

Federal Budget Skills Package fails to lift Australia's digital potential, says AIIA

Sydney, Australia – 4 April 2019 -- The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) welcomes the Skills Package of \$525.3 million announced in Tuesday night's Federal Budget, especially the \$15.6 million in capital funding over four years from 2019-20 to further improve the quality of the Vocational Education and Training (VET).

However, the AIIA is concerned it doesn't go far enough on two critical priorities for driving Australia's future economic growth: digital skills, and more women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

In its pre-budget submission to Government, the AIIA identified the development and supply of digital skills as a key priority for Australia's future economic growth. Today, the AIIA commends the injection of Skills Package funding but says the outcomes must be more clearly focused on identifying and developing digital skills.

"The proposed \$20.1 million investment in emerging skills as part of the Jobs and Education Data Infrastructure Project is a solid start, but will do little to foster the calibre and volume of digital skills required to meet current demand in data analytics, machine learning, cybersecurity, robotics to support Australia's digital economy," says Ron Gauci, CEO, AIIA.

"It is also disappointing to see such a relatively low level of investment in addressing the persistent gender imbalance in STEM. A mere \$3.4 million over four years to encourage more women into STEM education and careers is a drop in the ocean of possibility," he says.

The peak member body for the ICT industry says active collaboration between industry organisations, government and research institutes is key to realising the economic potential of the fourth industrial revolution for everyday Australians. Therefore, the success of the soon to be established National Skills Commission, Skills Organisation and National Career's Institute in fostering digital skills and careers will depend on cross sector collaboration.

"Our pre-budget submission to Government highlighted the urgency of addressing Australia's significant digital skills gap. If we are to keep pace with other developed economies, we must up-skill and cross-skill our workforce as an absolute priority, and work together to achieve clearly articulated shared outcomes," said Mr Gauci.

"AIIA members anticipate working with the Government to develop a digital curriculum for its proposed \$67.5 million over five years trial of 10 national, school based, VET training hubs aiming to provide school leavers with the digital skills required by local industry," he added.

AIIA members look forward to viewing the opposition's policies on fostering digital skills in Australia.

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About AIIA

The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) is Australia's peak representative body and advocacy group for those in the digital ecosystem. Since 1978 AIIA has pursued activities to stimulate and grow the digital ecosystem, to create a favorable business environment for 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.

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