

Briefing note for the Universities Accord Panel:

Lifelong learning

Key points

- Lifelong learning is a personal journey with the learner as the decision-maker in action to improve employment and productivity. Learning opportunities must be relevant to learners and their circumstances, as well as to industry and community.
- For decades universities have provided cohesive and coherent experiences for students through foundational and postgraduate degrees which the AQF was designed around – although there have been persistent barriers for some learners (like time, cost and lack of opportunity)
- Through their own missions and reforms like the Bradley Review, universities are now working with a broad group of students – our learners come from very diverse backgrounds and have diverse needs and goals
- Universities (in partnership with TAFE and VET sector) must re-energise and re-tool to create new models that can turn their expertise and reputation for quality into sustainable shorter course offerings and more flexible pathways
- There is more information for students and more ways of accessing it than ever before, but that just increases the need for universities to help learners build skills to manage, interpret and use it
- It used to be that the primary challenge was accessing information – it resided on the shelves of our libraries and in the minds of academics
- These days, the primary challenge is curating it – helping students navigate their own way through education, work and life and providing quality assured learning and outcomes
- Lifelong learning must offer more than standalone and discrete courses – we must make students feel like they're joining a thriving ecosystem of customisable options and pathways
- Curation, careers, connections and credit will be the key to a meaningful and quality experience for students and learners need to be able see and realise the value of lifelong learning

How can lifelong learning help?

- Addressing skills shortages
- Smoothing local and regional industry transitions
- Facilitating integration of tertiary sector – universities, TAFEs and other providers
- Blending work, life and study

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Who does lifelong learning help?

- Career starters - undergraduates or recent graduates looking to supplement their skills
- Career changers – whether forced or voluntary
- Career advancers – moving up in the same job, company or industry
- School students – getting a taste of university and other pathways
- VET graduates – building their higher level skills
- Those returning to the workforce – retirees, parents, job seekers

What are key features of a lifelong learning system?

- Affordability – income contingent loans and skills accounts
- Transferability and portability - skills passports
- Sustainability - mix of government, learner and industry contributions
- Flexibility - recognition between providers and sectors
- Opportunity – transformed university business models

What is needed to progress lifelong learning?

- National leadership and governance
 - Ideally a national shared credit point system, or least an agreed model
 - National principles for aligning micro-credentials to agreed and well-understood levels
 - Guidance for mapping and recognising international credentials
- Open technical standards for interoperability, transparency and authentication
- Guidance on digital badging and verifiable credentials
- Lifelong learning accounts for learners for recognition and portability of learning
- Universal access to quality careers advice for everyone across their life
- A common language to identify the skills and competences being certified (taking into account international work)

ATN proposal for technology skills passport

Accelerate the harmonisation of vocational education and training and university, starting with a technology skills passport initiative, delivered in partnership by ATN and industry.

ATN proposes that the Government provide seed funding to develop a technology skills passport that will open pathways for Australians to jobs in the fast-growing technology sector.

The tech skills passport will accelerate the integration of vocational education and universities, expand access to recognition of prior learning, and get people qualified and into a job (or a better job) faster.

Crucially it will provide the practical example and proof of concept to roll out a skills passport in other key priority areas such as aged and disability care, clean and renewable energy, engineering and manufacturing. These are areas key to our prosperity and well-being, which need skills from both university and vocational education, and which will need a mix of Australians and skilled migrants.

A skills passport combining qualification and skills recognition will enable people to pursue opportunities to upgrade and broaden their skills throughout their working life. Unlocking the potential of micro-credentials will also allow rapid development of new courses, enable timely training for workers and employers, and better target sustainable investment in career-long skilling.

ATN Universities will partner with vocational education providers (including dual-sector providers) and the technology industry through the Tech Council of Australia to co-design, deliver and recognise skills, and provide career support to help people make the most of their skills.

With guidance and mentorship from educators and industry, workers will build up their own passport of skills from a suite of industry-recognised and industry co-designed micro-credentials.

