



VERTICAL SCOPE GROUP

RESPONSE TO THE POLICY DISCUSSION PAPER

DEVELOPING HORIZON 2 OF THE
2023 – 2030 AUSTRALIAN CYBER SECURITY STRATEGY

28 AUGUST 2025

Executive Summary

- 1) The establishment of an **Australian National Civilian Cyber Reserve** would enhance surge capacity, build a cleared and deployable civilian cyber force, and strengthen national cyber resilience in alignment with other initiatives.
- 2) Government-led, scenario-based **live-fire cyber exercises** would strengthen coordination, improve incident response, and enhance Australia's collective resilience against large-scale cyber threats.
- 3) The **WorkPath Australia** program could support the Australian Public Service in building a more inclusive cyber and ICT workforce, while greater government support for industry access would expand its reach, deliver job-ready talent, and strengthen national workforce resilience.

About Vertical Scope Group (VSG)

- Fully Australian-owned and operated DISP Level 3 Member company, dedicated to developing sovereign workforce capability to address critical skills shortages, strengthen national security and workforce resilience, and advance Australia's national interest.
- Prime Minister and Industry awarded, workforce capability and capacity solutions provider focused on cyber, ICT and security.
- Strong supporter of engaging and advancing underrepresented and underemployed groups of Australians, including veteran and their partners, women, students, neurodiverse individuals, and Australia's First Nations peoples.
- To address critical skill shortages and support the development of a more diverse, inclusive, and future-ready Australian workforce, VSG launched the WorkPath Australia program in 2021— a nationally recognised, award-winning training and employment initiative that delivers inclusive, sovereign workforce capability. The program was established to bridge the gap between underrepresented and underemployed groups of Australians, making them job ready and securing them meaningful employment. Originally designed as a veteran and partner transition program, WorkPath Australia has since evolved to support a wide range of groups, including women, neurodiverse individuals, First Nations peoples, students and recent graduates, and those undergoing mid-career transitions including first responders and frontline workers.
- Trusted partner for the Australian Government and industry, with a proven track record of delivering solutions to the Department of Home Affairs, ASD, DFAT, AGD, Red Hat, HPE, Oracle and others.
- Fully accredited and nationally operating organisation, with established offices in ACT and Victoria, and additional teams and programs in South Australia, Queensland, NSW and Western Australia.
- Partnering with a strong ecosystem of organisations to scale delivery and impact—including the TAFEcyber, the Future Skills Organisation (FSO), Australian Women in Security Network (AWSN), RSL QLD and a range of education, community, and industry bodies committed to building inclusive cyber and tech talent pipelines.
- Leveraging international best practices and global networks, VSG is leading several initiatives aimed at delivering national and international cyber live-fire exercises and digital twin solutions for Australian industry, government, and academic partners.

VSG's Responses to Questions

Q 30:

Are the roles and responsibilities of government and industry clear for cyber security in a conflict or crisis scenario? What activities, such as cyber exercises, could Government undertake to make you feel better prepared to respond in a cyber conflict or crisis?

The roles and responsibilities of government and industry in a cyber conflict or crisis scenario could be further defined and tested in practice. While frameworks and partnerships exist, there is an opportunity to improve coordination, information sharing, and decision-making processes to ensure a faster and more unified response during potential crises.

To support this, VSG is actively working towards establishing a structured **Australian National Civilian Cyber Reserve** capability to strengthen collaboration, build workforce readiness, and enhance Australia's national resilience, that:

- Strengthens Australia's national resilience through a security cleared, trained, and deployable civilian cyber force.
- Supports Australia's Cyber Security Strategy by strengthening Shield 1 (Strong Citizens and Businesses), Shield 3 (World-class threat sharing and blocking), Shield 4 (Protected Critical Infrastructure), and Shield 5 (Sovereign Capabilities).
- Complements the ADF Cyber Reserve initiative.
- Takes into account international best practice (US, UK, Estonia, Finland).

Objective

- Build national cyber capability by training members through structured exercises and real-world deployment experience.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration between members with industry, government, defence, and academic background.
- Provide rapid, expert support and deployment during cyber incidents by trained and security vetted members.

Role

1. Training:

- Take part in national and international cyber exercises such as the ADF Cyber Skills Challenge, Locked Shields and other similar initiatives open for participation.
- Organise live-fire, digital twins and CTF exercises for members, in co-operation with ADF Cyber Reserve, Australian Government and/or other Australian and international partners.
- Engage in other training activities through industry briefings, sponsor-led workshops, and education providers.

2. Incident response:

- Provide surge capability during critical cyber incidents and recovery support.

3. Defence & Government capacity building:

- Building capacity for ADF Cyber Reserve, Australian Public Service (APS), and Defence-related workforce needs under the Total Workforce System.

Members

- Australian citizens, AGSVA security cleared.
- Industry, government, military and/or academic background with relevant experience/qualifications.
- Current and former serving veterans, public service, cyber security professionals.

Call to action:

While VSG is committed to driving this initiative, the full potential of the civil cyber force—including deployment activities—can only be realised through close coordination with relevant government entities.

