previously been associated** with weapons companies. However, at the time of writing, programs on this list:

- Stopped running, or their operational status could not be confirmed;
- Changed sponsorship arrangements; or
- Had unclear sponsorship arrangements.

No program responded to inquiries by date of publication.

Concept 2 Creation

CREST

Cyber Taipan (stopped running in 2023)

Engineering Is Elementary

Raytheon Australia Playford International

College STEM Academy Scholarship

Robo Cats

Robo Gals

STEM PUNKS

Thales in Tech Schools Design Competition

YMCA Space Squad

Young Space Explorers

Note that these lists are not exhaustive and commercial arrangements can change.

Progress Report

State education policies



Since 2022, there have been positive developments in state and territory education policies regarding the weapons industry.

Industry engagement and participation in third-party programs such as STEM competitions is strongly encouraged in Australian education. Most states and territories have policies or guiding principles to help schools make informed decisions about engagement and participation. While most acknowledge that some industries—such as tobacco, alcohol, junk food, and gambling—are inappropriate due to their harmful effects on children and targeted marketing tactics, in 2022 only the ACT explicitly recognised the weapons industry as an unsuitable partner for schools.

Since 2022, advocacy efforts by groups and individuals have convinced three state education departments to recognise weapons companies as inappropriate partners for schools. These policy changes are explicit

recognition of our core arguments and an important lever for change.

In 2022, while the **ACT** did have a policy that recognised weapons companies as inappropriate partners for schools, oversight and enforcement was weak. After persistent lobbying from groups and individuals, in a welcome development in July 2024, the ACT education directorate rejected a partnership proposal from weapons giant Northrop Grumman, citing both its own policy and community objections.

In July 2022, after extensive lobbying by the Medical Association for Prevention of War, the **Victoria** education department changed its Teaching and Learning Resources policy to recognise that resources created by weapons companies were not appropriate for classroom use.

In May 2023, following advocacy, the **Queensland** education department published an updated sponsorship policy and procedure, listing companies involved in the “manufacturing or selling of weapons.. [or] associated with the use of weapons” as inappropriate partners for schools.

In July 2023, in response to lobbying, the **NSW** Education Department updated its sponsorship policy to recognise that weapons manufacturers are not appropriate partners for schools.

While **Tasmania** has not yet included a specific prohibition on association with the weapons industry in its policies, the education department has engaged with the issue to some degree. Existing policy is highly sensitive

to the normalisation of weapons and violence and we look forward to further developments.

The **Northern Territory** Department of Education and Training does not permit lobby groups and political parties to partner with schools, but does not explicitly prohibit any other industry. The NT education department has not engaged with campaigners.

South Australia and **West Australia** education departments continue to be deeply involved with the weapons industry. Both state education departments continue to accept federal grants to promote the weapons industry to children through the Schools Pathways Program (see page 9).

Citing the need for a 'pipeline' to service AUKUS workforce needs, in 2024 the SA education department gave \$1.9 million to BAE Systems to expand the Beacon program into more primary schools. SA and WA education departments are therefore unlikely to change their policies.

Opportunities for action

Despite positive policy changes, education departments continue to facilitate the industry's involvement in education.

For example, in December 2023, the NSW STEM Industry School Partnerships program marketed an event with Lockheed Martin as the primary sponsor. In correspondence with Teachers for Peace, the NSW education department defended the arrangement, saying the sponsorship policy only applied to direct relationships between schools and industry,

and "does not govern which external programs and initiatives a school chooses to involve its students in." This distinction raises questions, as it's unlikely the department would apply the same rationale to other industries, such as tobacco or alcohol, which are also barred under the sponsorship policy.

State and territory education departments should proactively implement the letter and spirit of policies that recognise that the weapons industry is harmful and targets children.

Groups and individuals can continue to raise concerns about compliance and oversight with state authorities.

Unions and union members

Education unions and their members are key stakeholders, and have made important contributions to progress on this issue.