The micro-credentials on offer will span the best of vocational education and university – enabling people to choose the mix of technical, practical and transferable skills they need to succeed.

This means workers will access the skills they know they need now (with the benefit of up-to-date industry advice), but also build up their passport with credentials that lead to an established qualification.

The personalised technology skills passport is for workers at all career stages including:

- **career changers** – existing workers looking to build their digital credentials and transfer their existing skills and experience into the technology sector
- **career advancers** – existing workers in the technology sector looking to kickstart their career and take the next steps.

This initiative will help workers stay in their current jobs, get better jobs in the same company or industry, and change jobs or industries.

ATN understands that people, whatever their experience and background, benefit from support to successfully navigate the working world.

That is why it created Designing Your Future – a short course that equips workers with a toolbox to solve problems, determine what they want in a career, and take practical steps towards their career goals.

Combining ATN's innovative Designing Your Future program and guidance and mentorship from the Tech Council's industry partners, workers building a tech skills passport will receive the career advice and support they need to set and achieve their career goals.

Australia has 2.2 million small-to-medium enterprises that are crucial to our economy and innovation. In partnering with the Tech Council, we will ensure that we hear the voice of employers of all scales.

By involving industry in co-design and co-recognition, this initiative is also primed to connect workers with employers. This may be as simple as career advice, but can also grow as needed to include mentorships, internships and job placements – with the guarantee of the technology skills passport.

This initiative will set the standard for future partnerships of vocational education, universities and industry. The technology passport is scalable and replicable in other key industries.

This helps to build and combine and provide leadership for several existing skills initiatives such as qualifications reform, industry clusters and the National Microcredentials Marketplace.

ATN's Designing Your Future

[Designing Your Future](#) is a new easy access short course from ATN Universities. It is designed for workers looking to upskill and retrain and graduates about to enter the workforce and looking to shape their future careers.

Built on the Life Design model from Stanford University and adapted for the Australian career context, Designing Your Future helps workers from all backgrounds assess their strengths and goals, plan their future career and begin taking the steps needed to get there.

The short course is split into three stages. The first stage, Designing Success, is free of charge, open to all and involves 15 hours of self-paced online learning. Those completing Designing Success will gain a toolbox to solve problems, determine what they want in a career, and take practical steps towards their career goals.

The second and third stages, Designing for You and Designing Your Career, each involve 30 hours of online learning. Those who complete stages two and three will have a detailed plan for their future career, a suite of skills for enacting that plan, and a clear overview of opportunities to upskill themselves for continual success.

Designing Your Future is offered through individual ATN universities. As of June 2022, it is being taught at Curtin and UTS with the other four ATN universities opening their courses to enrolment shortly. ATN is seeking opportunities to reduce the costs of the second and third stages to make the course even more accessible.

Tech Council's roadmap for tech jobs

The [Getting to 1.2 million: Our roadmap to create a thriving Australian tech workforce](#) report was launched on 2 August 2022. This report sets out Australia's tech jobs opportunity, the barriers we face to meet this opportunity, and what industry and government can do reduce these barriers.

The [Digital Employment Forum](#) (DEF) brings together key tech employers to grow the number of Australians in tech jobs, and identify new approaches to preparing Australians to work in technical roles. This report is the result of the DEF collaboration between tech employers, tech businesses and education providers. ATN is an anchor partner in the DEF, alongside companies like Wesfarmers, Woolworths Group, Commbank and BHP.

Report overview

- The Australian Government and the Australian tech sector have a shared commitment to achieve 1.2 million Australian tech jobs by 2030.
- Meeting this goal will be challenging – we forecast that Australia will need an additional 650,000 new tech workers to meet this goal by the end of the decade (an uplift of 186,000 above business-as-usual approaches).
- But achieving this goal will be critical to improving living standards. Tech jobs are well-paid, stable and flexible. These jobs are accessible to people from all walks of life, and with a variety of skills, and there is little discrimination in pay based on education, socioeconomic status once people break into the sector.
- As the economy becomes increasingly digital, missing out on this opportunity will leave us behind.

