

**Transcript of webinar recorded 15:00 AEST Tuesday 7 September 2021**

**Webinar recording:** [7 9 2021 NESM Workforce Specialists - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eI3-9r_aYqE)

**Workforce Connections Plan**

Underpinning the Workforce Specialists Initiative

New Employment Services Model

**Presented by:**

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**Speaker:**

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[*Opening visual of slide with text saying ‘Australian Government with Crest (logo)’, ‘Department of Education, Skills and Employment’, ‘Workforce Connections Plan, ‘Underpinning the Workforce Specialists initiative’, ‘New Employment Services Model’*]

[The visuals during this webinar are the content of a PowerPoint presentation being played on screen]

**Stuart Watson:**

Good afternoon, everybody. We might kick off with today's Webinar. We are expecting a few more attendees.

We will just start at 3 PM. To introduce myself, my name is Stuart Watson, and I'm the Assistant Secretary of the Employers and Work Experience Branch.

With me today is my colleague, Nikita Sharpe who heads up my Workforce Specialist team.

And she's here to help me answer any questions you might have today.

In today's webinar, I'll be talking to you about the new Workforce Specialist initiative and the development of the Workforce Connections Plan to support and underpin this initiative.

We'll then be posing some questions to you and seeking your feedback to help inform the development of this plan.

I just want to say, before we start, I'm aware of the significant consultation that's already taken place to inform and develop specific industry workforce strategies and actions that you may have been involved in, We’ll be drawing on all this existing work, as well as the data and resources available through the National Skills Commission.

The focus of our consultation is identifying not only industries and occupations with significant labour market demand, but within this, where are the opportunities exist for job seekers and how the work projects of Workforce Specialists could undertake to help connect job seekers to these opportunities.

We welcome any insights you can share with us today, should you have any questions or comments at any point throughout the presentation, feel free to send them through by typing them in under the Questions tab and clicking Send there'll be other opportunities to send through feedback, so please don't feel rushed in any way.

A recording of this webinar, including responses to your questions, will also be put up on the department's website in due course.

Firstly, I'd like to begin by respectfully acknowledging the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today, and we gather from various places across Australia.

I pay my respects to them, their Elders past, present, and emerging, and to those who may be participating in today's Webinar.

This presentation, and any questions and discussions today will be undertaken with due consideration to probity.

When we talk about probity, we mean acting with integrity, fairness, uprightness, honesty of process.

What this means is that we will be ensuring every single process we enter into is fair, equitable, and transparent.

This includes making sure that detail, we share with one stakeholder is shared with others,

For example, if we answer a direct question that could give one potential supplier an advantage, we must ensure it is available to other potential suppliers.

By participating in or providing information in relation to this session today, you'll be taken to have agreed to the following.

The department may use information you contribute for purposes related to its development of the Workforce Connections Plan and the Workforce Specialists initiative.

The department will not publish any identifying information without first obtaining consent from you or your organization, subject to law or request by the minister or parliamentary body.

Any information provided by you will confer no right or benefit in any future procurement of services that may be related to the Workforce Specialists initiative.

Also, in all of our interactions, please be aware that we want to be as open as possible and to answer any questions you might have.

But there may be some questions or subjects off limits at this stage.

So, having a look at the Workforce Specialists model now. In July of 2022, the government will be introducing a new employment services model to replace jobactive.

A key element of the new model will be the Workforce Specialists initiative.

For mid-2022 onwards, a range of projects will be delivered by Workforce Specialists to help meet the workforce needs of identified key industries and occupations.

The government will be investing up to 12.5 million dollars each year for this program.

And this will be targeting industries and occupations with high demand for labour and strong growth prospects, particularly for lower skilled or entry level roles, job seekers registered in digital services, or those being serviced by an enhanced services provider.

A panel of Workforce Specialists will be established from July 2022 to deliver strategic projects with major employment opportunities, Projects will vary in size and duration, and one or more Workforce Specialists may be engaged on any one project.

The department will be responsible for overseeing all projects.

Projects will typically span large areas, potentially across the whole country, May involve many businesses and may draw upon other multiple employment providers.

To supply participants, projects will complement existing services where possible, leverage existing programs, initiatives in project design and operation.

So, what might a Workforce Specialist project look like?

Some hypothetical examples that we've developed include: a project that aims to supply job ready workers to help construct the Western Sydney airport.

This could include a pre employment pathway and training and work experience, a project that raises people's awareness of career opportunities in the agricultural industry.

This could involve financial assistance for relocation and training support.

Training and work experience projects in home disability carers.

This could potentially involve co-design with industry associations, training providers, and employers who are experiencing significant staff shortages.

Another example is co-ordinating a large recruitment exercise for a national hotel chain, including co-ordinating the assessment of candidates across multiple cities and towns and an induction process.

