



30 October 2020

The Department of Premier and Cabinet
Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
West Perth WA 6005
By email: dgov-administrator@dpc.wa.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

Digital Inclusion Blueprint – AIIA Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Western Australian Government's draft Digital Inclusion Blueprint, as was recently released for public comment by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in June 2020.

About the AIIA

The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) is Australia's peak representative body and advocacy group for those in the digital ecosystem. We are a not-for-profit organisation to benefit members, and AIIA membership fees are tax deductible. Since 1978, the AIIA has pursued activities to stimulate and grow the digital ecosystem, to create a favourable business environment for our members and to contribute to Australia's economic prosperity.

We do this by delivering outstanding member value by:

- providing a strong voice of influence
- building a sense of community through events and education
- enabling a network for collaboration and inspiration; and
- developing compelling content and relevant and interesting information.

We represent a larger number of technology organisations in Australia, including:

- Global corporations
- Multinational companies
- National organisations; and
- a large number of small and medium businesses, start-ups, universities and digital incubators.

Our members are diverse and truly represent the diversity of the Australian tech ecosystem and include Australian SMEs and larger technology, telecommunications and infrastructure and cloud companies as well as hyper-scale cloud and multi-national software and SAS providers.

Introduction to the AIIA's submission

Digital inclusion is essential to social and economic participation on the part of citizens and businesses alike. Bridging the digital divide for vulnerable groups, including people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and older Australians, provides a critical connection point between worker and workplace, constituent and government, individual and social network. From the AIIA's perspective, digital inclusion is a prerequisite for Australia's effective economic recovery post-COVID-19 and the reskilling and upskilling that needs to take place in the jobs market this decade to cope with the fallout from skills shortages and border closures. It is important that the WA Government link in with existing strategies and tools of government, particularly at the federal level, to effect its four pillars of digital inclusion.

In this vein, Australia's Digital Economy Strategy puts forward four pillars that prove complementary to the four pillars of digital inclusion named in this draft:

- developing Australia's digital skills and leaving no one behind
- how government can better deliver digital services
- building infrastructure and providing secure access to high-quality data
- maintaining our cyber security and reviewing our regulatory systems

One of the initiatives spearheaded by the federal government under the theme of 'inclusion' that the AIIA believes is of relevance to WA government initiatives in this space is the Universal Service Guarantee, replacing the previous Universal Service Obligation, whereby the government provides all Australian homes and businesses with access to broadband and voice services regardless of location. This is complemented by Part B of the Consumer Safeguards Review which recommended, as set out in the report:

- wholesale level regulation of connections, repairs, and appointment keeping timeframes to underpin whole of industry performance on connecting and repairing individual services
- retail level requirements for clear consumer information around any service commitments from retailers together with transparency of performance
- further consideration of well targeted and sustainable arrangements to maximise connectivity for medically vulnerable consumers, and
- addressing existing reliability safeguards of limited and declining relevance.¹

Service disruption and unreliability in the context of the NBN rollout across Western Australia, including in metropolitan Perth, is a live business issue, especially given the disproportionate impacts upon small business.²

The importance of the NBN in effecting the Universal Service Guarantee dictates that governments prioritise its effective, extensive and efficient implementation for all customers. The participation of an invigorated NBN Liaison Group, which consists of state and territory government representatives, could be instrumental in this regard.

With COVID-19 making working from home a necessity in a post-COVID-19 world, the importance of the Universal Service Guarantee has been heightened even further, with a recent survey reported by the NBN Co on 26 May 2020 finding that 83% of workers-from-home indicated that access to fast internet was a *sine qua non* condition to their ability to complete their work.³

¹ <https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/part-b-reliability-services-consumer-safeguards-review-final-report>

² Submission 17, WA Small Business Development Corporation, Inquiry into the business case for the NBN and the experiences of small businesses

³ <https://www.nbnco.com.au/corporate-information/media-centre/media-statements/behavioural-change-survey>

Education and Digital Inclusion

COVID-19 has shown the importance of connectivity and technology infrastructure for both employees and businesses working from home and going online, but also for schooling and education when schools across Australia were forced to move to remote learning. Remote learning for a state like WA shows the benefits that technology can deliver to citizens but it also demonstrated in some cases the shortfalls where some lower socio-economic families and students struggled with internet access and support even where schools provided the device.

The AIIA believes a digital backbone and post-COVID changes will lead to a regionalisation of business and the workforce but it is important that those less well-off are not left behind. We believe this digital literacy and jobs of the future needs to be embedded in our schools and curriculum. In our White Paper we discuss how the schools' curriculum needs to be updated to include digital skills to be seen as core subjects the same as maths, English and science. We need to ensure that our school leavers have a basic digital literacy but also for some this drives a passion and keen interest to achieve further education and training through VET or tertiary education. Historically we don't have enough ICT graduates come from Australian institutions to meet the market demand so more needs to be done to pull people into and through the training system to meet our industry and economic requirements (especially as our international borders are shut and we need to get our young people and school leavers into training with job opportunities reduced in the current environment).

