



Building Australia's digital future

ACS 2022 federal election platform

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ACS, Australia's association of ICT professionals, is pleased to present our digital economy platform ahead of the 2022 federal election.

As the global pandemic that has gripped the nation and the world for the last two years has highlighted, Australia has a greater need than ever to build up its digital infrastructure. Digital transformation, remote work, e-commerce, security and privacy have become critical elements of a modern economy.

To ensure Australia's place in the global ecosystem, we need to ensure that we have the professional skills and infrastructure in place to build on the economy's strengths, with the objective of making the nation a digital leader by the end of the decade.

Last year, ACS members and the public were surveyed on key technology policy priorities that would advance the national interest. This included identifying the digital opportunities for our nation, and the blockers inhibiting Australia from achieving its potential.

A clear message from the community was the need to boost the size of the ICT workforce to address the many skill shortages in the economy. One of the most effective approaches to address this problem is to champion diversity in the ICT workforce, particularly around gender balance, with ACS Australia's Digital Pulse report consistently finding that women are under represented in the sector.

Discussions also highlighted the coming explosion in data and digital services that will redefine our society, and that is why we propose programs to boost the skills of ICT teachers, the public sector, and the broader workforce.

More immediately, the nation needs to boost its cyber security defences as well as dealing with the issue of online fraud and scams that are costing Australians millions of dollars each year.

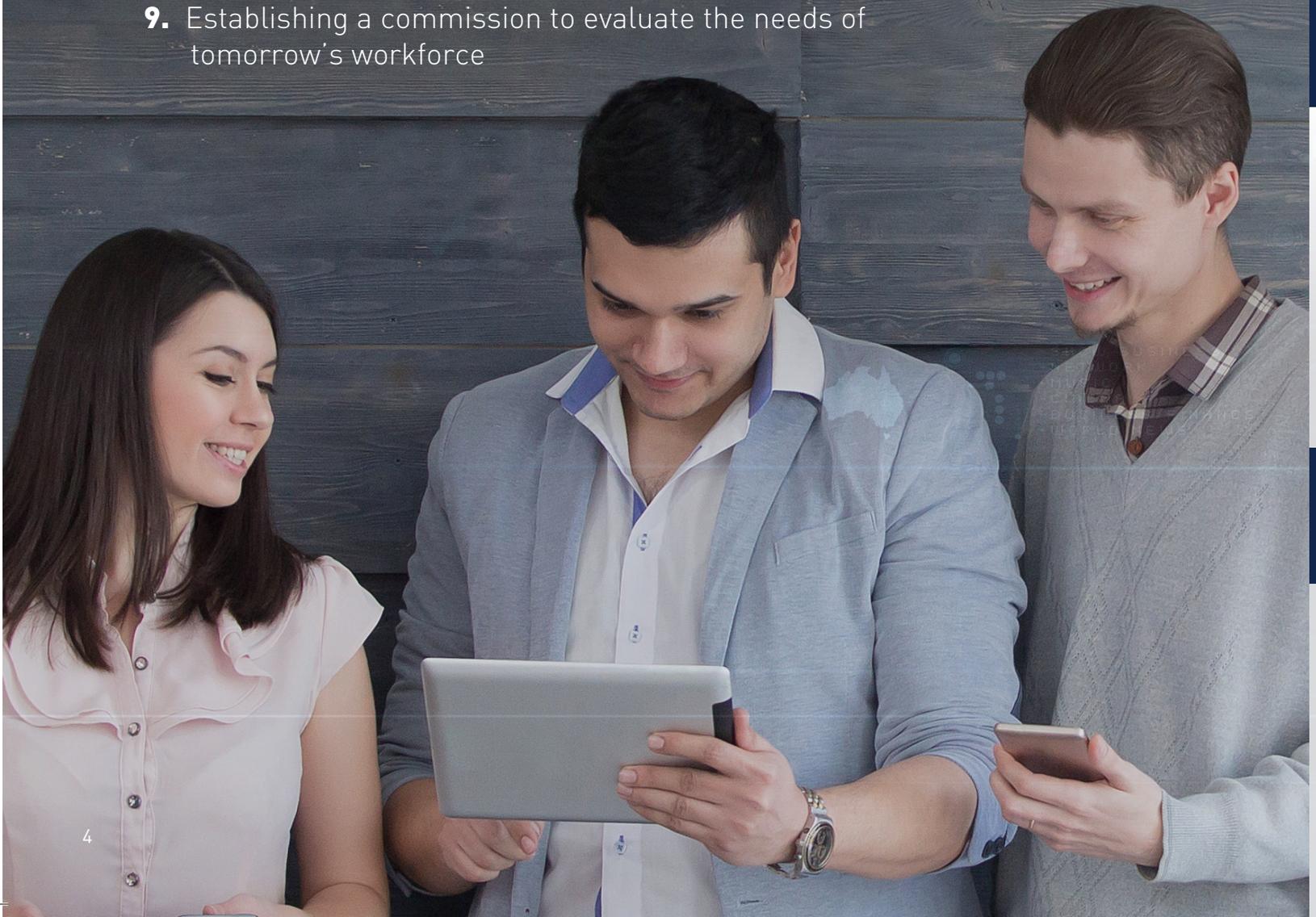
Australia cannot be complacent in face of these changes. The nation has been sliding in many economic measures, including the technical skills of our workforce, the education rankings of our students and the complexity of the Australian economy. The measures laid out here seek to address some of these structural issues facing the economy.

Technology will be front and centre as we transition to the economies of the future. We urge all Australia's political parties to adopt our proposals to ensure the nation will lead the world in the years to come.