A Workforce Connections Plan, will identify key priority industries and occupations for targeted project funding.

The Plan is being developed by the Department in consultation with key stakeholders, including industry, employers, state and territory governments, training organizations, and the National Skills Commission.

That's why we're talking to you today.

Each priority industry occupation under the plan, will have its own implementation plan. These implementation plans will provide greater detail on how each industry or occupation will be supported, helping to shape the projects.

While the main objective of the plan is to ensure a strategic and targeted approach to funding projects, we acknowledge that things can change.

The plan will be reviewed regularly to respond to changes in the labour market.

There will also be scope for projects to support other emerging priorities, for example, in response to further changes in economic or environmental conditions, such as opportunities that don't neatly fit into one of the priorities but require a rapid response.

This slide has a diagram that illustrates the overall approach that we're taking.

An overarching plan will be developed by the department that would include both short and long term workforce priorities for investment.

A handful of key priorities will be identified, focused on industries and or occupations that have significant labour market opportunities for job seekers.

Each priority would have an implementation plan that identifies targeted projects that may have different durations and operate in different parts of the country.

Some projects may sit across multiple priorities.

Supporting these projects, and allowing the government to respond to identified priorities, emerging opportunities, is the Workforce Specialists panel.

To ensure the approach remains relevant and is fit for purpose, all elements would be regularly reviewed.

A review could result in projects being extended, reassignment of resources or additional priorities added, for example.

The focal point of this approach will be a Workforce Connections Plan, which communicates the Government's workforce agenda and key priorities.

The plan will have numerous inputs illustrated in this slide.

We'll be sourcing labour force data, several other data sources from the National Skills Commission, Employment Services administrative Data, Education, and Training Data, Industry Workforce Strategies. Many industries and stakeholders already have done a lot of work when it comes to workforce planning, and government priorities, things that our Minister and the rest of the Australian Government deem as being priorities for investment.

And, of course, we'll be responding to stakeholder feedback.

This is where you come in.

We are consulting with a range of groups to help inform the plan, including industry, government, businesses, and other stakeholders.

And I'll now go through a few data sources that will help illustrate what we're looking at to inform the Workforce Connections Plan.

Where are the growth opportunities charted over the next few years?

The National Skills Commission’s Five-Year employment outlook, shows that long-term structural shift in employment toward services industries is projected to continue over the five years to November 2025.

As you can see from this, as you can see from this slide, nearly two thirds of total employment growth over the five years to November 2025 comes from Health Care and Social Assistance, Accommodation and Food Services, Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, and Education, and Training, other significant contributors are from Construction, Retail Trade, Transport, Postal, and Warehousing.

Next slide.

We have job vacancies or demand for labour over time.

As you can see from this graph, the labour market took a big hit from Covid-19 in 2020, but rebounded strongly over the last year or so.

The closed borders have meant a lot of vacancies are not being filled in a range of sectors.

You can see at June 2021, a small decline. We expect this to continue. This was the first month on month decline in job ads since the low point of the pandemic in April 2020. In coming months we expect the impact of ongoing lockdowns on the eastern seaboard to show up in these figures.

So where does the data show us that jobs are at the moment?

As you can see from this slide, Australia's five largest employing industries are Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail Trade, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, Construction, Education and Training.

You can also see the top three employing occupations on the right, show which occupations employ the most people in each of these industries.

So, up until recently, noting that this is June 2021 data, which industries were recruiting at the time of this data snapshot?

The proportion of employers currently recruiting, or who recruited in the last months, are shown in this graph by selected industries.

At the time, there was increasing demand in accommodation and food services with more than two thirds of employers recruiting in June.

Retail trade also experienced a jump in June.

Of course, of interest is the drop in June in Health Care and Social Assistance.

So, now I'd like to turn to looking at employment services data specifically for jobactive, which is the Australian Government's mainstream employment service.

This graph shows the industries that the most jobactive participants are placed into.

The Accommodation and Food Services industry has over a quarter of a million job placements recorded across the life of the jobactive from July 2015 to June 2021.

Retail Trade and Construction are also big contributors to job placements.

And despite being the largest employer nationally, the Health Care and Social Assistance industry is not the largest employee industry for jobactive participants.

So, the next slide talks about who the job seekers are who access employment services, and, therefore, who Workforce Specialists will be targeting in the new model.

The majority of participants will be drawn from the new employment services model that will replace jobactive as at 30 June there was slightly over a million people on the jobactive caseload.

On the left, you can see some of the characteristics of this job seeker group.

This highlights the relative disadvantage that many jobactive participants face when looking for work.

On the right is the highest educational attainment of the jobactive caseload.

Less than one in eight have a university degree, nearly one in three has a trade or TAFE qualification as their highest qualification, and a sizable portion, one in three have not achieved Year 12 or equivalent.