Q 36:

What support would assist critical infrastructure owners and operators to mature their cyber and operational resilience practices? What role should government play in enabling uplift, including through tools, guidance or incentives?

Under the Security of Critical Infrastructure (SOCI) Act, designated Systems of National Significance (SoNS) may be required to conduct cyber security exercises to demonstrate preparedness and response capability. While the format of these exercises is not prescriptively defined in the legislation—allowing flexibility based on cost, proportionality, and organisational maturity—there is a growing recognition that traditional tabletop or discussion-based formats, though useful for decision-making and coordination, are not sufficient on their own. Live-fire exercises, which more closely simulate real incidents and require teams to actively perform their roles and responsibilities, are becoming a more effective way to test operational resilience, technical response capabilities, and cross-sector coordination under realistic conditions.

Nationally facilitated cross-sector exercises would enable critical infrastructure operators, industry partners, and government agencies to work together in real time, simulating large-scale cyber incidents and crisis scenarios. This would strengthen situational awareness, operational coordination, and decision-making capabilities across multiple sectors that are increasingly interdependent.

Government can play a vital enabling role by:

1. Coordinating and funding live-fire exercise programs across sectors and regions.
2. Providing common tools, frameworks, and threat intelligence to ensure consistency.
3. Facilitating information sharing between sectors and agencies before, during, and after exercises.
4. Offering incentives for critical infrastructure operators to participate and invest in capability uplift.

Such a coordinated national approach would not only increase the cyber maturity of individual operators but also strengthen collective operational resilience, ensuring Australia is better prepared to respond to significant cyber incidents and emerging threats.

Call to action:

To enhance the cyber and operational resilience of Australia's critical infrastructure, we urge the government to expand access to realistic, scenario-based live-fire cyber exercises. These exercises would allow organisations to test incident response plans, improve detection and recovery capabilities, and build confidence and resilience under pressure in a safe, controlled environment.

Q 39:

What role should government play in supporting the development and growth of Australia's cyber workforce? What initiatives, pilots or policy ideas do you think would best support industry to grow?

Q 40:

What have been the most successful initiatives and programs that support mid-career transitions into the cyber workforce and greater diversity in technology or STEM-fields more broadly?

Veterans and their partners, women, First Nations peoples, neurodiverse individuals, students and mid-career transitioners often face significant challenges entering cyber and other ICT roles. Unclear employment requirements and the overlap of certifications can lead to over-training, unnecessary costs, and limited job outcomes. These issues also affect many TAFE and university graduates, who often lack the practical skills and experience employers are seeking.

To address these barriers, WorkPath Australia was established to bridge the gap between underrepresented Australian talent and meaningful, future-focused employment. Launched in 2021 as a veteran and partner transition program, it has since evolved into a sovereign workforce solution, now supporting a diverse range of groups—including women, First Nations peoples, neurodiverse individuals, students and mid-career professionals—to enter Australia's growing cyber workforce.

Overview of the WorkPath Australia program

WorkPath Australia (WPA) is a nationally recognised, industry and Prime Minister's National Veteran Employment Awarded training and employment program, delivering sovereign workforce capability to address national skills shortages and create greater diversity since 2021.

WPA prepares Participants to become 'job-ready' for high-demand positions across technology, corporate and government environments. Participants are provided with tailored Pathways which include training and attainment of nationally recognised qualifications and micro-credentialing, mentoring, security clearance sponsorship, and other activities, which culminates in the Participant entering employment and being placed with their Employment Partner.

Pathways are co-designed with Employment Partners, ensuring that each Participant's Pathway and conditions for employment, are exactly aligned to the Employment Partner's actual workplace needs. This means Participants graduate having completed essential specific workplace training and ensuring that they Participant is "fit-for-purpose" for their intended position before entering their meaningful employment.

WPA consists of 5 stages, and it has 3 streams:

5 Stages of WPA:

1. **Identification:** The Employment Partner will provide WPA with details of available positions, including the number of roles, job descriptions, expected start dates and locations. WPA will identify and vet potential Participants to match employment requirements and locations.
2. **Selection:** The Employment Partner reviews Participants nominated by WPA, with shortlisted Participants progressing to the Selection interview stage. Following interviews, and where a mutual fit is identified, a selected cohort of Participants will be issued a Conditional Employment Offer or other equivalent instrument. This offer will outline the training, certification, and security clearance requirements that must be met prior to formal employment.
3. **Pathway:** Participants enter a structured Pathway that includes pastoral care, mentoring, and any additional training and certifications specified and paid for by the Employment Partner to ensure they graduate job ready. Where requested by the Employment Partner, WPA can sponsor Participants through to NV2 security clearance.
4. **Placement:** Upon successful completion of the Pathway requirements, Participants are issued an Employment Contract and placed with the Employment Partner as permanent, full-time employees or as subcontracted resources.
5. **Alumni:** Graduated Participants remain engaged through the WPA network, where they support new Participants and continue their own professional development. WPA can provide ongoing pastoral care, mentoring, and training to help participants grow and advance their careers, where appropriate and as directed by the Employment Partner.

