Developing the Tech Workforce: Unlocking the Potential of Earn While You Learn Report

JULY 2025

FUTURE SKILLS ORGANISATION
Finance Technology Business

Future Skills Organisation

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and pay our respects to elders past and present.

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A message from the CEO

Patrick Kidd OBE OAM

Chief Executive Officer
Future Skills Organisation

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present this study of Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models in Australia's digital sector. This report examines pathways that hold enormous potential yet remain significantly underused in addressing our nation's digital skills shortage.

The need for action is clear. Despite the technology sector being one of Australia's fastest-growing industries and a major driver of economic growth, less than 1% of all Australian Apprenticeship commencements are in IT qualifications. This clear gap between industry demand and training participation reveals systemic problems that require immediate and coordinated action.

This report addresses these critical issues head-on. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the current climate, highlights emerging trends, and proposes actionable recommendations to evolve the existing system. Our detailed research identified five linked challenges limiting the growth and sustainability of EWYL initiatives in the digital sector. These range from limited employer awareness to misaligned qualifications and complex system navigation requirements.

This report presents twelve targeted recommendations structured across immediate, medium-term, and long-term priorities. These recommendations recognise both the opportunities for rapid implementation within existing frameworks and the need for substantial structural reform.

Success requires coordinated effort across governments, industry, and the Future Skills Organisation (FSO):

- **FSO** must lead the charge in driving immediate actions, such as defining entry-level pathways, developing industry endorsement frameworks, and coordinating efforts to embed EWYL models within the digital and tech sectors. Additionally, FSO must support the ongoing alignment of qualifications with industry needs.
- **Governments** should take the initiative to strengthen funding mechanisms, reduce system complexities, and support innovative EWYL models. They should also support public awareness campaigns to highlight the benefits of EWYL pathways for employers and learners.
- **Industry** must actively engage in EWYL initiatives, collaborating with FSO and governments to ensure that EWYL outcomes are aligned with real-world requirements and the system is evolving to meet their needs.

The digital economy's continued growth depends fundamentally on our ability to develop scalable, sustainable pathways into technology careers. This report provides the evidence and strategic framework necessary to contribute to that goal.

About this report

FSO's *Developing the Tech Workforce: Unlocking the Potential of Earn While You Learn Report* (this report) examines traineeships and other EWYL initiatives including non-accredited models and degree apprenticeships.

FSO was engaged by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) to review qualifications and non-accredited courses currently delivered as apprenticeships, traineeships, or EWYL initiatives that align with the Digital and Tech Skills Working Group[1] threshold criteria. The objective was to develop recommendation that supported the scalability and sustainability for these models, ensuring they effectively addressed workforce shortages and inclusion challenges.

To do this, FSO conducted a multi-stage project:

- **A Review Report** that reviewed the existing landscape including the use of Information Technology (IT) traineeships and alternative EWYL models.
- **An Interim (Mapping) Report** that mapped the existing system and EWYL case studies against the Digital and Tech Skills Working Group model to identify barriers and opportunities for implementation.
- **A Final Report** (this report) that brings together findings from the previous reports with additional research and stakeholder engagement to develop a series of recommendations that will allow for scalability and sustainability in digital EWYL models.

A mixed methods research and engagement approach has been undertaken to understand the challenges affecting the sustainability and scalability of EWYL models in the digital sector. It has analysed the emerging policy context and how it relates to the report recommendations.

In depth stakeholder engagement provided an understanding of existing models and programs, and insight into opportunities, development and validation of recommendations.

Stakeholder engagement:

24 employer and **training provider** case studies

4 learner case studies

11 stakeholder **interviews**

5 stakeholder **validation sessions**

EWYL Project Technical Committee

1. *Digital and Tech Skills Compact and Working Group Final Report* - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government

Background

Read the *Digital and Tech Skills Working Group Final Report.*

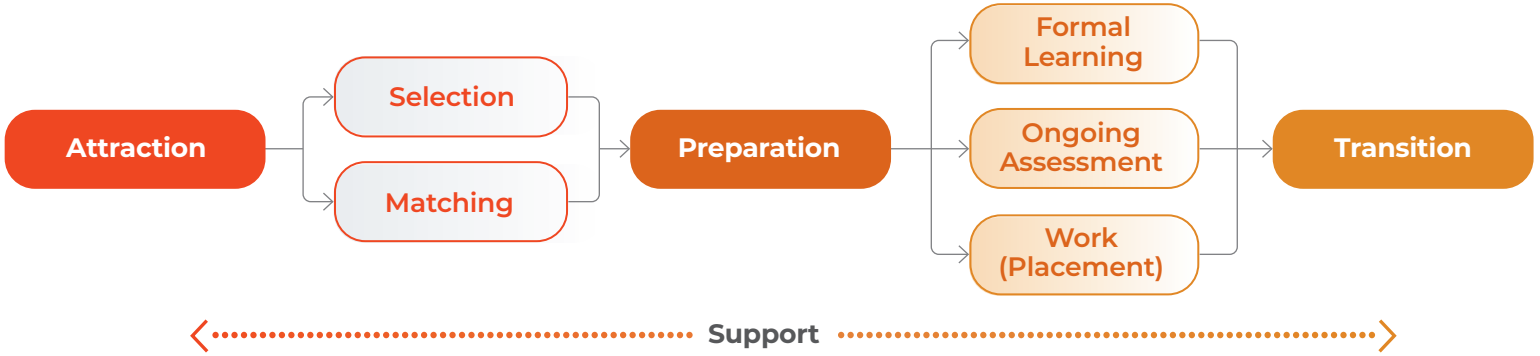
The Digital and Tech Skills Working Group was commissioned in 2022 by the then Minister for Industry and Science, the Hon Ed Husic MP, and the Minister for Skills and Training, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP. The group was tasked with developing a model to enable workers to EWYL in entry-level technology roles, with a specific focus on increasing participation from groups traditionally underrepresented in the digital and tech sectors.

Released in May 2024, the Digital and Tech Skills Working Group's Final Report[2] outlined a preferred EWYL model, including proposed actions for government, training providers, and industry to support implementation and address systemic barriers. The report emphasised a scalable and sustainable EWYL model however did not provide specific implementation strategies.

The preferred EWYL model was designed to attract a broad range of learners and employers, and diligently match and prepare them. It then delivers well-integrated formal learning and work placements, with a focus on effective assessment, support, and transition into further employment.

The model focuses on entry-level roles, promotes diversity, and aims to uplift staff training within the digital sector.

