Bridging the Digital Divide

Consultation Paper

Digital Accessibility and Inclusion

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Executive Summary

The Future Skills Organisation (FSO) [Initial Workforce Plan (IWP)](link)[1] identified increasing demand for digital skills as one of the five key challenges for the Finance, Technology and Business (FTB) workforce. Also in this plan, FSO identified a gap in digital access and inclusion, particularly for priority groups. The plan did not provide data on this issue, which stakeholders pointed out as a significant oversight in the feedback received on the IWP.

During the development of the second Workforce Plan, consultations — with community groups, FTB businesses and organisations — highlighted that as learning, job applications and recruitment processes increasingly move to digital platforms, some individuals face challenges related to accessibility and inclusion. Inadequate digital access and non-inclusive platforms have the potential to limit the supply pipeline and opportunities for those interested in a career in these sectors.

Digital accessibility and inclusion are increasingly significant as Australia strives to ensure that all citizens have equal access to digital information and services[2]. Digital accessibility ensures that digital products and online tools are accessible and useable for people with disability — ensuring ease in operation, understanding and interaction with digital content and services. Digital inclusion ensures that all individuals and communities have equitable access to and use of information and communication technologies, including affordable internet access, internet-enabled devices, digital literacy training and quality technical support[3].

The digital skills gap is directly impacted by the challenges of digital accessibility and inclusion, as those who lack access to digital technologies or the skills to effectively use them are more likely to be excluded from the benefits of the digital world, such as accessing information, services and economic opportunities. By improving digital accessibility and inclusion, more individuals can develop the necessary digital skills to thrive in Australia's rapidly evolving technological landscape, helping to ensure equal opportunities and full participation in society, while reducing the digital skills gap to promote digital equity[4].

The digital skills gap has recently been addressed in the [Australian Government's White](link)

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[1] Future Skills Organisation (2024) Initial Workforce Plan. Available at: https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan
[2] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) The digital divide, GTFA website. Available at: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/the-digital-divide/
[3] Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2024) What is digital inclusion, ADII website. Available at: https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/what-is-digital-inclusion
[4] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Digital Sisters AI for Good. Available at: goodthingsfoundation.org.au

[Paper](#)[5] and the [National Skills Agreement](#)[6], which state the necessity for digital proficiency in the workforce. Gaps in digital access and inclusion risks exacerbating the digital skills gap against an environment of increasing demand for digitally skilled workers.

The Australian Government, in collaboration with community organisations, has launched initiatives designed to foster digital inclusion. One is the [First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan](#),[7] developed through consultation with First Nations communities to deliver tailored digital literacy resources. Collaboration between government, industry and education is also essential, as seen in [Victoria's Digital Jobs](#) program[8], which offers industry-backed digital skills training and career coaching.

The [Digital Transformation Agency](#)[9] has developed standards to ensure digital services are accessible and inclusive. The [Australian Digital Inclusion Index](#) measures access, affordability and digital ability — informing strategies to deliver connected, accessible services by 2030[10] Other initiatives include the [Digital Sisters: AI for Good program](#)[11], empowering women with digital and AI literacy, and Queensland's push for a digital inclusion plan focused on underserved communities.[12]

The FSO is undertaking a comprehensive needs and gaps analysis of the ICT Training Package in response to [IWP](#) findings[13]. Industry and learners reported gaps between taught skills and entry-level ICT needs, with declining VET completions. The analysis will examine alignment with current and emerging pathways, job roles and skills — including cybersecurity and emerging technologies. Key stakeholders, including those in digital accessibility and inclusion, will contribute. The FSO is also exploring uplifting digital capability in the Business and Finance sectors through accredited training and the [Australian Digital Capability Framework](#)[14].

