Submission No 68

INQUIRY INTO STUDENT PATHWAYS TO IN-DEMAND INDUSTRIES

Organisation: Swinburne University of Technology

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Swinburne University of Technology

Response to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries

Swinburne University of Technology welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Student Pathways to In-Demand Industries. The Victorian Parliament is investigating how students can be better supported with advice and pathways for jobs in in-demand industries through TAFE and other vocational routes.

As a multi-sector, technology focused university, Swinburne is commitment to innovation, industry engagement, and lifelong learning. Swinburne advocates for a transformative approach to education pathways that better align with the evolving needs of students, employers, and the broader economy.

This submission will articulate the ways in which Swinburne supports student pathways to participate in TAFE and Higher Education, and how we are responsive to jobs of the future.

We have a series of recommendations for the Committee to consider and would welcome the opportunity to host the Committee on Swinburne's campus to tour our programs and speak to staff and students about their experiences.

Swinburne is breaking ground in new technology and industry collaboration

As a leading institution in industry engagement and the delivery of cutting-edge technology solutions across both large enterprises and SMEs, Swinburne has cultivated a robust ecosystem of placement opportunities for students across a diverse range of industrial sectors to ensure future-readiness.

Our premier industry partners support in-industry Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs—including Professional Placements, Professional Internships, Masters Internships, and Law Accreditation Placements—spanning sectors such as manufacturing, healthcare, government, finance, engineering, and entertainment.

Notable collaborators include Bosch, Nissan Casting, CSL, Wurth Australia, the Department of Defence, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Pitcher Partners, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Trajan Scientific, Cablex, Carlton & United Breweries (CUB), and The Walt Disney Company. New WIL programs are constantly being added to support pathways for students in emerging fields.

In addition, Swinburne's industry co-location initiatives have enabled strategic partnerships with organisations such as KordaMentha[1]. Through this initiative, students gain paid, hands-on experience in anti-money laundering while developing advanced skills within Swinburne's state-of-the-art Financial Crime Lab, located at the Hawthorn campus.

Swinburne also led government-funded initiatives such as the Advanced Manufacturing Industry 4.0 Hub, supported by the Victorian Government. These programs have catalysed multi-million-dollar technology investments and generated significant employment opportunities for students and emerging professionals in the manufacturing sector. Outcomes from these initiatives have been formally submitted to the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) as part of its Evaluation Report.

But for our strong industry connection to mean something to the State's future prosperity, we need to ensure we are offering young people opportunities as early as possible to navigate their way through

[1] https://www.swinburne.edu.au/news/2025/03/Swinburne-and-KordaMentha-launch-state-of-the-art-facility-to-combat-financial-crime/

tertiary education – sometimes beginning this process in high school.

A brief introduction to our pathway programs

Swinburne already offers the following support for our enrolled students to help them navigate their study and job pathways through

- Swinburne's State Government Funded Skills and Jobs Centres.
- Job and Career Readiness Program. The Job Readiness Program is designed to equip students with the essential skills and confidence needed to navigate the job market successfully. In 2024, 941 VET students attended, 65 workshops delivered across three campuses and online.
- Job Readiness Mentoring Pilot Program. The mentoring program engaged 98 students across multiple courses, including:
    - Building Design (60 students, face-to-face)
    - Building & Construction (8 students, face-to-face)
    - Accounting & Bookkeeping (30 students, online)
    - Industry and alumni mentors (15) from diverse roles supported students with career insights and job readiness guidance.
    - 3-hour sessions featuring panel discussions, speed mentoring in small groups, workshops from industry associations
    - Follow-up Job Readiness workshops (job applications and LinkedIn) after mentoring sessions
- Active engagement with Jobs and Skills Councils, hosting visits on campus and contributing to their consultations

Swinburne also actively works with a broad range of secondary schools to deliver a variety of programs targeted towards helping students to find a pathway and successful career. We are one of the two metropolitan TAFE providers delivering the Department of Education's Vocational Taster Experiences pilot which aims to build awareness and uptake in studies for in-demand industries in Building and Constructions, the Care Economy and Clean Energy. Swinburne's pilot project will reach 2,250 year 9 and 10 students in 2025 and 2026.

Swinburne's School teams run targeted on campus and in school workshops to build TAFE aspiration, careers education and pathway planning all aimed to empower students to make informed choices in their final years of school and into post school education and careers. This year we have already engaged with over 1000 year 9-12 students from equity backgrounds with targeted programs and, more broadly, we have reached nearly 50,000 year 9-12 students via workshops, presentations, careers talks and visits to our three campuses to boost aspiration to post school tertiary studies.

Additionally, we are connecting students with the space technology future industry, which by 2040 will be worth $1 trillion. In recognition of stimulating interest in this future industry and STEM career pathways, Swinburne offers the Youth Space Innovation Challenge to all Victorian school students as a holiday program. The Challenge is a three-day immersion into space, where students embark on an unforgettable science experience, learning and working with astronomers and space scientists on challenge-based problems.

Our recommendations

The challenge for the State Government is to invest in the jobs of the future – through industry grants and innovations at universities. This means taking risks in new ventures. Swinburne is constantly reimaging the skills needed for future workforces and investing in research in groundbreaking areas of science.