Education unions have long resisted corporate influence in education, and have been steadfast advocates for peace, opposing militarism and war as a means to solve conflict.

Over the past several years, amid rising militarism in Australia and increasing conflict around the world, education unions and their members have become vocal and active on the issue of the weapons industry's interference.

In March 2023, the **Australian Education Union** (AEU) Federal Executive adopted a resolution opposing the AUKUS security pact, reaffirming its stance against militarism and the promotion of lethal industries within educational settings.

In July 2023, the **NSW Teachers Federation** (NSWTF) annual conference endorsed the 'On Peace' recommendation. A comprehensive resolution was published, which included the statement:

Federation expresses its opposition with what appears to be an increasing militarisation of education across the schools and tertiary sectors. The weapons industry is emboldened by the AUKUS decision and their attempts to push their way into public schools, TAFE and universities must be rejected

At the same time, union members reacted swiftly to the launch of the Nuclear-powered Submarine Propulsion Challenge - an AUKUS-related competition for children, run out of the Department of Defence - condemning the program in sub-branch motions and refusing to participate. The AEU Federal Executive went on to publish a statement:

The AEU condemns [the nuclear submarine challenge] and the use of Australian schools by the Defence Department, in drawing secondary students into the government's development of new industries focused on armament manufacture and industries associated with warfare. A politicised pro-AUKUS curriculum has no place in our schools, alongside other private industries who attempt to use schools as a vehicle for promotion of their own products and profits hidden

behind spurious educational benefits for students.

The AEU resolved to communicate its opposition to the challenge to the Federal Education Minister and the Defence Minister and "demand that government discontinue" the initiative. (The Nuclear-powered Submarine Propulsion Challenge did not run in 2024.)

There was ongoing rank and file organising in Victoria throughout 2023, including by **Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria, Labor Against War, and Friends of the Earth**, with a key motion being adopted by a number of AEU sub-branches across the state, representing thousands of teachers. The motion committed the sub-branch members to "refuse to refer students to any program that is sponsored by weapons manufacturing corporations, and ... refuse to promote them within our schools." The sub-branches urged the union executive to also implement the motion, and called for the Victorian government to implement the letter and spirit of its own policy.

And in September 2023, the **AEU South Australia** also adopted an unequivocal position on weapons companies' participation in education, calling on schools across the state to "reject and resist the promotion and implementation of war and weaponry programs and competitions in all their forms."

In March 2024, to coincide with the United Nations International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness, Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria launched a union members' ban on all school STEM

programs sponsored by weapons companies, generating national media coverage.

The **Canterbury-Bankstown Teachers Association** became the first association of the NSWTF to adopt a motion on the weapons industry in education in May 2024. This motion also committed members to refuse to participate and promote programs associated with the industry, and demanded the NSW education department adhere to its policy by “proactively monitoring school program providers and ensuring that programs offered to NSW schools have ethical partnership policies that prevent any ties to the weapons industry.”

In July 2024 the **AEU Victoria** Branch conference as a whole resolved to "support the actions of AEU members to implement the Department's sponsorship policy so to prevent, in any way, the engagement of weapons manufacturers in our schools."

Teachers in Western Australia have worked hard to bring the issue to the attention of the **State School Teachers Union Western Australia** (SSTUWA). A SSTUWA member reports raising the issue of weapons companies in WA education at the June 2024 State Council and receiving a commitment for a “report back” at the November 2024 meeting. In correspondence with Teachers for Peace, the SSTUWA said that, “the SSTUWA is a branch of the AEU; as such these processes and actions are decided at the AEU level.” **Teachers for Palestine WA** had a presence at the November meeting, and distributed information to delegates.

The **Independent Education Union** published an article by Teachers for Peace in August 2023, and covered the issue again in March 2024.

Opportunities for action

Unions and union members can engage directly with STEM education programs to encourage them to change their sponsors.

