

30/01/2018

Committee Secretary
Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) would like to thank you for the opportunity to comment on the impact of technological and other change on the future of work and workers in Australia. The ATN wishes to note that we believe a world class, robust, flexible and academically independent university sector will be vital to ensuring Australians and Australia at large are adequately equipped to take advantage of the opportunities technological change will have on the future of work and workers.

The ATN is a national collaborative group of five major universities including Queensland University of Technology (QUT), University of Technology Sydney, RMIT University, University of South Australia and Curtin University. Our universities education more than 20 per cent of Australia's graduates.

Collaboration has always been important for the ATN and its members, and students are at the heart of everything we do. ATN universities all have genuine linkages to industry as an inherent part of both our teaching and research. We are committed to developing work-ready graduates by connecting them to world leading innovators and thinkers. We believe that it is vital that we equip graduates with skills that industry require to ensure they can adapt to the jobs of today and the future. Partnerships with industry provide our students with the opportunities to gain practical knowledge and experience in their areas of study as well as broader skills necessary to succeed in the workforce. Our graduates lead changes in society, provide innovative solutions to global problems and are equipped with the skills to enter the modern workforce.

It should be noted that Australian university graduates score highly on employability measures. The most recent Employer Satisfaction Survey revealed that employer satisfaction in graduate skills continues to rise. This includes rises in categories of employability, teamwork, adaptability and general communication skills. The survey reported that nine out of 10 employers stated that university graduates were well prepared for their current roles and 88 per cent of graduates remarked that their qualification prepared them for their job.

Additionally, the most recent Graduate Outcome Survey, a survey that looks at employment outcomes for Australian graduates, showed that employment outcomes for graduates remained high, with 86 per cent (undergraduate) and 90 per cent (postgraduate) finding post-university employment. These statistics point to the excellent education universities continue to provide to Australia's graduates, ensuring that Australian graduates remain employable, with a combination of technical and transferrable career skills. This combination of skills results in highly sought after graduates who make significant impacts on Australia's economy.

8/1 GEILS COURT
DEAKIN ACT 2600

+61 2 5105 6740
INFO@ATN.EDU.AU
WWW.ATN.EDU.AU
TWITTER @ATNUNIS

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However we recognise there is always more to be done and the ATN continues to work to ensure our graduates are well prepared for their future careers.

As the nature of work changes, universities in Australia continue to engage with industry ensuring that courses are underpinned not only by the latest in educational pedagogy but also but the latest in sector specific expertise, research and best practice. The resulting educational outcomes ensure that students of Australian universities are equipped to contribute to meeting Australia's workforce needs. An example of ensuring graduates have a full selection of transferrable careers skills, increasing employability of graduates is the ATN e-Grad School.

The e-Grad School is a virtual graduate school managed by QUT as a joint collaboration of the ATN. Its primary aim is to support the development of generic professional skills in Higher Degree Research (PhD and Masters by Research) students during their research degree candidature so that they prepared to enter the workplace. Training is provided to research student cohorts via short, fully online, flexible and easily accessible modules and are designed to improve transferable skill development, promote cohort interactions and develop awareness of issues and themes relevant to internationally mobile research graduates. Over 10,000 students have registered for training, including students from universities across Australia, Asia and New Zealand. Increasing student enrolments in the e-Grad school indicate the relevance of this training to globally mobile students.

Additionally universities are actively engaging in creating precincts, through collaboration with industry recognising that university students are increasingly seeking entrepreneurship skills as well as technical expertise. The ATN universities are proactively engaging with industry and government to build a thriving innovation community around their campuses, thus providing opportunities to students to have a greater link between their studies, research and industry. University engagement extends to running highly successful accelerators, incubators, and actuators on their campuses with significant links between students, innovation and commercialisation know how. By running these programs, universities are enabling the next generation of organisations by providing students and graduates with expertise, facilities and opportunities to develop solutions. Examples of this include:

- QUT's bluebox which is providing capability to entrepreneurs to build new industry based on QUT initiatives, and undertake new and more flexible end-user focussed approaches to early stage commercialisation;
- University of South Australia's presence in the South Australian Government's Health and Biomedical Precinct. A precinct that is built upon existing connections between the University of South Australia, the new Royal Adelaide Hospital and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI);
- RMIT's Advanced Manufacturing Precinct which leverages RMIT's expertise in technology and design innovation. The precinct is developing the next generation of engineers, designers and technicians, and working closely with industry both in Australia and internationally. The Advanced Manufacturing Precinct offers research capability in aerospace, automotive and biomedical sectors;

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- Curtin University's Innovation Central Perth which is a collaboration between Cisco, Curtin and Woodside Energy. At present it has over 80 researchers and links to advanced facilities and a global industry network. The Centre utilises an open environment to bring together start-ups, industry experts, developers and researchers with the aim of creating ground-breaking and innovative solutions that foster growth, provide jobs and help build sustainable economies; and
- UTS anchors the Ultimo Precinct which is a world scale, emerging precinct with large upside potential. This precinct requires ongoing support for long term success. The precinct is the 4th largest start-up community in Australia, and already possess the attributes to support a thriving innovation precinct. The precinct has more than 52 start-ups per square kilometre. UTS contributes physical infrastructure and world leading research facilities and technology, teaching, community, and commercial spaces, bodies of knowledge and human capital both academics and students who create, hold, preserve and refresh critical knowledge and capabilities.

In acknowledging that the impact of technological change on the future of work and workers will be varied depending on geographical location around Australia, it is important to note that Australia's higher education sector provides equal opportunity to students, regardless of their background or location. Furthermore, Australia's universities provide opportunities to students anywhere in Australia and proactively support students to succeed. Although our universities all have their main campus in metropolitan settings, we believe Australian students regardless of where they live should be able to access higher education that suits their needs.

The ATN are also currently working with industry and PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) on a major policy piece on the future of work and would be happy to share the findings of this work with the committee once completed.

Preparing all of Australia for the impact of technological change to work is no small task, however universities are best placed to continue training graduates who are equipped with a multitude of skills to adapt and respond to the challenges presented by technological change.

Please do not hesitate to contact the ATN Directorate on (02) 5105 6740 or via e-mail at info@atn.edu.au to discuss any elements of the submission further.

Yours sincerely,

Renee Hindmarsh
ATN Executive Director

8/1 GEILS COURT
DEAKIN ACT 2600

+61 2 5105 6740
[INFO@ATN.EDU.AU](mailto:info@atn.edu.au)
[WWW.ATN.EDU.AU](http://www.atn.edu.au)
TWITTER @ATNUNIS

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