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Jobs and Skills Australia

**ENQUIRIES**

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## A. INTRODUCTION

La Trobe welcomes the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and the opportunity to participate in this consultation on how JSA can work with stakeholders to generate the required evidence and analysis to ensure Australia has a skilled workforce. La Trobe endorses the submission of Universities Australia to this consultation.

Universities have a key role to play in the training of the future workforce and, through both their teaching and research functions, in boosting the nation's productivity. Accordingly, we strongly welcome the inclusion of universities within the scope of JSA.

Along with the rest of the higher education sector, La Trobe looks forward to working with the Agency in the coming years. We broadly welcome the proposed structure for JSA but make some recommendations as to how it could be improved particularly in terms of the composition of the Advisory Group. Access to comprehensive and real-time data will be a crucial resource for all of JSA's stakeholders. We welcome the fact that JSA's operations will be reviewed after the first year allowing for adjustments to maximise the potential of JSA.

Our response to the Inquiry's Discussion Questions is included in Section B.

## B. INQUIRY'S DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Structure and Governance

1. Are there other design considerations that could further strengthen Jobs and Skills Australia's ability to produce advice to government?
  - La Trobe supports the proposed model of a Commissioner with a robust Advisory Group. However, there is scope to better articulate the role of the Advisory Group including whether it will be focused on advising about existing skills gaps and/or the challenges associated with filling these skills gaps. If the aim is to provide advice in both these areas, then La Trobe recommends a rebalancing of the Advisory Group to include the senior secondary curriculum and the post-secondary regulators.
  - This area of the proposal could be strengthened by more clearly articulating the way the Advisory Group will be sourcing information. For instance, will the Advisory Group be involved in framing the studies which will be commissioned by JSA or will it only be involved in the analysis after studies have been completed? We recommend the Advisory Group be involved in the entire process.
  - Currently the description of the Advisory Board refers only to representation. It is important to articulate more clearly the minimum requirements from a technical skills perspective. This would ensure that people with the adequate skills are forming part of the Advisory Board.
  - Further clarity is required on how the impact of the Advisory Board will be measured. This is something that should be outlined from the outset ensuring that the right scope is defined and that the expectations are clear.

### Jobs and Skills Australia functions:

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

La Trobe recommends the following:

- inclusion of both technical and broader skill considerations;

- consideration of long-term and emerging skills needs (Linked to Point 1 above on the composition of the Advisory Board, in order to enable longer-term considerations, the Advisory Board needs to include people who are able to adopt a longer-term view);
- aiming for national consistency whilst also catering for contextual realities and local priorities; and
- ensuring principles interface with the National Skills Agreement.

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

La Trobe recommends the following:

- holding of roundtables bringing together a wide array of stakeholders to cover the full pipeline of skills/workforce shortages. For example, in certain instances, skills gaps may be the result of poor demand rather than the lack of provision/availability of courses/awards. In other instances, there may be limited incentives for industry to sponsor the upskilling of workers with industry having high expectations of having access to graduates who already have a lot of experience;
- actively seeking consultation with stakeholders such as universities who experience intersectionality of the priority cohorts; and
- undertaking multimodal forms of data collection that will encourage engagement and recognise need. e.g. First Nations facilitation for First Nations peoples

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

It is not clear what 'major studies' refers to but presumably the means of engagement will depend on the nature and the extent of the studies.

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

- As mentioned in Point 3, in terms of looking at the entire pipeline leading to skills/workforce shortages, a key task for JSA will be trying to identify the faults in the system which are resulting in a lack of demand from students in areas of workforce need. One possible approach is to consider promoting a wider transferable skill set and ways in which that can be mapped or leveraged to promote pathways in areas of need.
- It would be useful for JSA to keep a close eye on data from other sectors providing insights that might help shape JSA's approaches. For instances, NAB's analysis of the financial practices of under 25s provided insight into what this cohort values and prioritises. It helped shape the current wave of micro-credentialling.

### **Functions and 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?
- One way of expanding engagement is to link into existing collaborations within this space in the different states and territories such as Regional Development Victoria in Victoria.

7. What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?
  - It is important for JSA to have a proper communication and engagement plan which includes education of both industry and providers regarding its functions and its outcomes (including research outcomes);
  - An informative, user-friendly website featuring reports as well as allowing for direct engagements with organisations who may be seeking input such as consultancies or state and territory governments;
  - Outreach needs to be underpinned by consistency, visibility and place-based events across Australia. Otherwise there is a risk, particularly in rural and remote Australia, that this will be seen as yet another city-centric endeavour.
8. How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?
  - This is arguably one of the most useful resources that JSA will provide to stakeholders. It is essential that data is presented in short, digestible formats with full data sets accessible for further studies or work.
  - A query engine, which enables users to work with the data to answer questions with multiple parameters and possibilities for comparison would probably be more useful than providing reports with standard questions. **Access to comprehensive and real-time data is critical for educational institutions to understand where the issues lie and to engage in innovation that is directed toward unmet need.**

## C. OTHER COMMENTS

### Priority cohorts

- At various instances, the Discussion Paper refers to 'regional' Australia or 'regional and remote' priority cohorts. We would recommend consistency in the terminology used, and, more importantly, the inclusion of 'rural' communities.
- It is also worth considering the inclusion of migrants and refugees as priority cohorts.

### Role of Jobs and Skills Councils

- According to the Discussion Paper (p.10), the Jobs and Skills Councils will, among other roles, have a role in "developing fit-for-purpose qualifications and micro-credentials". Further information on what this entails and how it would interact with other education and training providers is required.