Union executives, associations and sub-branches can continue to publicly oppose the intrusion of the weapons industry in education, and increase non-participation in STEM programs that choose harmful sponsors.

Schools can adopt formal policies of non-participation, and encourage other schools to follow.

Unions can continue to scrutinise the purpose and value of AUKUS-related programs, and question the role of Defence in shaping the curriculum.

Parliaments

Questions have been raised in Victorian and Federal Parliaments about the weapons industry's involvement in education, as well as the Department of Defence's role.

This important development elevates our issue as a policy problem. It reinforces our contention that there are not only ethical problems with the weapons industry's involvement. Corporate involvement in education, non-educational bodies' influence, political interference, and

governance and quality issues are also concerns.

In March 2024, **Aiv Puglielli, Greens MP for North-East Metro** raised the issue in the Victorian Parliament. Speaking in support of Teachers and School Staff for Palestine Victoria, and referencing the Victorian Government's own policy, Mr Puglielli asked the Education Minister, The Hon. Ben Carroll MP:

It is, frankly, preposterous that companies such as BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin and Boeing are running STEM programs in Victorian primary and secondary schools. These same arms companies are supplying weapons to the Israeli government that are being used to devastate Gaza and kill Palestinian children. Minister, will you ban any STEM programs that are being sponsored by weapons manufacturers from being run in public schools in my electorate?

(Mr Carroll provided a response on 23 April 2024, but did not directly address the question.)

In the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee hearing on 6 June 2024, **Senator Mehreen Farqui** questioned Australian National University President, Professor Genevieve Bell, over the university's investments in and partnerships with weapons companies. **Senator Lidia Thorpe** also asked Professor Bell about contact between ANU staff and directors and the weapons industry. In the hearing of 24 June, **Senator David Pocock** asked further questions about weapons investments, and for "the total value of

philanthropic donations or other funding that the Australian National University has received from companies whose activities include weapons manufacturing over the past financial year." (See more on the ANU on page 10)

In October 2024, Greens Senator and Education spokesperson **Penny Allman-Payne** won agreement in the Senate for the government to produce documents relating to the Schools Pathways Program (SPP). The multi-million dollar program has not previously been scrutinised, or been properly assessed for its value to students and the community. Regardless, the SPP recently expanded into an \$11 million open competitive grant.

And in Senate Estimates hearings in November 2024, Senator Allman-Payne questioned Defence officials about Defence's role in shaping the Australian STEM curriculum.

Defence has a stated objective to "influence the STEM school curriculum to meet Defence future needs", but there has previously been almost no detail about Defence's actual role.

In answers to questions in estimates and through Questions on Notice, Defence provided the following information:

- Between January and November 2024, "Defence.. directly conducted STEM engagement with approximately 270 schools." No information about the nature of the engagement was provided.
- While Defence has a goal of providing STEM teacher sabbaticals, no teachers

undertook a Defence sabbatical in 2023 or 2024

- Five years into Defence's STEM Workforce Vision, there is no framework to monitor impact, performance, and outcomes of Defence STEM programs

Opportunities for action

State and federal parliamentarians can continue to scrutinise programs designed to influence children's attitudes to the weapons industry, including AUKUS-related programs. Programs should be interrogated for their educational value, alignment with the curriculum and community values, value for money, and actual outcomes.

Parliamentarians can challenge claims about the weapons industry's contribution to the economy, employment, and national security. For example, in 2022-23, the defence sector contributed just 0.45% of the Australian economy's total employment and evidence from overseas suggests government investments in the weapons sector yield limited local or national benefits, and can actually inhibit economic growth.

Parliamentarians can champion programs to encourage students into other industries with workforce shortages - like nursing or teaching - or industries with greater social and economic benefits.

Universities

Students and staff of a number of Australian universities have taken action on the issue of weapons companies' involvement with education institutions.