It spans from the initial attraction phase, to preparation, through integrated earning and learning components, and includes transition into ongoing roles. Support is embedded throughout the model.



2. Digital and Tech Skills Compact and Working Group Final Report - Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government

The challenge

The technology sector is one of Australia's fastest-growing industries and is a major driver of economic growth and national productivity, rapidly expanding its influence across the broader economy.[3]

Read FSO's *Workforce Plan 2025 Pathways to impact*

The tech sector needs to actively engage with 'alternative pathways' to build talent pipelines and alleviate skills shortages.

Alternative pathways include Vocational Education and Training (VET) based programs including traineeships, degree apprenticeships, and non-accredited EWYL initiatives. Increased industry engagement with alternative pathways creates opportunity for scalable and sustainable EWYL models. Employer engagement in programs such as the 20% Pledge under the NSW Digital Skills and Workforce Compact[4] demonstrate interest in these pathways.

> "Historically, fewer than 3% of Australian businesses have employed trainees or apprentices, though there remains a large addressable market."
>
> Apprenticeship sector representative

Governments are also focussed on driving demand for alternative pathways into the digital and tech workforce, along with broader work to evolve the Australian Apprenticeships system.

The existing and emerging policy environment could have significant impact on digital EWYL, supporting both use and outcomes.

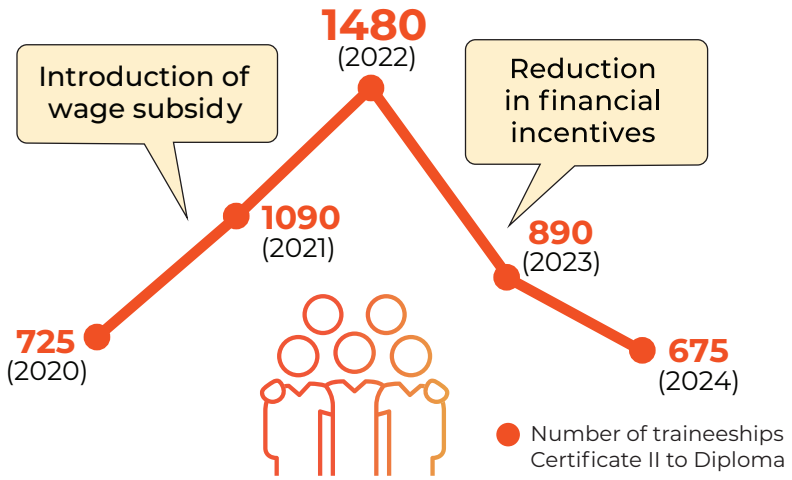
- Australian Skills Guarantee
- Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentives System
- National Skills Agreement
- National and State/Territory Skills Plan
- Higher and Degree Apprenticeships
- Tertiary Harmonisation

To leverage industry and government activity related to EWYL, this report identifies the key issues related to scalable and sustainable EWYL pathways in the digital and tech sector and delivers a plan to drive meaningful change.

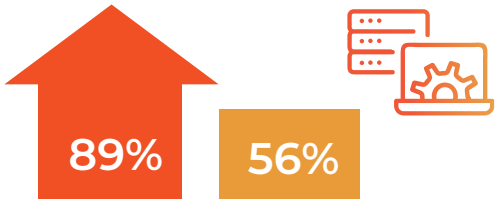
3. FSO's Technology Industry Workforce Plan 2025
4. The NSW Digital Skills & Workforce Compact 2023-30

Insights from data[5]

Trends in IT traineeships are demonstrated through data which show the impact of financial support on commencements, the superior employment outcomes for trainees compared to non-trainees, and the limited engagement of employers with accredited VET.



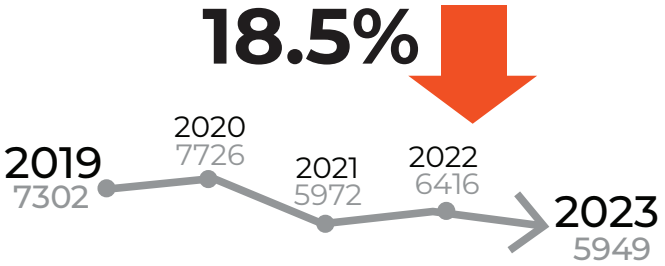
IT traineeship commencements are sensitive to financial support[6].



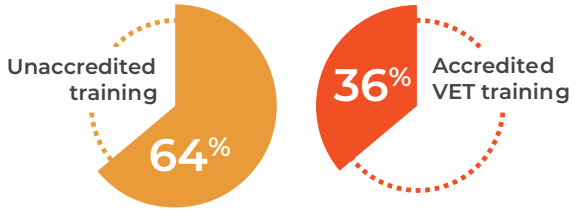
Employment rates for IT trainees are stronger than for non-trainee learners, **demonstrating the value of this EWYL pathway** for workforce development[7].

Information Technology	**675**
Electrotechnology	**12,480**
Carpentry	**9,460**

Uptake of **traineeships in IT is low compared with trade apprenticeships,** where this EWYL model is embedded into workplace hiring practices[8].



VET in schools use of IT qualifications has declined, reducing the number of 'prepared' learners[9].



Employers are training staff, however **unaccredited training is used by more employers** than accredited VET[10]. The review considered traineeships, non-accredited programs and HE apprenticeships.

5. Administrative data on EWYL use is limited to traineeships. For the purpose of this report, this is limited to the Certificate II in Applied Digital Technologies to the Diploma of Information Technology
6. NCVER Apprentices and trainees: December quarter 2024, IT qualification commencements extracted on 19/06/2025
7. VOCSTATS, http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html, 'National Student Outcomes Survey' extracted on 18/03/2025
8. NCVER Apprentices and trainees: December quarter 2024, qualification commencements extracted on 19/06/2025
9. VOCSTATS, http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/vocstats.html, 'VET in schools' extracted on 18/03/2025
10. NCVER 2023, Employers' use and views of the VET system 2023: data tables, NCVER, Adelaide

Addressing key issues

This report identifies five interconnected challenges that limit the growth and long-term success of EWYL initiatives in the digital sector:

1. Increase awareness and engagement

Many employers lack understanding of VET and traineeship pathways, often viewing them as less valuable than university qualifications. This results in low employer participation. To address this challenge, we must increase awareness and engagement.

2. Strengthen funding mechanisms

Fluctuating funding and the reduction of key subsidies have made it harder to promote traineeships and attract employer involvement. To address this challenge, we must strengthen funding mechanisms.

