

## The Sydney Morning Herald

INDEPENDENT. ALWAYS.

# Big Apple leads technology-sector investment to boost jobs

BY MATTHEW HALL



*First day of class for a new crop of Flatiron technology students in New York.*

As Australia's federal government looks to make controversial budget cuts to education, innovation and science research, New York City is partnering with schools and private companies to fund training and jobs in its technology sector.

The Flatiron School, a private vocational college that runs intensive courses in computer programming, is a new educational institution the city has partnered with to boost its Tech Talent Pipeline program, an initiative the city intends will connect New Yorkers with training - and eventually employment - as its local tech industry booms.

"If there is one single thing a government can do it is help in the search for talent," Maria Torres-Springer, Commissioner, New York City Department of Small Business Services told IT Pro.

"Growing and supporting the tech sector is important but government will always be slower than the technology sector. We want to make investments in the right place and leave it to the experts. We intervene only in the right places. We intervene in this case to ensure people otherwise shut out of the industry have access to it."

The city's partnership with The Flatiron School is a recently launched fellowship that provides free tuition to New York residents with no previous web development experience who are currently earning less than \$US50,000 per year or are unemployed.

The Flatiron School's rapid-fire curriculum is considered crucial to the program's success. The school opened in 2012 as a private college by entrepreneurs Adam Enbar and college dropout Avi Flombaum.

The school's hook - it has never advertised and all its 202 graduates initially applied after word-of-mouth referrals - is that \$US12000(\$1280) buys students a 12-week course that teaches programming and web development.

It claims a 98 per cent employment rate for graduates who subsequently earn an average of \$US75,000 per year. Graduates, who have included a former professional football player and a radio producer, have since been hired by The New York Times, Etsy, Time Inc, and email marketing firm Constant Contact.

It has also become an employer in its own right by hiring 35 staff since the beginning of the year to keep pace with demand for its courses.

School founder Enbar said: "We went to employers and said 'If we teach these skills will you hire these people and if not what are we missing?' That is how we built our curriculum."

"A staff member recently met with Google who said that if they hired every single computer science graduate in the country they still wouldn't have enough," Enbar added. "On the one hand we are talking about unemployment and low wages in this country and then on the other we have companies who can't pay people enough and can't find enough people to do this work."

Torres-Springer said the city's challenge was plugging residents into the success and growth of developing industries and also funding programs like the Tech Talent Pipeline which is funded by a combination of federal funding, city tax dollars, and private and non-profit investment.

"It's important that, as a nation and as a city, we continue to invest in the types of programs and training initiatives that allow people to develop the skills for 21st century jobs," said Torres-Springer.

"What we found in our agency was that a lot of our funding came from the federal government and that has diminished over time. That forced us to think about how to blend different funding streams. At the end of the day having a top notch workforce is good for everybody."