Most Australian universities have research partnerships with the weapons industry. Some - like ANU, Newcastle, and Macquarie University - also manage STEM education programs for children that are branded by weapons companies. Universities play an important role in fostering a 'talent pipeline' for the weapons industry, while normalising and depoliticising the development of lethal technologies.

The **National Tertiary Education Union**, **student unions**, and **solidarity groups** have been instrumental in making progress. University students and staff have demonstrated the fundamental incompatibility between the weapons industry and the stated values and aims of public universities. They have successfully obliged some universities to delay or cancel events related to defence or weapons research, disclose information about their relationships with the weapons industry, and to defend - poorly - their involvement. Some institutions have changed policies or practices. At all institutions where staff and students have taken action, they have successfully demonstrated these partnerships are unethical and controversial.

In response to student protests, including by **Students and Staff Against War ANU**, in

August 2024 **Australian National University** (ANU) announced a change in policy concerning investments in weapons manufacturers.

Following a review and input from staff, students and alumni, university said it would no longer invest in manufacturers of civilian small arms and makers of controversial weapons, namely “anti-personnel mines, cluster munitions, chemical weapons, biological weapons and nuclear weapons outside of the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] NPT.”

While this was a welcome development, the policy does not exclude investments in conventional weapons or nuclear weapons in NPT signatory nations like the US and UK, leaving the ANU exposed to holdings that don't comply with its investment policy of avoiding 'social injury'. The policy was also unclear about investment thresholds.

Students and staff also demanded disclosure about ANU research partnerships with weapons companies. In a response to a June 2024 question in Estimates from Senator David Pocock, the ANU said it had received just \$46 000 from Northrop Grumman in the previous financial year. The Canberra Times later quoted an expert who described this disclosure as “extremely incomplete”.

After sustained advocacy from students and staff, in 2023 **RMIT University** ended its collaboration with the Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems.

In 2021, the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees (PFUPE), representing over 6,000 academics and staff, had requested RMIT suspend all

collaborations with Elbit Systems. There was extensive on-campus and online organising throughout 2022 and 2023, including by **Free Palestine Melbourne, BDS Australia** and **Students for Palestine (Victoria)**. In an October 2023 statement, RMIT said that it “does not have a partnership with Elbit Systems”, effectively confirming the campaign's success.

For several years, **University of Melbourne** (UniMelb) students and staff have demanded transparency around UniMelb's partnerships with and investments in the weapons industry.

Escalating action over 2024 forced UniMelb to disclose \$43 million in funding from the Australian and United States defence departments, plus at least \$7.1 million from defence-related companies, with the caveat, “Disclosure is subject to confidentiality obligations, national security regulations and laws, and the safety and security of our researchers undertaking their academic work.” **UniMelb for Palestine** (UM4P) produced much more comprehensive research, showing extensive connections between UniMelb and the world's biggest weapons companies, including those supplying weapons for use by Israel.

Students and staff at the following universities have also taken action on their institution's ties to the weapons industry and complicity with war crimes: University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of Newcastle, University of Wollongong, Macquarie University, University of Tasmania, Curtin University, University of Adelaide, Monash University, La Trobe University, Deakin University.

Students and staff of TAFE Queensland, organising as **Demilitarise TAFE Queensland**, have also taken action to end their institution's partnership with weapons giant Rheinmetall.

Opportunities for action

Students and staff and their unions, along with grassroots groups, can continue to challenge universities' associations with the weapons industry, and draw more attention to University programs targeting children, such as NYSF (hosted by ANU).

University students who are NYSF alumni can raise the issue in the alumni network and with NYSF leadership, and refuse to participate in the alumni volunteer program.

Weapons industry and harm

The weapons industry creates a predictable pattern of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure. Since 2022, this harm has both increased and become more visible, leading to greater public awareness - and increased scrutiny and rejection of the industry.