3. Improve qualification attractiveness

Current qualifications often do not match employer needs, leading to a preference for non-accredited or higher education solutions. Employers also expect candidates to have some digital and enterprise skills before entry, highlighting gaps in preparation and training. To address this challenge, we must improve qualification attractiveness.

4. Reduce system complexity

The complexity of the traineeship system makes it difficult for employers to navigate, discouraging their participation. To address this challenge, we must reduce system complexity.

5. Trial new EWYL models

Even among leading ICT employers, few EWYL programs have achieved significant scale or long-term sustainability, underscoring systemic challenges. To address this challenge, we must trial new EWYL models.

Diversity and inclusion elements were considered during the consultation process; while progress has been made, ongoing challenges remain in building a truly diverse digital workforce.

Recommendations

FSO's 'Developing the Tech Workforce' report focuses on recommendations to improve the scalability and sustainability of digital EWYL models with a focus on traineeships.

1. Increase awareness and engagement
2. Strengthen funding mechanisms
3. Make qualifications more attractive
4. Simplify the system
5. Develop and trial new EWYL models

Drawing on sector feedback and analysis of current traineeships and alternative EWYL pathways, the report presents a roadmap of practical recommendations to make EWYL models more scalable and sustainable.

The recommendations provide an opportunity for Australia to transform its EWYL systems to align with industry needs and deliver stronger outcomes for employers and learners. This will help close the digital skills gap and ensure the digital workforce is equipped for Australia's economic priorities, supporting a more competitive, future-ready economy.

All recommendations have been assessed for their potential impact on:

Scalability: Capacity for EWYL models to be expanded or replicated without losing effectiveness or quality.

Sustainability: Ability for EWYL programs to continue delivering benefits over time, focusing on long-term impact and viability.

Twelve recommendations are made to address the five interconnected challenges. ❯

	Recommendation	Rationale	Scalability	Sustainability
1. Increase awareness and engagement	1.1 Create entry-level pathways for the digital sector	Entry-level pathways clarify the linkage between skills and training for use by industry and employers and inform the career journey for students.	HIGH	MODERATE
	1.2 Gain industry endorsement of EWYL models which align with the Digital and Tech Skills Working Group model	Industry endorsement enhances employer and industry awareness, credibility, and understanding of EWYL programs, ensuring alignment with workforce needs and broader skills development priorities.	HIGH	MODERATE
	1.3 Promote what works	Promotional campaigns seek to enhance awareness and understanding of EWYL programs that are already working well, while strengthening connections to existing preparation programs to maximise accessibility and workforce readiness.	HIGH	MODERATE
	1.4 Develop a 'front door' for interested parties	There is need for a structured and simplified process for funnelling interested parties toward appropriate EWYL and traineeship models and programs.	HIGH	MODERATE
2. Strengthen funding mechanisms	2.1 Reset incentive levels and include digital roles on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List	Inclusion on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List and access to related incentives increases the attractiveness of ICT traineeships to industry and employers and improves access to good-practice models such as the use of Group Training Organisations.	HIGH	MODERATE
	2.2 Broaden incentives to support employers using endorsed models	Targeted financial supports encourage new employers into the EWYL market, allow for increased commencements to support scale.	MODERATE	HIGH
	2.3 Fund targeted skill sets or Units of Competency so they can be used as EWYL training	Funding skills sets and Units of Competency allows employers to use these as part of EWYL models, reposition VET in the minds of industry, and increase harmonisation with higher education.	MODERATE	MODERATE
3. Make qualifications more attractive	3.1 Increase relevance of the Training Package to industry	The qualifications underpinning traineeships need to be more attractive to industry and employers.	HIGH	HIGH
	3.2 Increase Certificate II and III completion in secondary school	Utilising the updated Training Package qualifications in secondary school will increase the pipeline of 'prepared' talent for post-secondary EWYL programs.	MODERATE HIGH	MODERATE HIGH
4. Simplify the system	4.1 Support industry to undertake supervisor training	Supervisor training can support business to navigate the EWYL system, while also improving the quality of their supervision and mentoring of learners.	MODERATE	HIGH
	4.2 Encourage state and territories collaboration to align traineeships across Australia	Greater consistency and alignment across states and territories will make the system simpler and more attractive for employers.	MODERATE	MODERATE
5. Develop and trial new EWYL models	5.1 Develop and trial a new model	This initiative reimagines and extends VET as a both a 'finishing school' for graduates and a 'reskilling and upskilling school' for career changers, enhancing job readiness, productivity, and transitions into new roles, thereby broadening industry perception of VET.	HIGH	HIGH