Rethinking the ATAR: A Barrier to Equity and Innovation

We believe that the current reliance on the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) as the primary mechanism for university entry is outdated and increasingly misaligned with the skills and capabilities required in today's dynamic workforce. Instead, we propose a more inclusive, flexible, and responsive model of education—one that embraces stackable credentials, integrates vocational and higher education, and supports learners throughout their lives.

The ATAR system, while originally designed to provide a standardized measure of academic achievement, has become a narrow and often inequitable gatekeeper to higher education. It fails to capture the diverse talents, experiences, and aspirations of students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, including regional, Indigenous, and low-SES communities.

Moreover, the ATAR does not reflect the competencies most valued by employers—such as problem-solving, adaptability, communication, and digital literacy—nor does it accommodate the varied learning journeys that students increasingly undertake. In a world where career paths are non-linear and industries are rapidly evolving, a single score at the end of secondary school is an insufficient predictor of future success.

Swinburne supports the phasing out of the ATAR as the dominant entry mechanism to university. In its place, we advocate for a more holistic and flexible admissions framework that recognizes a broader range of achievements, including vocational education and training (VET) qualifications, micro credentials, work experience, and portfolio-based assessments.

Recommendation
Victoria should lead the nation in new post-secondary education assessment for entry at university or TAFE. Swinburne would welcome the opportunity to design this new assessment in conjunction with the State Government and relevant authorities.

Strengthening Industry Partnerships and Work-Integrated Learning

A key pillar of Swinburne's approach is our deep engagement with industry. We believe that education should not occur in isolation from the world of work. Through partnerships with employers, industry bodies, and government, we co-create learning experiences that are authentic, applied, and future focused.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is embedded across our programs, providing students with opportunities to gain real-world experience, develop professional networks, and apply their knowledge in practical settings. This includes internships, placements, industry projects, and apprenticeships.

By aligning education with industry needs, we can ensure that graduates are not only job-ready but also equipped to drive innovation and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Recommendation
Just as Victoria has procurement requirements as a purchaser (such as Social Procurement Guidelines and the Fair Jobs Code etc), Swinburne recommends that any funding to industry should also require that a certain number of student placements are taken on per year, attached to a university or TAFE qualification.

State Government Funding for universities is critical

While TAFEs have been the obvious focus of the Victorian Government over the last 10 years, universities are critical in imagining the jobs of the future and provide further pathways for students not inclined to vocational learning. However, State Government partnership and funding is key to realising this whole of sector vision and to deliver on the goals of all students.

The Victorian Higher Education State Investment Fund (VHESIF) was developed in response to the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Victorian universities. $350 million was allocated to Victorian Universities to fund capital works, applied research and research infrastructure focused on boosting Victoria's productivity and the economy as the state recovers from the impacts of COVID-19. The fund was designed to support Victorian higher education, which was hit hard by the pandemic. In total, 56 projects were funded. Unfortunately, since this fund, no additional funding specific to universities has been allocated.

Often universities are required to bid for grant funding alongside businesses and industry, and often the guidelines stipulate that universities must be the junior party to grant applications, with industry as lead[2].

Recommendation
Modify existing industry and innovation fund guidelines to enable universities to apply as the major party to stimulate research and development for future industries. Commonly, universities have industry partners in development but need additional support to get ideas and projects ready for commercialisation.
Create a university specific fund to support job creation through development of new technologies, in partnership with industry and sovereign need.

A step beyond traditional learning – shaping families' experiences of higher education

The Children's University Swinburne is an early intervention program that celebrates and encourages student-led learning beyond the classroom. Swinburne partners with Learning Destinations and Victorian schools to offer a diverse range of fun, high-quality educational experiences to our 7 to 18-year-old members to engage with and show them what they can achieve through further and tertiary education. All learning experiences are linked to careers to build student agency and aspiration and imbed a lifelong learning mindset. In 2024, with 21 school partners our members logged more than 19,000 hours of extra-curricular learning.

We now have 35 school partners, and we have a waitlist of schools, pending further funding. Schools see an increase in learning confidence, improvement in engagement, attendance and academic achievement in students.

All Children's University Swinburne members are issued a Passport in which students collect stamps from different Learning Destinations they have visited and record their learning or volunteering activities. Achievements are recorded and milestones celebrated at an annual graduation ceremony. Once members have accumulated a minimum of 30 hours of learning, they will graduate just like grown-ups do. See the recent 9 News story[3].

Swinburne is currently the only university in Victoria offering the Children's University program, and we are always keen to partner with more schools to bring this exciting program to more Victorian children. Our

[2] For example: *Industry Growth Program* (applications to come in via Victorian SMEs and must be industry-led) and *Future Industry Fund* (applicants must be companies operating in Victoria and be investing in new technologies, processes or capabilities)

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lPplclMV51A

current focus is working with low socioeconomic schools and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, where the impact will be the greatest in levelling the educational playing field.

Being able to provide these students and their families with the opportunity to see different careers, discover the diversity of industries, and experience tertiary institutions, we hope to nurture belief in their potential, provide resources and opportunities to imagine their possible future, and offer guidance to help them achieve their goals beyond that of secondary school studies.

Recommendations
The Victorian Government supports and funds the roll out and expansion of Children's University state-wide. Connecting primary and secondary schools in Victoria to universities through catchment zones will ensure that pathways are understood early. It brings parents and teachers into a university setting and builds educational confidence. Swinburne can provide a business case should the State be interested in a further roll-out.

For further information, or to arrange a tour of Swinburne's facilities or to arrange evidence at a hearing of the committee, please contact:

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