There are more state-based conflicts now than there have been since 1946. These conflicts are notable for their heavy toll on civilians. Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) has called 2024 the deadliest year it has recorded for civilian harm from the use of explosive weapons - such as artillery, airstrikes, rockets, and bombs - in populated areas. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas in December 2024, civilians accounted for 98% of all recorded casualties.

Overall, AOAV reports a 67% increase in global civilian casualties since 2023.

The visibility of harm caused by weapons in some conflicts has, since 2022, increased dramatically through real-time documentation and global dissemination on social media and other platforms. (Though not all conflicts have received equal public attention.)

This heightened exposure has raised public awareness of the human cost of conflict, and helped people understand their own connections to civilian harm through their participation in the global economy - such as through banking and finance - and the global weapons industry, such as through national weapons production and export.

Recent national and global responses to weapons industry harm include:

- In 2025 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted the weapons industry's role in preventing, addressing and mitigating the negative human rights impact of arms transfers
- Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, and RTX were named in a 2024 UN Special Procedures communiqué on arms companies' potential complicity in serious violations of international human rights and international humanitarian laws in Palestine.
- A 2022 US Government Accountability Office report on US Military Support to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, found serious fault with

defence exports review, approval, and end-use monitoring process. The report said that US authorities could not provide evidence it had acted to prevent US arms facilitating human rights abuses

- Disruptive direct action, by groups like **Wage Peace**, against weapons manufacturing and weapons expos has increased the public's awareness of the industry
- The Australian arms export system has come under increased parliamentary and public scrutiny, and faced legal challenges such as from the **Australian Centre for International Justice**
- Civil society organisations in other jurisdictions are pursuing legal challenges to arms exports to Israel, Yemen, Myanmar and other states
- Legal scholars are advancing frameworks to hold corporate executives and others accountable for supplying weapons that facilitate breaches of international and human rights law
- A growing number of bank customers and super fund members are asking their financial institutions to divest from weapons manufacturers
- Investor advocate groups are consistently pushing to improve human rights practices in major weapons companies

- A new Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) has adopted explicit policies to exclude weapons of any kind from their loans and investments
- Research in 2023 and 2024 in a number of countries showed the majority of people surveyed did not support weapons sales to states suspected of human rights violations¹
- Scrutiny of regulatory capture and the weapons industry's influence over government policy across various jurisdictions

Opportunities for action

Maintaining close scrutiny of the weapons industry is as important in peace time as in times of rising conflict.

Concerns about the global weapons industry can be incorporated into broader national and global efforts for peace, disarmament, and demilitarisation. Disarmament is an uneven process that relies on sustained civil society engagement and advocacy. Groups and individuals can help civil society understand the broader issues, and raise public expectations about our government's approach to disarmament.

¹ See for example Efrat, A., & Yair, O. (2024). Should we sell arms to human rights violators? What the public thinks. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 35(6), 694-712 and Majority of voters in UK back banning arms sales to Israel. poll finds

In Australia, advocacy for peace and disarmament is chronically underfunded, with little philanthropic support. Philanthropic organisations have an opportunity to help maintain progress.

Background

The 2022 *Minors + Missiles* report (Medical Association for Prevention of War) described the purpose and function of weapons industry interference in education.

The industry's sponsorship of STEM education can be summarised as a means to:

- Create social licence
- Build positive brand association in children
- Gain commercial advantage

Social licence

A *social licence* is the approval that an industry needs from the public, communities, and stakeholders to conduct business. Social licence is different from legal or regulatory licences, as it is informal and reflects broader attitudes in society.

The weapons industry - just like fossil fuels, junk food, and tobacco industries - struggles to gain social licence because of the harm their products cause to people and the planet.

These industries are often called stigmatised or noxious industries, and employ a range of tactics to manufacture social licence. By associating itself with something positive - like

education - a noxious industry seeks to improve its public image.