Report key messages

Required growth in talent pipelines over the next decade:

- 174,000 new entrants – an additional 42,000 graduates are needed above the expected 132,000 graduates through university and VET pathways
- 318,000 people reskilling from other occupations – an additional 100,000 workers are needed above the expected 217,000 workers
- 162,000 skilled migrants – an additional 43,000 skilled migrants are required on top of a forecast 119,000

There are five barriers preventing Australians from seizing tech jobs opportunity:

1. Australians lack awareness about what tech jobs exist, or how to get into them.
2. Current training products and pathways into tech jobs are not fit for purpose.
3. There are strong demographic skews in tech jobs, with women, older Australians and regional Australians being under-represented.
4. There is a small talent pool of people with the skills and experience needed to work in experienced technical roles, which have boomed.
5. Australia lacks coordinated effort, analysis and planning for the tech workforce.

Skills for Tomorrow

[Skills for Tomorrow](#) is a joint initiative of leading education and employer bodies, the Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN), TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group) and AlphaBeta, now part of Accenture. It sets out a shared vision for education and employment in Australia post-pandemic and recommends four resolutions and twelve actions to realise this vision.

1. Put the strategy, funding, and partnerships in place that grow high-value jobs and industries, and support them with innovative education and training models

- a. Align investment from the tertiary education and training sector, government and industry to high-value industries and high-value jobs.
- b. Produce a national workforce development strategy to clearly articulate the needs of industry, government and the tertiary and training sector and facilitate a more aligned, collaborative approach.
- c. Develop collaborative learning hubs that co-locate industry, education and training sector organisations. Hubs will facilitate enterprise-based training, greater collaboration and commercialisation of research.

2. Equip Australians with the skills and confidence to power the economic recovery

- a. Use data analysis to identify employer and learner training needs and use this to inform the design of education and training content and products.
- b. Design education and training around critical skill needs, rather than occupations or industries, to help develop work-ready individuals and improve mobility of the workforce between different occupations and industries.
- c. Encourage enterprise-based learning – such as work-integrated learning, industry-linked research positions, and employer-driven apprenticeships, cadetships and internships.

3. Expand the range of education and training products on offer to ensure that all learner needs can be met and to improve the opportunity to gain new skills and maximise employability

- a. Encourage shorter, targeted courses, such as micro-credentials, to encourage continuous learning that is relevant to work needs. These micro-credentials should be substantial enough to impart the key skills, knowledge and attributes needed; stackable so that workers can build on previous skills; and portable so that skills can be recognised across different industries and employers.
- b. Develop agreed knowledge and skill combinations that involve both higher education and Vocational Education and Training (VET) to make it easier for individuals to move between these sectors, e.g. Advanced Diplomas and apprenticeships for higher qualification levels to ensure Australia continues to develop skills in high-value, high skill industries.
- c. Create an effective, engaging online learning experience to enhance learning experiences, improve access to learning and improve digital literacy among the workforce. Create blended learning models which utilise online and face-to-face interaction to create a more engaging learning experience.

4. Ensure funding and accreditation approaches allow modern, innovative and high-quality learning models

- a. Explore individual skills accounts and skills passports to allow workers to undertake training throughout their lifetime through financial support to re-skill or up-skill via relevant micro-credentials and courses.
- b. Enable an industry-led approach to further learning that allows enterprises to select relevant training for their employees to undertake, which is then subsidised by government.
- c. Ensure the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) prioritises knowledge, skills and application rather than being narrowly focused on progression through hierarchical levels of education. This will support more modern and innovative approaches to learning and qualification development such as short courses and lifelong learning.

Short courses

The Morrison Government facilitated the roll out of a suite of six-month, online courses focussing on areas of national priority such as nursing, teaching, counselling, IT and allied health as part of its Higher Education Relief Package in April 2020.

The discounted course fees ranged from just \$1,250 to \$2,500 for a six-month course with students still able to defer payment through HECS-HELP.

The 2020-21 Budget allocated \$251.8 million for an additional 50,000 short course places in 2021 and unused allocations were able to be used in 2022. There have been no further announcements for 2023 or beyond.

