

Question on notice: Education Legislation Amendment (Startup Year and Other Measures) Bill 2023 hearing

21 April 2023

The following is an answer to a question taken on notice by Luke Sheehy, Executive Director, during the Education and Employment Legislation Committee hearing on the Education Legislation Amendment (Startup Year and Other Measures) Bill 2023 on 17 April 2023.

Page 4

Senator PAYMAN: Thank you. The bill provides that underrepresented cohorts will be prioritised in the program, including Indigenous Australians, female entrepreneurs, people with a disability and community based startups working on rural and regional issues. I would love to hear from you all on whether you support that and, if so, whether you have any data on the representation of these cohorts in the existing accelerator programs.

Mr Chesworth: I think I'll give the call to Mr Sheehy.

Mr Sheehy: Thank you, Mr Chesworth. We absolutely fundamentally support the idea that students from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented backgrounds are prioritised not only for the Startup Year but for enrolment in additional places at universities. Minister Clare has already announced that an additional 20,000 places will go to underrepresented groups....

... We also call, in terms of Startup Year, that we look at different types of arrangements that might be needed for these students from diverse backgrounds to succeed as entrepreneurs, be it additional mentoring, bursaries or space on campus. We need to develop those knowledges over time and apply them to this program. That's why we're asking for a flexible and agile approach to this program's implementation.

In terms of our current accelerator programs and startups on campus, we have some of the best in the country. I am happy to take on notice and get back to the committee around what kind of student cohort mix that is and inform you that way.

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ATN's response

Below are available statistics on diversity within accelerator, incubator and startup programs at ATN member universities. These programs are not necessarily limited to university students – many also welcome participants from the wider community.

Also included are relevant examples and case studies of participants in these programs.

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Curtin University

Curtin Ignition is an intensive training program for aspiring entrepreneurs, academics and corporate innovators to trial and then prepare business ideas for the commercial environment. Ignition comprises of practical teaching sessions, expert clinics, mentor sessions and experienced advice and support from leading entrepreneurs and innovators.

Curtin Ignition has had 651 graduates from inception:

- Women represent 49 per cent of delegates
- First Nations people represent 2 per cent of delegates

[SEQTA Software](https://research.curtin.edu.au/businesslaw/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Ignition-Program-Case-Studies-SEQTA.pdf) is an example of a successful female participant in Ignition:

<https://research.curtin.edu.au/businesslaw/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Ignition-Program-Case-Studies-SEQTA.pdf>

Curtin Accelerate is a free program available to Curtin researchers, staff, students and graduates. Tailored for our next generation of startup founders, Curtin Accelerate grows entrepreneurial capabilities and provides the tools to take innovations to market quickly and effectively.

Curtin Accelerate has had 140 graduates (73 start-ups) from inception. Women represent 36 per cent of founders.

An example of a women-led start-up from Accelerate is Fibre Economy: <https://fibreconomy.com/>

Deakin University

ManuFutures Ignite program is a doorway to the whole of Deakin University, connecting participants to a robust network of mentors, academics and researchers and a growing industry network. It helps participants accelerate business ideas, develop a business strategy, develop a robust commercialisation plan and access ManuFutures workspace and infrastructure.

Ignite has had 28 per cent female participation so far.

Two case studies focused on female Ignite participants:

- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6999202348656971776>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6999163182816641024>

RMIT University

Gender diversity in RMIT programs (1319 participants):

- Female: 46.9 per cent
- Male: 51.4 per cent
- Prefer not to say: 1.4 per cent
- Non-binary: 0.4 per cent

RMIT has supported 32 Indigenous founders/businesses through its Indigenous Global Growth Program, Trade Routes, in 2021 and 2022.

Below are examples of diverse businesses supported through RMIT's programs:

- Gender Quest which supports trans and gender diverse communities
<https://www.rmit.edu.au/students/news/2022/november/genderquest-game>
- Indigenous business Dhuwa Coffee supported through Trade Routes
<https://youtu.be/Ue4gaVoEErM>

The University of Newcastle

The Integrated Innovation Network (I2N) fuels the success of innovators and entrepreneurs by connecting them to community, customers, coaching and capital. No matter their connection to the University, it helps people develop their enterprise skills and impact potential, validate ideas and accelerate to market.

The annual survey indicates whether founding team members are:

- Female (32 per cent)
- Indigenous (0 per cent)
- First generation immigrant or refugee (12 per cent)

University of South Australia

The Innovation & Collaboration Centre (ICC) is the University of South Australia's startup incubator.

The ICC engages with the community through the delivery of community events, workshops and programs which draw on the research and professional expertise of UniSA and its partners, to support the generation of new startups and the growth of existing companies.

The ICC is headquartered in Adelaide and has a regional Centre in Whyalla, South Australia.

Since 2016, the ICC has supported 434 company founders and staff, program participants, and residents. The majority of these have operated in the Space, Defence and STEM related sectors. In an often-male dominated arena, approximately 28 per cent of all ICC participants have been female. This percentage has been relatively stable over the life of the ICC.

Cultural diversity has increased with current programs attracting participants from 13 different countries as opposed to only 6 countries when the ICC began operations.

As part of an ongoing commitment to increase diversity in our programs, ICC are currently in talks to participate in the 2023 International First Nations Space, Science and Environment Symposium. ICC hopes that by participating in this event, it will be able to build on current strategies to better engage First Nations entrepreneurs.

Similarly, ICC is currently in talks with the wider university to introduce strategies that will help secure a pipeline of UniSA students and recent graduates into its programs. As part of this initiative, ICC hopes to reserve a number of placements each year for entrepreneurs from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

ICC see these initiatives as pro-active measures to further the overall diversity of its cohorts, thereby better representing the South Australian community and ensuring equity of opportunity as it works towards contributing to the economic development of the state.

University of Technology Sydney

UTS Startups is the home of entrepreneurship at UTS. It inspires students to be entrepreneurs and supports them at scale. It develops the skills, knowledge and confidence that participants need to explore entrepreneurship in your career.

Currently UTS Startups has 34 per cent female members in its community. The intention is raise this level, however it is above the average for startups broadly (22 per cent according to Startup Muster 2018).