

Master Builders Australia submission to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Jobs and Skills Australia discussion paper

Master Builders Australia (Master Builders) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the Department) on the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA).

Master Builders is Australia's peak building and construction industry association. We are the only association representing all sectors in Australia's \$200 billion building and construction industry – residential, commercial, and civil construction. Established in 1890 through the federation of the Master Builders State and Territory Associations, we work collaboratively to promote and advance the development of a profitable and sustainable building and construction industry.

To maintain Australia's prosperity, we need to address current jobs and skills needs while concurrently planning for and taking steps toward longer-term goals and workforce needs. JSA will have a critical role in this work and will need to carefully balance its workplan to ensure that longer-term needs are not overshadowed by immediate pressures.

Master Builders broadly agrees with the common themes raised by stakeholders and is pleased that Jobs and Skills Australia's operations will be reviewed and refined after 12 months.

Design considerations

JSA is an independent statutory body to be led by a commissioner, supported by Deputy Commissioners, resourced by the Department, and informed by an advisory body and sub-committees.

Master Builders supports the proposed model and agrees it is critical that JSA is independent and considers a wide range of perspectives including jurisdictional, regional and industry needs.

JSA's success will depend on buy-in from:

- state and territory governments as the federal government's funding and delivery partner
- industry and businesses as the employers of the current and future workforce
- trainers and educators as the teachers of knowledge and skills.

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

The design of JSA should include a formal role for Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs). JSCs will have an explicit role in addressing skills shortages and broader workforce challenges. And, being industry owned and led JSCs will be a valuable source of industry insights to JSA to inform and strength the advice it provides to government. Master Builders recommends a second advisory body be established, with this body to comprise the CEO or a nominated executive from each of the 10 JSCs.

The design for JSA should also be cognisant of the need to complement, not duplicate, existing and related bodies. These include the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER), the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Centre for Population, state and territory skills commissioners, and JSCs.

Functions

The National Skills Commission played a pivotal role in progressing labour market analysis in Australia. JSA continues much of this work and under the initial legislation, provides advice on current and emerging labour market, skills and training needs and priorities to inform policy development and program delivery.

The discussion paper proposes the functions of JSA be expanded to:

- improve identification of skills and labour imbalances across the economy through the development of a national skills supply and demand model
- strengthen the economy-wide focus to include higher education as well as vocational education and training (VET) when considering skills and workforce issues
- enhance analysis of regional skills and labour needs to provide greater understanding of the labour market for people living in regions, skilled migration needs, and consideration of workforce requirements as they relate to the skills and broader tertiary system
- enhance cohort level analysis to ensure skills and labour market needs are responsive to specific priority cohorts, such as women, over-55s, people with disability, youth, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- develop a deeper evidence base around the impact of insecure work through analysis of the characteristics and labour market experiences of Australians
- ensure a collaborative relationship with JSCs that strengthens tripartite input into the national evidence base to facilitate the JSCs role in determining sectoral workforce needs, defining job roles, mapping pathways, and developing fit-for-purpose training products.

It is proposed that JSA will develop and publish an annual workplan identifying national research, analysis and consultation priorities, and anticipated projects, activities and timeframes. The workplan will be informed through stakeholder engagement, the advisory body, and consultations with state, territory and federal governments.

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

Principles to guide JSA priorities and workplan should include:

- underpinned by evidence
- informed by broad consultation
- transparent and easily comprehended
- independently derived and not driven by political agendas

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

- To provide stakeholders with greater clarity on the longer-term priorities and direction of JSA its workplan should be a rolling three-year plan that is updated annually.
- Ahead of the annual drafting/updating process stakeholders should be given the opportunity to propose projects, activities and timeframes for consideration by JSA.
- Master Builders supports the proposal in the discussion paper to release of a draft workplan for public comment ahead of finalisation. This will provide opportunity for broad input.

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

- The capability and capacity of stakeholders to engage varies significantly. To ensure that stakeholders can meaningfully engage with JSA it is critical that information and opportunities to engage are easy to find, understand and participate in. A range of engagement mechanisms should be made available to maximise the opportunity for stakeholders to participate in a way that best suits their circumstances and resources.
- Interested stakeholders will likely engage in areas of relevance – particularly where there are engagement mechanisms that suit their needs – but will only continue to do so if they feel their voice contributes.
- While the primary target of JSA's research and analysis will be government decision makers, JSA's outputs will also be relevant to a far broader range of stakeholders including tripartite partners, experts, and others. Ensuring findings are made publicly available and in suitable formats will add value for these stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of their ongoing participation in JSA's major studies, projects and other activities.

