The Castlereagh Statement: A cross-sector call to action on Australian education and training in the age of AI

The *Castlereagh Statement* is a collective vision of educators, leaders, and students from organisations at the forefront of change across Australia's education and training sectors and industry partners. Many participated in a national summit in October 2025 hosted by the University of Sydney at its Castlereagh Street campus, which brought together people from schools, vocational education and training providers, universities, government departments, accrediting bodies, and leading organisations from industry, the professions, and the arts.

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Executive summary

Australia stands at a critical juncture. AI is fundamentally reshaping the capabilities our learners need, the work they will do, the society they will build, and the equal place of all within it. The rapid advancement of generative AI has necessitated deep interrogation of our assumptions about education and training, in particular what we value and what we measure. Our education and training systems were not designed for an AI-driven society where information and cognitive labour are abundant. Jobs and Skills Australia (2025), the Productivity Commission (2025) and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (2024), amongst others, have all called for urgent, coordinated national action. Australia possesses the expertise to lead. What is missing is the coordination and collective courage to do so.

The *Castlereagh Statement* provides a unified national vision. It is built on three goals: a shared definition of what we value in human learners and educators, with aligned measurement systems; coherent learning pathways from early childhood to lifelong learning, aligned with societal needs; and every Australian being capable of confidently, critically, and creatively engaging with AI. Six foundational principles underpin these goals, from redefining the educated, future-ready Australian to placing technology in service of pedagogy.

To operationalise these principles, the *Statement* proposes a three-horizon framework for action. The near horizon addresses urgent stabilisation, including national guidelines on responsible AI use, structural assessment reform, and teacher upskilling. The medium horizon drives necessary structural transitions, including national learning networks for brave cross-sector experimentation, curriculum reform to reduce duplication and overcrowding, realigned incentive structures, and dedicated time and funding for educators to pilot new approaches. The far horizon lays new foundations for education and training models centred on valued human capabilities, with seamless movement between formal, workplace, and community learning throughout life. A core contingency mechanism ensures the action framework can be accelerated if trigger signals, such as rapid labour market shifts or AI capability leaps, demand it.

Achieving this vision requires unprecedented national, cross-sector, and multi-cultural coordination. We invite members of the government, education and training providers, curriculum and accreditation bodies, regulators, employers, and communities to join this movement, and we commit to providing the evidence, networks, and momentum to make this successful. Our future depends on us acting together, now.

Preamble

The *Castlereagh Statement* is designed as a unified national vision to build on the 2019 *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019), which set out ambitious goals to promote excellence and equity in an education system that nurtures all young Australians to be confident, creative, and successful lifelong learners.

However, the emergence and ubiquity of generative AI have exposed misalignment between the priorities and practices of our current education and training systems and the goals of the *Declaration*. These systems were designed for an era in which access to information and cognitive labour was scarce. Whilst they have steadily evolved, Australian education and training systems still largely prioritise information transmission and reward the reproduction of knowledge.

The *Declaration's* vision of confident, creative, and successful lifelong learners now calls for something different: the development of human discernment, fostering of deep relationships, cultivation of dispositions that enable people to thrive amid change, and nurturing the capability to learn how to learn. Closing this gap requires more than individual institutions working separately; it calls for a national, coordinated reconsideration of what we value, what we teach, how we assess, and how we recognise and support the educators who make it possible.

The *Castlereagh Statement* offers a shared vision of stakeholders from education and training, industry, community, and government, providing the foundation for the joined-up national effort needed to secure Australia's social and economic prosperity in the age of AI. While its goals and principles apply across every sector and stage, from early childhood through vocational training, higher education, and lifelong learning, their expression in practice will necessarily differ by context.

This document is deliberately designed as a green paper: it identifies three goals, six foundational principles, and proposes horizons for action. It purposely does not define the architecture of the solution; that needs to be done together.

In the words of Muurrbay Language, kindly gifted to the *Castlereagh Statement* by the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-Operative, we can work together to build a world worth living in:

Bindaay-girr yam
Marraal juuda-ndi
darruy guunuwaygu

Three goals for Australian education and training in the age of AI

Preparing Australians for an AI-transformed future requires building adaptive, capable, diverse humans who can thrive amid continuous change. To secure Australia's social and economic prosperity in this age of disruption, we urge for all governments, leaders, educators, institutions, industry and other bodies involved in Australian education and training to embrace three essential goals:

1. **A shared definition of what we value in human educators and learners, and aligned measurement systems to support these.** Establish a clear, national consensus on the knowledge, capabilities, and dispositions that we want humans to continue developing and demonstrating. This imperative has become increasingly urgent in the context of rapidly accelerating AI capability but the approaches, such as nurturing the capability of learning how to learn, should be timeless and decoupled from the current or predicted state of AI or other technologies. We also need to transform measurement and incentive structures (such as appointment, workload, recognition, and classification models for staff, and syllabus and assessment foci for learners) across all sectors to reinforce these commitments and values and promote change in practice.

2. **Coherent and scaffolded learning pathways from early childhood to lifelong learners, aligned with societal needs.** Build a joined-up, scalable, and responsive ecosystem where every Australian can continuously develop capabilities throughout their lives, which are recognised across all sectors. Develop a national framework for learning 'future-ready skills' as a continuum from early childhood through all of adulthood, cultivating learners who are responsible, agile, and resilient. To do this, establish a connected national compact where industry, education, and training sectors actively work and experiment together, with government coordinating key policy and funding frameworks.

3. **Every Australian being capable of confidently, critically, and creatively engaging with AI.** Equip all Australians with the capabilities and discernment to know how to use AI effectively and responsibly, understanding its limitations and maintaining human agency and voice. Design lifelong education and training so that human flourishing, creativity, relationships, judgement, and ethics are paramount, reinforcing valued human traits. Develop a framework that identifies developmentally appropriate learning at each stage, ranging from a foundational focus on AI safety through to responsible and effective AI use in the context of fields of practice, work, and life.

Background: A fragmented response to an increasingly urgent mandate

Australia is home to some of the world's leading teachers, researchers, and thinkers on AI in education. Across the country, conferences and professional networks regularly showcase the work of creative educators, visionary leaders, and innovative partnerships between education institutions and industry. We should be proud of our demonstrable capacity for innovation and collaboration.