The FSO is responding to the need for updated telecommunications training by revising the ICT30519 Certificate III in Telecommunications Technology. They are also proposing a more in-depth analysis of the ICT TP Telecommunications Technology to align with current industry standards and address the evolving requirements of the telecommunications

[5] https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report

[6] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/national-skills-agreement:~:text%3DThe%20National%20Skills%20Agreement%20(the%2Cwill%20commence%201%20January%202024

[7] https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/economic-development/first-nations-digital-inclusion-plan

[8] https://djsir.vic.gov.au/digital-jobs

[9] https://www.dta.gov.au/

[10] https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/

[11] https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/news/digital-sisters-ai/ :~:text=%E2%80%98Digital%20Sisters%3A%20AI%20for%20Good%E2%80%99%20is%20an%20innovative,purpose%20of%20creating%20a%20more%20digitally%20inclusive%20country

[12] Department of Housing, Local Government, Planning and Public Works (2023) Our Thriving Digital Future: 2023–2026 Action plan, DHLGPP, Queensland Government. Available at: https://www.qld.gov.au/about/how-government-works/strategies-and-initiatives/digital-economy-strategy/action-plan

[13] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan

[14] https://adcf.au/

sector. Telecommunications infrastructure and connectivity in rural and remote regions of Australia is a factor contributing to the digital divide in Australia.[15]

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[15] Infrastructure Australia (2019) Australian Infrastructure Audit: Report on Telecommunications, Infrastructure Australia, Australian Government. Available at: https://www.infrastructureaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Australian%20Infrastructure%20Audit%202019%20-%208.%20Telecommunications.pdf

Introduction: Digital Divide and Its Impact in Australia

Australia faces a notable digital divide, with approximately one in four Australian's experiencing digital exclusion.[16] This exclusion is more pronounced among specific groups, including people with disability, culturally diverse communities, low-income households and residents of rural and remote areas. The digital divide can contribute to existing social and economic inequalities, making it more challenging for some people to access education, employment, healthcare and social services.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)[17] provides a detailed measure of digital inclusion across the nation, tracking improvements and identifying areas that require attention. In 2023, the National Index Score — which considers measures related to access, affordability and digital ability — improved to 73.2, up from 71.1 in 2021 (out of a possible 100), indicating progress in access, affordability and digital ability.[18] Despite these improvements, disparities remain, especially among remote First Nations communities, older Australians and individuals on low incomes.[19]

Case Study: Turbocharging Australia's digital capability

23.6% of Australians were considered digitally excluded in 2023, according to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2023.[20], Ishtar Vi[21], Convenor, Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA)[22] says, "Every worker now needs digital skills. It will increase productivity and enables people to access new career pathways.

"We know that those experiencing digital exclusion, including in relation to their digital capability level, are groups already facing barriers to education and employment: First Nations Australians, those with a disability, living in public housing, who've not completed schooling, and senior Australians."

The ADIA are proposing the adoption of the Australian Digital Capability Framework

[16] Good Things Foundation Australia (15 October 2023) New research shows digital skills are a 'must' not a 'nice to have' [media release], GTFA. Available at: https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/news/media-release-new-research-shows-digital-skills-are-a-must-not-a-nice-to-have/
Note: Digital exclusion refers to the systemic differences in access to and use of digital technologies, particularly the internet, among individuals and communities, arising from a complex interplay of factors including age, socio-economic status, disability, geography, educational attainment, literacy and language and housing circumstances

[17] https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/

[18] Rowland M and West D (18 July 2023) Australian Digital Inclusion Index highlights First Nations digital inclusion gap [media release], Ministers for the Department of Infrastructure, Australian Government. Available at: https://minister.infrastructure.gov.au/rowland/media-release/australian-digital-inclusion-index-highlights-first-nations-digital-inclusion-gap

[19] Treasury (2023), Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance Submission to the Measuring What Matters Consultation, Treasury, Australian Government, accessed. 14 April 2024; Australian Digital Inclusion Index (n.d.) What is digital inclusion, ADII website

[20] https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/digital-inclusion-the-australian-context-in-2023/

[21] https://www.linkedin.com/in/ishtar-vij-427b7443/

[22] https://www.digitalinclusion.org.au/

(ADCF) as Australia's national common language around what it means to be digitally capable to support all Australians to meaningfully access work, learning, and life. [Read the full case study on our website](https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/case-studies/turbocharging-australias-digital-capability)[23].

