

# **WithYouWithMe submission – Productivity Commission Skills and Workforce Development Agreement**

*December 2019*

## Executive summary

This document outlines WithYouWithMe's (WYWM) submission to the Productivity Commission's call for views on the National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review. The document outlines WYWM's views on the direction Australia should be heading to solve many of the challenges which currently exist in the skills industry, and how a closer relationship with industry and tying outcomes to in-demand skills can help drive success.

For more than three years WYWM has been working with some of Australia's largest companies and government departments to help build new talent for in-demand tech careers, most of which had no previous tech experience. Our role in the tech training ecosystem, as well as international experience working in the United State and Canada, has seen us uncover interesting insights on what aptitude and personality characteristics make successful tech talent, and the steps required to identify and upskill an individual.

WYWM will outline four key observations and recommendations as part of this submission, which are:

1. Content of most tech VET courses do not align to the requirements of industry
2. Current IT and tech apprenticeships are suffering from a lack of on the job experience
3. Tech VET courses struggle to attract the quality teaching talent required due to market demand
4. No standardised entry requirements for tech courses, resulting in unsuitable candidates lacking the aptitude to succeed in the industry long term

## About WithYouWithMe

In the military 'with me, with you' is a term used in room to room combat. Before you venture through a doorway, you say 'with me'. Without any further discussion, or even eye contact, someone will come up behind and say 'with you' and together you will go through into whatever danger lies on the other side.

*WithYouWithMe exists because Australian workers are standing at a doorway.*

Back in 2015, WithYouWithMe founder, Tom Moore, set out to fix the nation's problem with veteran unemployment. Tom had both witnessed and lived the struggle of transitioning from service to civilian life. He knew countless veterans, people with highly developed hard and soft skills, in part time work that didn't match their abilities, or who couldn't find work at all. Something in the system was broken.

He took a long hard look at the traditional recruitment model and found it was primarily motivated by speed and a 'hire and fire' mentality. The mandate was clear: find new jobs, move candidates, and fill vacancies as quickly as possible. These rapid decisions were based almost entirely on whether you had performed an exact criteria in a previous role. It left no room for growth, aptitude or human potential.

He took action, designing a workforce technology platform that could reinvent the recruitment model and bring all the disconnected parts of the journey (training, searching, interviewing) together.

WithYouWithMe identifies industries with high growth and job potential, like cyber security and robotics. Regardless of background, candidates are then tested for aptitude, trained for any additional skills needed, and connected with employers actively searching for roles in these industries.

It worked. WithYouWithMe's platform has now facilitated the training and transition of hundreds of veterans into new roles. They come from diverse backgrounds with a variety of former skills, but have all found meaningful, full time employment in technology.

*That's when the team realised this problem and potential was a lot bigger than veterans.*

Technology is rapidly changing what jobs will be on offer in years to come, companies are already making mass redundancies to 'restructure' for the future, and Australia's underemployment rate is climbing. Too many of the so called 'future of work' jobs have been overcomplicated by industry.

At the start of the funnel universities are providing courses to hundreds of thousands of young people in sectors where there are very few job prospects. Students are coming out of four year degrees in \$40,000 debt, and not getting a job in their field for on average, [4.7 years](#).

Instead of training, retraining and redeploying our workforce, we're firing large numbers, pushing up salaries of a few candidates with 'experience' and burying our heads in the sand about an impending skills gap that could cripple our economy.

The system is broken for everyone.

WithYouWithMe is fiercely committed to helping the Australian workforce — those about to enter it, or those already in it — realise its aptitude and skill-up for what's ahead. If we want a 'future of work', it has to start today.

## **WYWM Academy and tech training**

In 2017, WithYouWithMe launched the WYWM Academy – a dedicated training academy focused on upskilling currently serving and ex-serving defence force talent for new in-demand careers.

From the beginning, WYWM Academy has focused on helping industry build job-ready talent for major skills gaps in the Australian workforce. WYWM Academy's focus has always been on building talent, quickly, which can help solve these challenges.

When selecting an industry pathway to focus on, WYWM Academy has three key criteria:

1. Is there a sufficient skills gap in industry to sustain long-term careers for graduates (i.e. does the current demand for talent vastly outstrip the current supply)?
2. Has the skill and entry-level role requirements been overcomplicated by industry?
3. Is it a skill we can build entry-level talent for in less than 150 hours?

All of WYWM Academy courses are delivered online, however key to the program is the student interaction with real instructors who are experts in the field. These instructors split their time between course development, student instructing and guidance, assessment marking and, most importantly, time within WYWM's professional services practice getting regular industry experience. This enables the instructors to provide relevant and up-to-date insights to students – an essential element in a fast-paced tech industry.

In 2017, WYWM Academy launched with what has become our flagship program – Cyber Security.

It has been long reported about the skills gap which currently exists in the cyber industry and the issues organisations face in finding skilled talent. WYWM Academy looked to challenge the traditional pathway models for cyber, which typically involved three-year bachelor's degrees, and replaced it with a WYWM Academy course which can upskill an individual in less than 120 hours.

WYWM was able to achieve this by focusing on two key components:

- Testing potential applicants via WYWM's proprietary testing to identify the individuals who have the aptitude and attitude to succeed in a cyber career
- Focusing on different skills required for entry level cyber analysts, developing individuals suited to analysis, rather than engineers

The WYWM Academy Cyber Security Analyst course has been the Academy's most successful course, graduating more than 500 individuals since launch, with more than 350 currently enrolled.

From this beginning, WYWM Academy has continued to grow and focus on a number of different tech career pathways, including:

- Cyber Security
- Robotic Process Automation
- Data Analytics
- Cloud Computing

Under each of these pathways, WYWM Academy has delivered a number of different courses and modules which upskill individuals for new careers, but also allows them to continue their educational journey and continue to upskill throughout their career.

