

# Students pay for their own upskilling

Concerns over fees as expensive training to navigate AI in the workplace is being tacked onto existing courses.

Kiara Angelini

SIENNA Flynn has already witnessed artificial intelligence become more and more integrated in the public sector.

But she's worried students are being asked to foot the bill to upskill on top of paying thousands to get their university qualification.

"I struggle to see how that is ethical in itself for a student to have to pay to upskill when they already have their degree," she said.

The University of Canberra has announced a new graduate certificate exclusively for public service workers in response to insufficient availability of training for new technologies.

The Certificate of law for AI and ethical data aims to help workers navigate the legal, regulatory and ethical challenges of this technology, UC said.

Tess Rooney, Program Director said it "is fast becoming one of the most valued capabilities in government".

The tuition costs of the year course is \$12,000.

Ms Flynn, who is president of the nursing association at UC, said future public servants are concerned they are left to pay for their own upskilling.

"Many students struggle to pay upfront for their degree, let alone another year for a course unrelated to nursing," she said.

"We aren't studying computer science, we are nurses."



University of Canberra nursing association president Sienna Flynn. Picture by Karleen Minney

## Future public servants concerned

There is a growing expectation for public servants to have competency in the responsible use of AI and data.

The Australian National Audit Office's recent examination of AI governance found 56 Commonwealth entities were already using AI in some form in 2023 to 2024.

Ms Flynn said UC's course was not affordable for many students and also raised concerns about if there is enough internal training on ethical use of these technologies.

"AI isn't person-centred or completely reliable. When it comes to health information, we rely on critical thinking. We rely on proper human connection, empathy," she said.

A survey by the Community and Public Sector union in 2024 found 92 per cent of respondents have not received any training on the use of AI at work, and 16 per cent felt

prepared to use the tools effectively.

"There must be strong guardrails around AI to enhance a human-centred approach -not one focused on productivity or cost-cutting," the union said.

## Worries on accessibility

UC nursing student Joshua Haze-Moran said the course "is out of reach for a lot of people".

"I think that all education should be free," he said.

Mr Haze-Moran said that the use of AI for nurses is not essential, and it was not widely used at his previous employment in the public sector.

"I think that students feel pressure from themselves to use it because it seems like things are going to be a lot easier if they do," Mr Haze-Moran said.

He hopes that the course will teach public

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Sienna Flynn

servants how to use AI ethically as a tool, rather than a technology that does the work for them.

The 2025 Australian Government Data Governance Framework noted officers are now expected to use these technologies lawfully and ethically.

## The university's new course

The director said that within government, AI and data is increasingly being used to inform policy and assist decision-making.

An ACT Government spokesperson said AI and automation tools helped with "improving service delivery".

"From frontline to administrative staff, AI and automation tools help our public service focus on work that benefits the community most by streamlining processes, improving service delivery, and strengthening policy development," the spokesperson said.

UC Vice-Chancellor and president, Bill Shorten said: "Our graduates will be equipped with skills and knowledge they can immediately apply in the workplace".

The program will be delivered with the support of Google and engagement from Google Cloud to provide guidance on the course curriculum.

It will be delivered online and is designed to be completed part-time over a year in four study blocks.

## REGISTER OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The Australian Electoral Commission has received an application to change the name, abbreviation, and remove the logo of Australian Citizens Party under the provisions of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918*.

Current name: **Australian Citizens Party**

Current abbreviation: **Citizens Party**

Proposed name: **Australian Peoples Party**

Proposed abbreviation: **Peoples Party**

Objections must be lodged by **3 September 2026**.

For more information see

[www.aec.gov.au/party-reg-objections](http://www.aec.gov.au/party-reg-objections)



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