1. Increase awareness and engagement

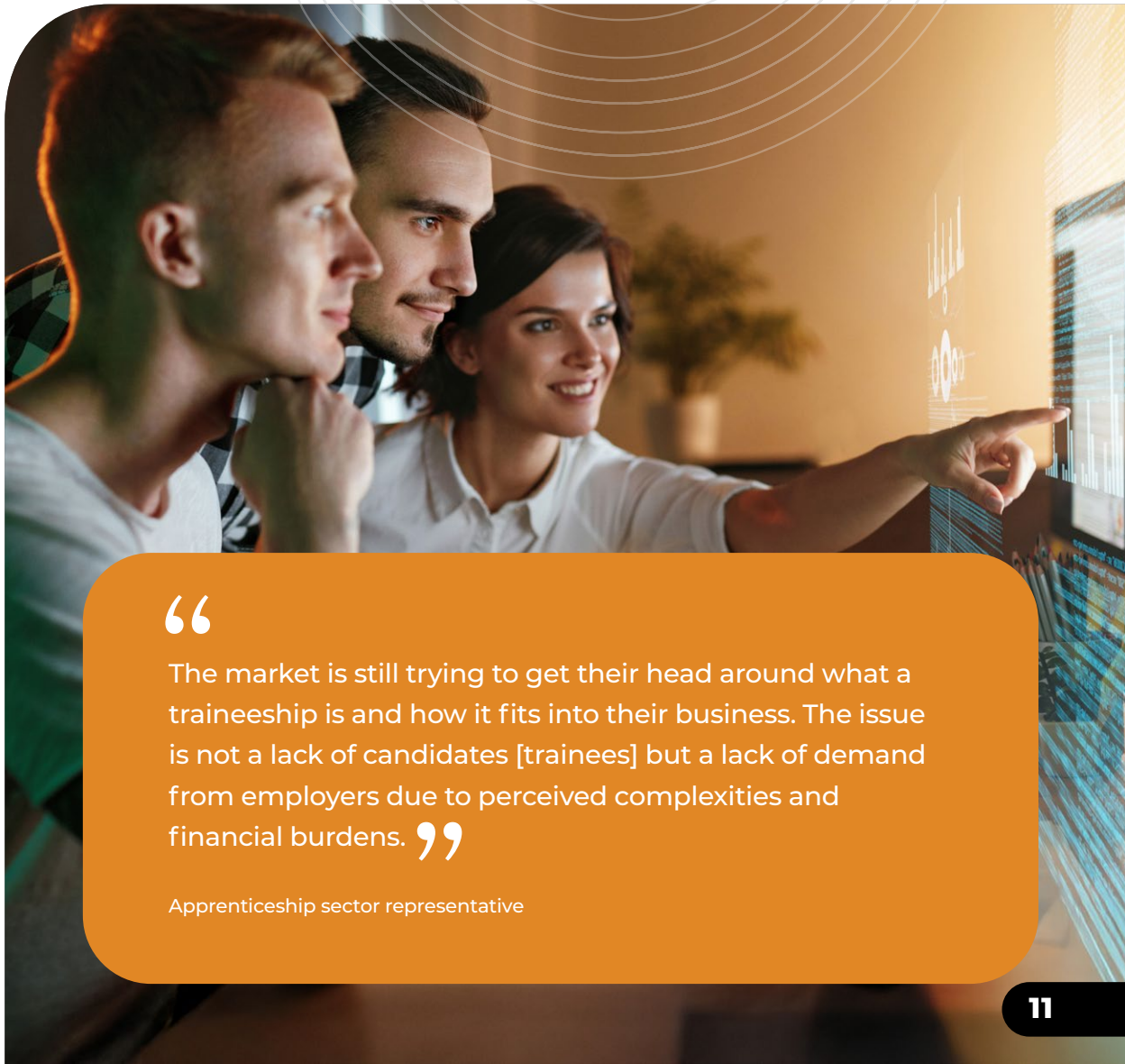
Awareness and engagement are critical barriers to scaling EWYL models in the digital sector.

Despite the growing demand for skilled digital workers, employers often lack awareness and understanding of EWYL models, preventing them from integrating these pathways into their hiring and workforce development strategies.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to support both scalability and sustainability in digital EWYL programs by attracting new employers into the system (scale) and supporting engagement with current good practice (sustain).

They seek to increase awareness and generate interest among employers, bringing new employers into the EWYL ecosystem and fostering their willingness to explore and adopt these models.



> “The market is still trying to get their head around what a traineeship is and how it fits into their business. The issue is not a lack of candidates [trainees] but a lack of demand from employers due to perceived complexities and financial burdens.”
>
> Apprenticeship sector representative

1.1 Create entry-level pathways for the digital sector

Employers often struggle to identify clear pathways into digital roles and lack clarity into the attributes that define an ideal worker in these positions.

These gaps in employer knowledge, combined with a shortage of relevant, accessible resources and a common language for digital skills, hinder employer participation in training programs for entry-level employees, and complicate the education system's ability to design relevant training and materials.

Entry-level pathways clarify the linkage between skills and training for use by industry and employers and inform the career journey for students.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

1.2 Gain industry endorsement of EWYL models which align with the Digital and Tech Skills Working Group's (DTSWG) model

Many EWYL models are neither recognised nor endorsed by the industry, and as a result, they are not highly valued. Industry and employers lack the capacity to evaluate individual EWYL models for quality and alignment with the DTSWG model. As a result, industry peak bodies have little incentive to engage with aligned models outside their own programs, leading to alternative approaches remaining unknown or undervalued.

Industry endorsement enhances employer and industry awareness, credibility, and understanding of EWYL programs, ensuring alignment with workforce needs and broader skills development priorities.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

1.3 Promote what works

Digital EWYL programs in Australia are promoted in a fragmented way, relying on investments by Group Training Organisations (GTOs), Registered Training Organisation (RTOs), industry peak bodies and individual companies. While there are successful programs, overall, these efforts are not adequately targeted, national or sufficiently impactful. Additionally, a review of the ICT Training Package has highlighted gaps in understanding the benefits of VET among employers, who often favour university training. This results in:

- Limited employer engagement with existing traineeship programs.
- A lack of clarity on effective digital sector initiatives, further hindering industry participation.

Promotional campaigns enhance awareness and understanding of EWYL programs that are working well, while strengthening connections to existing preparation programs to maximise accessibility and workforce readiness.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

1.4 Develop a 'front door' for interested parties

Australia's traineeship system for the digital sector is overly complex and fragmented. It involves seven generalist Apprentice Connect Providers[11], approximately 150 GTOs[12], and hundreds of RTOs[13]. The Apprentice Connect Providers offer generalist information that does not cater to the specific needs of the digital sector. This leaves specialist information to be delivered solely by individual RTOs and GTOs, which results in:

- Confusion and barriers to entry, discouraging engagement with digital traineeships.
- Inefficiencies in service delivery and stagnation in provider capability.
- A worsening digital skills shortage due to a lack of targeted support and unified approaches.

There is need for a simplified process and coordinated approach to funnelling interested parties toward appropriate EWYL and traineeship models and programs.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

11. Apprentice Connect Australia Provider | Australian Apprenticeships accessed 31 March 2025
12. Group Training Organisations | Australian Apprenticeships accessed 31 March 2025
13. National Training Register accessed 31 March 2025

2. Strengthen funding mechanisms

Financial supports through funding and incentives are essential for the scalability of EWYL models, including traineeships and alternative pathways.

The availability, structure, and accessibility of financial incentives affect employer participation and the sustainability of these programs. Effective funding strategies should align with economic priorities, encourage employer investment, and ensure EWYL models become competitive with other entry-level pathways.

Recommendations

Targeted funding is essential for supporting employer participation, reducing engagement barriers, and enabling new employers to join the market.

Strategic funding will drive scalable growth, sustain industry involvement, and strengthen the skilled digital talent pipeline.

> “Why have some organisations walked away from traineeships? I would say a lot of it might be around available funding. So, for example, from 2018 to June of last year we received some partial funding to support this programme because (large traineeship programs) are quite an investment as a business. But now (business) is having to fully fund.”
>
> Employer representative

2.1 Reset incentive levels and include digital roles on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List

The financial burden of training and supervision is a significant barrier for many employers, making it difficult for them to see the long-term benefits of participating in traineeship programs. Additionally, accessing support through GTOs introduces extra costs which may deter many employers. Without adequate funding, employers are less likely to invest in EWYL programs, leading to a lack of skilled talent in the digital sector.