The global weapons industry is known for tactics such as:

- Partnering with schools and universities to fund STEM programs, scholarships, and research
- Presenting careers in the weapons industry as creative, disruptive, and at the forefront of innovation
- Diluting association with lethal and harmful products, using euphemistic language, and emphasising socially acceptable applications of its products - such as national security or aviation
- Sponsoring community projects, veterans, charities
- Emphasising 'green' credentials, women in leadership, Indigenous and veteran employment, opportunities for low socio-economic communities
- Funding think tanks, influencing the policy environment through high-level access to government, emphasising job creation and broader economic benefits

Positive Brand Association

Some STEM programs associated with weapons companies put weapons brands and logos on certificates, trophies, uniforms, and resources. Some weapons companies provide staff as mentors, trainers, careers advisors and event staff. These are powerful ways for

children to develop positive associations with weapons companies' brands.

Positive brand association is the favourable attitude an individual has towards a company. Children and young people are especially targeted by noxious brands because:

- Children are impressionable and easily persuaded
- Positive brand association formed in childhood can last into adulthood, and influence decisions
- Children do not always distinguish between advertising and entertainment
- or advertising and education
- Children can prefer a company they are positively associated with even when they know the product the brand makes is harmful

Branding children's STEM activities is therefore an effective way for weapons companies to create early, positive associations and to normalise the weapons business.

Commercial advantage

Weapons companies are unique in that, in order to succeed, they must invent innovative and cost-effective ways to create harm.

Weapons companies compete with each other to develop novel ways to kill, maim, frighten, coerce, dominate, surveil, and repel. This competition drives rapid advancements in military technology, and creates demand for highly skilled labour.

The weapons industry competes for a STEM-skilled workforce with other, less noxious industries. There is also dwindling engagement with, and performance in, STEM subjects in Australian schools. This reduces the pool of STEM-skilled talent, and increases the competition between employers.

The weapons industry understands that it has an 'image problem'² that affects its ability to recruit talent. By manufacturing social licence and creating positive brand association in children, the weapons industry works to create a workforce 'pipeline' and ultimately gain commercial advantage.

Children can start making subconscious decisions about their future career from as young as seven years of age, so there is clear incentive for early and regular engagement with schools.

Company Profiles

A note on subsidiaries

Major weapons companies have subsidiaries across the globe, including Australia. This global presence allows easier navigation of different regulatory environments, and helps secure local contracts and government subsidies.

Some educational programs and public institutions associated with weapons

² See for example Vergne, J. P. (2012). Stigmatized categories and public disapproval of organizations: A mixed-methods study of the global arms industry, 1996–2007. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(5), 1027-1052

companies have tried to deflect concerns about weapons companies' conduct and human rights records by arguing they are dealing with an Australian subsidiary.

Local subsidiaries of weapons companies are wholly-owned by the parent company, which has full control over the subsidiary's assets, operations, and strategic direction. Therefore local subsidiaries should always be considered to be part of the parent company.

A note on human rights

We have included, below, links and information on weapons companies' known associations with specific instances of human rights violations.

It should be noted, however, the global trade in arms *in and of itself* affects a range of human rights protected under international and customary law. The global arms trade routinely facilitates breaches of rights such as the rights to life; freedom from torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of assembly and of expression, as well as the rights to health, education, food and housing.

Generally speaking, weapons companies say that states - who licence weapons exports - are responsible for human rights, and that increased human rights diligence negatively affects their ability to do business. (See for example the [2024 RTX proxy statement](#), Proposal 7.)

Lockheed Martin

Sponsor of National Youth Science Forum, Code Quest, ME Program, Science and Engineering Challenge, STEM Day Out, Science Alive.

Lockheed Martin is one of the world's largest weapons companies, reporting annual net sales of US\$71.0 billion in 2024, a 5.14% increase from 2023.

Lockheed Martin produces the F-16 and F-35 fighter jets, Patriot, Hellfire and Javelin missiles, nuclear weapons, hypersonic missiles, launching systems, surveillance systems and more. Lockheed Martin subsidiary Sikorsky manufactures Black Hawk and other combat helicopters.