However, despite these strengths, Australia's overall response to generative artificial intelligence in education and training is fragmented, stalled, and at odds with national plans to improve our social cohesion and economic productivity. This situation has emerged from significant gaps in policy and institutional action, presenting systemic risks for learners transitioning into, between and beyond education and training sectors. This delay has placed Australia at a quantifiable risk of losing its international competitiveness and social cohesion in a world increasingly impacted by rapidly advancing AI technologies.

Additionally, our education and training systems were designed for an industrial economy: age-based cohort progression, fixed curriculum delivered in fixed timeframes, and credentials as proxies for capability. These made sense when information and cognitive labour were scarce and the pace of change was gradual. Generative AI is rapidly matching or exceeding human performance on many cognitive tasks and is advancing at a pace that outstrips multi-year curriculum review cycles. The accelerating impacts of climate change compounds this urgency, but both disruptions demand graduates who have deep, adaptive capabilities that industrial-era education was not designed to foster.

This *Statement* takes a systems perspective: incremental or isolated reform does not serve Australia's needs to create a future-ready society and workforce. Different sectors operate under varying assumptions, principles, and levels of maturity, creating a preparedness gap for learners and leaving the nation without a cohesive plan to manage disruptions or capitalise on the opportunities presented by AI. Patchwork responses, where individual institutions act alone or sectors operate in siloes, will not produce the national transformation required.

Risks urging immediate action

We are driven by a shared understanding of the following risks and imperatives:

Urgency and disruption: Learners are already using AI, often without guidance. We must prepare learners for a world in transition, where the employment landscape is transforming around them (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025) at a pace that has outstripped our collective education and training systems' ability to respond. We face the profound challenge of preparing learners, and staying relevant, when the full extent of AI-driven disruption remains unknown. Failing to urgently enact a national skills uplift strategy will result in a lost productivity dividend and more profound social inequity.

Fragmented national policy: Australia lacks a unified vision for AI in education and training. The K-12 sector operates under a risk-mitigation AI in Schools framework and fragmented state-level integrity policies. Some schools and state Departments of Education have proactively embraced AI as a tool for learning, moving further ahead of other schools and many tertiary institutions. The higher education sector has national principles that address the opportunity and risk of AI, supported by TEQSA (Lodge et al., 2023; 2025). Furthermore, there are no ongoing systematic evaluations that could be used to guide other jurisdictions.

Loss of international leadership: The world's peak bodies have articulated the path forward.

UNESCO (2023) has set the definitive ethical standard, and the OECD (2024) has provided the non-negotiable economic imperative for deep curricular reform. Other countries are moving quickly to transform their education and training sectors to leverage AI. Australia has demonstrated early international leadership in academic integrity and institution-and system-wide adoption of home-grown, education-centred AI platforms. Without urgent action to accelerate Australia's leadership, we will lose the attractiveness and relevance of Australian education and the opportunity to instil Australian values of equity, diversity, and social justice.

Forfeiting educators' and students' agency: Those at the centre of education and training must continue to play a central role in shaping AI integration. They must be stewards of pedagogy, empowered to choose and use the right AI tools, and not be passive recipients of AI. Their expertise and discernment are essential to ensuring AI services educational purposes instead of undermining them. We must specifically include the student voice in our processes for continuously developing our thinking and action in this area.

Disconnection between education sectors and industry: Ad hoc collaboration between education, training, and industry is a missed opportunity for mutual transformation. Formally strengthening these partnerships becomes critical to achieve mutual benefit as the boundaries between learning and work blur. In addition, the nature of collaboration rather than competition between players in each of our primary, secondary, vocational and higher education sectors must be enhanced and we need full harmonisation between them.

Widening equity, diversity, and inclusion challenges: AI could either dramatically deepen existing educational inequalities or democratise access to learning in previously impractical ways. Access to physical and digital infrastructure, availability of safe and responsible AI tools that are accessible, and the expertise to utilise them effectively requires deliberate system-wide prioritisation. The discrepancies between states and across the sectors also creates equity issues and preparedness gaps. We need to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Educator capacity and priority crisis: We acknowledge that educators across all sectors face overwhelming workload pressures and conflicting priorities, which are unevenly distributed and compounded by caring responsibilities, casualisation, and inequitable working conditions. No meaningful change is possible without addressing the crisis in teacher capacity through aligned training, funding, time, support, and incentive structures. AI must not be seen solely in terms of potential efficiency gains, but rather in terms of how time with students can be used more effectively and meaningfully.

Challenges of assessment integrity and focus: We recognise that the fundamental premise of how we verify learner capability is at risk, and that detection-based approaches to integrity are not the way forward. We also recognise that many assessments no longer measure what is valuable for learners to develop in an AI age and commit to re-evaluating curriculum and the assessments within to better develop and verify valued, relevant capabilities.

It is only by working together that we can clarify what we truly value in education and training, connect a disjointed lifelong journey of learning, and secure Australia's benefits from AI transformation.

Yaam darrundaygirr gangaa-gu; wurraaygirr gujaa-nyarr

This Muurrbay phrase emphasises that we must work to make it better for the future whilst drawing from the past. The *Castlereagh Statement* is presented as a mechanism to break this impasse and unite all Australian education and training under a single, proactive, and coordinated national commitment.

Foundational principles for a unified national cross-sector response

To navigate this disruption, we urge all governments, leaders, educators, institutions, industry bodies and others involved in Australian education and training to commit to a process of developing, evolving and maintaining a unified national response guided by six foundational principles. Schools, tertiary education providers, government, accreditation bodies, and employers must unite around shared goals and a vision in order to shift the future for all Australians, starting now and over the long-term.

Principle 1: Redefining the educated, future-ready Australian

We call for a commitment to an education and training system that cultivates the enduring dispositions and capabilities that we will always value humans exhibiting, even as AI capabilities continue to develop.

Human values and adaptive capacity: We will prioritise the development of compassion, curiosity, creativity, collaboration, and courage alongside the metacognitive skills that enable learners to navigate uncertainty, build resilience, and thrive as lifelong learners driven by personal purpose. We recognise that AI can support human flourishing when used thoughtfully.

Deep knowledge and diverse ways of knowing: We affirm that deep domain expertise and practical experience are necessary foundations for intellectual honesty and truth-seeking. We will embed genuine respect for and integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives, including connection to Country and intergenerational stewardship and protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, alongside the rich cultural and linguistic knowledge systems of diverse Australians.