Digital Government services: privacy-by-design

As government services become increasingly digitised, in part due to citizen demands for seamless online services, the consultation paper rightly points out that trust and transparency in the technology are required to gain citizen trust. Privacy-by-design must become a core requirement when governments build digital services. The COVIDSafe app is a good example of privacy by-design principles, where it was transparent and open and baked into the up-front design. This sense of trust and transparent approach have resulted in the citizen largely supporting the app, with over 7 million downloads. This case study can serve as a lesson for government generally in respect of privacy principles and the importance that the incorporation of privacy-by-design principles must not just be done, but must be seen to be done.

Skills

There is a potential blind-spot within the 'Skills' pillar as it stands in the consultation draft, as there is little reference to schooling and education. The AIIA believes that the surest path to a broadening of digital skills among the WA population is to situate digital skills training at the 'gateway' to primary skills acquisition; that is, education and training providers. Digital skills and STEM need to be given their due weight at the curriculum level, given that digital literacy is equally crucial to traditional pillars such as literacy and numeracy in the jobs market of the future.

Another waypoint for the effective implementation of the Skills pillar is the acceleration and debureaucratisation of up-skilling at the industry level. The deficiencies in the digital skills base was apparent prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the importation of skilled workers from across borders necessary in fields such as coding, development and analytics. With the realities of border closures, increased reliance upon online service delivery and the rampant regionalisation effect observed on the back of the pandemic, the deficit in digital skills domestically has been made even more apparent. The digital skills base can be invigorated domestically by reducing barriers to training, upskilling and reskilling.

As proposed in AIIA's recently-released Covid-19 White Paper, *Building Australia's Digital Future in a Post-COVID World*,⁴ the mandatory Certificate IV in Training And Assessment course duration should be cut to 6 weeks rather than the current average duration of just under a year. This dovetails with the draft's reference to a 'train-the-trainer' model of digital skills training.

⁴ https://aiia.com.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/103562/Building-Australias-Digital-Future-in-a-Post-COVID-World-AIIA-Whitepaper-2020.pdf

Across key technical skill sets, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data, Cloud, Automation and Internet of Things (IoT), short, industry-based training situated in the work setting, so as to incentivise and accommodate existing professionals within digital-adjacent industries, can be staged up rapidly and efficiently. Industry can work together with external education providers to effect 'digital apprenticeships' whereby partnerships between government, educational institutions and industry generate a consistent 'skills passport'. Rather than take time out of the workforce at significant personal expense, if key employees are offered rapid skills training in-situ within their existing industry context, this will create ripe ground for a flow-on effect of training within teams and management structures. Although greater clarity is required around the concept of microcredentials or 'short form credentials' and their attendant standards, as advised by Emeritus Professor Beverley Oliver as part of the AQF review in 2019,⁵ the domestic market has the capacity to crystallise and invest in this concept on a local level. This should be done in congruity with a nationally consistent 'skills passport' around which employers, governments and education providers can meaningfully collaborate.

It is important that the WA government note, and indeed leverage, recent reforms to the ICT sector within VET in this regard. Due weight should also be given to the recent response of the WA Government to the Review of Skills, Training and Workforce Development released in July 2020.⁶ The *Skills Ready* recovery package and the *Lower Fees, Local Skills* initiative are key levers available to the government as a starting point for digital inclusion funding pathways. The Review specifically identified a skills passport as a requirement for the post-COVID jobs market on the back of strong industry feedback.

The Review recommended leadership from, and collaboration between the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and the Commonwealth Government. The Review further recommended that the government ramp up the online capability of the training sector and invest in the application of new technologies to simulated work and training environments. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the National Skills Commission, and the Australian Qualifications Framework, currently play host to a 'plethora' of websites which according to the Productivity Commission risk becoming a 'burgeoning number of websites to assist people....carries with it the risk of a confusing maze of information'.⁷ If a digital passport is to be implemented, the AIIA believes its inception should take place within the context of a rationalisation and streamlining of resources and tools available to jobseekers and workers as part of government offerings.

Digital Skills for Older Workers – Existing Initiatives

Finally, the AIIA wishes to note that the Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers Program by which workers aged 45-70 at risk of long-term unemployment can access up to \$2,200 and the Be Connected Initiative are federal initiatives with which the WA Government could cooperate and integrate into a Digital Passport model. In Western Australia, the Skills Checkpoint is operated by The BUSY Group Ltd (trading as Busy at Work) whereas the Be Connected initiative has 298 network partners in Western Australia across social clubs, elderly advocates, indigenous community groups and government service providers, including in regional and remote areas.

The AIIA would welcome further opportunities to engage on this blueprint. Should you have any enquiries about the content of this submission, please contact policy@aiaa.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Ron Gauci
CEO, AIIA



Sharon Brown
AIIA WA Chair

⁵ https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/aqf_review_2019_0.pdf, p. 148

⁶ <https://www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/uploads/dtwd-gov-response-review-july2020.pdf>

⁷ Productivity Commission, *Shifting the Dial: 5 Year Productivity Review*, Report No. 84, p 116