Inclusion on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List and access to related incentives increases the attractiveness of ICT traineeships to industry and employers.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability  Sustainability 

2.2 Broaden incentives to support employers using endorsed models

Incentives are not currently targeted to support alternative EWYL models, despite these models being commonly used in the digital sector. Alternative models often better meet the needs of employers and learners but can come at an increased cost compared with traineeships.

Targeted financial supports encourage new employers into the EWYL market and allows for increased commencements to support scale.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **moderate** potential for scalability and **high** potential for sustainability.

Scalability  Sustainability 

2.3 Fund targeted skill sets or Units of Competency so they can be used as EWYL training

Employers often find that training with shorter durations meets their needs better than full qualifications, including for entry-level EWYL models. However, skill sets and Units of Competency are seldom funded for this purpose, as state and territory funding typically favour full qualifications. This increases the cost for employers, reducing uptake of these models.

Funding skills sets and Units of Competency allows employers to use these as part of EWYL models, reposition VET in the minds of industry, and increase harmonisation with higher education.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **moderate** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability  Sustainability 

3. Make qualifications more attractive

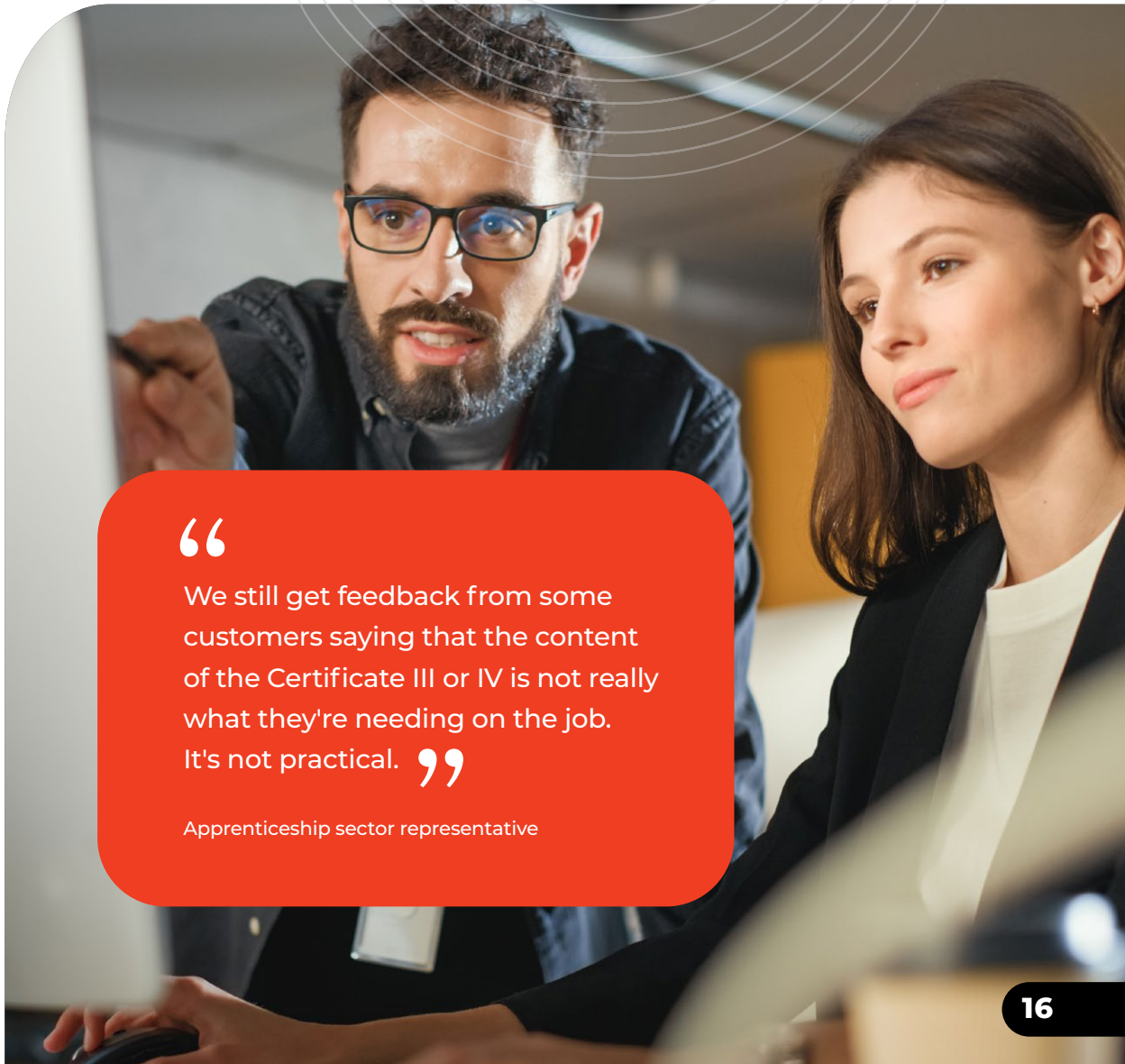
Qualifications play a key role in ensuring EWYL models provide structured, industry-relevant training that lead to recognised credentials and meaningful career pathways.

However, in the digital sector, there is evidence that existing qualifications have limited alignment with industry needs, particularly for entry-level roles. FSO's *Towards Effective ICT Training: A Needs and Gaps Analysis of the ICT Training Package* report provides a detailed analysis of this challenge.

Recommendations

Ensuring the suitability of qualifications is critical to the success of IT traineeships and alternative EWYL models which use accredited VET skill sets and Units of Competency.

Training products must align with employer needs, industry standards, and workforce expectations, providing learners with the right mix of foundational knowledge and practical skills. Aligning qualifications with workplace demands will also support better employer engagement, ensuring that trainees are job-ready and well-prepared for evolving digital roles.



> We still get feedback from some customers saying that the content of the Certificate III or IV is not really what they're needing on the job. It's not practical.
>
> Apprenticeship sector representative

3.1 Increase relevance of the ICT[14] Training Package to industry

The current ICT Training Package does not align with the needs of industry, employers, and learners.[15] Consequently, many in industry favour non-accredited training, which cannot be utilised within a traineeship model. There is a preference for higher education qualifications over VET qualifications, partly driven by a misconception that VET is of lower status.

