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We thank Matthew Brown, Ian Chubb, Robin King, Barbara van Leeuwen and Leon Sterling for reviewing the content.
As time moves on it becomes increasingly difficult to decide who is and isn’t a ‘STEM worker’. After all, how many of us rely on new technologies to manage all the tasks we’ve got to fit in a working day? How many of these technologies had we imagined when we made our year 12 subject choices? How might technologies we can’t imagine now be part of our daily experience tomorrow?

There’s no opting out from the forces of change. They’re too powerful, too widely dispersed, too slippery to catch. But even if I had the choice, I wouldn’t take it. I hope all Australians would say the same.

When I look to that future I see a world of opportunity for Australians with STEM training. I see a STEM-powered economy that Australians can forge, if we have the confidence and the capability combined.

So I look to this report as one important measure of the national potential.

Much of the analysis is based on the 2011 Census, which is the most comprehensive and detailed data set of this type available to date. It also establishes a valuable benchmark for comparison with Census data that will be collected in 2016. Once these data are available and analysed (in late 2018), the impact of reforms in the years from 2011 to 2016, such as the demand-driven higher education system, can be investigated.

For today, this STEM skills index will be a valuable resource for students, as well as an important evidence base for public policy.

The most striking finding in my mind is the range of occupations that people with STEM qualifications have pursued. We have people with physics doctorates working as financial analysts. We have chemistry graduates running farms and making wine. We have ICT graduates planning cities. There are no limits on what a STEM graduate can do, and we shouldn’t impose them.

Do we impose them? I suspect we do, perhaps particularly on women with the talent and passion for STEM. The pay gap between men and women revealed in this report is significant, it is longstanding and it is unacceptable. No clever country under-serves half its people.

And no clever country would encourage its most STEM-literate people to pursue only traditional research paths, in universities or public sector research agencies.

I know from my own experience that the opportunities rarely lie in the expected places. Our STEM community, and most of all our young people, should be given every encouragement to find new applications for their skills across the economy.

Our best future is a future that builds on technology, innovation, ideas and imagination. It is a future with STEM. And it is a future that is ours to build.

Alan Finkel AO
Australia’s Chief Scientist
KEY FACTS

TOTAL STEM WORKFORCE

STEM qualified population

- 32% University qualified
- 68% Vocational Education & Training (VET) qualified

16% of STEM qualified people are female

- 29% University qualified
- 9% VET qualified

Unemployment rate

- STEM = 3.7%
- Non-STEM = 4.1%

Growth of STEM vs non-STEM qualified population

Between 2006 and 2011:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per cent growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>15% STEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>26% Non-STEM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STEM UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

Industries and occupations

STEM graduates work across the economy in a wide variety of industries and largely as professionals (55%) and managers (18%).

Top six industries (65% of STEM graduates)

- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services 25%
- Manufacturing 10%
- Public Administration and Safety 10%
- Education and Training 6%
- Health Care and Social Assistance 5%
- Financial and Insurance Services

% of STEM graduates earning in the top income bracket ($104,000 or above)

- 32% male
- 12% female

% of employed STEM graduates in the private sector

- 77% All STEM graduates
- 43% STEM PhDs

STEM PhD GRADUATES

Business ownership

- 23% Non-STEM PhDs
- 10% STEM PhDs

10% of STEM PhDs owned a business compared to 23% of non-STEM PhDs.

A PhD can provide an earning premium

- Environmental Sciences PhD 2.0x
- Chemical Sciences PhD 1.9x
- Biological Sciences PhD 2.7x

In every STEM field, higher proportions of PhDs earned in the top income bracket compared to bachelor graduates.

# CONTENTS

FOREWORD iii  
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION 1  
PART 1 AUSTRALIA’S STEM CAPABILITY 7  
CHAPTER 2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF AUSTRALIA’S STEM-QUALIFIED POPULATION 9  
CHAPTER 3 EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF AUSTRALIA’S STEM-QUALIFIED POPULATION 19  
PART 2 PATHWAYS OF UNIVERSITY STEM GRADUATES IN AUSTRALIA 33  
CHAPTER 4 STEM PATHWAYS: OVERVIEW 35  
CHAPTER 5 STEM PATHWAYS: PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY 59  
CHAPTER 6 STEM PATHWAYS: CHEMICAL SCIENCES 69  
CHAPTER 7 STEM PATHWAYS: EARTH SCIENCES 79  
CHAPTER 8 STEM PATHWAYS: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES 89  
CHAPTER 9 STEM PATHWAYS: AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES 103  
CHAPTER 10 STEM PATHWAYS: ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES 115  
CHAPTER 11 STEM PATHWAYS: INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY 125  
CHAPTER 12 STEM PATHWAYS: ENGINEERING AND RELATED TECHNOLOGIES 135  
CHAPTER 13 STEM PATHWAYS: MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES 147  
CHAPTER 14 FUTURE DIRECTIONS 157  
APPENDIXES 159  
REFERENCES 203
**TABLES**

