



SUBMISSION

Department of Employment and Workplace
Relations

TDA RESPONSE TO JSA DISCUSSION PAPER JANUARY 2023

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About TAFE Directors Australia (TDA)

TDA is the peak national body that represents Australia's national network of State and Territory publicly owned TAFE institutes and university TAFE divisions. All TAFE institutes and TAFE divisions of universities across Australia are [members of TDA](#).

The primary business of TDA members is vocational education and training focusing on nationally accredited qualifications and skill sets, non-accredited training for bespoke employer purposes, and foundation skills development for all learners. TAFEs dominate the market in the delivery of apprenticeships, partner extensively with secondary schools for delivery of vocational education and training and prioritise support for vulnerable and less advantaged Australians. Of the 29 TDA members, ten TAFEs are higher education providers and a further six are TAFE divisions of dual sector public universities.

TDA members are the main providers of training for critical Australian industries including Electricians, Plumbers, and Enrolled Nurses. TDA members are heavily invested in supplying skills development in emerging industries such as clean energy and cyber security and have significant roles in skill shortage areas such as aged care and community services. Importantly, TAFEs' breadth of scope is reflected in TAFE-industry-employer-local community engagement in cities and suburbs, and in regional, rural and remote Australia.

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Structure and governance

1. Are there other design considerations that could further strengthen Jobs and Skills Australia's ability to provide advice to government?

TDA agrees with the Government's ambition to improve advice to Ministers on the skills and training needs of workers and employers now and into the future through the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA). This is a significant development.

TDA supports the Commissioner model and JSA's commitment to broad consultation to reflect a wide range of perspectives. TDA would welcome further clarification on the various roles and responsibilities of the Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioners, including their interaction with and reporting structures to the advisory body and various sub-committees.

TDA supports the advisory body and the breadth of representation on it. To be successful it will be essential JSA engage fully with the TAFE sector. TAFE is fundamental to skills and training for industry and TAFE's voice has often not been considered or been treated as only one among over 3,500 training providers.

The fact the advisory body includes the Chair of TDA Board, who is also a CEO of a Melbourne TAFE Institute, is welcomed. This action will ensure that the experience of those delivering skills and training in complex not for profit TAFEs, with many industry stakeholders and to large numbers and broad groups of learners, will inform JSA's work. It is essential that this representative can represent all TAFEs.

TDA supports the inclusion of universities in JSA's work and on the advisory body. This will mean JSA cannot help but look at the funding, regulatory and policy restraints that prevent effective workforce solutions that draw from both sectors. With JSA's industry focus they will inevitably have to tackle the factors that constitute Australia's tertiary education system that are preventing higher education and vocational education pathways.

The advisory body must consult broadly and be held accountable for that consultation. For many years the VET sector has received advice from a limited group of stakeholders, so it is refreshing to see the advisory group broadened to include TAFE, universities, unions and other perspectives.

JSA must operate as part of the whole ecosystem where States and Territories have invested in equivalent skills authorities to meet their specific needs. JSA must therefore actively engage with organisations such as the Victorian Skills Authority, the South Australian Skills Commission, Jobs Queensland and similar bodies in their respective States and Territories.

TDA notes that the government, industry and regulatory architecture within which the vocational education and training (VET) sector operates is already complex and somewhat over governed. When considering the design of JSA, TDA cautions against an overly bureaucratic governance structure and advocates for simplicity, flexibility and accountability to ensure that innovation and skills development are enabled.

From the perspective of a TAFE and given the constant reforms in the VET sector, it will be important for JSA to have a well-defined and well understood role and remit. There is a danger of lack of clarity between the role of JSA and the Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs), the

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), the various regulators including the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), industry and union stakeholders as well as state training authorities and state skills commissions. Consideration must be given to how all these actors will work together.

There is also a danger of too much being expected of JSA. Some have advocated for JSA to have an overarching and authoritative view over JSCs. This needs to be handled carefully as governance may then become more important than the task at hand which is fundamentally matching skills and training with workforce demand. However, TDA would welcome JSA playing a role to minimise duplication of effort, and not repeat the mistakes of the precursors of the JSCs, where there was blinkered attention to implementation issues of training products and their impact on enrolled students and thus the pipeline of qualified people for employers.