The qualifications underpinning traineeships need to be more attractive to industry and employers.

Read FSO's report *Towards Effective ICT Training: A Needs and Gaps Analysis of the ICT Training Package.*

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **high** potential for sustainability.

Scalability  Sustainability 

3.2 Increase Certificate II and III completion in secondary school

Employers are unable to recruit learners with appropriate skills to join entry-level EWYL programs. Without adequate preparation, trainees often fall short of employer expectations, making it difficult for businesses to integrate them effectively into their operations.

Use of IT qualifications in VET delivered to secondary students has been declining, despite these qualifications having potential to meet the preparatory requirements for post-secondary EWYL programs.

Utilising the updated ICT qualifications in secondary schools will increase the pipeline of ‘prepared’ talent for post-secondary EWYL programs.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **moderate-high** potential for scalability and **moderate-high** potential for sustainability.

Scalability  Sustainability 

14. The ICT Training Package includes the IT qualifications assessed in this report.
15. FSO (2025). Towards Effective ICT Training: A Needs and Gaps Analysis of the ICT Training Package

4. Simplify the system

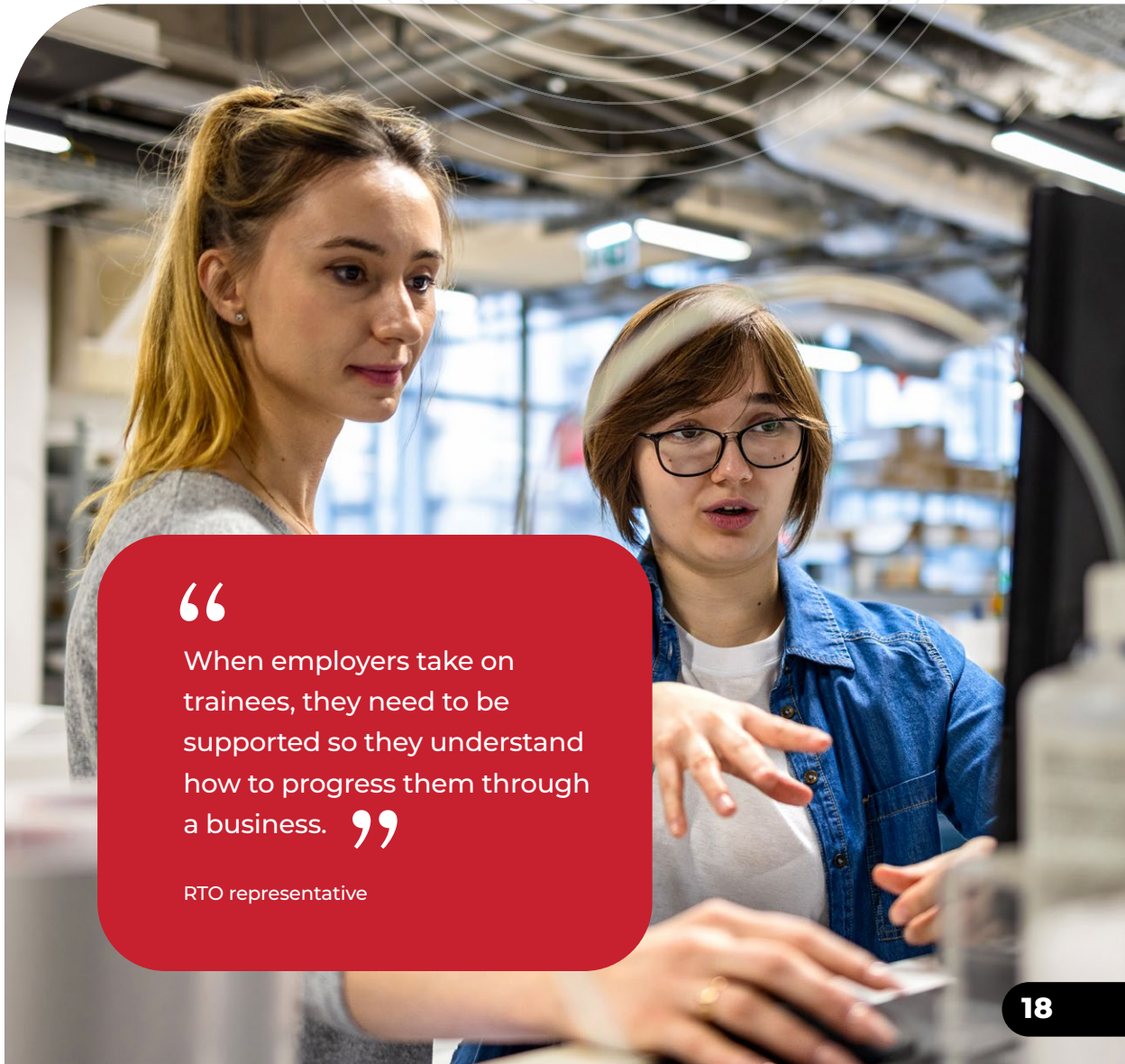
The EWYL system in Australia is complex and fragmented, making it challenging for employers, learners, and training providers to navigate.

The interaction between multiple stakeholders, including national and state government agencies, industry bodies, training organisations, and employers, creates barriers to participation and scalability.

Recommendations

Addressing system complexity will streamline employer engagement and create a more efficient and responsive system that better supports industry-driven training and workforce development.

System complexity creates friction for new employers and those engaged in the system. These recommendations aim to reduce that friction thereby increasing engagement with the system.



> When employers take on trainees, they need to be supported so they understand how to progress them through a business.
>
> RTO representative

4.1 Support industry to undertake supervisor training

Employers navigating the complex traineeship system face significant challenges, especially when operating across different states and territories with varying systems. This complexity burdens supervisors and undermines employer confidence.

Despite there being a genuine interest in the professional development of supervisory staff, the additional costs associated with such training programs often serve as a strong deterrent. Employers are hesitant to incur further expenses on top of the existing costs of an EWYL program, which ultimately impacts their ability to offer comprehensive training to their staff.

Supervisor training can support businesses to navigate the EWYL system, while also improving the quality of their supervision and mentoring of learners.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **moderate** potential for scalability and **high** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

4.2 Encourage state and territory collaboration to align traineeships across Australia

Companies operating in multiple states and territories must navigate different systems and often have access to different programs and supports, which adds layers of complexity and hinders the scalability of their training initiatives. The inconsistency across states and territories exacerbates the difficulties in addressing national skills shortages and future workforce needs.

