

File/Our Ref:
Your Ref:
Please quote in reply



By your side

19 August 2022

Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment

By email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Re: Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 [Provisions] and the Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022 [Provisions]

The Australian Services Union (ASU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 [Provisions] and the Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022 [Provisions].

The ASU is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 135,000 members. The ASU has members in many industries and occupations including: social and community services, local government, state government, transport, aviation, energy, water and the private sector.

We welcome the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) as a statutory body to provide independent advice on current, emerging, and future workforce, skills, and training needs.

The role of Vocational Education and Training

Federal, State and Territory Governments along with other key stakeholders including unions, employer associations and training providers must work closely together on skills solutions. It is important to align Vocational Education and Training (VET) system outcomes with current and emerging industry shortages and ensure more efficient mutual recognition of qualifications.

VET, with TAFE at its centre, can play a significant role in building the vocational skills of the nation. Public funding for the VET system in Australia has played a valuable role in improving social and economic equality.

Recent policy directions have placed increased emphasis on a market driven approach to the provision of VET services which has resulted in a range of problems including revelations of deteriorating quality standards, aggressive marketing behaviour by some training companies (particularly in vulnerable communities) and practices which have left many students demoralised, in debt and left with inadequately training or an inability to complete their chosen course work. The unfortunate consequent of poor-quality training is that young people are not adequately prepared to enter the job market.

We need to rebuild the VET system, so it does what it is supposed to do, which is allow students and workers to get the "critical skills and capabilities they need to enter the workforce, move into higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs, return to the workforce, or transition to a new field of work." [ACTU]

This can be achieved by allowing for both the VET and TAFE systems to work closely together with all stakeholders to develop and support an innovative and forward-looking sector. A strong fully funded VET & TAFE sector that is accessible to all, must be at the centre of JSA.

The Care workforce

The care workforce is struggling to attract, retain and develop its staff. Employment conditions for the care workforce are characterised by low pay rates and insecure employment practices. These characteristics are directly linked to short-term government funding arrangements tied to the bare minimum safety net entitlements of the modern award system.

Low wages and precarious conditions for the care workforce limit the attractiveness of skilled workers and increases employee turnover. There is little incentive for employees to seek additional skills or qualifications because the funding arrangements limit the scope for career progression in the industry. Similarly, the funding arrangements and employment practices limit the opportunities for employees to undertake training.

It is vital to attract and retain workers with the right skills. Greater choice and control for participants in the care industry over the types of supports they want and need means the care workforce needs to be supported to continuously develop new skills and qualifications relevant to the diverse needs of individual clients.

For example disability sector workers, who are part of the care workforce, are highly skilled and passionate about what they do – but their capacity to have their skills recognised, to develop new skills and to attain relevant person-centred qualifications is severely limited. Disability support work demands physical and interpersonal skills and high-level communication skills. The range of cases one worker will deal with on a daily basis are diverse and complex. For these reasons we need to invest in skills, training, and development of disability workers in a strategic and planned way.

To maximise the potential of the NDIS as an engine of jobs and economic growth, the system desperately needs a strong and immediate strategy for ongoing investment in workforce development and training. Workers need an opportunity to accumulate skills. It is vital JSA be well placed to tackle the current skills deficit in the care workforce.

Local Government workforce

Key challenges facing the local government workforce include the current and emerging skills shortages as well as training delivery and uptake. Councils in regional areas are particularly disadvantaged, facing additional barriers regarding skills and training opportunities.¹

Never has the need for workforce development been greater in local government. Efforts to raise workforce skills through VET are essential for effective service delivery and for enabling local government to respond to emerging challenges.

The advancement of learning pathways from VET or certified training to higher qualifications can enable local government workers to move into qualified professional roles. In 2017, 44% of local governments across Australia indicated they did not have enough apprentices/trainees to meet their future skill needs.² There must be increased apprenticeship support funding and as proposed by the ACTU in their submission as well as an effective National Apprenticeship Advisory Board targeting the growth of apprenticeships and work-based training initiatives.

¹ Australian Local Government Association, Local Government Workforce and Future Skills Report Australia, September 2018

² Ibid.

JSA is an important opportunity to develop the highly skilled, highly paid jobs of the future to ensure Australia's continued prosperity.

Finally, the ASU is aware that several other Unions and affiliates are making submissions in response to the proposed Bills. The ASU supports those submissions and the recommendations contained within. In particular, the ASU supports the ACTU submission outlining a model for JSA including key functions, objectives and governance.

Yours faithfully



Robert Potter
NATIONAL SECRETARY