Digital skills are also contributing to this digital divide with both the Government reform agenda [(Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities | Treasury.gov.au)](https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report)[24] and the [National Skills Agreement](https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/national-skills-agreement)[25] emphasising the need for a digitally skilled population. The FSO's [IWP](https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan)[26] also identified a shortage of digital skills as a critical gap in the finance and business sectors. As the economy increasingly relies on digital technology, workers across all sectors require digital skills to participate fully in the workplace. The [Growing Australia's Digital Workforce report](https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/about-dso)[27] by the Digital Skills Organisation categorised the workforce into three segments: 50% are digitally informed, requiring digital literacy but with some need for specific digital skills; 43% are digitally enabled, relying on digital skills to augment their functional skills; and 7% are digital experts, who require specific digital skills as central functional skills.

This report highlighted the need for digital skills across all levels of the workforce for not just work, but also for learning and life. The lack of accessible and inclusive digital platforms can therefore hinder some workers' ability to keep pace with this change, potentially widening the skills gap and increasing the already high demand for skilled workers.

Factors Affecting Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion is affected by a number of factors:

- Digital Accessibility: Australia has made significant strides in improving web accessibility, particularly through compliance with the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)](https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/)[28] and the [Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-discrimination)[29] However, a broader commitment to digital inclusion is required. Digital accessibility is influenced by:[30]
  - Affordability: High costs of internet services and digital devices make access unaffordable for some Australians.

[23] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/case-studies/turbocharging-australias-digital-capability
[24] https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report
[25] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/national-skills-agreement:~:text%3DThe%20National%20Skills%20Agreement%20(the%2Cwill%20commence%20 1%20January%202024
[26] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan
[27] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/about-dso
[28] https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/
[29] https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/disability-discrimination
[30] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Digital Sisters AI for Good, goodthingsfoundation.org.au

- Infrastructure: Lack of infrastructure in remote and rural areas limits connectivity.
- Teaching and training availability: Lack of teaching and training staff also reduces accessibility. There is a need for ongoing education and training to increase digital accessibility competency among professionals and educators. The establishment of a common foundation of accessibility awareness and understanding across different roles and organisations is crucial for building a digitally inclusive society.[31]
- Digital literacy: A portion of the population lacks the necessary skills to effectively use digital technologies.
- Cultural and language barriers: Non-English speakers and culturally diverse communities face additional obstacles in accessing digital resources.

- Disability: ADII data suggests there is unequal access to digital infrastructure and affordability issues, particularly for Australians with disability.[32] People with disability, including those with low vision, use digital platforms less frequently. They are also more likely to encounter online safety issues, such as cyberbullying, harassment, image-based abuse and technology-facilitated abuse.[33]

- Remote First Nations Communities: Remote First Nations communities are among the most digitally disadvantaged groups in Australia. The digital divide for these communities is pronounced, especially in remote and very remote locations, where access to reliable internet and digital literacy programs is limited. This gap hinders the ability to participate fully in economic, social and civic life.[34]

- Low-Income Households: Reduced likelihood of having access to affordable and reliable internet services and the necessary skills to effectively navigate the digital world. This exclusion can lead to reduced access to essential services, including healthcare, education and social connections.[35] One third of those with a mobile-data only connection are low-income families with school-aged children.[36]

- Impact of COVID-19: The pandemic has accentuated the digital exclusion faced by vulnerable groups like migrants, refugees and people with disability.[37]