Table 1.1: Direct economic impact of selected STEM fields  
Table 1.2: Terms used in this report to describe the STEM fields  
Table 2.1: Australian population with post-secondary qualifications, by field and level  
Table 2.2: Field of highest post-secondary qualification and percentage of total population, by state or territory of usual residence  
Table 2.3: Absolute change in post-secondary qualifications, by field and age group, 2006 to 2011  
Table 3.1: Unemployment rate, by state or territory of usual residence and field of highest post-secondary qualification  
Table 3.2: Sector of employment, by field of highest post-secondary qualification  
Table 3.3: Occupations of people with STEM qualifications, percentage by gender and level of highest post-secondary qualification  
Table 4.1: Number of individuals with qualifications at the bachelor level and above, by highest level of qualification and field
FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Australian STEM-qualified population, by field and level ......................................................... 11
Figure 2.2: Australian population with post-secondary qualifications, by field and level as a percentage of the total in each field ................................................................. 12
Figure 2.3: Percentage change in the number of people living in Australia with post-secondary qualifications, by field, 2006 to 2011 ................................................................. 12
Figure 2.4: Gender distribution of post-secondary qualifications, by field and level ........................................... 13
Figure 2.5: Percentage change in the number of people living in Australia with post-secondary qualifications, by gender, field and level, 2006 to 2011 ........................................... 13
Figure 2.6: Percentage change in post-secondary qualifications, by gender and field, 2006 to 2011 ...................... 13
Figure 2.7: Distribution of people with post-secondary qualifications across Australia, by field and state or territory of usual residence ........................................................... 14
Figure 2.8: Percentage change in post-secondary qualifications, by field and state or territory of usual residence, 2006 to 2011 ................................................................. 15
Figure 2.9: Australian population with post-secondary qualifications, by field and country of birth ................... 16
Figure 2.10: Age profile by proportion of people in each age group, by field of highest post-secondary qualification ................................................................. 16
Figure 2.11: Percentage change in STEM-qualified population, by field and age group, 2006 to 2011 .............. 17
Figure 3.1: Percentage change (bars) and absolute change (data labels) in employed people by field, 2006 to 2011 ................................................................. 21
Figure 3.2: Percentage of employed people working full-time, by field, gender and level ................................ 21
Figure 3.3: Unemployment rate, by field, 2006 and 2011 ........................................................................... 22
Figure 3.4: Unemployment rate, by field, level of qualification and gender .................................................... 23
Figure 3.5: Unemployment rate, by field, age and gender ........................................................................ 23
Figure 3.6: Unemployment rate, by state or territory of usual residence and field of highest post-secondary qualification .......................................................................................... 24
Figure 3.7: Unemployment rate of people living in Australia with post-secondary qualifications, by field and place of birth .................................................................................. 25
Figure 3.8: Unemployment rate of people living in Australia with post-secondary qualifications, by field, place of birth and date of arrival ......................................................... 26
Figure 3.9: Industry sector of employment, by field ................................................................................... 27
Figure 3.10: Occupations of people with a VET level qualification, by field .................................................. 28
Figure 3.11: Occupations of people with a university level qualification, by field ........................................... 28
Figure 3.12: Business ownership, by field and level of qualification .............................................................. 29
Figure 3.13: Personal income of people with VET level qualifications, by field ............................................. 31
Figure 3.14: Personal income of people with university level qualifications, by field ..................................... 31
Figure 4.1: Employment status of STEM graduates, by field ........................................................................ 40
Figure 4.2: Age distribution of employed male graduates, by field
Figure 4.3: Age distribution of employed female graduates, by field
Figure 4.4: Skewness of the age distribution pattern of male STEM graduates, by field
Figure 4.5: Skewness of the age distribution pattern of female STEM graduates, by field
Figure 4.6: Percentage of graduates in the workforce with doctorates, by field
Figure 4.7: Percentage of graduates employed in the private sector, by field
Figure 4.8: Percentage of doctorates employed in the private sector, by field
Figure 4.9: Top three industry divisions for graduate employment, by field
Figure 4.10: Percentage of females in each industry division, by field of qualification
Figure 4.11: Percentage of females with Science qualifications in each industry division, by field
Figure 4.12: Business ownership amongst employed graduates with qualifications at the bachelor level or above, by field
Figure 4.13: Percentage of graduates who were business owners employing more than 20 individuals, by field
Figure 4.14: Top three unit group level occupations, by field
Figure 4.15: Percentage of STEM graduates earning above $104,000, by level and field
Figure 4.16: Percentage of graduates with a personal income above $104,000, by gender and field
Figure 4.17: Percentage of bachelor level STEM graduates working full-time who earned greater than $104,000 annually, by age group and gender
Figure 4.18: Percentage of doctorate level STEM graduates working full-time who earned greater than $104,000 annually, by age group and gender
Figure 4.19: Percentage of bachelor level STEM graduates working part-time who earned greater than $104,000 annually, by age group and gender
Figure 4.20: Percentage of doctorate level STEM graduates working part-time who earned greater than $104,000 annually, by age group and gender
Figure 4.21: Percentage of bachelor graduates earning above $104,000, by age group, field, gender and number of children
Figure 4.22: Percentage of doctorate graduates earning above $104,000, by age group, field, gender and number of children
Figure 5.1: Age distribution of employed graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by field and gender
Figure 5.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Physics and Astronomy graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 5.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Physics and Astronomy doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 5.4: Top ten industry classes of employment of Physics and Astronomy graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 5.5: Top ten industry classes of employment of Physics and Astronomy doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 5.6: Top ten sub-major group level of occupations of Physics and Astronomy graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 5.7: Top ten unit group level occupations of Physics and Astronomy graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 5.8: Top ten unit group level occupations of Physics and Astronomy doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 5.9: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification

Figure 5.10: Personal annual income of Physics and Astronomy graduates working full-time and part-time, by field, gender and level of qualification

Figure 5.11: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, age group and gender

Figure 5.12: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, age group and gender

Figure 6.1: Age distribution of employed graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by field and gender

Figure 6.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Chemical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 6.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Chemical Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 6.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Chemical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 6.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Chemical Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 6.6: Top ten unit group level occupations of Chemical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 6.7: Top ten unit group level occupations of Chemical Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 6.8: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification

Figure 6.9: Personal annual income of Chemical Sciences graduates working full-time and part-time, gender and level of qualification

Figure 6.10: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group

Figure 6.11: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group

Figure 7.1: Age distribution of employed graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by field and gender

Figure 7.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Earth Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 7.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Earth Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 7.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Earth Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 7.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Earth Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 7.6: Top ten sub-major group level occupations of Earth Sciences graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender 84
Figure 7.7: Top ten sub-major group level occupations of Earth Sciences doctorate graduates, by gender 84
Figure 7.8: Top ten unit group level occupations of Earth Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 85
Figure 7.9: Top ten unit group level occupations of Earth Sciences doctorate graduates, by gender 85
Figure 7.10: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification 86
Figure 7.11: Personal annual income of Earth Sciences graduates working full-time and part-time, by field, gender and level of qualification 86
Figure 7.12: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104,000 annually, by field, gender and age group 87
Figure 7.13: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104,000 annually, by field, gender and age group 87
Figure 8.1: Age distribution of employed Biological Sciences graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender 91
Figure 8.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Biological Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 92
Figure 8.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Biological Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender 92
Figure 8.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Biological Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 93
Figure 8.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Biological Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender 93
Figure 8.6: Top ten unit group level occupations of Biological Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 94
Figure 8.7: Top ten unit group level occupations of Biological Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender 94
Figure 8.8: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification 95
Figure 8.9: Personal annual income of Biological Sciences graduates working full-time and part-time, by field, gender and level of qualification 96
Figure 8.10: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104,000 annually, by field, gender and age group 97
Figure 8.11: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104,000 annually, by field, gender and age group 97
Figure 8.12: Age distribution of employed Medical Science graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by field and gender 98
Figure 8.13: Top five industry subdivisions employing Medical Science graduates, by gender 98
Figure 8.14: Top five sub-major group occupations of Medical Science graduates, by gender 99
Figure 8.15: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification 99
Figure 8.16: Age distribution of employed Food Science and Biotechnology graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by field and gender