This data leads us to think that targeting Workforce Specialists projects, to assist job seekers connected with entry level roles or those that require a TAFE or trade qualification will help maximize employment opportunities for job seekers in the new model.

So, now, I'd like to ask you a few questions, noting that you can still ask questions and hit Send for, Nikita to ask towards the end.

This website, please use the form on our Workforce Specialist website to give your responses to questions.

Noting that Workforce Specialists projects will connect job seekers with labour market opportunities and industries and occupations with significant demand for workers, And what industries should be priorities of projects and why, and what occupations should be a priority for projects, and why. I might pause there, Nikita, whether we've got any questions coming in yet.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

We do have one question that's popped up, particularly around Workforce Specialist program settings, that you spoke about earlier in the presentation, the $12.5 million investment that you mentioned, for industry and occupation projects. Is that for projects that are nationwide or will they be Employment Region specific?

**Stuart Watson:**

We would like to think that they are larger scale projects.

We haven't, we won't be expressing a view that they must be national, But we would think that they would have some capacity to cross regions.

We have another program called the Local Jobs program, which is very much targeted at regional responses, within boundaries.

And we do expect the Workforce Specialists projects to be of a larger scale than just particularly one region. And I'll bring you back to the examples that I gave earlier in the presentation.

And when we release any tendering documents, we'll also provide additional detail on the scope of projects that we will be expecting people to supply.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Thanks Stuart. And another question around the Workforce Connections Plan will identify industries and occupations.

What about those that aren't identified? is their capacity to undertake specialists projects for the other industries and occupations?

**Stuart Watson:**

The Workforce Connections Plan will identify target industries and occupations, and we will be directing funding towards those targeted areas.

Now that doesn't mean that, that other ideas for other industries and occupations can't be funded through other mechanisms. And further to that, the Workforce Connections Plan will be able to respond to emerging priorities.

So, just because a particular industry or occupation isn't targeted in the initial phase of the Workforce Specialist Initiative doesn't mean that we can't respond to emerging priorities as they appear.

The $12.5 million won't be able to be all to everyone. But it will be able to direct people to funding sources if funding sources are available elsewhere in the employment services ecosystem.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Thanks, Stuart.

And one more question. When do we expect that the request for proposal may go out to market, noting I guess that we are in a probity environment that you spoke about earlier.

**Stuart Watson:**

Yeah, sure. So, we haven't announced any date for a release of a request for proposal.

But at this stage, we're expecting that the Workforce Specialist Request for Proposal will be issued in the first quarter of 2022, and as usual, we’ll release that through AusTender and we'll use social media, and possibly even media to make that tender release announcement.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Thanks Stuart.

Anyone else, please feel free to add any questions into the Question and Answer box and I’ll endeavour to read them out.

**Stuart Watson:**

Great, thanks Nikita, just to go through the other questions we are seeking broader feedback on. And, again, noting that you can provide responses onto our website directly.

So, we are looking at industries and occupations of particular need and focus. But bearing that in mind, we're also looking for industries and occupations that provide the greatest opportunity for job seekers with minimal work experience, and or needing some training interventions in order to get people ready for those entry level roles.

We’re trying to gather together skills and attributes that job seekers might require for particular industries and occupations. For example, an industry could have lots of opportunities. But a barrier is a short sharp qualification to get through into those opportunities, which we could look at in terms of the Workforce Specialist initiatives and identified in the Workforce Connections Plan. And we're also interested in making sure that we cover all the sort of project ideas that we think could be delivered by Workforce Specialists. So, we've been asking people for their views there.

One of the other questions we've been asking is, How often to review the plan?

And I think one of the questioner’s was alluding to the fact that if industries or occupations aren't in the plan and an emerging priority arises, when would we be able to update the plan? We're getting varying feedback on that.

And so, we'd be interested in people's in people's views.

The other questions we're asking people, are people aware of other data sources that maybe we haven't taken into account, in making decisions about priorities of industries and occupations. We want to feel like we've got access to as much information as we can draw on. And also we're seeking people's assistance to identify other stakeholders.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation, we're recording this and we'll be publishing it on our website and we'd be very keen if you could think of other people who might be interested in hearing this webinar that you could direct them to the webinar on our website.

So, I might just pause there because that's the end of my formal scripted presentation.

I do want to make the point that, we have got further information on the department's website, It is the place we'll be publishing information, as we develop it, and it's available publicly.

And we very much encourage you to send your feedback on the Workforce Connections Plan, using the form on the webpage listed.

We also have a Frequently asked Questions document, and this is posted on our website, on the DESE website, the big long addresses is there. And any feedback that you do have, we'd appreciate it by the 24th of September 2021.

So, on that, I might pause to see if Nikita we've had any more questions come through.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Just the one.

Stuart could you maybe recap what the Workforce Connections Plan is and potentially what it isn't.

