Inquiry into innovation and creativity: workforce for the new economy

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Australia is experiencing a period of profound economic and social change occurring at a rate not seen since the industrial revolution. The knowledge economy requires unprecedented economic and labour market agility. It is estimated that 40 per cent of existing jobs are likely to disappear in the next 10–15 years.1 The challenge is to ensure that these are replaced with jobs that emerge through the creation of new and innovative ideas.

Universities Australia’s it Clever: Policy Statement 2016 argued that Australia’s universities are uniquely placed to produce the next generation of innovators and career-ready graduates that will create and fill the jobs of the future. Our universities are the only institutions that link all elements of advanced scholarship, skills creation, research, innovation and development. They are key contributors to Australia’s economic future, providing the building blocks for our transition to a productive, diverse and internationally competitive knowledge economy. Key facts and figures on the Australian university sector are reported in Universities Australia’s Higher Education and Research Facts and Figures (PDF 3.4MB).

The university sector alone cannot drive the innovation needed to secure Australia’s future prosperity from research and innovation, and galvanising businesses to become active partners is crucial. Leadership and support from governments at all levels can help provide the necessary catalyst for change.

The Government’s National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA) is a positive step in providing the policy architecture for Australia to evolve into an innovative and creative nation. The current debate on higher education and workforce policy would greatly benefit from an injection of the same longer-term, whole-of-government aspirational thinking that led to, and underpinned, the development of the NISA.

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