In terms of workforce planning, JSA must identify what are the conditions outside training that might be impacting the workforce. A good example is the current design of the aged care workforce. (As an example, TDA references its letter regarding aged care minutes of February 2023 to Minister Anika Wells and copied to Minister O'Connor). Additionally, TAFEs and RTOs cannot attract students into an industry with skills shortages if jobs in those industries are not valued or remunerated appropriately and provide no career progression. Therefore, JSA must be able to make representation beyond skills and training.

Recommendation 1

Ensure advice to JSA is prioritised to those who are fundamental anchors in the solution to Australia's skills requirements. TAFE must be included and TDA provides the national voice for all TAFEs.

Recommendation 2

Require JSA to work closely with State and Training equivalent bodies to gather from them local data that informs the national picture and analysis.

Recommendation 3

Define roles and responsibilities of JSA and actors associated with JSA so that stakeholders understand its role within a broad, complex system, with specific consideration of interactions with JSCs.

Recommendation 4

Enable JSA to make representation beyond skills and training relating to workforce planning and supply issues.

Functions

2. What principles could be used to guide Jobs and Skills Australia's priorities, and the development of its workplan?

JSA should develop its workplan following the key principles of data-driven and evidence-based, independence and sustainability focused. The workplan must be flexible and have clear lines of accountability.

In developing its workplan, JSA should be aware of local, regional, state and territory differences and economic needs. Therefore, consultation with those bodies that have been formed to have a State or Territory view will be essential. Revealing the blockages and current workforce capacity will be crucial.

JSA must continue to publish the skills requirement of the nation. That is, JSA must also not lose the valuable work led by the previous National Skills Commission.

While supportive of the inclusion of universities and their role in skills development and education in the JSA workplan, TDA advocates universities must not become the main narrative. Parity of esteem between the two sectors is essential with a specific requirement that JSA is tasked to improve the value and perception of vocational education from foundation skills to AQF 6. JSA has a role to advise on how the tertiary educator sector can deliver combined solutions for industry and employers.

There are currently reviews underway that are exploring both VET and the higher education to ensure they can meet future knowledge and skills demands. TDA would expect that the outcomes and findings of these reviews will also inform the future workplan of JSA.

JSA has a role to provide information to Australians about their careers and therefore subsequent choices regarding education and training. The principle that everyone should be able to access the skills and education that they need to secure meaningful work must underpin JSA's mandate.

In terms of the development of the JSA workplan, TDA also notes that there is some urgency for JSA given the multiple challenges and opportunities that the Australian economy provides now. These include critical skill shortages, limited innovation, a narrow industrial base, the importance of sovereign capability, a changing geostrategic environment, the need for digital transformation in businesses, movement to a clean energy economy and society, and gender biased industries (including both trades and care industries).

TDA supports JSA's proposed work on clean energy skills and foundation skills. The advisory body should help determine other key pieces of work that address the current workforce crises in other sectors, such as aged care. In regards the aged care sector, TDA repeats its view that the advice of TAFE has not been included in proposed solutions.

Similarly, TDA would like to see JSA's workplan include consideration of questions of whether there is adequate funding to develop the skills of Australians? And have TAFEs have been adequately resourced to deliver on skills priorities? TAFEs, as public providers have a different status and purpose in the overall skills system than for-profit providers and this needs to be acknowledged to ensure that TAFE's public resources are utilised to their full extent.

However, it is not the role of JSA to begin to dictate how training should occur. There is a need for Australia to allow much more agile partnerships between TAFE and employers and this will best be realised through self-accreditation of TAFEs. Once that occurs JSA will have further insight into employers' needs that require immediate solutions.

Recommendation 5

Consider the following in the development of the JSA workplan:

- move quickly to identify major skills shortages/crises/bottlenecks in the economy and make demonstrable progress on these in consultation with JSA stakeholders
- draw on existing information and use findings from current and ongoing reviews to inform future JSA workplan
- recognise the difference in purpose of a publicly funded, state-based TAFE versus a private RTO and how to better utilise and better resource TAFEs to meet Australia's skills needs
- join the system together i.e. link employers with VET and foster pathways between higher education and VET that can be practically implemented
- understand industry skills and training needs through the development of fast to market employer demanded training products that are made possible through TAFE self-accreditation.

