

Curriculum is standing in the way of progress

 By [Lindsey Schutters](#)

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Professor Harlene Hayne, vice-chancellor of Australia's Curtin University, was quite frank in her assessment of the global education system. From South Africa to Australia, the challenges remain the same, "Australia doesn't have a big unemployment rate problem as South Africa, but the high school curriculum is not fit for purpose and it is a big concern because students are losing interest."



University auditorium. Source: Changbok Ko/Unsplash

Hayne was one of many Australians speaking at the 2023 Future of Education Summit and boasted that Curtin University enjoys the highest employment rate in West Australia, and its graduates command among the highest starting salaries in the country.

"Curtin grew out of the mining sector and, as we transition into a low-carbon economy, we've found that we actually need more mining, not less," explained Hayne.

According to its [own reporting](#), the state added almost 118,000 full-time equivalent jobs in 2022, with resource sales also booming to AUS\$15bn. Much of this activity came from the exploration of consumer technology-linked minerals nickel, cobalt, lithium, and copper.

A [McKinsey report](#) revealed that 71% of mining leaders are dealing with talent shortages that have negative effects on production targets and strategic objectives, and 86% are finding it difficult to recruit and retain talent.

The same report also shows a decline in interest in studying towards mining-related qualifications. Australia has seen a 63% drop in mining engineering enrolment since 2014, and mining graduates in the US have fallen off by 39% since 2016.

Professor Gary Martin, CEO of the Australian Institute of Management Western Australia, has a different view of the curriculum mismatch: "In Australia, the lag time between industry skills demands and university curriculum is almost two years... we need to get that down to almost up to the minute if we want to respond to how fast things are changing."

Universities are lagging behind

Martin cites the slow response to adding coursework that keeps up with the rapid development in artificial intelligence as his

main reason for criticising universities.

While fellow panellist Access Bank CEO Sugendhree Reddy was not prepared to condemn the university curriculum to the same degree, she did voice concern about the skills that are being taught at tertiary level.

“We want our children to be employable and that means removing curriculum that is no longer relevant,” she said. “We can’t be enrolling students for degrees focused on jobs that won’t be around by the time they finish their studies.”



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Dell Technologies and the World Economic Forum sketched visions of the future where between 80-85% of all jobs available in 2030 are not available yet, and variations on this data point were quoted throughout the summit.

“By 2027, 70% of jobs will require a minimum bachelor’s degree or equivalent, and only 3% of all jobs will be available for those without qualifications,” said Hayne.

CNBC Africa – summit host – anchor Tania Habimana added that “82.5 million jobs will need skills that don’t exist yet”.

It could be an unfair expectation for universities to fast-track curriculum changes at the rate of technology development, and many panellists instead suggested that the responsibility for skills development should shift to the employer. However, the summit did highlight a growing concern about the effectiveness of the traditional education model.

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