- Women: Women are more likely to be digitally excluded and suffer from online

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[31] Lethwaite S, Horton S and Coverdale A (2023) 'Workplace approaches to teaching digital accessibility: establishing a common foundation of awareness and understanding', Frontiers in Computer Science
[32] Thomas, J, Barraket, J, Wilson, C, Ewing, S, MacDonald, T, Tucker, J and Rennie, E (2017) 'Measuring Australia's Digital Divide: The Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2017', RMIT University
[33] Good Things Foundation Australia (n.d.) Digital Sisters AI for Good, goodthingsfoundation.org.au
[34] Rowland M and West D (18 July 2023) Australian Digital Inclusion Index highlights First Nations digital inclusion gap [media release], Ministers for the Department of Infrastructure, Australian Government
[35] Australian Institute of Family Studies (2021) The digital divide in telepractice service delivery, AIFS, Australian Government; Australian Digital Inclusion Index (2024) What is digital inclusion, ADII website
[36] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Digital Sisters AI for Good, goodthingsfoundation.org.au
[37] Ibid

abuse:[38]

- Globally, men are 21% more likely to be online than women.
- The term "digital gender divide" encapsulates the disparity between men and women in terms of access to and participation in digital spaces.
- Australian women, especially those on low incomes, unpaid carers, women with disability, First Nations women and older women, face challenges related to skills, confidence, and affordable internet access.
- Women are underrepresented in the tech workforce.
- Career breaks for family caregiving often result in stalled digital skills development and decreased confidence.

Key Facts and Figures:

- Digital Exclusion: One in four Australians is considered digitally excluded. Since 2014, the rate of digital inclusion for Australians with disability has changed very little.

- Digital Divide: Nearly 40% of Australians lack confidence in keeping up with technology. Within just 3 years, 90% of the Australian workforce is set to require digital skills.

- Impact of COVID-19: The pandemic has accentuated the digital exclusion of migrants and refugees.

Source: Good Things Foundation Australia - Improving lives through digital accessed 20 March 2024

Initiatives

To bridge the digital skills gap, the Australian Government, in collaboration with community organisations, has launched a series of initiatives designed to foster digital inclusion. One initiative is the [Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan](#)[39]. This plan was developed through a consultative process with First Nations communities, ensuring that the program is tailored to meet the unique needs of the community. By considering the specific challenges faced by these communities, the plan aims to deliver more effective and culturally sensitive digital literacy resources.[40]

[The Mapping the Digital Gap](#)[41] project is a four-year research initiative conducted by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision Making and Society, in partnership with Telstra. The project aims to generate a detailed account of digital inclusion across

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[38] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Improving Lives Through Digital, goodthingsfoundation.org.au

[39] https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/economic-development/first-nations-digital-inclusion-plan

[40] Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (2024) Digital Jobs: Building Victoria's digital workforce, DJSIR, Victoria State Government; NSW Government (2024) Skills NSW - Digital skills, Education, NSW Government

[41] https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/case-study-mapping-the-digital-gap-digital-inclusion-in-remote-first-nations-communities/

remote Indigenous communities, track changes in digital inclusion over time, inform the development of local strategies to improve digital capabilities and services and provide evidence to guide policy and program resourcing by government and industry. The data collected will enable comparison with national digital inclusion metrics, helping to measure and track the scale of the digital gap for remote First Nations communities.

With a new Closing the Gap[42] target of equal digital inclusion by 2026, this project seeks to inform the policies and programs needed to help close this critical divide.

Collaboration between the government, industry and educational institutions is essential for addressing the digital skills gap. The Digital Jobs[43] initiative in Victoria is an example of this collaboration. This program offers training in areas of high demand for digital skills, supported by industry-backed courses and career coaching. These collaborations ensure that training programs are not only aligned with current industry needs but also assist participants in making the transition into digital careers.

