



## Higher education and the future of learning, life and work symposium



Jacob has just embarked on his third career change in 15 years, and is enrolled in a postgraduate course with the aim of becoming a nostalgist [1]. He is also working part-time as a sub-contracted aged care worker, for which he was awarded a foundational qualification last year. Prior to this Jacob worked as a plasterer, but it was becoming too hard to compete with automated plastering services, and so he decided to change. Because Jacob has an educational subscription, he receives ongoing educational and career advice and support from a human advisor, supported by AI recommendations. His course fees are also covered by his subscription (with a government subsidy applied for any 'high value' courses in which he enrolls).

Demi is in Jacob's cohort. While Demi is a retiree in her late 60s, quite a number of the retirees who are also in her cohort are in their 80s and only recently retired. She is at university pursuing an interest in the digital recreation of Greek-Australian suburban life in the 1970s. She is also an active member of a global learning community based at the university. These topic-based learning communities connect researchers, students, professionals, and others around the world to learn and share knowledge informally. The learning community to which Demi belongs is about preserving and using historical images and video from local neighbourhoods to invigorate community life through augmented reality.

The lifelong-lifewide university embraces the fact that there are constant shifts in job roles and careers, which necessitate an ongoing and whole-of-life commitment to (and investment in) education and training. People are living much longer and maintaining good health, and many are retiring later. As technological and scientific advances create new roles, there is also increasing specialisation of existing professional roles, with an ongoing need for people to stay up to date. All educational offerings contain some curricular elements that develop students' 'uniquely human' capabilities – such as creativity and emotional intelligence. They also contain curricular elements that develop students' capacities to interact with, and make the most of, the latest digital technologies. Most students study entrepreneurship at some point in their lifelong study-careers, as nearly 70% of the working population is now self-employed to some extent through the gig economy.

The lifelong-lifewide university fosters ongoing professional readiness across extended life-and-work spans. It also caters to a range of interests beyond the professional, recognising that people bring a wide variety of motivations to learning. The lifelong-lifewide university seeks to become a global hub of learning and knowledge creation.

[1]A nostalgist works to recreate remembered experiences. Because people are so long lived, there will be a strong trade in recreating the best parts of life for people from 80 or 100 years ago. Nostalgists can help people who suffer from dementia feel safer and happier, by building environments and experiences resembling the past, that are therefore familiar. Nostalgists combine interior design expertise with personal digital research to design a personalised experience for their clients. People may wish to live in environments designed by Nostalgists, or to visit them virtually.



Kay is a Wakka Wakka and Wiradjuri woman who grew up in Cherbourg. From grade seven she participated in an educational pathways program co-run by four Queensland universities, funded by the State government, and supported by the local Aboriginal Council. She is now studying education and social work at university and is also a student cultural ambassador and peer learning and support advisor for first-in-family students. Her degrees contain strong elements of authentic, community-partnered learning activities that are based in 'real life' challenges and issues. In nearly all of her subjects, Kay works in interdisciplinary teams and networks, and learns about wider social and environmental issues as well as acquiring disciplinary and professional skills and knowledge.

The civic university balances and integrates its role in economic development with responsibilities to civil society. The civic university movement gathered momentum in Australia from the early 2020s, reflecting increasing community concerns around environmental sustainability and social inequality. The same young people who were striking from school to protest climate change in 2018 around the world enrolled in university degrees from 2020. They demanded changes to the undergraduate curriculum. Their message was that in addition to wanting 'good jobs' from their degrees, students were also seeking a fundamental sense of purpose and connection with one another, their communities and the environment, and ways to contribute and make a difference.

The civic university maintains a deep commitment to understanding the needs of the university's identified community (local, regional, national, global), and infusing this knowledge into institutional strategy and policy, campus development, learning and teaching, and research. The '22nd century' civic university adds an explicit future-thinking and forward-influencing focus to the civic university's strengths in engagement. Recognising the increasingly complex and disruptive influences of digital technologies, economic, political and social change, and environmental

sustainability concerns on education and society, it seeks to lead proactive responses and adaptation through research, education, and direct engagement.



Hayden moved straight from school into an apprenticeship with a digital marketing firm. While working, he completed eight credentialled units of study in marketing by studying online. He completed six foundational units with the firm's preferred educational provider, Microsoft U, for which he received a discounted fee, and then did two specialised units on personalised marketing offered by Georgetown University. With four more units, he will be able to approach a credentialling agency which, for a fee, will award him a degree recognised by the Institute for Digital Marketing. He will study two of these at a local university, which will give him knowledge of the Australian marketing context and will enhance his locally-based professional networks.

The unbundled university recognises that people need to get into work as soon as possible. It offers individual online-only units of study, for which students are awarded credentials. Each unit can be studied over a time period that suits them, and combine the credentials in ways that suit their individual employability needs. Universities are largely financially independent of the government, and instead rely on professional learning fees from organisations and course fees from students. Because units of study are online-only, students can enrol from anywhere around the world, and there is significant global competition between and among traditional universities and private higher education providers.

The unbundled university is highly attuned to industry and professional skill development needs. A small number of (mostly international) providers offer very highly regarded 'platinum standard' units into which students enroll from across the globe. Local providers offer cheaper units in order to compete with their international counterparts, often emphasising local / regional knowledge. To survive, unbundled universities need to find market niches corresponding to in-demand skill sets, optimise their marketing approaches so that potential students are aware of their offerings, and offer continually updated courseware in highly flexible modes. They may form strategic alliances with other educational providers that offer complementary units in order to maximise collective market impact.



Wang Shu is studying a postgraduate qualification in AI intellectual property law. She receives real-time learning feedback and support from her virtual personal assistant, based on data about her learning and engagement with the university. She also receives reports daily and weekly that indicate how she is performing on various key learning measures compared with her peers. The measures relate to what she is learning, and also how well and efficiently she is learning. If she performs well across a variety of summative measures, she will be awarded badges that she can use to advertise her employability, and she will also be given a discount on her student fees (both now and in subsequent enrolments).

In the performative university, there has been a major push to increase the quality of education and enhance teaching performance. A wider range of internal measures and indicators have become possible due to institutional data and learning analytics. The internal measures are complemented by external outcome measures based on the tax system and the online behaviour of employers and graduates. The university's funding from the government is based on its performance across both internal and external measures, and people who are considering enrolling compare universities based on these measures.

Because the university wants to perform well across the key measures, it offers degree programs in professional fields where there is strong demand for graduates. Programs are designed by specialist learning designers, who know how to build courses that will perform well on the key measures. Students with good engagement and learning performance profiles are incentivised for enrolling. Students who do not have good profiles may be offered a place in a fee-for-service bridging program to bring their scores up.