



# Future-Proof: Protecting Australians Through Education and Skills

Response to the Consultation Paper  
Submitted January 2018

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## Overview

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) is the peak leadership organisation for university libraries in Australia. CAUL members are the University Librarians or equivalent of the 39 institutions that have representation on Universities Australia. University libraries are diverse institutions, which intersect core university business.

CAUL's vision is that society is transformed through the power of research, teaching and learning. University libraries are essential knowledge and information infrastructures that enable student achievement and research excellence. CAUL makes a significant contribution to higher education strategy, policy and outcomes through a commitment to a shared purpose:

**To transform how people experience knowledge – how it can be discovered, used and shared.**

University libraries and library organisations broadly play a leading role in enabling fair, affordable and open access to knowledge. They are also instrumental in building society's capacity for digital dexterity – fluency in the use of digital technology, skills and essential literacies.

Learning and the concept of lifelong learning are central to the mission of all libraries.

We are grateful for this opportunity to provide a response to the Business Council of Australia's (BCA's) policy paper [Future-Proof: Protecting Australians Through Education and Skills](#).

This response will comment broadly on the paper's policy proposal and then specifically focus on the topic of lifelong learning.

In doing so this response makes a series of three recommendations, which are as follows:

1. In order to future-proof Australians through education, the issue of tertiary system policy development must also be addressed.
2. The BCA should adopt a broad definition of lifelong learning which is not limited to the idea of continuous or recurrent education.
3. To create a culture of lifelong learning business needs to actively and systematically promote and support learning among employees. This could be achieved in partnership with education institutions such as libraries.

## CAUL's response

The changing nature of work and preparing Australia's future workforce are critical issues that the education and business communities must grapple with together.

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) is right to point out that Australia's tertiary system needs to be looked at holistically, and that higher education is not a one size fits all solution that will meet the needs of Australia's future workforce.

However, as Julie Hare, Associate Director, Education at KPMG has pointed out Australia's education sector currently faces a policy void<sup>1</sup>. While this presents opportunity for alternative policy ideas it also creates great uncertainty.

How will Australia's policy position be determined? Who has the time and resources to filter out the noise of emerging and existing ideas to ensure that the best are taken forward?

The BCA's policy paper Future-Proof: Protecting Australians Through Education and Skills proposes that Australia needs a tertiary system funding and marketing information institution.

We agree with the merits of this proposal, but we would argue that it can go further and play a role in tertiary system policy similar to [Innovation Science Australia](#).

**We recommend** that in order to future-proof Australians through education, the issue of tertiary system policy development must also be addressed.

## Create a culture of lifelong learning

CAUL supports the idea of lifelong learning as raised in the BCA's paper. In January 2017 The Economist<sup>2</sup> published a special report which looked at how lifelong learning can provide a framework to meet the challenge of technological change and the continuous connection between education and employment that it requires.

The concept of lifelong learning provides common ground between education and employment and it is a concept well understood by libraries and librarians. But use the concept in The Economist and in the BCA's paper strongly emphasises the idea of continuous or recurrent education.

IFLA – the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions have advocated that use of a broader definition for lifelong learning better captures the different forms of education and training from formal, non-formal to informal. They argue that it also helps dissolve boundaries between traditional policy sectors such as education and labour market policy<sup>3</sup>.

A recent survey of lifelong learning in library literature<sup>4</sup> proposes that a definition used by the European Commission is sufficiently broad and specific enough to be useful. It is a definition that goes beyond the idea of simply continuous or recurrent education.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://newsroom.kpmg.com.au/one-size-not-fit-australia-needs-diversity-degree-offerings>, viewed 18/1/2018

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21714169-technological-change-demands-stronger-and-more-continuous-connections-between-education>, viewed 18/1/2018

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/public-libraries/publications/lifelong-learning-report-2004.pdf>, viewed 18/1/2018

<sup>4</sup> [Mahoney, M. H. \(2017\). An Academic Librarian's Search for Meaning: A Survey of Lifelong Learning in Library Literature. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 43\(6\), 540-547.](#)

*“All learning undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills, and competence, within a personal, civic, social, and/or employment-related perspective”* (page 543).

**We recommend that** the BCA should adopt a broad definition of lifelong learning which is not limited to the idea of continuous or recurrent education.

### What role do you think business should play in creating a culture of lifelong learning?

Business needs to play a leading role to foster a culture of lifelong learning among current and future employees. This can be achieved by making learning a priority and establishing partnerships with education institutions to enable flexible and affordable training.

For example libraries play an important role in fostering lifelong learning by teaching information skills, providing access to information and a wide range of support services to independent learners.

These resources are usually open access and publically accessible. The Australian National University library offers an open access course on scholarly communication and publishing<sup>5</sup>. The University of Wollongong library’s MakerSpace<sup>6</sup> offers members of the public the opportunity to volunteer as mentors – advertised as ‘a great way to keep on top of current technologies and safe work practices, plus enhances your workplace skills in communication, teamwork and customer service’.

Partnering with these kinds of institutions could be a starting point for business to promote learning and skill development.

The BCA’s paper clearly identifies that there is scope for businesses in Australia to do more when it comes to skill development by better supporting their employees.

*“Some businesses embrace skill development and support their workers. Others are not as committed, and workers are often expected to source their own professional development, and are not given time or a reduction in responsibilities to undertake the development”* (page 52).

An article in The Economist’s special report<sup>7</sup> suggests that embracing learning as a core skill can promote a culture of lifelong learning. This can be achieved by encouraging curiosity, enabling people to be effective learners, even training them to learn.

This kind of preparation to future-proof Australia against technological change does not depend on government policy or funding.

**We recommend that** to create a culture of lifelong learning business needs to actively and systematically promote and support learning among employees. This could be achieved in partnership with education institutions such as libraries.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://scholarlycommunicationseas.wikispaces.com>, viewed 18/1/2018

<sup>6</sup> <https://uow.libguides.com/uowmakerspace>, viewed 18/1/2018

<sup>7</sup> Cognition switch; the role of employers. (2017, Jan 14). The Economist, 422, 7.