The Digital Transformation Agency (DTA)[44] has developed the Digital Service Standard to ensure that digital services are accessible and inclusive for all Australians[45]. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII)[46] measures digital inclusion across dimensions of access, affordability and digital ability — highlighting areas for improvement. The government's commitment is further evidenced by strategies to deliver connected, accessible services centred around the needs of people and businesses by 2030, emphasising importance of omni-channel service delivery and compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines standards[47].

The Digital Sisters: AI for Good: Good Things Foundation's[48] innovative program aims to empower women — especially those from migrant and refugee backgrounds — with digital literacy skills using Artificial Intelligence (AI). This initiative explores the intersection between digital and AI literacy, emphasising responsible and ethical use of AI to bridge the digital divide[49].

In Queensland, the Digital Inclusion for Queenslanders Consultation: Good Things Foundation[50] advocates for a formal digital inclusion plan to benefit all equally. The focus

42 https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/
43 https://service.vic.gov.au/find-services/work-and-volunteering/digital-jobs
44 https://www.dta.gov.au/
45 Digital Transformation Agency (n.d.) Help and Advice: Make it accessible, meeting the standards, DTA, Australian Government
46 https://www.digitalinclusionindex.org.au/the-adii/
47 Data and Digital Government Agency (n.d.) Delivering for all people and business, DDGA, Australian Government
48 Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Digital Sisters AI for Good, goodthingsfoundation.org.au
49 Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Improving Lives Through Digital, goodthingsfoundation.org.au
50 Good Things Foundation. (2024). Digital Inclusion for Queenslanders: Consultation and Our Submission. Retrieved from https://www.goodthingsfoundation.org.au/news/digital-inclusion-for-queenslanders-consultation-our-submission/

is on key communities such as low-income families, new migrants and refugees, people with disability, First Nations peoples and women. Recommendations include establishing affordable access measures like Digital Devices & Data Bank[51].

The [Australian Network on Disabilities (AND)][52] has established a task force with the goal of simplifying the process for organisations to purchase accessible and inclusive goods and services. The task force is focused on finding solutions that enhance user experience for people with disability, simplify the purchasing process without extensive input from accessibility experts and improve intuitiveness for both organisations and suppliers. This initiative is crucial for enabling the identification and selection of accessible goods and services, thereby promoting inclusivity.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (ADIA) has released a report titled "[A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse][53] which examines the digital divide in Australia and explores how device donation and reuse can help bridge this gap. The ADIA suggests incentivising the donation of surplus devices from businesses and government, alongside secure data erasure and device refurbishment, as a viable solution. Despite challenges in data security and logistical issues, the potential for device donation is substantial with an estimated 10 million devices eligible for reuse over five years. The report calls for a collective effort to normalise device donation and reuse, emphasising its social and environmental benefits and its role in enhancing digital inclusion[54].

Policies and Guidelines to Support Digital Inclusion and Accessibility

The [Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA)][55] is the key legislation that safeguards people with disability against discrimination, particularly in the context of accessing information and services online[56]. This Act promotes equal opportunity and access, making it unlawful to treat people with disability less favourably than others in various areas of public life, including employment, education and the provision of goods and services. The DDA is enforced by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which also provides a platform for individuals to seek redress in cases of discrimination[57].

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[51] Good Things Foundation Australia (2022) Improving Lives Through Digital, goodthingsfoundation.org.au

[52] https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au

[53] Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance (2024), A Digital Inclusion Approach to Device Donation and Reuse, ADIA

[54] Ibid

[55] https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2004A04426/2018-04-12/text

[56] Australian Human Rights Commission (2014) Disability Discrimination, AHRC, Australian Government; Australian National University (n.d.) Disability legislation (Disability Discrimination Act of 1992, ANU

[57] Ibid

In alignment with the principles of the DDA, the Australian Government has endorsed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG)[58], setting a standard for all government websites to ensure digital accessibility. These guidelines are designed to make web content more accessible to people with disability, including visual, auditory, physical and cognitive impairments. The WCAG provides a framework for creating content that is perceivable, operable, understandable and robust — thereby facilitating access for all users[59].