Discerning partnership with technology: We will nurture learners who understand the affordances and limitations of AI, and who work with it to enhance rather than replace their own capabilities. The thoughtful use of AI is a highly desirable, and indispensable, part of study, work, and life in the age of AI.

Principle 2: Institutional and individual humility

We call for a commitment to institutional collaborative innovation and humility, acknowledging that many of the structures, credentials, and pathways we have inherited may no longer serve learners or the community in the AI age.

Protecting learning, not institutions: We need to courageously identify institutional structures that would benefit from being transformed, consolidated, or retired, recognising that institutions exist primarily to serve learning and learners.

Building coalitions of experimenters: We acknowledge that transformation requires shifting deeply entrenched processes and culture. We will build the coalitions necessary to overcome this discomfort together, and create the conditions for rapid, supported experimentation that recognise not every initiative will succeed.

New foundations: We recognise that the structures we have inherited (e.g. schools organised by age cohorts, time-bound formal qualifications as proxies for capability) were designed for a different era. Some may not survive in recognisable form, and this represents new foundations to be shaped rather than failure to be resisted.

Principle 3: Reconceptualising learning and assessment

We call for a commitment to reconceptualising the processes of learning and assessment to prioritise deep understanding, human connection, and visible skill development over the mere production and evaluation of outputs. We will look for new, transformative ways to teach, learn, and assess to make education and training more accessible. This will be grounded in well-established evidence-based pedagogy, including authentic and experiential learning.

Learning, measuring, and rewarding what we truly value: We will ensure assessments are capable of measuring if learners have developed and demonstrated the redefined knowledge, skills, and character of educated Australians, assuring both the integrity and relevance of education. This needs a fundamental reorientation of assessment philosophy to draw on diverse forms of evidence, accumulated over time and across contexts, to verify learners' capabilities.

Learning is relational and grounded in human experience: While AI may augment learning, we affirm that education is fundamentally relational. We support the thoughtful use of AI and the continuing importance of embodied experiences, human educators, informal interactions, and community as essential for deep learning.

Prioritise process over product: We will shift teaching and assessment design to make the learning process visible, helping students use AI to augment rather than replace their thinking. We embrace desirable difficulties as essential to learning, while using AI to remove unnecessary barriers and improve accessibility. This may include broader adoption of well-established approaches like program-level design, authentic tasks, and longitudinal gathering of evidence.

Principle 4: Designing an agile and capability-focused curriculum

We call for a commitment to national curriculum reform, integrating all education and training sectors and industry, that shifts the focus from content transmission to development of valued capabilities and dispositions.

Pivot from content to capability: Even as information becomes more abundant, human acquisition of foundational knowledge remains necessary but no longer sufficient. We will evolve curriculum to sequence knowledge and combine durable skills, ways of thinking, and valued dispositions, explicitly including learning how to learn. We will further embed evidence-based practices such as teacher-guided inquiry, interdisciplinarity, problem-based learning, and work-integrated learning to develop human capabilities.

Agile and connected curriculum: We will shorten multi-year curriculum review cycles, enabling continuous evolution and removal of outdated elements. We will break down siloes between disciplines and between K-12, VET, higher education, and lifelong learning, creating coherent pathways with robust credit recognition for demonstrated capabilities.

Developmentally-appropriate AI integration: We will embed curriculum guidance on when, how, and why to use AI at each developmental stage, including critical understanding of both the strengths but also safety risks posed by, and biases and limitations contained within, these technologies.

Principle 5: Empowering teachers and redefining teaching

We call for a commitment to empowering the education and training workforce, acknowledging that no technological transformation is possible without their agency, expertise, and support.

Trust and relationships: We affirm that human relationships are at the heart of education and training. Genuine education requires co-creation between teachers and students, with radical transparency about AI use to maintain the reciprocal trust and safety that underpin learning.

Teacher agency and capability: Teachers, as professionals who understand diversity in their students, must have agency to guide when and how AI is used, ensuring tools are fit for purpose and grounded in pedagogical principles and professional judgement.

Institutional investment in teachers: We commit to genuine workload transformation, empathetic leadership that aligns AI use to institutional values, and sustained professional development that moves practice beyond substitution to genuine transformation. Recognition and reward processes, and workload models, must be adapted to value and promote transformational, collaborative teaching work. Where used, AI must support human flourishing across our education community.

Principle 6: Placing technology in service of pedagogy and trust

We call for a commitment to a national educational technology strategy that ensures AI and related technologies serve Australian education and training, upholding our values, ethics, and sovereignty.

Align use of technology with values and purpose: We commit to ensuring technology serves education, not the reverse, with developmentally appropriate applications of AI tools matched to learners' age, stage, and needs. We respect that engagement with AI is not a universal aspiration; some communities have principled reasons for caution or refusal, and a truly inclusive approach must consider these positions while ensuring access for those who choose it.

Sovereignty, safety, and standards: We will enforce high standards for security, accessibility, transparency, safety, inclusivity, and privacy from all technology vendors. We will pursue data sovereignty and interoperable standards, ensuring AI tools align with Australian principles which include Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Cultural and Intellectual Property, and Protocols for AI.

Active co-design instead of passive consumption: We will ensure procurement and implementation involve educators, researchers, students, and staff in shared governance. Australia's education sector will collaborate globally and locally to shape ethical and effective AI tools, being mindful that all technologies have in-built values and assumptions.

A proposed framework for cross-sectoral action

The *Castlereagh Statement* recognises that collective and coordinated collaborative action between schools, tertiary education providers, government, accreditation bodies, and employers is needed for true transformation. To operationalise these principles, we urge for the consideration of a phased, three-horizon framework for national action, which has been developed through cross-sectoral consultation and collaboration to date as a first step in a process that should follow this *Statement*.