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

- A current gap in workforce data is attrition rates. The ABS Participation, Job Search and Mobility dataset enables users to work out rudimentary estimates for attrition. Improving the quality of data on industry and occupational attrition would greatly assist to improve understanding of skills and training needs.
- The Skills Priority List is used for a variety of purposes across government, including informing skilled migration levels and eligible occupations. Data on migrant intake collected by the Department of Home Affairs should be leveraged by JSA to monitor and assess the impact of migrant intake on Australia's workforce needs and to ensure that migration planning is consistent with strategic long-term workforce skills needs.
- A key challenge is the number of organisations that collect and publish disparate datasets and the lack of interoperability between these datasets. JSA should work with other analytical agencies to improve data interoperability. This includes the NCVER, the ABS, the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT), and state and territory bodies.

Engagement and outreach

The discussion paper identifies that JSA's outputs will need to be widely available and accessible for multiple audiences.

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

- Reaching and engaging individuals and businesses, particularly small businesses, is challenging. In our experience, broad engagement from small businesses is most likely to occur where engagement is relevant to a pressing business issue. For example, in 2021 building and construction businesses faced acute material and labour supply shortages – during this time they were highly responsive to requests for information.
- The level of interest and the capability and capacity of stakeholders to engage varies significantly. To ensure that stakeholders can meaningfully engage with JSA engagement opportunities need to be easy to find, understand and participate in. A range of engagement mechanisms – surveys, webinars, face-to-face, events, focus groups, interviews, JSA staff attending industry events and meetings, etc. – should be available to maximise the opportunity for stakeholders to participate in a way that best suits their circumstances and resources.
- Leveraging intermediaries such as industry associations and trusted advisors is another effective mechanism to increase engagement.
- Ensuring that outputs are publicly available, in suitable formats and accessible to diverse audiences will increase their usefulness and value to stakeholders. Stakeholders that value JSA outputs are also more likely to engage and provide input.

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

- Outputs and outreach should be tailored to the intended audience. This will mean some outputs need to be made available in different formats and the way they are disseminated will need to vary accordingly.
 - For example, findings relating to emerging and future jobs could be of interest to teenagers making decisions about their post-school pathways, to parents, to schools, training providers and universities, as well as to career changers, industry associations, research bodies and others. However, the level of interest and the type of information sought will vary, as will the channels through which the information might be sought or be pushed.
- It will be important that JSA identify the key audiences for their products, whether these audiences will proactively seek the information or whether it will need to be pushed out and, if so, what the most appropriate communication channels are for a particular audience.
- In the initial stages JSA's outreach should be as broad as possible. The outreach mechanisms and products should be reviewed and refined over time to ensure they are useful to their intended audience and achieving value for money and effort.

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

- Master Builders has a keen interest in workforce analysis, data, and research, and how it applies to and informs the needs of the building and construction workforce and employers. As such we will be interested in engaging with JSA to inform their work as well as being a proactively end user of JSA's data and analysis.
- Given the breadth of relevant policy work undertaken by Master Builders and our data and analysis capability our preference is for comprehensive datasets. However, we fully acknowledge that for the majority of users this format would not be suitable.
- The NCVER presents their data and analysis in multiple formats to make it as accessible as possible. For most releases the NCVER provides findings targeted to general, regular and expert users.

NCVER user categories		Products available
General	Users with a basic understanding of data and/or users wanting the headlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Media release• Online summary of analysis and the key figures• Downloadable report and supporting documents• Webinars and podcasts
Regular	Users that can understand and manipulate data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Downloadable tables and datasets• DataBuilder, the NCVER's online tool enabling users to quickly create customised tables
Expert	Users with a detailed understanding of data and its uses, including items and concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VOCSTATS, the NCVER's interactive database enabling users to generate highly tailored statistical outputs

- Master Builders recommends the JSA follow the NCVERs example by providing data and analysis in different formats to meet user needs and capability.

Contact

Master Builders is grateful for the opportunity to provide input. Should the Department have any questions or want further information please contact:

Jennifer Lawrence, Manager Industry Policy
0447 529 170, jennifer.lawrence@masterbuilders.com.au