

Jobs and Skills Australia discussion paper

10 February 2023

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations on the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) discussion paper.

ATN welcomed the announcement and establishment of JSA and we support the inclusion of higher education in the founding legislation and the discussion paper, in line with our recommendation that the scope of JSA should explicitly include higher education to properly reflect the current and future nature of the workforce and need for education, training and skills.

ATN has consistently supported an integrated and cohesive approach to tertiary education within a framework that recognises the distinctive contributions of higher education and vocational education and training. Fostering accessible and flexible pathways between and within school, tertiary education is also crucial for lifelong learning and developing Australia's modern workforce.

As a significant contributor to addressing Australia's skills and productivity challenges, ATN supports a system that provides the Government, tertiary education and industry with policy advice and data that is reflective of the role of higher education plays in underpinning a highly skilled workforce.

Universities already have comprehensive industry advisory input into both curriculum and labour market trends that informs planning and therefore workforce development outcomes, but would also benefit from JSA providing advice and data at a national level.

Principal recommendation

ATN recommends that the design, priorities and workplan of JSA includes higher education as part of a shared and integrated approach to post-school skills development encompassing all education and training opportunities.

This approach is needed to properly reflect the current and future diversity of the workforce and need for education, training and skills across a range of industries and jobs.

This need for JSA to fulfill this role is more pertinent as the responsibility for tertiary education is shared across multiple departments and ministers. JSA should play a pivotal advisory role and provide the Government with a holistic and connected overview.

It is important that JSA:

- works in partnership with the Department of Education to enable research and analysis on the need for higher education, to complement its similar role for vocational education and training
- consults and works with higher education providers and representatives.

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Additional recommendations

In support of the principal recommendation, ATN also recommends that the Government and JSA:

- 1. Appoint a Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education**
- 2. Appoint education and training representatives to the tripartite advisory body**
- 3. Adopt guiding principles for JSA's priorities and workplan that include:**
 - Promoting equity and opportunity
 - Using regional and place-based lenses
 - Building emerging and future industries
- 4. Harness entrepreneurship to create opportunities**
- 5. Promote a common language of jobs and skills**

Further information on additional recommendations

Recommendation 1: Appoint a Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education

The discussion paper proposes that a senior Commissioner be supported by permanent and project-based Deputy Commissioners. ATN recommends that a Deputy Commissioner for Higher Education be appointed to oversee and lead JSA's research, analysis and engagement with the higher education sector and work with the other Deputy Commissioners on tertiary integration.

This position will be particularly important during the current Review of Australian Higher Education and the Universities Accord it will support. The Deputy Commissioner will have an ongoing role in supporting AQF reform, facilitating JSA's partnership with the Department of Education to enable research and analysis on the need for higher education, and providing stakeholders with a holistic view across the post-school landscape.

Recommendation 2: Appoint education and training representatives to the tripartite advisory body

The discussion paper proposes establishing a tripartite advisory body to seek insights from relevant stakeholders on specific skills, labour market and workforce issues as they emerge. The advisory body would consist of a mix of representatives from state and territory governments, unions and industry, and it would also call on independent experts with relevant skills, experience and networks.

ATN recommends that education and training representatives be full and permanent members of the advisory body, as well as including experts in skills and training or tertiary education as appropriate. This is crucial to ensuring JSA has a blended approach to skills that combines industry led and educator led perspectives – an approach that understands the use, demand and context of skills as well as the development of skills and people.

Recommendation 3: Adopt guiding principles for JSA's priorities and workplan

The discussion paper proposes a set of principles aimed at balancing JSA's focus on urgent needs of industries, cohorts, and regions in distress with longer-term future focused research. ATN supports this approach and recommends that the guiding principles incorporate:

- Promoting equity and opportunity
- Using regional and place-based lenses
- Building emerging and future industries.

Promoting equity and opportunity

Maximising Australia's growth and productivity will rely on providing more opportunities for all Australians to get the education and training they need for secure, high-value jobs. Australians, regardless of their background or postcode should have access to these opportunities – for almost everyone this requires a post-school qualification.

All Australians will need access to lifelong learning post-school so they can fully participate in society and the workforce. Lifelong learning is needed to fulfill the ambitions and plans of Australians and businesses now and into the future. While participation in university has improved over recent decades, more needs to be done to ensure the benefits are more evenly shared across all communities and regions in Australia.

Equity risks being conceived and implemented too narrowly if we simply focus on strictly defined groups and metrics – we must have a broader and more holistic view of sources and consequences of educational disadvantage.

