SUBMISSION

Inquiry into the opportunities and impacts arising out of the uptake of artificial intelligence

10 May 2024

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN Universities) is pleased to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) inquiry into the opportunities and impacts for Australia arising out of the uptake of AI.

As Australia's most technologically-focused and innovative institutions, ATN universities prioritise impact, creativity and fostering solutions. We recognise that AI is a transformative tool which can enhance learning, drive innovation in research, and streamline university operations and workflows. Higher education institutions can and should be taking a proactive approach to ensuring students, teachers and researchers know how to use AI technologies effectively to support their own work and research, and to find efficiencies that will give them more choices about how to spend their time.

Beyond the university environment, all Australians will need to be digitally proficient to compete in the job markets of the future. AI-powered innovations have the potential to materially improve Australia's productivity and change the nature of work. ATN universities are dedicated to preparing graduates who can confidently lead and engage in that transition.

However, the use of AI also risks compromising the high academic standards and integrity expected of Australia's higher education institutions if not used responsibly. It is important that institutions prepare students and staff to engage critically when using such tools. They should be encouraged to constantly evaluate whether AI-generated content and AI-enhanced material remains reliable and accurate, and whether it is being used in an appropriate context. As fake news continues to proliferate, and AI tools continue to aggregate content based on quantity rather than quality, there is no substitute for an enquiring mind and an ability to engage with and contest information that is presented. This is one of the key skillsets taught by universities and arguably one that AI cannot, and should not, replace.

The adoption of AI also risks further amplifying discrimination and bias, whether consciously or unconsciously. It is important that those developing such tools actively combat design flaws that would cause or exacerbate discrimination, and that those using them are taught to do so in a societally responsible way. Further, if AI is to be adopted widely in Australia, measures to ensure fair and equitable access are essential. Financial resources should not be a barrier to any student's desire or ability to benefit from and engage with AI. These principles have been recognised and highlighted in the Australian Government's 8 AI Ethics Principles.

ATN Universities recommends:

- **that Australian policymakers, higher education institutions and industry adopt innovative and proactive approaches to integrating AI into education and work, recognising its potential to support learning, research and operations and the need for digitally fluent graduates;**

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- **any approaches to AI incorporate critical thinking and responsible use; and**
- **that fair and equitable access is prioritised to ensure AI does not amplify discrimination.**

By taking a thoughtful and considered approach to the uptake of AI in Australia, we have an opportunity to foster a responsible AI industry. We note there are a number of consultation processes and inquiries currently underway, including the separate House Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training inquiry into the use of generative AI in the Australian education system, the ongoing consultation by the Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources on supporting safe and responsible AI, and the upcoming request for information from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency for education providers to submit institutional action plans to address the risks of generative AI.

Ensuring consistency of approach and reducing duplication will be important in a crowded and regularly changing space. Any guidance frameworks or regulation intended for the higher education sector should be developed in consultation with the sector and should build in flexibility to accommodate the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies. Our universities are trialling and implementing approaches to AI and refining these as lessons are learned and technology improves.

ATN recommends:

- **that the Government ensure any regulation of AI technologies is developed in consultation with the higher education sector; and**
- **any regulatory approaches provide flexibility to accommodate a rapidly changing environment and the need for educational institutions to test and refine a range of approaches to AI.**

ATN universities are committed to remaining at the forefront of technological innovation. We continue to prioritise enabling our students, graduates, educators and researchers to maximise the benefits of new and emerging technologies while recognising and responsibly addressing their risks. We look forward to assisting the Select Committee further as required as it conducts its inquiry.

Further enquiries should be addressed to:
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