In 2019 alone, WYWM has had more than 1,500 individuals join the WYWM Academy, with a graduation rate of up to 69 per cent - far higher than the industry averages for online courses. WYWM Academy now has more than 600 hours of content, as well as experiential learning platforms including our cyber range, which encourages a deep experimental learning environment.

In 2019, WYWM Academy was awarded two industry leading certifications:

- All WYWM Academy courses have been accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). This is a leading certification in the United States (where WYWM also operates) and highlights the depth of teaching and learning outcomes offered by the Academy; and
- WYWM Academy’s cyber security courses were accredited by the UK’s GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters) – the UK government’s cyber security arm which has a progressive accreditation process

All of WYWM Academy’s courses have been offered free of charge to current and ex-serving military members across Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada.

In 2018 WYWM Academy also opened its courses up to the general public to access, as well as businesses who are looking to upskill internal talent. While the direct to consumer model at this stage is not a key component of WYWM’s program, the B2B programs have been growing exponentially as companies look to reskill and augment their workforces.

In 2019 WYWM’s CEO Tom Moore was asked to participate in the Digital Technology Skills Organisation Pilot operated by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, offering key guidance on how to develop talent for in-demand skills.

WYWM Academy will continue to build out its course content and pathways, as we look to change the way individuals upskill and companies look to build talent.

## **WithYouWithMe observations and recommendations**

### **How does Australia’s skills and workforce development need to adapt to the changing nature of education and industry?**

From WYWM’s experience in the market, we make the following observations about the state of the industry. These observations are focused specifically on the needs for thriving skills development for tech and IT roles – areas of the economy suffering from the largest skills gaps which require changes from the traditional pathway models.

#### **Content of most VET tech courses do not align to the requirements of industry**

Many of the current VET courses in market do not align to the requirements of organisations to enable the individuals to be effective when they enter into roles.

The nature of many of the emerging tech skills means that industry requirements are constantly changing at a rapid rate. What is relevant and best practice today in the cyber industry can change dramatically with a single major breach.

WYWM believes that there must be changes made to the education frameworks in Australia to better align learning outcomes to the job requirements of industry.

In addition, current certification and accreditation frameworks need to allow more flexibility in course content and enable more rapid changes to content to align to the changing nature of industry. The accreditation program offered by GCHQ is a good example of flexible, practical accreditation – which was the overriding reason why WYWM Academy sought this accreditation.

### **Current IT and tech apprenticeships are suffering from a lack of on the job experience**

In WYWM's experience, one of the key issues which many students studying tech VET courses face is the lack of a formalised apprentice program with the inclusion of mandatory on the job training.

Too many students are entering the workforce after extensive study, often at significant personal expense, without the skills required to be successful in roles. This degrades confidence from the employers in the tech education systems, making it more difficult for future students to succeed.

Most apprenticeship programs across Australia skew heavily towards on the job learning, with classroom learning confined to a few days a week at most. Most tech VET programs are the opposite of this.

WYWM believes that formal work placement tech apprenticeships should be established to allow students to get on the job experience in a risk-free environment, which has been structured to encourage learning outcomes.

Employers should be incentivised to participate in these programs through multi-year rebates. While rebates provided to organisation while an individual is completing studying their apprenticeship are important, what is more critical is that the employers are able to retain that talent long-term and see the value of their investment as they become experienced and highly valuable in the job market.

### **Tech VET courses struggle to attract the quality teaching talent required due to market demand**

One of the biggest issues facing the education of tech talent is the quality of educators and industry experts delivering the course content. Given these individuals are delivering content for industries where there is a large skills gap, these individuals by nature are highly-sought out talent in industry and can often command a far higher salary 'on the tools'.

While there are a number of individuals who are highly passionate about educating future industry leaders, these individuals are few and far between and education providers often struggle to attract the top talent.

WYWM believes that programs must be established where individuals are incentivised to participate in the education industry. This could be achieved via rebates to the education institute, or even the individuals directly.

These programs could work in tandem with programs like that offered by WYWM Academy, where instructors are given the opportunity to rotate into industry roles, keeping their skills relevant and making higher salary packages possible.

### **There is currently no standardised entry requirements for tech courses, resulting in unsuitable candidates lacking the aptitude to succeed in the industry long term**

One of WYWM Academy's key differentiators is the use of WYWM's proprietary testing suite to help identify talent which has been matched to a career in tech. This is largely driven by an individual's ability to learn a new skill and their suitability to the job type they are pursuing.

One of WYWM Academy's major differentiators is that individuals who do not match to careers via our testing are unable to enrol in our courses. We firmly believe that individuals must have the right aptitude to succeed in a career and we're not interested in providing false promises by training individuals who we don't believe will be a success when entering industry. This allows the quality of our graduates and the courses reputation to remain high.

With the explosion of tech training and job opportunities, many individuals are looking at this as a valid career pathway. However, without a standardised entry requirement, many unsuitable individuals are pursuing these careers. They are often supported by unscrupulous providers who are willing to accept payment from an individual, despite the likelihood of that individual being unable to grasp the concepts of the course.

WYWM believes that entry requirements for tech VET courses need to be standardised to ensure we are only attracting suitable candidates and we're not setting individuals up for failure.

## **Conclusion**

WYWM believes that the above actions will greatly improve Australia's ability to respond to the challenges we face in building out a sustainable tech education and skills industry, enabling us to become a global leader in addressing skills gaps and building talent.

Priority must be given to speed of change, with the country unable to afford the luxury of resting on its laurels – this issue needs to be addressed now in order to be successful and avoid the country falling behind.