3. How could Jobs and Skills Australia seek broader input into the development and refinement of its workplan?

Drawing on lessons from the past, TDA would like to see the membership of the advisory body and sub-committees change on a regular basis. This would ensure that JSA remains a dynamic organisation through a continual pipeline of new thinking, new ideas and new ways of working. The selection of members to provide input to advisory bodies and sub-committees should also reflect national agenda, policy and sustainable development goals.

As the membership is refreshed it is critical that TAFE continues to be represented on the advisory body. The proposed tripartite model should make clear that TAFE is 'at the heart of the training sector'. Without the voice of TAFE nationally, as government owned large providers with breadth of scope and students, the impact on skills and training will not be effective.

JSA must also identify and work with organisations that have a similar remit (research, analyse and advise), such as Jobs Queensland that provides strategic advice to the Queensland Government on future skills and workforce needs. JSA could also engage with state regulators to get a standardised approach especially around zero emission vehicles and new technologies.

Recommendation 6

Renew the membership of the advisory body and sub-committees on a regular basis, while sustaining TAFE membership.

4. How could Jobs and Skills Australia engage tripartite partners, experts and other interested parties in its major studies?

As previously mentioned, JSA must firstly work with State and Territory counterparts and JSCs to minimise a perception of over consultation.

Once that has happened and there is confidence that there are groups that have not been included, JSA could, in partnership with the respective JSC:

- hold consultation events that are facilitated and actively encourage engagement
- engage with industry sectors and learner cohorts to understand specific skill needs
- develop clear terms of reference for major studies to assist with identifying relevant stakeholders
- seek written input to proposed studies and provide avenues for ongoing consultation as the workplan/study progresses
- use TDA as a conduit to communicate with its TAFE member institutions across Australia.

Recommendation 7

Work with State and Territory counterparts and JSCs to gather data and minimise duplication and the perception of over-consultation.

5. What new information should Jobs and Skills Australia be collecting through its engagement to build a stronger evidence base?

JSA must require industry to be specific on the sorts of skills and knowledge they require. It would be useful to determine what specific educational outcomes are desired by industries, especially new “clean energy” industries, e.g. what types of maths. JSA should also collaborate with state and territory education departments to ensure a pipeline of students through schools.

The contribution that TAFEs make in regional, rural and remote economies and communities should also be recognised and better utilised.

Recommendation 8

Require industry to be specific as to their requirements.

Recommendation 9

Use knowledge from TAFEs to ensure local perspectives are being captured in broad studies and use TDA as a conduit to establish appropriate TAFE forums for advice to JSA as appropriate.

Ways of working

6. How can Jobs and Skills Australia expand its engagement to include a broader range of skills and industry stakeholders in its work?

An important role for JSA will be to encourage employers to step into education and training and understand their responsibilities within the system. COSBOA will play a role on the advisory body providing the perspective of small business. This will require making it attractive for employers to engage and building employers' capability to know how to engage. In terms of the latter point, that will involve providing guidance to employers to detail what outcomes they need from skills and training, not replicating the prescriptive, task focused training package structure that developed over the last decade.

In terms of migration and the offshore environment, JSA could determine countries and skills development programs for priority industries. Partnerships with DFAT and DOHA will streamline advice. Innovation, such as TAFE programs delivered offshore need to be considered prior to opening opportunities for migration from those countries.

7. What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?

Being responsive to existing events that increase exposure to key target groups is important. Additionally, connecting industry with TAFEs through structured forums would make a difference to the understanding of what skills and training is required and nuancing that to regional communities.

Engagement with specific support groups and agencies should be informed by those agencies and people that support those cohorts and who understand the daily challenges they face in accessing relevant training for meaningful jobs.

8. How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?

Information and data should be easily accessible, clear and targeted to the relevant stakeholder audience or cohort (rather than generic information). This will require close consultation between JSA, JSCs, the sub-committees and relevant communications and media groups that represent each stakeholder.

Use existing communication channels to share that data, as per current practice.

TDA would welcome:

- regular reporting of JSA outputs and outcomes through its existing communication channels
- easily accessible, visual data dashboards (and graphs, infographics, resources) that are vocationally specific, locally relevant or cohort focused.

Recommendation 10

Use TDA channels for communication to report regularly on JSA outputs and outcomes.