Lockheed Martin and its subsidiaries have an extensive history of corporate misconduct. Recent cases include a US\$29.74 million settlement in February 2025 over allegations of defective pricing on F-35 military aircraft contracts, and a \$70 million penalty for contracting fraud. The [Global Violation Tracker](#) maintains a list of proven misconduct.

Lockheed Martin has been named in multiple legal suits and communiques on its role in the facilitation of serious human rights abuses in Yemen and Gaza. The [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#) maintains a repository of information about Lockheed Martin.

RTX Corporation

Sponsor of FIRST Australia (FIRST LEGO League, FIRST Robotics, FIRST Tech Challenge).

In 2024, RTX Corporation reported annual sales of US\$80.7 billion, a 17.15% increase from the previous year. RTX is a 2023 rebrand of three companies, Raytheon, Collins Aerospace and Pratt & Whitney.

RTX produces Patriot, Tomahawk and other missiles as well as directed-energy weapons. RTX is deeply involved in nuclear weapons.

RTX and subsidiaries have violated export control regulations and in 2024 paid \$124 million to settle bribery and kickback allegations. The [Global Violation Tracker](#) maintains a list of RTX misconduct.

The [Arms Trade Litigation Monitor](#) lists civil cases against RTX for egregious violations of human rights. RTX has been named in various [submissions](#) and communiques on facilitation of human rights violations in Gaza.

BAE Systems

Sponsor of Beacon, ME Program.

In 2024 BAE Systems reported revenues of approximately £22.2 billion.

BAE produces combat aircraft, warships, tanks, armoured vehicles, artillery, missiles, small arms ammunition, cyber & intelligence, and nuclear missile submarines. BAE is significantly involved in the F-35 fighter jet.

BAE Systems is named in a civil lawsuit relating to 26 airstrikes on residential buildings, schools, hospitals, a museum and world heritage sites in Yemen by Saudi Arabia, a major BAE Systems

customer. BAE Systems is also named in a 2024 United Nations [communique](#) on potential complicity with alleged war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza.

Boeing

Sponsor of F1 in Schools Primary Challenge, Science and Engineering Challenge, STEM Racing, Subs in Schools, Space in Schools.

Boeing reported approximately US\$66.6 billion in revenue for 2024. Boeing produces attack helicopters, combat aircraft, missiles, bombs, battlefield laser systems, and intelligence and surveillance systems. Boeing is involved with the production of nuclear weapons.

Boeing GBU-39 Small Diameter Bombs (SDBs) and larger GBU-31/32/38 bombs equipped with Boeing's Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) have been widely used against civilians in Gaza and in Yemen.

The Economic Activism Program of the American Friends Service Committee maintains a list, dating to 2005, of [known issues with Boeing](#) products and conduct.

SAAB

Sponsor of F1 in Schools Primary Challenge, Science and Engineering Challenge, STEM Racing, Subs in Schools, Space in Schools.

SAAB is a defense and security company headquartered in Sweden. In 2024, SAAB reported approximately USD\$3.8 billion in revenue.

SAAB produces ground-to-air missiles, weapons systems for tanks and combat vehicles, anti-tank weapons, mortars and warheads. SAAB is also known for advanced surveillance technologies and naval systems.

Acknowledgements

Many groups and individuals are responsible for progress on the issue of weapons companies in schools: Medical Association for Prevention of War, Wage Peace, Friends of the Earth, Quakers Australia, WILPF, BDS Australia, IPAN, Australian Education Union and members, NSW Teachers Federation and members, National Union of Students and student unions across Australia, National Tertiary Education Union, No Weapons for Genocide, Teachers and School Staff for Palestine and 'for Palestine' groups in every state and territory, and more. Thank you to everyone who has taken action.

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To cite this report: *Weapons Companies in Education: A Progress Report (2025)*, Teachers for Peace.



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