Rio Tinto and EdTech Sector to Invest in Developing the Skills of Young Australians for the Future

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Rio Tinto will work with leaders in Australia’s education and innovation sectors in a new, disruptive approach designed to tackle a looming skills gap in the nation’s future workforce.

The company will invest A$10 million in a four-year national programme, targeted at school-age learners, that aims to fast-track the development of skills needed for the digital future, including critical thinking, problem-solving, automation, systems design, and data analytics.

Launched today at the Rio Tinto Centre for Mine Automation at the University of Sydney, and developed in partnership with leading startup accelerator BlueChilli and Amazon Web Services (AWS), the programme will crowd-source and fund ideas from start-ups and schools.

Designed to prepare young Australians for work of the future, the initial phase of the programme will identify existing EdTech projects aimed at enhancing future skills, that can be scaled-up quickly for the use of students, teachers and parents.

Data compiled by employment analytics firm Burning Glass shows there is a shortage of transferable, broad-based Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills, such as systems analysis and programming, and broader expertise, such as communication and problem solving, needed for the digital revolution.

An advisory board of Australian education, innovation and business leaders, to be announced early next year, will guide the accelerator programme and recommend future areas for investment. In 2020, startups selected for the programme will each receive a grant from Rio Tinto, as well as training and mentoring from experienced entrepreneurs.

Rio Tinto will also encourage other business, education and innovation leaders to join the programme.

The initiative complements the A$14 million Rio Tinto already invests in education programmes each year with universities, schools, governments and the not-for-profit sector to help meet growing demand for new and emerging skills. The existing investment includes a partnership with the West Australian Government and TAFE to develop the first nationally recognised qualifications in automation.

Rio Tinto chief executive J-S Jacques said “This new programme takes a bold and disruptive approach to identifying solutions that will help equip young people with the knowledge and skills for a changing world.

“Rapid technological change is transforming our lives, and the pace of change is only increasing, challenging our ability to attract, develop and retain the talent needed to run our operations of the future.

“Workers with transferable skills including broad-based Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Maths are critical for Australia’s future productivity and global competitiveness.

“Addressing the change in skills required by mining and other industries is a task that requires new thinking and genuine partnerships between business, governments and academia. This approach significantly expands the network of organisations focused on equipping people for a digital future.”

BlueChilli CEO & Founder Sebastien Eckersley-Maslin said “At BlueChilli, our mission is to help people solve the world’s biggest challenges with technology and ensuring the next generation of Australians have the skills to succeed in a tech-driven world is critical. Australia is home to a vibrant and rapidly growing EdTech sector, and we’re excited to partner with Rio Tinto and AWS to help the most promising startups accelerate and scale their commercial and social impact.”

Amazon Web Services Head of Resource Industries for Australia and New Zealand Sarah Bassett said, “AWS is committed to helping Australians develop the skills needed to thrive in the future workplace and drive economic growth. We are delighted to work with Rio Tinto and BlueChilli, as well as some of the most innovative startups, to help enable their ideas through technology.”

University of Sydney Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Duncan Ivison: “We have worked with Rio Tinto for over a decade in advanced robotics and AI technology. Programmes like these are particularly important when you consider the automation of routine tasks will increase demand for higher order skills such as critical thinking and analysis. We need to prepare young people for these changes and at a minimum ensure that with increasing digitisation of the workplace there is basic digital literacy across all workers.”

To register your interest in the programme or join our EdTech community, please visit Bluechilli.com/futureskills

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