ATN Universities offered 181 short courses in 2021, including 55 undergraduate certificates and 126 graduate certificates. This is a substantial increase over the 55 short courses offered in 2020 (15 undergraduate certificates and 40 graduate certificates).

ATN Universities have been allocated over \$57 million in Commonwealth funding for short courses in 2021, including over \$22 million for undergraduate certificates and over \$25 million for graduate certificates.

National Microcredentials Marketplace

As part of the 2020-21 Job-ready Graduates Package, the Australian Government announced funding of \$4.2 million to develop a Microcredentials Marketplace. Now called [MicroCred Seeker](#), the aim of the website is to create a user-friendly, nationally consistent platform for students to allow them to easily compare microcredential courses.

ATN universities actively assisted in the early stages of development of MicroCred Seeker, working with the NSW Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) by providing testing data and undertaking beta testing. This is indicative of ATN's willingness to share expertise and collaborate constructively.

Launching in early December 2022, the MicroCred Seeker will connect microcredential providers with learners, employers and industry groups to facilitate lifelong learning and meet emerging workforce demands. All TEQSA-registered higher education providers in Australia are invited to participate in the project.

MicroCred Seeker is underpinned by the National Microcredentials Framework released in March 2022. The Framework stipulates critical information requirements and minimum standards for courses to be listed on MicroCred Seeker, ensuring consistency across the platform.

MicroCred Seeker displays credit recognition arrangements and pathways to a higher qualification, showcasing stackability options and highlighting the flexibility of microcredentials. Students can shortlist prospective courses and easily compare critical information such as flexibility, time commitment and mode of delivery.

Proposed policy option - National Job Cadet Program

[Averting an Escalating Labour Market Crisis for Young People in Australia: A Proposed National Job Cadet Program](#) – Peter Dawkins, Peter Hurley and David Lloyd – October 2020

- Combine an employment contract with formal education and training
- Like apprenticeships, the Government would provide a financial incentive for employers to take on cadets
- Program would substantially increase the range of occupations and industries where apprenticeship-like models apply

Two streams:

- Stream 1 - extension of the apprenticeship/traineeship pathway into new occupational areas, focusing on areas of clear or expected demand
- Stream 2 - supporting employers to hire new entrants into semi-skilled and skilled jobs who already have qualifications and/or experience that qualify them for the job, but where without a financial incentive and top-up co-created education and training (e.g. short course, micro-learning etc.) the employer would be unlikely to hire a young person.

University-Industry Collaboration in Teaching and Learning Review (Bean-Dawkins Review)

The [Review](#) recommended short-term and long-term actions that government, higher education providers and industry could take to promote greater collaboration across the sector. It considered how to increase industry engagement in teaching and learning through improved course curricula, opportunities to combine work, study and skill development, and how schools, tertiary education and industry could interact to ensure students are able to transition between sectors more seamlessly.

The Review was led by Emeritus Professor Martin Bean CBE and Emeritus Professor Peter Dawkins AO and released in December 2021.

Many of the following recommendations are still very relevant and have not been acted on in any significant way. There is still much to do to create meaningful pathways for learners.

Recommendations:

1. Accelerate the development and use of the Australian Skills Classification as an open access national skills taxonomy.
2. Expedite the reform of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) to facilitate better collaboration between higher education providers, vocational education providers and industry.
3. Build a unified credentials platform to surface current and emerging skill shortages, provider guidance to individuals to make informed learning decisions, link to quality micro-credentials and act as a bridge to labour market opportunities.
4. Providers and industry to build a stronger culture of partnership in the delivery of industry-focused micro-credentials – accelerated through targeted investment fund.
5. Roll out a flexible higher education cadetship program combining an employment contract and a learning program.
6. Enhance higher education's engagement with industry through the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) and the National Strategy on Work-Integrated Learning.
7. Build stronger partnerships between higher education, vocational education, and schools, including the introduction of a cross-sectoral teaching and learning innovation fund.