Greater consistency and alignment across states and territories will make the system simpler and more attractive for employers.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **moderate** potential for scalability and **moderate** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

5. Develop and trial new EWYL models

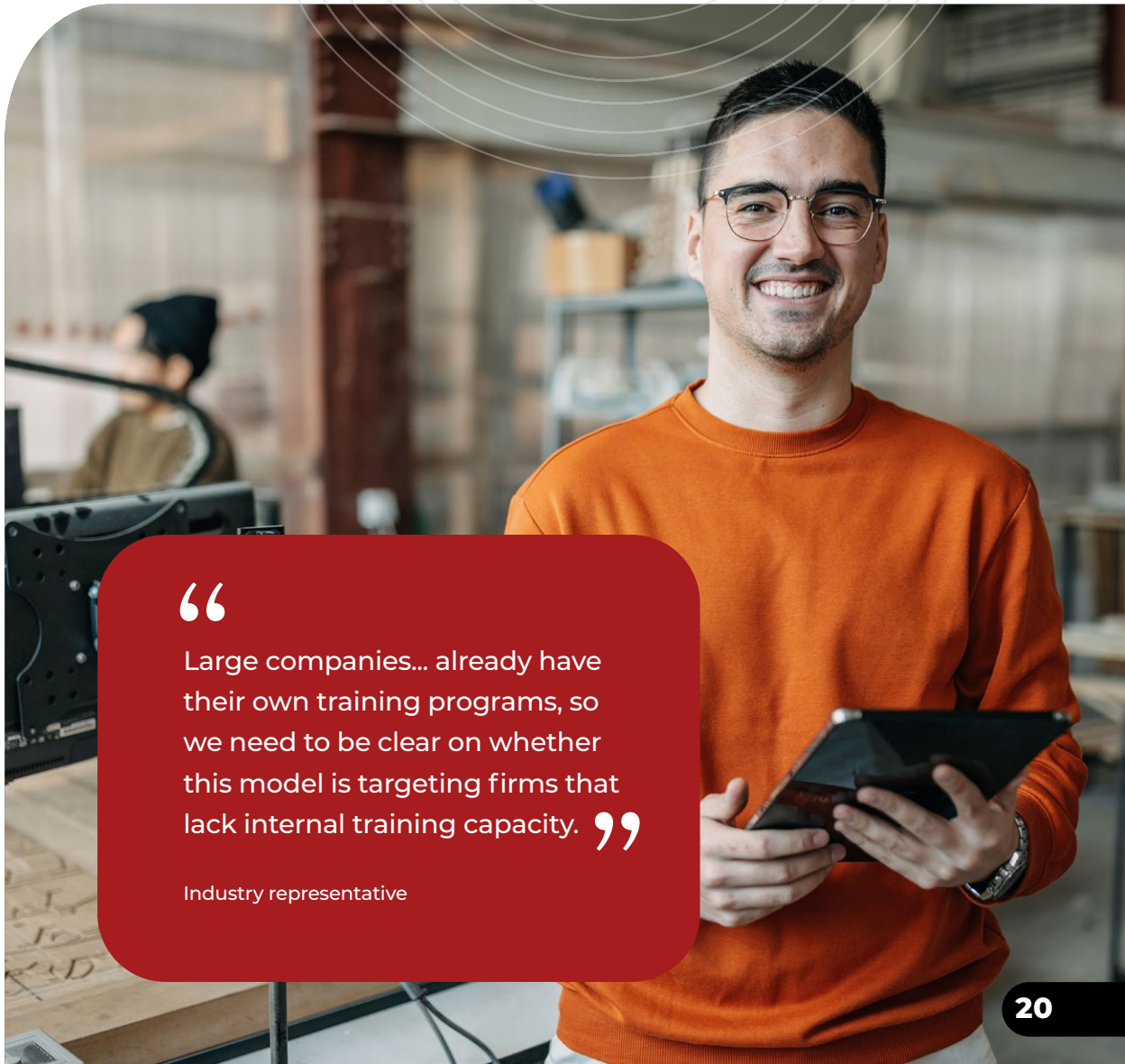
As the digital sector evolves, new EWYL models are required to suit the emerging needs of industry.

Employers require greater flexibility, learners seek faster and more targeted pathways, and the demand for digital skills is increasing across all industries. To meet these challenges, new models of EWYL programs are emerging, offering alternative pathways into digital careers beyond conventional training frameworks.

New EWYL models offer opportunities to create scalable, sustainable, and responsive pathways into the digital workforce, ensuring Australia remains globally competitive in the technology-driven economy.

Recommendations

New EWYL models can better serve employers and learners if designed for scalability and sustainability. Building awareness will generate interest and lead to pilot participation. Success will drive repeat employer engagement with the model.



> “Large companies... already have their own training programs, so we need to be clear on whether this model is targeting firms that lack internal training capacity.”
>
> Industry representative

5.1 Develop and trial a new model

The existing education and training offerings exhibit a gap in applied learning with many graduates and career changers facing challenges when entering the digital sector. While employers are exploring alternative models of hiring entry-level skills, many still perceive VET as offering only basic training that does not align with industry needs. There is currently no model which is effectively filling this gap in a scalable and sustainable manner.

A pilot to test EWYL models for HE graduates could leverage updated Units of Competency and skill sets to develop critical, applied generalist and specialist skills for new technology sector entrants who have completed higher education. This initiative reimagines VET as both a 'finishing school' for graduates and a 'reskilling and upskilling school' for career changers, enhancing job readiness, productivity, and transitions into new roles, thereby broadening industry perception of VET.

Potential for impact

This recommendation has **high** potential for scalability and **high** potential for sustainability.

Scalability **Sustainability**

> "I really like this idea... The model is a great way of creating a meeting point, post education with industry to say hey, you've just done a business degree, or you've just done an engineering degree or an arts degree and there's now a kind of practical pathway available to you if you spend an extra year."
>
> Industry representative

The pathway to a new approach for EWYL

No single recommendation or 'silver bullet' can resolve the key challenges we face. Instead, a comprehensive suite of actions with varying levels of complexity must be pursued in parallel to drive meaningful change.

Change in the tech sector, particularly through EWYL models, is complex and requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholder groups.

A series of actions are sequenced into immediate, medium, and long-term priorities, recognising both the opportunities for quick wins and the need for comprehensive structural reform.