Figure 8.17: Top five industry subdivisions employing Food Science and Biotechnology graduates, by gender

Figure 8.18: Top five sub-major group occupations of Food Science and Biotechnology graduates, by gender

Figure 8.19: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification

Figure 9.1: Age distribution of employed Agricultural Sciences graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender

Figure 9.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Agricultural Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Agricultural Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 9.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Agricultural Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Agricultural Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 9.6: Top ten unit group level occupations of Agricultural Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.7: Top ten unit group level occupations of Agricultural Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 9.8: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification

Figure 9.9: Personal annual income of Agricultural Sciences graduates working full-time and part-time, by gender and level of qualification

Figure 9.10: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group

Figure 9.11: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group

Figure 9.12: Most common industry sub-division of employment for Fisheries Studies graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.13: Most common sub-major occupations of Fisheries Studies graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.14: Most common industry sub-division of employment for Forestry Studies graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 9.15: Most common sub-major occupations of Forestry Studies graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 10.1: Age distribution of employed Environmental Studies graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender

Figure 10.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Environmental Studies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender

Figure 10.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Environmental Studies doctoral graduates, by gender

Figure 10.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Environmental Studies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 10.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Environmental Studies doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 10.6: Top ten unit group level occupations of Environmental Studies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 10.7: Top ten unit group level occupations of Agricultural Science doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 10.8: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification
Figure 10.9: Personal annual income of Environmental Studies graduates working full-time and part-time, by gender and level of qualification
Figure 10.10: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group
Figure 10.11: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group
Figure 11.1: Age distribution of employed Information Technology graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender
Figure 11.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Information Technology graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 11.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Information Technology doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 11.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Information Technology graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 11.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Information Technology doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 11.6: Top ten sub-major group occupations of Information Technology graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 11.7: Top ten sub-major group occupations of Information Technology doctorate graduates, by gender
Figure 11.8: Top ten unit group level occupations of Information Technology graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 11.9: Top ten unit group level occupations of Information Technology doctorate graduates, by gender
Figure 11.10: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification
Figure 11.11: Personal annual income of Information Technology graduates working full-time and part-time, by gender and level of qualification
Figure 11.12: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by gender, field and age group
Figure 11.13: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by gender, field and age group
Figure 12.1: Age distribution of employed Engineering and Related Technologies graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender
Figure 12.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Engineering and Related Technologies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender
Figure 12.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Engineering and Related Technologies doctoral graduates, by gender
Figure 12.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Engineering and Related Technologies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 139
Figure 12.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Engineering and Related Technologies doctoral graduates, by gender 139
Figure 12.6: Top ten sub-major group occupations for Engineering and Related Technologies graduates at bachelor level and above, by gender 141
Figure 12.7: Top ten sub-major group occupations for Engineering and Related Technologies doctoral graduates, by gender 141
Figure 12.8: Top ten unit group level occupations for Engineering and Related Technologies graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 142
Figure 12.9: Top ten unit group level occupations for Engineering and Related Technologies doctorate graduates, by gender 142
Figure 12.10: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification 143
Figure 12.11: Personal annual income of Engineering and Related Technologies graduates working full-time and part-time, by gender and level of qualification 143
Figure 12.12: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group 145
Figure 12.13: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group 145
Figure 13.1: Age distribution of employed Mathematical Sciences graduates at bachelor level and above, by field and gender 149
Figure 13.2: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Mathematical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 150
Figure 13.3: Top ten industry divisions of employment for Mathematical Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender 150
Figure 13.4: Top ten industry classes of employment for Mathematical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 151
Figure 13.5: Top ten industry classes of employment for Mathematical Sciences doctoral graduates, by gender 151
Figure 13.6: Top ten unit group level occupations for Mathematical Sciences graduates with qualifications at bachelor level and above, by gender 152
Figure 13.7: Top ten unit group level occupations for Mathematical Sciences doctorate graduates, by gender 152
Figure 13.8: Personal annual income of graduates, by field and level of qualification 153
Figure 13.9: Personal annual income of Mathematical Sciences graduates working full-time and part-time, gender and level of qualification 154
Figure 13.10: Percentage of bachelor level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age group 155
Figure 13.11: Percentage of doctoral level graduates earning greater than $104 000 annually, by field, gender and age groups 155