



Australian  
National  
University

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Steven Palethorpe  
Secretary  
Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers  
Department of the Senate  
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Dear Mr Palethorpe

The Australian National University (ANU) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers and have attached our response to the Terms of Reference.

Our response to the Terms of Reference chiefly focusses on a) *the future earnings, job security, employment status and working patterns of Australians* and c) *the wider effects of that change on inequality, the economy, government and society*.

Our principal recommendations are as follows:

- Facilitation and support for stronger links between universities and the business community.
- The creation of a national upskilling agenda.
- Greater ease of access for SMEs seeking education and training including investment in digital education.
- Expansion of language programs in education with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.
- Increased support and facilitation of student learning experiences and work experience opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region.

On behalf of ANU I would like to express my support for this inquiry. We are happy to provide senior academic staff to expand on this submission or appear at the inquiry should that be required.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Brian P. Schmidt AC**  
**Vice-Chancellor and President**

## **ANU responses to the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the Future of Work and Workers**

### *a. the future earnings, job security, employment status and working patterns of Australians;*

Universities such as ANU are uniquely placed to prepare the next generation of Australian workers for a future in which the fundamentals of work will be uncertain. As more and more traditional jobs disappear through automation or redundancy, universities will play a crucial role in equipping workers with the skills and high-order knowledge required to thrive in new fields of work.

Furthermore, it is crucial to ascertain the combinations of skills that graduates require in order to fill gaps in the labour market as our economy changes. Recent research out of the Tepper School of Business suggests that workers who possess 'synergistic' skills that can be used in combination to undertake complex tasks are more successful when it comes to meeting labour market needs as they arise.<sup>1</sup>

In order to anticipate these rapidly evolving workforce trends, there must be seamless linkages between universities and industry. Although there will always be cultural differences between university research and business/industry priorities, the key is in harnessing this tension to foster creativity.

At an undergraduate level, student interactions with corporations and SMEs through internships and work experience adds a crucial dimension to a university education that is invaluable in preparing students for the workplace. Moreover, close partnerships between academics and industry ensures visibility of future workforce needs and allows degree programs to be embedded with new and emerging skills as the economic impetus for them arises.

On top of this, we must respond to the reality that single, lifelong careers have all but disappeared and that workers must be prepared to thrive in multiple and varied occupations where job security is a rarity. This means that across all disciplines, universities must work to foster a culture of adaptability, a determined pursuit of ambition and an appetite for uncertainty among all those it teaches. To this end, ANU has several programs focussed on skill development for current and future employment:

- ANU has the country's most internationally employable graduates according to a recent study published in the [Times Higher Education](#). ANU was ranked 21st out of the top 150 institutions for global employability.
- ANU has a robust relationship with the Australian Signals Directorate which sees staff and students from our Computer Science and Mathematical Science areas co-located to work on joint projects.
- The recently announced ANU Cyber Institute has been set up to foster collaboration between academics, students, government and private sectors entities of all scales.
- ANU is working to integrate internships and industry placements within as many of our degrees as possible. Any financial support offered by the government and any legal facilitation – around the conditions and entitlements of interns, for example – to enable movement into industry would be welcome.

There is also a much bigger role to be played by universities in ensuring the flexibility and adaptability of the existing workforce. Links with business and industry can bring world-leading research and teaching to workers who require new skills and knowledge to remain relevant in the workforce. This could be achieved with the support from government in the following ways:

- Creation of a national upskilling agenda to ensure that workers have the skills to smoothly transition out of declining industries and into emerging ones.
- Greater ease of access for SMEs seeking education and training.
- Investment in digital education to allow workers to easily access knowledge and skills throughout their career.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, K. (2017). Skill networks and measures of complex human capital. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(48), pp.12720-12724, <http://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1706597114>.

b. *the wider effects of that change on inequality, the economy, government and society;*

As well as the significant impact that technological change is having on the workforce, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the future of work and prosperity in Australia will be dictated by geopolitical shifts in the stability of our region. As market forces and strategic tides see America's dominance of the Asia-Pacific begin to recede, a future where the economic norms of our region are set by a non-western power could be just over the horizon.

The Asia-Pacific is a region where Australia is culturally, linguistically and social disconnected. Furthermore, we currently lack any form of substantive infrastructure for educating our future workforce about the histories, cultures, societies and languages of our Asia-Pacific neighbours.

As our economic prosperity becomes more reliant on our regional neighbours, it will be essential for Australian workers to develop proficiency in Asian languages and to develop a cross-cultural understanding akin to that which we share with western nations today. Without significant investment in Asia-Pacific culture and language programs, the future Australian workforce could become sharply segregated between bilingual workers who are able to thrive and monolingual workers who are left behind.

Greater investment and work in this area should build off the success and established frameworks of pre-existing programs. The Government's New Colombo Plan (NCP) scholarships and mobility grants provide invaluable support for students seeking to study in Asia and equips them with the skills needed to build professional links and business ties in later life. Since the NCP's inception in 2014, ANU students have received 478 mobility grants and 31 scholarships. The value of this support is magnified by collaborations with in-country organisations such as The Australian Consortium for 'In-Country' Indonesian Studies (ACICIS) that deepen local links. We hope to see further expansion of this program and collaborations with in-country organisations into the future.

We suggest that the Government could consider:

- Significantly expanding language programs across the higher education sector including the funding of Diploma of Language programs with a particular focus on the Asia-Pacific region.
- Creation of an overseas internship support program – perhaps with links to the New Colombo Plan – that assists Australian students in finding and participating in internships in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Incentivizing Australian students to seek out work experience and opportunities overseas and also encouraging international students to seek out internship opportunities in Australia.
- The ANU College of Asia and the Pacific currently offers its students 'The Year in Asia' program, allowing them to immerse themselves in the language and culture of a chosen country for up to 12 months. Further support and facilitation of this program would be welcome.