To assist with compliance, the Digital Service Standard[60] and the Commonwealth Government Style Manual[61] offer comprehensive guidance on adhering to Australian standards and the WCAG[62]. Additionally, the GOLD Design System, along with various state and territory design systems, are developed based on the work of the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) to ensure that design practices are accessible[63]. These resources underscore the importance of digital accessibility as a human right and emphasise the role of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in developing protocols and guidelines that set the international benchmark for digital accessibility[64].

The W3C Accessibility Maturity Model[65] is a framework designed to assess and enhance accessibility maturity across organisations of varying sizes. Emphasising the importance of inclusive practices, it underscores the need to integrate accessibility into the ICT development lifecycle. By doing so, organisations can create inclusive experiences that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of all users, ensuring equitable access and usability across digital platforms and services[66].

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[58] https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/

[59] World Wide Web Consortium (2023) W3C Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 3.0, Web Accessibility Initiative; Digital Transformation Agency (n.d.) The Digital Service Standard, DTA, Australian Government; World Wide Web Consortium (2023) W3C Accessibility Standards Overview, Web Accessibility Initiative

[60] https://www.dta.gov.au/DigitalServiceStandard

[61] https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/

[62] Digital Transformation Agency (2023) The Digital Service Standard V2: Supporting agencies to deliver simple and seamless digital services, DTA. Australian Government

[63] Digital Transformation Agency (n.d.) The Digital Service Standard, DTA, Australian Government

[64] World Wide Web Consortium (2023) W3C Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 3.0, Web Accessibility Initiative

[65] https://www.w3.org/TR/maturity-model/

[66] World Wide Web Consortium (2023) Accessibility Maturity Model, Web Accessibility Initiative, accessed 14 April 2024

FSO Actions to Increase Digital Skills

In direct response to findings and stakeholder feedback from the IWP[67], FSO will undertake a comprehensive needs and gaps analysis of the ICT Training Package. Industry and learners reported gaps between the skills taught in the training package and the skills needed for entry-level ICT occupations, with the VET sector seeing a decline in completions as a result. This training package has traditionally been a key pathway into the workforce and the analysis will examine how well it aligns with current and emerging pathways, job roles and skill profiles — such as cybersecurity and those required to keep pace with emerging technologies. Key users of the ICT Training Package — including RTOs, employers, learners and stakeholders in digital accessibility and inclusion — will be invited to contribute through consultations, workshops, surveys and submissions. The project will run from April to October 2024. Following the conclusion of the needs and gaps analysis, any recommended updates or changes to the training package will form the next steps.

The IWP[68] also highlighted digital skills gaps for workers in the Business and Finance sectors. In response, the FSO is exploring an additional activity to uplift the digital capability of these industries. The goal is to deliver digital skills training for workers in the Finance and Business sectors, utilising accredited qualifications and the Australian Digital Capability Framework[69].

Telecommunications technology plays a pivotal role in facilitating global communication across individuals, businesses and various entities. As this technology landscape evolves with advancements such as 5G and IoT, there is a growing need for reliable network connectivity and infrastructure — particularly in rural and remote areas to avoid digital exclusion. Recognising this demand, the FSO, as part of the outcomes from its IWP[70] and ongoing stakeholder feedback, is updating the ICT30519 Certificate III in Telecommunications Technology (Release 4) to address urgent industry issues.

The FSO is also proposing to conduct a more in depth review the ICT TP Telecommunications Technology qualifications to identify and validate any duplication and gaps, investigate available accredited and non-accredited courses, develop industry-endorsed qualifications, skill sets, and units of competency that encompass future trends and technology and design an educational and career pathway informed by industry insights and needs. These updates ensure that training standards remain aligned with current telecommunications industry requirements, guaranteeing that the qualification remains relevant and effective for industry professionals navigating the evolving telecommunications landscape.