Dr Nick Tate FACS
ACS President

Key policies

1. Boosting the technology profession's diversity and inclusion
2. Encouraging Digital Technologies education in schools
3. Improving the workforce's digital skills
4. Strengthening the National Cyber Security Strategy
5. Cracking down on spam and scams
6. Building Australia's regional digital economy
7. Establishing a Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology
8. Creating a Cabinet-level Digital Economy portfolio
9. Establishing a commission to evaluate the needs of tomorrow's workforce



1

Boosting the technology profession's diversity and inclusion

\$500m for a trainee program aimed at women and groups not well represented in the IT sector. The program would provide employees a subsidy of \$20,000 for 5,000 places a year over five years.

The 2021 ACS Australia's Digital Pulse report showed boosting female participation in the Australian tech sector could see 5,000 highly skilled jobs created each year for the next 20 years.

Modelling for the report found increasing the technology workforce's gender diversity would also grow Australia's economy by \$1.8 billion each year on average over the next 20 years. This amounts to an \$11 billion opportunity for Australia's economy.

While the opportunity is great, only 29% of workers in the IT sector are female, and addressing the lack of gender diversity is a complex issue far beyond any one policy proposal. Broad measures such as guaranteeing respect for women and protecting them from workplace discrimination and harassment also need to be implemented to address the underlying causes.

2

Encouraging Digital Technologies education in schools

A \$100m program to boost the resources and support for school teachers to implement the Australian Curriculum Digital Technologies framework.

Australia's chronic technology workforce shortages are hampering the nation's ability to become a global digital leader by 2030. ACS calls on the major parties to boost the resources available to teachers delivering technology-related content, especially the new Digital Technologies Curriculum.

ACS' 2020-21 Computer Education in Australian Schools survey found that 75% or more of primary school teachers had no prior experience or training to teach the Digital Technologies Curriculum. Those teachers are struggling and need help.

For our children to meet the needs of a technology driven society, ACS urges all parties to boost IT education resources and support to students and teachers with this program as a starting point.

3

Improving the workforce's digital skills

Up to \$10,000 per employee tax credit program for businesses providing staff vocational technical training, particularly in high-demand areas such as artificial intelligence and cyber security.

Australia's economy is rapidly evolving, and technology touches all industries. For Australian business and workers to compete in the global digital economy, it is essential the workforce have skills appropriate to the modern workplace.

To achieve this, ACS proposes the next federal government implement a tax credit program supporting businesses providing training for staff in key technology fields.



Strengthening the National Cyber Security Strategy

To protect Australian cyber infrastructure from foreign and domestic threats, mandate Australian government agencies and suppliers to be compliant with the Essential Eight Maturity Level 2.

The recent wave of ransomware attacks and security compromises has illustrated the importance of secure networks. Given the critical role technology plays in the operation of governments, it is vital agencies and their suppliers and contractors have the highest level of security.

ACS proposes the incoming federal government mandate a minimum cyber security standard for all public agencies and their partners.



Cracking down on spam and scams

A \$100m program to eliminate online scams and text messages coupled with stronger requirements for telecommunications operators.

Scam messages have become the bane of Australian households. ACS proposes a \$100m effort to reduce the volume of SMS, phone and email-based scams by boosting enforcement, tightening controls on scammer's money flows and compelling telcos to take stronger action to block calls from providers known to be hosting scam operators.



Building Australia's regional digital economy

A \$500m dollar program to support regional councils and local groups to provide hubs aimed at improving the digital literacy of their communities and local businesses.

Digital technologies are essential to all aspects of Australia's economy and the regions cannot be left out. Agriculture, mining and logistics are as dependent upon modern technologies as any other sector, while regional communities need access to the internet and IT services to attract business and workers.

ACS proposes a network of regional hubs providing advice and support on digital technologies to communities and businesses across Australia.

Along with the program ACS advocates, governments need to ensure all Australians have access to reliable and fast internet connectivity to enable their communities to compete in the modern, global digital economy.



Establishing a Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology

Create a Commonwealth Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology within the Department of Parliamentary Services to provide MPs and Senators with advice and guidance upon science and technology matters.

Based on the Westminster Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the independent office would provide impartial advice on technology and scientific issues to both houses and all members of parliament.

The Office would consult with industry and provide guidance to members and the government on current issues, assist in the drafting of bills governing technology matters and raise the digital literacy of the Parliament.



Creating a Cabinet-level Digital Economy portfolio

ACS calls on the next Federal Government to establish a Cabinet-level Digital Economy portfolio to streamline and co-ordinate legislation and regulation.

Australia's current technology regulations and legislation are fragmented and often contradictory, with laws being enacted with little consideration for consistency or long-term outcomes.

Given the importance of technology to modern Australia, ACS proposes a Cabinet-level digital economy ministry to coordinate agencies and portfolios covering the ICT sector. This will ensure legislation is better considered before being submitted to Parliament and regulation is consistently applied across sectors.



Establishing a commission to evaluate the needs of tomorrow's workforce

ACS proposes an Australia 2040 Commission to evaluate the effects of technological change on the workplace, educational needs and the demands of future society.

The National Skills Commission is carrying out an important role in monitoring the immediate skills needs for the economy. However, a longer-term horizon needs to be considered to evaluate the needs of Australian society over the next three decades as technologies such as quantum computing and artificial intelligence become commonplace.

Among the tasks for the new or expanded commission would be to develop a technology skills shortage forecasting model to better identify and target initiatives to address future demand.



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About the Australian Computer Society

ACS is the peak body representing Australia's IT professionals, with more than 43,000 members in every technology profession across all states and territories. For more than 50 years we have helped IT professionals progress their careers and assisted in the development of a digital Australia.

Contact us

General enquiries

E: info@acs.org.au
T: +61 (0)2 9299 3666