**Stuart Watson:**

Yes, I can, indeed.

Though, at its most straightforward level, the Workforce Connection Plan will be used to guide the activities of Workforce Specialists and it'll identify those key industries and occupations with labour market opportunities, and particularly labour market opportunities for the job seekers that participate in current jobactive, but in the future, new employment services world.

The Workforce Connections plan will, as I said, will guide that work, It's not a workforce strategy.

The plan will inform the identification of the delivery of the Workforce Specialist's initiative.

Identifying those particular industries.

It will not be all to everyone, $12.5 million, is a fantastic amount of money for the government to support in this initiative, but it will not be able to target every industry and occupation.

We will have to choose based on data in consultation with industry, employers, state and territory governments, and the National Skills Commission, a range of labour market data to identify which of those industries and occupations have the best chance of supporting job seekers into work.

So, that's what the plan is, as a recap and, and what it won't do,

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Thanks, Stuart.

You covered this a bit briefly earlier, but we've had another written question around how the Workforce Specialist program will be different to the Local Jobs Program.

**Stuart Watson:**

OK, the Local Jobs program is a, well, first of all, the Workforce Specialist initiatives is an ongoing, continuing part of the new employment services model. So, we expect these Workforce Specialists to be a feature of ongoing employment services throughout the life of the future market.

The Local Jobs Program, which will continue for quite a few years down the track, absolutely, was primarily designed as an economic response and a covid recovery response.

And very much is having local people on the ground, in their local communities operating within regional boundaries.

The Workforce Specialists, we think, will operate above those regional areas.

Potentially national as I mentioned, potentially multi regions, industries across multiple regions or occupations, across multiple industries.

I really see the Workforce Specialists as having a higher co-ordination and promotional roll around the industries and occupations that we've identified for ongoing support. Couple of key differences. The Local Jobs Program will have their local jobs plans, and also, will have access to some money in the Local Recovery Fund to fund those projects very much targeted at economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

So, I can see on paper, and in quick review, how people see similarities between them, but they will fill quite different spaces once the new market is up and operating.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

I think that's great, and as a follow on to that,

Where there are projects that are identified that do have a regional impact. What type of engagement will there be as part of that, I guess, project development and operation to ensure industries and employers within the area or more broadly, as you've said, we probably will be broader than a regional level, to ensure that employers and industries are engaged with the project and working with the Workforce Specialist.

**Stuart Watson:**

Well, the Workforce Specialists that we have on the panel, will have to identify how they are connected with industries that are in the Workforce Connection Plans, with the occupational groups that will, will employ people with those targeted occupations if we give them the skills to move in. So, I think the short answer to that is, they’ll need to demonstrate to us that they've got the capacity to get that momentum in the industries and occupations that we’ll be targeting.

And that could mean, co-ordinating, across a range of leveraging and co-ordinating across the range of existing programs.

It could be making sure that we are navigating, so, that an activity that could be funded through another funding source, is supported through that funding source and not through the Workforce Specialists initiative.

So, it's that kind of complimenting to other programs, but leveraging of other programs as well.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Awesome. Thanks, Stuart. And another question is related to the role of employment service providers. How will they be involved in promoting these Workforce Specialist activities and projects?

**Stuart Watson:**

Yeah, sure. Look, they are absolutely key in the success of initiatives like Local Jobs and, like Workforce Specialists.

They hold, they will be providing enhanced services to job seekers. So, they hold the people that we will need to be referred to this.

They hold the information about the labour supply that we have available, and we’ll need them to be feeding into Workforce Specialists, the sorts of activities that they may be interested in, Workforce Specialists running.

But having said that, we don't want Workforce Specialists replicating what the providers providing enhanced services in the future will be doing.

We very clearly wanting the Workforce Specialists to fill a space that other programs aren't already filling. There's no point in creating this is a competitive model. That's not the intent.

So, we want them to be working collaboratively across the labour demand side with employers and industry absolutely. But they have to be working with the parts of our system that produce the job seekers. And that's activating digital job seekers in the future world, but also working with enhanced service providers to make sure that there's the right people to go into the opportunities that they've created.

**Nikita Sharpe:**

Thanks Stuart. And I think, for now, that ends the questions that have been asked.

**Stuart Watson:**

Excellent. Thanks, Nikita, for doing that chauffeuring to the questions. I very much appreciate it.

So, just to recap that the conversation doesn't end here.

If you have particular feedback around the presentation, or Workforce Specialists, there’s the DESE website, we'd ask that you come back to us before the 24th of September, if you can.

And we ask that you keep an eye out for the DESE website for information about initiative going forward.

I thank you very much for your attention this afternoon, and I hope, if you're locked down, you stay safe and well, and if you're not locked down, enjoy your freedoms while you have them.

OK. Thanks, everyone.

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