Using regional and place-based lenses

ATN universities have a strong commitment to working within and transforming the communities in which we are based. We are an active voice in promoting partnerships between industry and research to grow our economy and deliver significant economic, social and cultural benefits to local and global communities. We encourage the use of our campuses to drive interaction and deeper relationships with our communities and often act as a catalyst for innovation.

Our universities have diverse community integrations even within single universities – be it an inner-city hub for innovation in our business and commercial centres, a suburban campus co-locating learning, research and industry, or an anchor institution in a regional centre or gateway city.

The resilience and transformative capabilities of skills-focused community partnerships is a powerful force for addressing the inevitable structural economic changes to come. Such transformational capabilities are created by investment in skills and research-intensive innovation and driven by a collaborative effort between local universities, industry and multiple tiers of government.

Support for these community partnerships will lay a foundation for our future national economic success and social cohesion. Universities act as innovative gateways, identifying research pathways and solutions to help Australia meet the significant economic, social and environmental challenges to come.

Building emerging and future industries

Developing and diversifying Australia's economy and workforce will require ongoing investment in skills, research and people. We need to actively develop and make the most of our own skilled workforce, deliver on national priorities, and build our national knowledge and innovation base.

New skills and learning pathways are needed to prepare Australia for long-term challenges such as industrial transformation, regional development, and the changing demographics of the workforce. They must be part of a system that encourages and enables Australians to continue accessing high-quality and relevant education and training through their lives. These measures can support individual aspirations and community development.

Many of the new workers Australia will need in the healthcare, technology and manufacturing sectors will have existing skills and experience. We will need to offer more flexible, adaptive and innovative education options.

Recommendation 4: Harness entrepreneurship to create opportunities

ATN supports the proposal for JSA to increase its outreach to seek feedback on and to promote the value and benefits of its products and advice (in the form of briefings and consultations). However, we urge JSA to go further to harness the opportunities of entrepreneurship.

If JSA is to provide advice on Australia's current, emerging and future skills and training needs, it must engage with current, emerging and future entrepreneurs who will be creating the demand for these skills and training.

It is worth noting the work of the [OECD](#) which confirmed the central role played by startups and young firms in creating jobs and bringing innovation to the market. Key facts from this report include:

- *On average across OECD countries and over years, young firms account for about 20% of employment but create almost half of new jobs.*
- *Transformational entrepreneurs' start-ups – on average 4% of all micro start-ups – create between 22% (the Netherlands) and 53% (France) of new jobs.*
- *Start-ups are more exposed to policies than incumbents, especially in volatile and risky sectors, where more high-growth firms operate.*

The learning spillovers from technology-enabled entrepreneurs also create a significant pipeline of people with truly cutting-edge skills and market understanding for larger organisations to then employ.

This reality is recognised in the NSW Innovation and Productivity Council's [report](#) exploring the importance of the innovation economy and how international governments are supporting its growth. The report identifies five key areas for government leadership to support the innovation economy some of which may be useful to the JSA:

- adjusting the business climate and institutions
- addressing infrastructure gaps
- tackling investment deficits
- gearing up for global competitiveness
- and correcting information and coordination failures.

ATN would be delighted to support the JSA with large scale engagement with entrepreneurs, especially technology-enabled ones.

ATN universities are supporting thousands of student, staff and other entrepreneurs by hosting hundreds of start-ups and micro-businesses at our campuses. These enterprising people will be key to maintaining the growth in wellbeing and productivity in the future as the nation's economy expands into service, value-added resources, data and knowledge-based economies.

Recommendation 5: Promote a common language of jobs and skills

ATN supports JSA taking on custodianship of the Australian Skills Classification. This should form a key component of JSA's engagement with government, industry, educational and community stakeholders and JSA's efforts to share and promote the use of its research, data and analysis. This will be important for AQF reform and the closer integration and partnership of universities, vocational education and industry.

The Australian Skills Classification helps define the skills that underpin jobs in Australia.

As employers, workers, education providers and policy makers recognise that skills are the real currency of the labour market, the Australian Skills Classification can play a pivotal part in enabling new skills-based approaches to workforce and talent strategies, learning and development, and policy.

[It] sets out the key core competencies, specialist tasks and technology tools required for occupations in Australia. [It] offers a common language of skills, enabling stakeholders to identify and articulate skills using a comprehensive and universal taxonomy.

<https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/australian-skills-classification>

Further enquiries should be addressed to:

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