IMMEDIATE

Leveraging FSO's existing strengths to align training with industry needs, **immediate** actions will establish quality standards and enhance promotion of EWYL opportunities. This also includes advocating for adapting the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List to include digital roles.

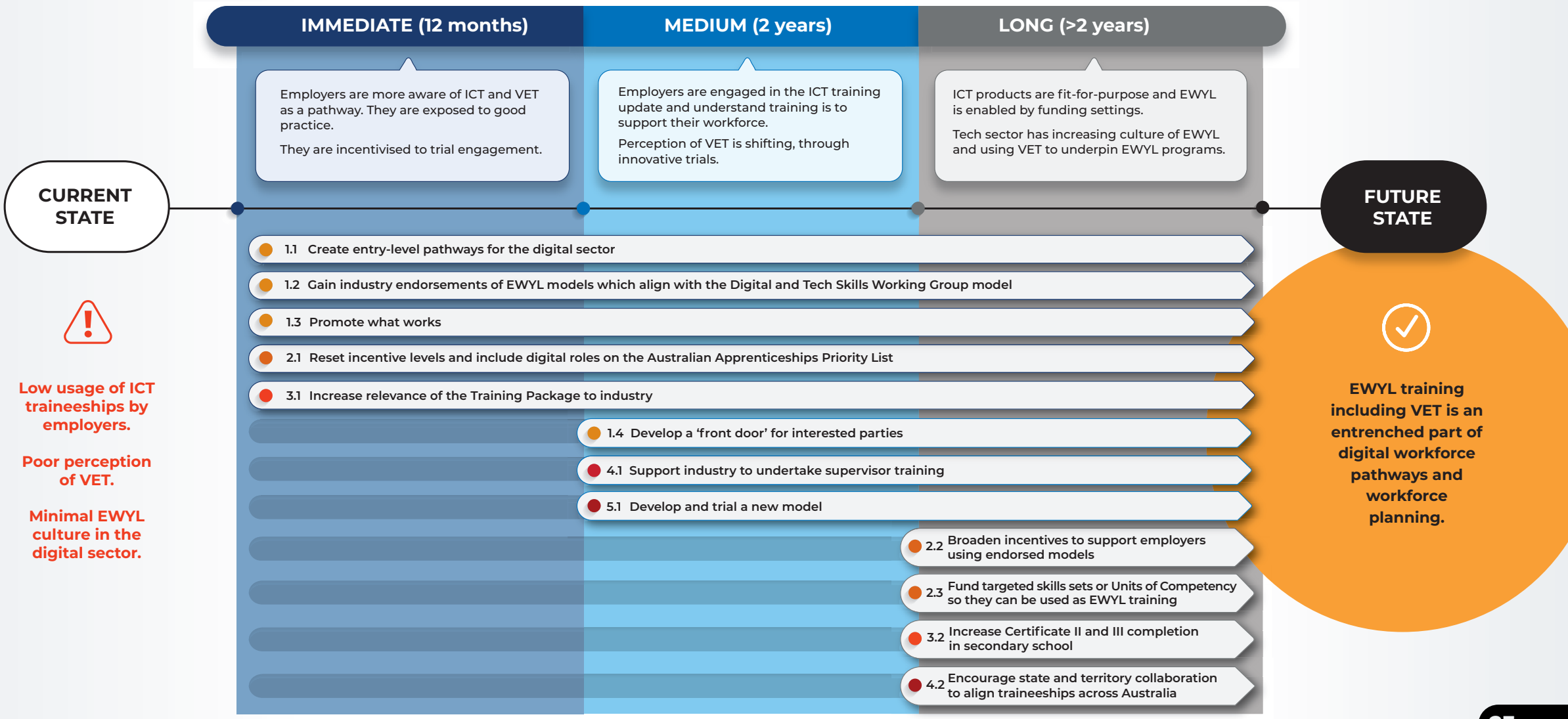
MEDIUM

Then within the next 2 years **medium-term** priorities should focus on strengthening central coordination, building industry capability, and developing an innovative model to fill the applied learning gap for undergraduates and career changers.

LONG

In the **long-term,** beyond 2 years, actions should target critical policy and legislative reforms to modernise financial supports, improve school-to-work transitions, and improve consistency across the traineeship system.

EWYL: Roadmap of recommendations



Conclusion

The EWYL training system needs to become more responsive, relevant and valued.

Strengthening the digital EWYL ecosystem requires a multi-faceted approach. It is essential to improve and promote existing traineeships by making them more relevant, efficient, and engaging for both learners and employers.

Equally, the important role of alternative EWYL models should be formally recognised and supported through the introduction of industry recognition measures, ensuring these programs effectively meet industry needs. Addressing persistent skills gaps will require the creation of new applied training models for recent graduates and career changers, developed in close partnership with industry.

Finally, establishing a central coordination mechanism will be key to driving systemic change, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that all initiatives are strategically aligned to deliver the greatest impact.

To gain early traction, consideration should be given to submitting a series of FSO projects to secure funding to support the initial development of EWYL capability. **This focus should be on three key areas:**

Showcasing existing success: Creating content that promotes successful EWYL programs and highlights their benefits to both employers and learners, by promoting what works (Recommendation 1.3).

Establishing EWYL promotion to employers: Developing a 'front door' to facilitate the connection of employers with appropriate EWYL and traineeship programs, potentially through a network of digital excellence. This would focus on promoting EWYL programs to industry to reinforce the value and support the uptake of these options. This work would complement the work of Apprentice Connect Australia Providers and GTOs in establishing EWYL arrangements with workers and RTOs.

Designing an innovative EWYL model: Collaborating closely with industry and RTOs to design an innovative EWYL training model (Recommendation 5.1) that can be used to inform decisions about the execution of any trial for a new model to bridge skills gaps and address specific industry needs, and which addresses how to streamline the accreditation and funding process for this type of skills training.

It is proposed that an EWYL pilot is conducted which targets mid-career professionals and recent graduates to help them gain practical job ready digital skills.

The report serves as a springboard for ongoing innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement in the digital sector. Progressing these recommendations will help to embed digital EWYL as a part of Australia's skills plan, making it easier for learners to work while they are training and for employers to build a future-ready workforce.

FUTURE SKILLS ORGANISATION
Finance Technology Business

Developing the Tech Workforce: Unlocking the Potential of Earn While You Learn Report

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Further detail on the research and findings featured in this report are available from FSO on request, email: hello@furtureskillsorganisation.com.au