

Not ready for digital future

Lucille Keen

Young Australians are less prepared for the digital revolution than comparable countries, according to a report released at the World Economic Forum.

The report, by global IT consultancy firm Infosys, found Australia ranked last out of nine countries for young people being confident in their job skills and feeling optimistic about their future employment prospects.

The report found young Australians were among the most aware of the need to continuously learn new skills.

However, only 16 per cent had a strong interest in developing skills in data science and analytics, 18 per cent had a strong interest in building mobile apps and only 19 per cent had a strong interest in learning how to code.

These results were the lowest of the countries surveyed – Australia, Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Just 3.8 per cent of Australian young workers wanted to work for a start-up, the lowest of any country.

The report surveyed 9000 people aged 16 to 25, 1000 of those in Australia.

Key points

Young Australians are not confident about their job skills, a survey shows.

Australia ranked last of nine nations in the Infosys report.

It found that more than half of the Australians surveyed believed their education had not prepared them for work.

Robert Holt, who is 23, and studying for a Masters of Engineering (software) at the University of Melbourne, said while he enjoyed his degree what he was learning was “very much divorced from workplace requirements”. Mr Holt said university curricula in the United States for software engineering courses were “more relevant to the actual field of work”.

“We are learning the essentials but it’s the way in which we’re taught to work and the tools that differs,” he said.

“For me to find a job from where I sit now is quite hard. It’s quite far flung and there is a need to offer students independent workplace experience.”

Mr Holt said Australian companies



University of Melbourne engineering student Robert Holt, left, and graduate engineer Shoukry Marzouk. PHOTO: LUIS ASCUI

were “quite scared” to invest in digital infrastructure.

“Digital infrastructure is dealt with as a risk rather than a way to monetise a business. Politically it’s the same general rhetoric.”

The report found young people in education or entering the workforce in 2016 faced “the most turbulent, rapidly evolving labor market seen by any generation”.

“The global economy is approaching a Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by increasing automation of the labor market – enabled by rapid innovations

in robotics, artificial intelligence and smart technologies,” the report said.

Infosys Australia and New Zealand vice-president and regional head Andrew Groth said young Australians were among the most highly aware of the increasingly pivotal role technology will play in their lives yet are falling behind in their confidence and drive to learn the necessary skills to remain relevant in the digital economy.

“This disparity needs to be addressed so we can empower our future leaders to succeed in the workforce of the future,” Mr Groth said.

“Our educators, business leaders and governments need to come together to action a modernised approach. The federal government’s innovation statement did not come a moment too soon – Australia’s STEM skills gap is too large and we need to start closing it.”

Graduate engineer Shoukry Marzouk, who has most recently been working on the Australian Driverless Vehicle initiative, said he has learnt the skills needed for his role “on the job”.

“You can only be as prepared as the university makes you,” Mr Marzouk said.