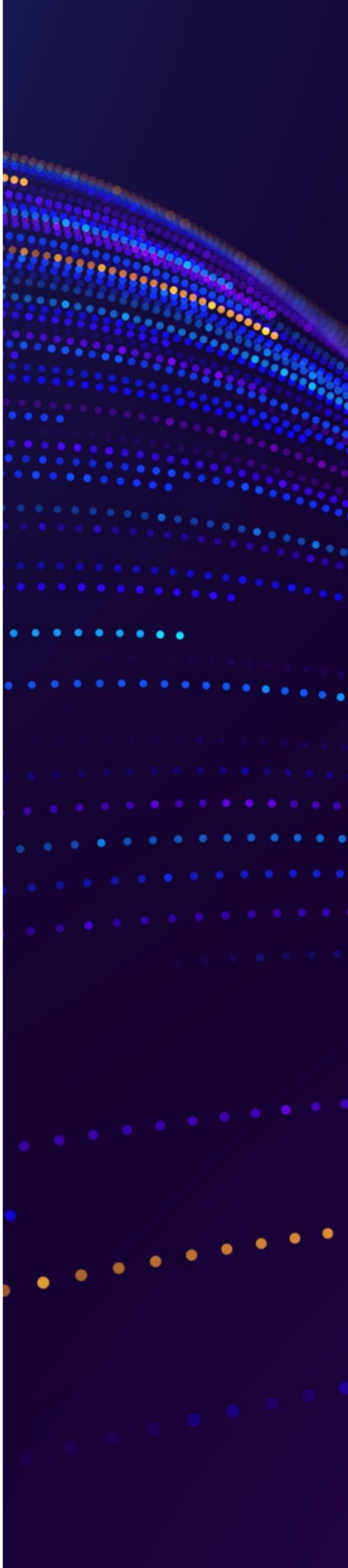
1: Near horizon – urgent stabilisation

Learners and learning: Value and implement teaching and learning strategies that emphasise desirable difficulties in learning. Establish clear national guidelines on responsible and effective AI use by educators and learners to support, extend, but not supplant, learning. Implement structural changes to assessment to ensure integrity of qualifications and credentials across the sectors. Start to shift assessment design away from product-only measures towards formally valuing and measuring process and capability. Phase out AI detection and unhelpful integrity framing, towards responsible and effective use of AI.

Curriculum: Embed critical AI competencies and learning to learn as core across all existing curricula as appropriate to the age and stage of learners. Establish a new joined-up nation-wide capability that enables and shares industry- and practitioner-led pilots and knowledge sharing on effective AI use and how this translates into curriculum.

Teachers and teaching: Across all education and training sectors, establish a national educator capability framework for teaching in the age of AI. Accompany this with teacher education research and upskilling programs on AI-enabled pedagogies and a platform for sharing promising practices to empower teachers to design AI-enhanced learning experiences.

Technology: Ensure essential physical and digital infrastructure and tooling is available to enable students and staff to access relevant AI securely and safely. Educators and learners should also have genuine influence over purchasing and deployment decisions around AI tools used in education and training through participatory procurement practices. Develop guidelines for technology developers that are grounded in sound pedagogical evidence and practices, and corresponding guidelines for educators to easily recognise pedagogically-sound technologies. These guidelines should be aligned to the principles in the *Castlereagh Statement* and national frameworks.



2: Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions

Learners and learning: Begin the national shift in redefining what we value, how we can better assess demonstration of these capabilities and values, and how learners can develop them. Continue the shift away from product to process by developing and implementing learning and assessment approaches to make the learning process visible. Deploy and validate pedagogically-sound AI tools, co-designed with educators and learners, and evaluated through rigorous research, that support individual and collective learning and maintain the primacy of human interaction.

Curriculum: Develop a national framework for defining future-ready, stage-relevant AI skills from early childhood through to lifelong learning, including tighter integration between industry and senior curriculum to ensure work readiness. Initiate pilots where demonstrated and verified capabilities are accepted in lieu of credentials for some roles. Conduct a national review to reduce duplication of content and curriculum overcrowding across all sectors.

Teachers and teaching: Shift incentive and reward structures across all sectors to elevate and promote the practices that serve our core values and signal their priority in education and training. Enable and encourage safe experimentation with AI across all sectors with funding for educators to spend at least 20 per cent of professional development time on pilots. Drive AI-enabled efficiency, that is human-centred, across institutions to reinvest time for discovery and implementation.

Technology: Establish a national networked learning lab where practitioners across sectors run pilots, share findings, and iterate together. Form consortium models to co-develop and deploy AI platforms that are grounded in sound pedagogy, ensuring that Australia continues to be a purposeful technology creator, not merely a consumer. Enable interoperability between AI tools and other systems, to better support holistic student support and learning.

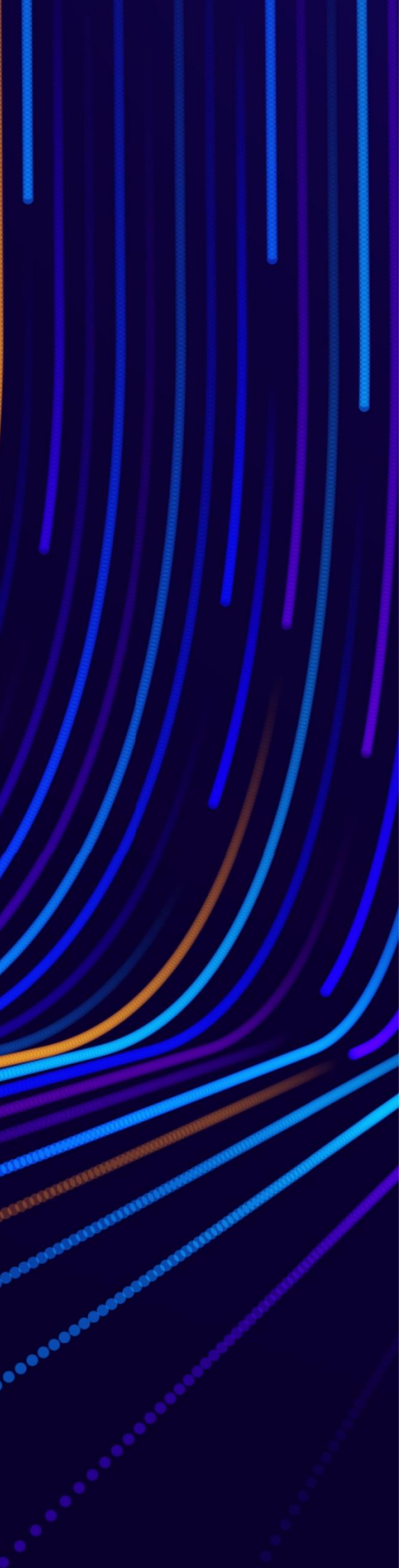
3: Far horizon – new foundations

Learners and learning: Reconceptualise education models away from traditional subjects towards mission-driven, capability-focused, project-based learning.