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[67] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan
[68] Ibid
[69] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-and-training/resources/australian-digital-capability-framework
[70] https://www.futureskillsorganisation.com.au/initial-workforce-plan

Conclusion

Digital accessibility and inclusion is a necessity for a digitally skilled workforce and is fundamental for the FTB workforce. The digital divide affects one in four Australians[71], with existing gaps more prevalent for people with disability, culturally diverse communities, low-income households and residents of rural and remote areas. The Australian Government and FSO are working to address the digital skills gap through initiatives like the Indigenous Digital Inclusion Plan and the Digital Jobs initiative.

FSO is undertaking a comprehensive review of the ICT Training Package, Telecommunications Technology qualifications and exploring initiatives to uplift digital capability across FTB sectors. These efforts are essential for ensuring that all Australians can participate fully in a digital economy, thereby fostering economic growth, social inclusion and enhanced civic participation. To reduce the digital divide, continued collaboration between government, industry and educational institutions is needed.

FSO Suggested Future Activity

Digital accessibility and inclusion in Australia affects one in four Australians, particularly impacting people with disabilities, culturally diverse communities, low-income households, and rural residents. Despite improvements in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) score to 73.2 in 2023, there are gaps. The FSO IWP identifies a growing demand for digital skills as a key challenge in FTB sectors. The digital access and inclusion gap, especially for certain groups, could limit the supply of skilled workers in these sectors.

Accordingly, we propose to:

- Include digital inclusion and accessibility as a criteria in the gaps analysis and review of the current ICT, FNS and BSB training packages.
- Support and promote the work of organisations in this space to help to better educate industry and training providers.
- Include digital inclusion and accessibility as a criteria to be included in the FSOs proposed Digital Capability Uplift for Finance and Business Sectors. This proposal aims to deliver digital skills training for workers in these industries, utilising an accredited qualification and the Australian Digital Capability Framework.
- Undertake a comprehensive needs and gaps analysis of the ICT Training Package.
- Revise the ICT30519 Certificate III in Telecommunications Technology to align with industry standards and meet the evolving requirements of the telecommunications

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71 Good Things Foundation Australia (n.d.) Digital Sisters AI for Good, goodthingsfoundation.org.au

sector.

- FSO are proposing to conduct a more in depth review the ICT TP Telecommunications Technology qualifications to identify and validate any duplication and gaps, investigate available accredited and non-accredited courses, develop industry-endorsed qualifications, skill sets, and units of competency that encompass future trends and technology, and design an educational and career pathway informed by industry insights and needs.

What industry can do:

- Leverage emerging technologies to develop more accessible and affordable digital solutions.

- Collaborate with technology companies and service providers to increase access and reduce costs.

- Implement policies that promote digital inclusion and address the needs of vulnerable groups.

- Develop strategies that address digital inclusion, including accessibility, and digital literacy.

- Collaborate with other organisations to leverage resources and expertise in this area.

- Ensure digital platforms and services adhere to accessibility standards and provide assistive

Key Insights

Groups impacted by the digital divide

Age, gender and digital access:

- Men are **21%** more likely to be online than women
- For those over 65, **80%** find it difficult to keep up with tech changes
- In remote communities, **30%** of people have no household internet or phone connection
- **87%** of jobs in Australia now required digital skills

Rural and Remote:

- Even with the rollout of NBN, **only one third of Australia** has mobile connectivity despite regional and remote areas making up **30%** of the Australian population.

Digital Gender Divide:

- Australian women face challenges associated with skills, confidence and affordable internet access. Career breaks for family caregiving often result in stalled digital skills development and decreased confidence.

Digital Literacy:

- **61%** of Australians don't feel confident they can identify misinformation online.
- **44%** of Australians with low levels of education have no media literacy.

Source: Good Things Foundation Australian – Improving lives through digital accessed 20 March 2024. Note: media literacy is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, create, engage with and act on using all forms of communication.