3 Streams of WPA:

1. Veteran and Partner Pathways—Empowering veterans and their families beyond service.

WPA proudly supports ADF veterans and their partners to transition into civilian employment aligned with their skills, values, and aspirations. As a Defence Industry Security Program (DISP) Level 3 Member, DVA-recognised Veteran Employer of Choice, ADF Reserves and Employer Support Silver Member, and proud signatory to the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program, WPA is deeply committed to veteran and partner employment.

Partners of veterans—who frequently relocate, disrupt careers, or serve as informal carers, also face unique employment disadvantages. At WPA, we recognise that both veterans and their partners bring immense value to the workforce. Through structured transitions, career-matched placements, and culturally competent support, we help unlock that potential—not just to support their civilian success, but to actively build Australia's sovereign workforce capability.

2. Professional Upskilling Pathways—Building inclusive, job-ready capability across Australia’s underrepresented communities.

This stream focuses on supporting underutilised and underrepresented groups of Australians to access and enter meaningful, future-focused careers through targeted learning, industry-aligned training, and tailored placement support.

We deliver culturally grounded, nationally scalable employment solutions—both on-country and in-city—designed in partnership with community leaders, industry and government.

We offer pathways to support:

- **Women**—particularly those early in their careers, returning to work, seeking career change, or entering male-dominated industries such as tech, cyber, trades, and defence industry.
- **Neurodivergent Australians**—by creating safe, inclusive environments that emphasise strengths-based assessment, routine, clear communication, and custom job matching.
- **First Nations Peoples**—through pathways that respect cultural identity, deliver community-embedded outcomes, and support economic self-determination.
- **Students and Graduates**—through structured, entry-level pathways that combine accredited training, mentoring, and employer connections to support a confident transition into meaningful first jobs.

3. Mid-Career Transition Pathways—Supporting Australia’s first responders, public sector professionals and essential service workers to transition into new career chapters with confidence.

This pathway is designed for Australians with significant public service or essential industry experience—including police, paramedics, emergency services, nurses and other mid-career professionals—who are ready to pivot into new, future-focused roles.

- Tailored for purpose-driven professionals with transferrable skills in leadership, crisis management, critical thinking, and service delivery.
- Recognises burnout, career stagnation or health-related exit points, and provides pathways to sustainable second careers.
- Offers targeted career mapping, skills translation, qualifications recognition, and job-matching into meaningful industries.
- Designed to preserve and repurpose institutional knowledge and embed values-driven talent into national workforce priorities.

Whether transitioning by choice or necessity, this stream empowers Australia’s community protectors to build long-term success in a new chapter of service—in sectors such as cyber security, risk management, logistics, government services, healthcare and more.

How WorkPath Australia goes beyond recruitment

Unlike standard recruitment models, WPA is a strategic talent development solution that prepares individuals to step into roles job-ready—not weeks or months down the track, but on

day one. The critical difference lies in our Pathway stage, which bridges the gap between selection and employment through:

- Offer of Employment given in advance allowing Participants to follow their pathway and plan with certainty.
- Pre-employment training and certifications aligned to the employer's actual needs.
- Security clearance facilitation, ensuring all vetting and onboarding steps are progressed in parallel- not post-offer.
- Tailored upskilling, mentoring, and role-specific coaching, led by accredited professionals and subject matter experts.
- Employer co-designed learning plans, so participants are fit-for-purpose and embedded into the organisation's workflow seamlessly.

WPA Employment Partners have highlighted clear advantages in joining the program:

- **Job-ready talent**—trained, cleared, and aligned to specific role requirements.
- **Co-designed workforce solutions**—built around long-term capability needs.
- **Reduced time-to-fill**—no waiting on clearances or training completions.
- **Demonstrated DEIB outcomes**—supports ESG, RAP, and Affirmative Measures.
- **End-to-end delivery**—we manage everything from attraction through to alumni engagement.
- **Cost-efficient placement**—avoids remuneration costs for employees still in training or not yet fully job-ready.

Call to action

- 1) WPA was specifically designed to reduce critical skills shortages and bridge the gap between underrepresented talent and meaningful employment opportunities, helping to address workforce shortages in highly sought-after fields such as cyber and ICT. To strengthen Australia's cyber and ICT workforce capability, the government could consider leveraging programs such as WorkPath Australia (WPA) to support the Australian Public Service (APS) in building a more inclusive and diversified talent pipeline. WorkPath Australia (WPA) is accessible to government agencies through the Whole-of-Federal Government, Department of Finance, People Panel—Phase 1 Deed ([SON3897769](#)).
- 2) The government could consider supporting Australians, students, and industry in accessing programs such as WorkPath Australia (WPA) by promoting awareness, fostering partnerships, and aligning workforce initiatives with national skills priorities. It could also explore targeted initiatives or support mechanisms to encourage greater private-sector participation and collaboration. Such measures would help expand the program's reach, improve pathways into cyber and ICT careers, and enable critical industries to access job-ready, security-cleared talent. In doing so, the government would strengthen Australia's workforce capability and enhance national resilience in the face of evolving cyber and digital challenges.