Curriculum: Establish a shared core curriculum across the lifespan focused on valued human capabilities, replacing outdated content silos. Enable movement of learners between formal and workplace learning and cross-recognition of demonstrated capabilities.

Teachers and teaching: Reorient teacher workload towards high value human interactions with learners.

Technology: Ensure all educational AI serves nurturing of relationships between learners and educators, and fosters learners' metacognitive skills. Build infrastructure that verifies demonstrated capability which allows seamless movement between learning contexts throughout life.



A core contingency for accelerated transformation

The proposed three-horizon framework for action assumes a rate of change that allows for staged implementation over multiple years. However, we must recognise that AI advancement appears to be accelerating, and its impact on society is unpredictable. We therefore need mechanisms that allow us to identify trigger signals and speed up transformation if circumstances demand this. To 'wait and see' is not an option. The trigger signals for interventions beyond ongoing evolution may include:

AI capability advancement: if AI systems demonstrate expert-level performance across multiple domains, including in the physical world, significantly impacting the nature of cognitive and/or physical labour.

Labour market signals: rapid decline in graduate employability or apprenticeship commencements, or the need for rapid and significant skills uplift across multiple industries, or employer realignment away from formal qualifications or training packages, or emergence of significant job categories with no current educational pathway, or large-scale job displacement.

Learner behaviour shifts: significant enrolment declines across multiple programs or qualifications linked to AI capability uplifts, or wide adoption of employer-accepted credentialling pathways outside formal education and training, or significant movement of learners to alternative parallel AI learning ecosystems (e.g. built by learners) outside institutional structures.

International disruption: major competitor nations or global institutions implementing radical education transformation that significantly threatens the market position of Australian education and training, or international organisations and institutions ceasing to recognise Australian qualifications as meaningful, or substantial relocation of Australian talent to other nations perceived as more future-ready.

We have a moral imperative to plan and act with these possibilities in mind. We should not wait for these potential scenarios to eventuate. If, as many of us believe is highly likely, these triggers activate, the Australian education and training sectors may need to shortcut lengthy governance processes, review cycles, and institutional inertia. We commit to serving learners and their learning even if this means eschewing institutional traditions and inertia under the direction of our governing bodies.

From Statement to national action

A coalition of the willing, enabled, and empowered

We urge willing organisations and governments to build an ongoing coalition of leaders and practitioners across public and private providers and industry. This proposed coalition should work collaboratively in achieving the goals of the *Statement* with the assistance of individuals and bodies who have created and supported it. Importantly, this coalition does not replace the need for coordinated government and regulator action. It creates the momentum and practitioner network that will be essential when that coordination materialises, and maintains pressure until it does.

We propose that the coalition:

Comprises practitioners, educators, researchers, and leaders **committed to running coordinated cross-sector experiments** with shared protocols, rapidly sharing outcomes (including both successes and failures) openly, and actively piloting alternatives to outdated structures and processes;

Issues collective **public statements on emerging developments in AI and education** as aligned with this *Statement*, providing timely guidance;

Is open to **any individual committed to the goals of the *Statement***, regardless of their position or institutional affiliation, because transformation often begins with those who may have insight but not positional authority; and

Monitors the environment for contingency triggers and is a voice to advocate for more decisive, even more urgent interventions that staged implementation may not address.

A national coordinating and enabling body

A coalition of willing practitioners is necessary but not sufficient. The country needs an independent, cross-sectoral body with an explicit mandate to drive coordinated action and provide advocacy and multipartite connectivity between government, industry, education and training, and community, so that each can inform and influence the policy and practices of others. This body should convene cross-sector working groups, advise government, publicly report on national progress, and more. It should be co-governed by representatives from schools, VET, higher education, industry, the community, and students. Funding needs to be independent of any single institution or government department.

The time to act is now

Australia's current response to artificial intelligence in education and training is fragmented, incomplete, and failing to meet the urgency of the moment. This policy and practice inertia persists in the face of clear mandates for a unified national strategy, compounded by urgent national economic warnings which state that failure to enact a cohesive national skills uplift will mean forfeiting a massive productivity dividend and worsening social inequity.

This domestic stalemate is occurring against a backdrop of clear global warnings and an emerging polycrisis. There are stark economic and ethical imperatives for reform. Australia's ongoing delay in acting decisively is a failure of national coordination, not a lack of expertise, and it puts our international, economic, educational, and social future at risk.

The *Castlereagh Statement* provides a comprehensive, unified, and actionable vision and three-horizon framework to break through this impasse. It has been written from the input of education, training, and industry leaders who commit to its message. We believe we have the capacity to enact change. We invite all who read this *Statement* including government officials, policy makers, institution leaders, educators, employers, practitioners, and communities to embrace it and be part of the coalition that makes it happen.

This *Statement* builds directly upon the *2019 Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (Education Council, 2019) and synthesises the expert consensus from education, training, and industry leaders across Australia. Its three goals, six core principles, and a cross-sectoral framework for action compels Australia to move all sectors in unison from essential responses to necessary structural transitions and, ultimately, transformation.

We invite Australian education and training providers, accreditation bodies, government, and employers to endorse the *Castlereagh Statement*. This will provide the necessary political will and national coordination to move from fragmented principles to unified implementation, securing Australia's social and economic prosperity in the age of artificial intelligence.

As this phrase in Muurrbay Language suggests, we need to have all of us together for the common good.

Ngiyaa duguula
darruy-aygam-gu
balgaarr-gu

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Appendix A: Summary of Australian and global frameworks and policies on AI in education

Australia's current policy and implementation of AI in education and training are not nationally unified. This fragmentation, which has evolved rapidly since late 2022, is a key source of systemic risk to the nation. This *Statement* takes a systems perspective: isolated reform in one sector or area does not serve Australia's needs to create a future-ready society and workforce. However, different sectors operate under varying assumptions, principles, and levels of maturity, creating a preparedness gap for learners and leaving the nation without a cohesive plan to manage disruptions or capitalise on the opportunities presented by AI.

The Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools

Australia's first national response was the *Australian Framework for Generative AI in Schools*, developed by the National AI in Schools Taskforce and released in 2023 (Department of Education, 2023), with representatives from all jurisdictions, national education agencies, education stakeholders and academic experts. This framework provides six guiding principles: Teaching and Learning, Human and Social Wellbeing, Transparency, Fairness, Accountability, and Privacy, Security and Safety. This risk-mitigation focus is evident in how it has been operationalised at the state and national levels:

- **State-level implementation:** State authorities have focused on academic integrity and safety. The Victorian Department of Education, for example, requires schools to obtain opt-in parental consent before using any generative AI tool that requires student personal information (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2024). In NSW, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) requires all students to complete the All My Own Work topic, which now covers the ethical use of AI (NSW Education Standards Authority, 2024).
- **National agency implementation:** The national bodies tasked with implementation have also adopted this focus. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is integrating AI literacy primarily through its existing Digital Technologies curriculum connection (ACARA, 2025) and has not yet reviewed the curriculum holistically to prepare students to be future-ready. Education Services Australia (ESA) is focusing on technical safety by extending its Safer Technology For Schools program and developing basic teacher-training modules (Education Services Australia, 2023; 2024). The Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO), the national evidence body, has published exploratory discussion papers on how GenAI could be harnessed to reverse inequity (AERO, 2024).

While these are critical first steps in articulating what safe and responsible AI in schools looks like, this framework is fundamentally a risk-mitigation tool. Its principles are largely focused on ensuring AI is used safely and that school communities understand how the tools work. It is not the framework for educational transformation that is needed for the second half of this decade and beyond.

The 'Australian Universities Accord' Final Report

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report highlights key shifts needed to transform Australia's higher education system over the next three decades (O'Kane et al., 2024). The report identifies rapid technological change, including the emergence of generative AI, as a fundamental driver that challenges traditional university roles in teaching, research, and knowledge dissemination. It also

warns that failure to reform will see Australia's productivity, innovation, and standard of living decline. The Accord's recommendations and findings include:

- Creating a national Council to harness the use of technologies, including AI, to advance the quality of the higher education experience
- Improving teaching quality through innovative learning approaches that embrace online and hybrid modalities whilst continuing to build student belonging
- Implementing digital infrastructure that integrates digital platforms across VET and higher education sectors, unifying the tracking of qualifications and skills
- Preparing Australians to be “digitally literate, creative, collaborative, good communicators, and able to solve complex problems” by working with schools, employers, and the community

The Accord positions Australia's response to generative AI as requiring coordinated national action across teaching practice, regulation, research methodology, workforce preparation, and digital infrastructure, rather than leaving institutions to navigate these challenges independently.

The 'Study Buddy or Influencer' Parliamentary report

The 2024 final report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education, and Training, *Study Buddy or Influencer*, represents the most recent, cross-party, and cross-sectoral consensus on AI in education (Parliament of Australia, 2024). Its title captures the central tension of the technology: its potential as a tool for profound opportunity versus its capacity for high-stakes risk. The committee delivered 25 recommendations that constitute a clear, bipartisan national action plan for Australia (Parliament of Australia, 2024). These recommendations (Parliament of Australia, 2024) include:

- Making the use of generative AI in education a national priority.
- Developing and implementing a national training rollout plan for educators, students, and parents.
- Mandating that universities and TAFEs embed generative AI competencies and skills across all courses and degrees.
- Establishing a Centre for Digital Educational Excellence to act as a thought-leader.
- Tasking TEQSA with developing standards and frameworks to guide universities in maintaining research and academic integrity.

However, the national conversation has largely stalled, evidenced by a lack of movement on these recommendations. While some agencies, like TEQSA and ESA, are acting on their specific recommendations, this is happening in the absence of a unified, national vision.

The ‘Envisioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI Futures Communique’

The *Envisioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AI Futures Communique* represents a landmark statement of Indigenous self-determination in Australia's AI landscape (Barrowcliffe et al., 2025). Developed by over forty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, practitioners, and community members, the communique is grounded in Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Indigenous Protocols for AI, and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property principles. The communique's key recommendations carry direct implications for the education and training sector:

- AI systems must recognise and respect the hundreds of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries, cultures, and languages, with communities determining appropriate access and permissions for their cultural knowledge.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will lead AI governance, including shaping how AI is integrated into learning environments.
- Data and technology literacy must be taught through school curricula and community-based courses, with accessible pathways at undergraduate and postgraduate levels supported by scholarships, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

The Communique warns that non-participation risks further widening the digital inclusion gap, leaving Indigenous learners and communities without influence over tools that could support them to thrive. These recommendations align very closely with the aims of this *Statement*: to empower every Australian, especially First Nations people, with the capabilities and attributes to thrive and with access to the opportunities afforded by advances in AI.

The international imperative: A human-centred, rights-based approach

UNESCO's *Guidance for generative AI in education and research* provides the global ethical benchmark (UNESCO, 2023). Anchored in a human-centred approach, the guidance calls on governments to regulate generative AI, including mandating data privacy and considering age limits for use (UNESCO, 2023). UNESCO's key policy recommendations urge member states to:

- Promote inclusion, equity, and universal connectivity to avoid widening the digital divide.
- Empower teachers with the competence to use AI ethically and effectively.
- Ensure AI is not viewed as an authoritative source of knowledge and that learners are explicitly taught to critique the responses provided by generative AI.
- Build a cumulative evidence base for AI's pedagogical effectiveness and avoid policies based on novelty, myth, or hype.

Australia possesses world-class leadership and practice in AI and education. The risk of falling behind, therefore, is not a lack of capability but a lack of national, coordinated implementation.

The national economic perspective: Jobs and Skills Australia & the Productivity Commission

The landmark 2025 report from Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), *Our Gen AI Transition*, provides a whole-of-labour-market view of AI's impact. Its key finding is that generative AI is far more likely to augment jobs than replace them (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025). This augmentation requires a massive national skills uplift. JSA (2025) highlights that the impact will be uneven and that success depends on building complementary human skills alongside digital literacy. The report makes 10 recommendations, including a call for a whole-of-population digital and AI capability uplift and the urgent need to embed contemporary data, digital, and AI skills into all VET and higher education qualifications (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025).

The Australian Productivity Commission (2025), in its *Harnessing Data and Digital Technology* report, warns that the significant productivity dividend offered by AI is not guaranteed. It must be actively secured through deliberate and agile policy choices (Productivity Commission, 2025). Submissions to the Commission also warn that without targeted intervention, AI productivity gains may concentrate among large enterprises and metropolitan centres, exacerbating domestic inequality (Productivity Commission, 2025).

Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment

Australia's first *National Climate Risk Assessment* confirms that climate change is already affecting every part of Australian society, and that risks will escalate significantly without transformational adaptation (Australian Climate Service, 2025). The assessment identifies nationally significant risks across key systems, including communities, health, economy, and infrastructure, and warns that those already experiencing disadvantage are the most vulnerable. The implications for Australian education and training include:

- The workforce of the future must be equipped to respond to compounding climate risks (such as extreme heat, bushfire, coastal erosion, and food insecurity) requiring new skills, adaptive capacity, and systems thinking across every discipline and industry.
- Generative AI represents both a powerful tool for accelerating climate adaptation, such as through data analysis, modelling, and decision support, and a source of new risk if deployed without equity, cultural safety, and sustainability at its centre.

Australia's education and training sector cannot address the generative AI transformation in isolation from the climate imperative. The two challenges are converging, and demand a coordinated national response.

The National AI Plan

Australia's National AI Plan 2025 establishes a whole-of-government framework anchored in three core goals: capturing opportunities, spreading benefits, and keeping Australians safe (Australian Government, 2025). The plan explicitly recognises that AI adoption will bring significant changes to Australia's labour market, and that workers and those seeking to enter the workforce must be at the centre of this transition. The plan's key workforce and education imperatives call on government, industry, and unions to:

- Ensure all Australians gain the skills needed to thrive in an AI-enabled economy, with particular attention to groups at higher risk of disruption, including women, First Nations peoples, mature-aged workers, people with disability, regional communities, and young graduates.
- Embed digital and AI skills across all levels of education, from schools through vocational training to higher education.
- Equip workers with the confidence that AI will enhance their jobs and skills, through meaningful consultation and co-design in workplace AI adoption.
- Align AI skills development with workforce needs through coordinated partnerships between government, industry, unions, and education and training providers, embedding AI competencies consistently across the Australian Qualifications Framework.

The plan urges coordinated national implementation to ensure the benefits of generative AI are equitably distributed – and the *Castlereagh Statement* is highly aligned to this approach.

The OECD outlook: An economic and skills warning

The OECD's *Digital Education Outlook 2023* (OECD, 2023) and its analysis of the AI landscape in AI and the Future of Skills (OECD, 2024) warn that AI is starting to outpace humans in critical areas such as reading, mathematics and scientific reasoning (OECD, 2024). Three years on its successor, the *Digital Education Outlook 2026* (OECD, 2026), arrived with harder evidence and a sharper warning: generative AI use by students has moved from marginal to mainstream, yet the research now shows that performing a task with GenAI does not automatically lead to learning. The OECD uses the term

"metacognitive laziness" to describe when students skip the cognitive struggle of learning (OECD, 2026).

Whilst the 2023 report set out principles for an emerging technology, the 2026 edition confronts a technology already embedded in classrooms with the evidence base shifting from cautious optimism to an urgent call for pedagogical redesign. The OECD's (2026) key takeaways reinforce and extend its earlier recommendations, urging countries to:

- Ensure students acquire and demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills without general-purpose generative AI, recognising that AI-boosted performance can mask learning deficits
- Design learning experiences where generative AI is used with intentional pedagogical purpose, emphasising process rather than output.
- Invest in purpose-built educational generative AI tools, co-designed with teachers, that preserve professional autonomy and are grounded in learning science
- Strengthen research, evaluation and international collaboration to build the evidence base for what actually works.

As AI outperforms humans on the foundational cognitive capabilities that our system currently values (e.g. those assessed by the Programme for International Student Assessment), an education model that prioritises the recall and application of subject matter in standardised tests and unsecured take-home tasks is actively preparing students for redundancy. At the same time, the human capabilities that are most valuable for students' futures are often not taught, measured, and reported on.

Appendix B: Detailed actions proposed across the three horizons for each sector

Supporting the cross-sector priorities presented above, we recognise that each sector has unique contexts that necessitate specific action. Proposals for actions are presented below, with the intention that they would dovetail with the joined-up cross-sector work that is crucial.

Proposed actions for schools

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Learners and learning	Phase out AI detection and unhelpful integrity framing, towards responsible and effective use of AI. Redesign assessment guidelines to measure and reward the process of learning, not just output. Introduce AI to help inform and clarify career possibilities and pathways. Implement pilots to co-create AI learning experiences with students.	Run experiments where students demonstrate capability through curated, longitudinal evidence that includes AI-supported and AI-independent work. Develop national guidance on the complementary roles of educators, families, and communities in children's development as critical, ethical users of technology, recognising that educators should not carry this alone.	Restructure schooling so students pursue pathways aligned with their interests. Closer collaboration with families and community who also take shared responsibility to develop children's critical judgement, digital discernment, and healthy relationships with technology from the earliest years.
Curriculum	Intentionally develop age-aligned AI capabilities in students so that they learn to use these tools safely, critically, and in ways that deepen rather than diminish their learning.	Embed the development of learner skills and dispositions in the curriculum. Actively review and remove redundant, duplicated, or outdated elements of curriculum.	Reorient post-school transition criteria to reflect valued capabilities, moving beyond a single entry score to allow schools to focus on what matters instead of teaching to the test. National standardised reporting on learners' competencies for learning alongside AI.

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Teachers and teaching	Encourage and incentivise teachers to build familiarity with responsible AI use in teaching and learning. Set up cross-school communities of practice and other avenues to share AI-aware learning designs. Make accessible and affordable AI competency a mandatory annual training requirement.	Provide additional resourcing (time, funding) for classroom practitioners to inquire and innovate together. Establish a national project to upskill teacher educators and pre-service teachers on the pedagogical use of AI and how to develop the AI competencies of their students.	Redefine teaching as a profession centred on what matters because of AI: nurturing identity, cultivating purpose, building the relational and metacognitive capabilities that enable learners to thrive beyond technology. Establish new professional standards, career pathways, and preparation programs that nurtures and rewards these.
Technology	Strengthen and implement national standards to safeguard use of AI in schools by students and teachers.	Address equity challenges around AI availability at home and school. Reduce reliance on, and the power of, technology vendors to manage and define good learning and use of learner data. Establish national bank of educational technologies with record of demonstrated efficacy, including guides and case studies to support learners, teachers, and administrators.	Co-design learner-centred educational technologies with vendors.

Proposed actions for vocational education and training

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Learners and learning	Communicate that responding to AI is a key priority of the VET sector and integration of future ready skills is to be prioritised. ASQA, TAC and the VRQA to issue VET providers with joint guidance on assessment integrity in an era of AI. Pilot lessons from industry – i.e. mature age students returning to VET to upskill or reskill will have examples of using AI in their job roles. Create opportunities for them to share those experiences as part of the learning process.	Use AI to capture students' skills history as a running record of skills acquisition. Strengthen VET's role in lifelong learning by identifying and championing VET students who are using AI in the workplace and community, and allowing them to lead conversations and curriculum development. Work with business and industry to embed AI and human skills and capabilities within their organisations.	Establish cross-sector training and evidence records to enable seamless skilling and recognition across VET, higher education, and workplace learning.
Curriculum	National pilots of AI tools to improve RPL for workplace learning. Continue to progress VET Qualification Reforms. Progress Future Skills Organisation's AI pilots.	Establish robust two-way credit recognition pathways between VET and higher education. Explore new models for industry leadership which reduce the lag in current training package development processes. Actively review and remove redundant, duplicated, or outdated elements of curriculum.	Evolve the training package model and replace it with new forms of industry oversight where greater flexibility is needed to deliver industry-ready graduates. Use AI to personalise learning and fully deliver on the promise of competency-based training, allowing for a pastoral care model instead of time-bound cohorts.

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Teachers and teaching	Uplift digital fluency and AI capability levels in general amongst teachers.	System-wide upskilling for VET trainers in AI (for teaching and learning + for work/industry) Establish responsibility for AI innovation in all large providers, with key accountability for leading ongoing and proactive professional development and curriculum reform.	Establish fit for purpose qualifications for trainers and assessors.
Technology	Continue to expand the TAFE Technology Fund.	Cross government collaboration to support non-profit/adult and community education providers to have access to improved technology platforms. Fund a national AI hub for industry collaboration with VET and higher education providers to allow the collective development of education modules for new AI tools as they emerge in different occupations and which can then be implemented nationally by all providers.	

Proposed actions for higher education

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Learners and learning	Implement structural assessment changes to maintain award integrity and public trust, without compromising assessment validity. Shift the narrative towards helping students use AI responsibly and effectively rather than covertly.	Expand workshop and project-based learning models that complement and progressively transform traditional didactic approaches. Implement genuine work integrated learning and industry placements. Develop and pilot teaching models, including minimising class sizes, that promote meaningful and quality interactions and mattering. Shift towards assessment models that promote the learning process and reward learning growth.	Implement successful teaching models that centre meaningful and quality interactions for the purpose of improving human relationships. Scale models where industry contributes to the verification of student capability alongside traditional academic assessment. Shift to continuous, capability-based learning ecosystems where learners move fluidly between formal, workplace, and community learning.

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Curriculum	Systematically establish advisory groups (industry, educators, students, AI) to monitor and adapt curriculum. Reduce unnecessary assessment load. Redesign program architectures to include moments of capability verification that are grounded in authenticity. Embed discipline-specific AI futures literacy across programs, that consider how AI is reshaping core methods, practices, and epistemologies.	Establish robust two-way credit recognition pathways between VET and higher education. Transform concept of academic integrity towards academic quality. Actively review and remove redundant, duplicated, or outdated elements of curriculum. Reform regulation and compliance frameworks to enable and promote mobility and flexibility. Enhance recognition of prior learning processes to enable coherent student journeys between sectors based on demonstrated capabilities.	Replace fixed-duration degrees with 'graduate when done' models with flexible pathways. Transition to curriculum frameworks that emphasise adaptive competencies (creativity, collaboration, courage, systems thinking) rather than disciplinary content.
Teachers and teaching	Uplift digital fluency and AI capability levels in general amongst all staff.	Commence structural workforce reforms and shift incentive structures including appointment and promotion criteria, and workload models, to equally value and incentivise education and research, to effect a system-wide culture change. Recast the role of the educator toward mentorship, design, and facilitation, and reshape standards and expectations of educators	Establish pastoral care model instead of class cohorts - free up space for human relationships in classes.

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions	Far horizon – new foundations
Technology	Democratise access to AI platforms for all students.	Further address equity challenges around infrastructure and AI availability at home and university.	Enable long term learning companions that nurture metacognition and identity development. Build secure, sovereign infrastructure that supports education, research, and operations.

Proposed actions for lifelong and workplace learning

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions	Far horizon – new foundations
Learners and learning	Coordinate communications strategy across government, industry, and other stakeholders to educate the workforce about the possibilities of AI and address negative perceptions. Increase awareness of the existing free AI short courses which are available to learners and small business owners.	Establish and expand 'earn-while-you-learn' models that allow workers to upskill while employed. Implement mechanisms to responsibly design industry/company specific solutions to meet needs as technology and the economy change.	Nation-wide assessment system to measure and verify learner capabilities.
Curriculum	Use AI to more effectively deliver RPL for workplace-acquired skills.	Industry participation in new models of learning aligned to future skills needs of industry. Learners co-create their own curriculum and journey in partnership with educators and AI support tools.	Remove barriers for workers to access the education system for lifelong learning (prior learning/qualification requirements, funding, time-based & granularity of learning options/courses).

	Near horizon – urgent stabilisation	**Medium horizon – necessary structural transitions**	**Far horizon – new foundations**
Teachers and teaching	Uplift digital fluency and AI capability levels in general amongst educators. Recognise and support people who are already helping colleagues gain AI skills in workplaces and the community.	Establish and fund cross-sector exchange opportunities where school and university educators, VET trainers, and workplace practitioners spend time in each other's contexts, to build shared understanding of AI transformation across sectors.	Redefine the role of the workplace educator to emphasise nurturing of key human qualities that will continue to be valued even as AI capability advances.
Technology	Audit existing workplace AI tools for accessibility, data sovereignty, pedagogical soundness, and impact on growth and learning, not just productivity.	Develop open, interoperable infrastructure that allows workers to carry a verified, portable record of their demonstrated capabilities between employers, sectors, and learning providers. Support the development of AI tools that are co-designed with workers and unions, not just procured by employers, ensuring that workplace AI serves learning and development.	Implement personalised AI that maintains long-term learning histories and supports continuous capability development. Build a national learning commons: public AI infrastructure any Australian can access for lifelong development, independent of employer or institution.