



Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Jobs and Skills Australia VET workforce consultation

Brotherhood of St. Laurence

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For further information or to discuss this submission, please contact:

Kira Clarke

Principal – Employment Education and
Training; Research, Policy and Advocacy
Phone: 0409 150 851
Email: Kira.Clarke@bsl.org.au

Nicole Bieske

Director – Research, Policy and Advocacy
Phone: 0491 159 255
Email: Nicole.Bieske@bsl.org.au

Summary

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Vocational Education and Training (VET) Building a better understanding of the VET workforce consultation. BSL is a social justice organisation working towards an Australia free of poverty. Our purpose is to advance a fair Australia through our leadership on policy reform, our partnerships with communities and the quality of our services. Our approach is informed directly by people experiencing disadvantage and uses evidence drawn from our research, together with insights from our programs and services, to develop practical solutions that work.

BSL makes several recommendations in response to the consultation paper.

Recommendations

Recommendation to expand scope of learning support roles

1. JSA should expand the methodology for VET workforce occupational mapping to include hidden workers in the VET workforce, specifically specialist staff not employed by RTOs but critical to support for learners with high needs.

Recommendations to support the development of the data strategy

2. JSA should establish a VET workforce advisory group with VET practitioners to inform how VET workforce data is used to inform policy and funding decisions.
3. JSA should undertake national VET stakeholder consultations to inform accessibility and utility of the proposed VET workforce dashboard.

Recommendations for areas of consideration in the research program

4. JSA should include applied VET researchers in research teams, through an institutional lend-out program, to contribute to research capability building and to leverage VET institutional expertise and perspective within JSA's research program.
5. JSA should include a specific program of research on the equity and inclusion capability of the VET workforce, including an analysis of existing capability gaps.
6. JSA's program of VET workforce research should be scoped to not duplicate work already in progress by the TAFE Centres of Excellence.
7. JSA should include student voice as a core principle underpinning the research program and as a consistent source of data across the VET workforce research program.

Occupational mapping (Action 1)

Understanding who works in the VET sector and their roles is vital to assessing how investment supports economic and social outcomes. Occupational mapping must include everyone in VET, however currently some members of the workforce are 'hidden'. The term 'VET workforce' refers to staff in registered training organisations (RTOs) and those in teaching, training and assessing roles. The [VET Workforce Blueprint](#) emphasises attracting people into these roles to ensure the sector meets industry and economic needs.

While the proposed occupational mapping includes those working in learning support roles, by only focusing on staff employed by RTOs, the occupational mapping risks excluding the important contributions of learning support workers who are employed outside RTOs but work within RTOs. This includes staff in specialist delivery contexts who are supporting learning in the VET classroom and educational support officers supporting VET Delivered to Secondary Students (VDSS) in secondary schools.

Dual industry professionals in community service organisations collaborate with TAFEs and RTOs to support VET learning and engagement. They help students navigate enrolment and stay engaged in training. These professionals are vital for equity and priority cohorts. Examples include vocational specialists at Headspace assisting young people with mental health challenges, as well as career practitioners and school staff managing VDSS administration.

Recommendation to expand scope of learning support roles

1. JSA should expand the methodology for VET workforce occupational mapping to include hidden workers in the VET workforce, specifically specialist staff not employed by RTOs but critical to support for learners with high needs.

VET workforce data strategy (Action 2)

A VET workforce data strategy would provide comprehensive insight into who makes up the VET workforce and support the development of workforce strategies. The development of an accompanying data dashboard will make it easier for users to explore and interpret the data.

Available data indicates that the VET workforce largely reflects the demographic make-up of the wider Australian workforce. However, this demographic make-up does not necessarily reflect the demographic make-up of VET students. For example, [NCVER](#) data shows that participation rates in VET (including VET delivered to secondary school students) are proportionally higher for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students, but it is not clear that the VET workforce demographically reflects this make-up. In 2024, Indigenous students only made up 3.3% of enrolments in the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment – the required training pathway for VET teachers.

Understanding VET workforce demographics helps identify gaps between staff and learners, and can guide strategies for diversity and inclusion. To move from data to action, the data strategy should include creation of a VET workforce advisory group with occupational and demographic diversity. This group would advise how to better shape workforce policy and strategy to close gaps identified in the data.

Also, [research](#) has indicated that involving end users in the design of a data dashboard supports the development of a dashboard that has real utility for the end user. Using the VET workforce advisory group, or undertaking other forms of stakeholder consultation during the design and development of the dashboard, would support the development of a dashboard that reflects how different stakeholders would use and interpret the data.

Gaining better insights into who makes up the VET workforce – and accompanying this with the development of a data dashboard – will help develop VET workforce strategies that support inclusive participation.

Recommendations to support the development of the data strategy:

2. JSA should establish a VET workforce advisory group with VET practitioners to inform how VET workforce data is used to inform policy and funding decisions.
3. JSA should undertake national VET stakeholder consultations to inform accessibility and utility of the proposed VET workforce dashboard.

VET workforce research program (Action 3)

The proposed JSA VET workforce research program presents an exciting opportunity to build and develop the applied research capability of those working across the VET workforce and system. [International research](#) has found that applied research can support the professionalisation of the workforce, foster collaboration and improve the perceptions and attractiveness of VET. The proposed workforce research program presents an opportunity for JSA to draw on researchers from across the VET sector, and build the research capability of the VET workforce. This could be done through the establishment of reciprocal arrangements and more intentional collaboration between JSA and VET institutions/ RTOs. By fostering these connections, the research program would help connect the policy ambitions of JSA with on-the-ground practice in the VET sector.

In Australia, current investments in applied research include scholarships available through the International Specialised Skills Institute, the TAFE Centres of Excellence (COEs) and research undertaken by the Jobs and Skills Councils. JSA is well placed to support and coordinate these

existing efforts rather than the duplicate them. The scoping of JSA's research program should consider how it can most effectively complement existing research priorities of the 14 TAFE CoEs and not duplicate their work in progress or proposed work. In playing a coordinating role, JSA's research program should include synthesis and translation of research and practice insights from other researchers, including through the CoEs, into policy recommendations. JSA is well positioned to consolidate the insights gained through the VET workforce studies being conducted by the 10 Jobs and Skills Councils to identify common VET workforce challenges and opportunities.

The JSA [Jobs and Skills Report 2025](#) highlights the importance of supporting inclusive participation and addressing barriers to productivity and participation in today's labour market. Similarly, [Speeding up progress towards gender economic equality](#) emphasises the need to take an 'equity by design' approach to address gender inequity. The development of the VET workforce research program presents an opportunity for JSA to focus on how to uplift the capability of the VET workforce to support equity and inclusive participation.

Alongside the focus on equity and inclusion, mechanisms need to be established that support the inclusion and embedding of student voice in the VET workforce research program. Strengthening student voice mechanisms would reflect JSA's commitment in the [2024-25 Work Plan](#) to 'fostering inclusive participation in research design to ensure diverse voices are heard and incorporated across all JSA insights and advice'.

Recommendations for areas of consideration in the research program:

4. The JSA research program should draw on researchers across the VET sector, through an institutional lend-out program, to contribute to research capability building both within JSA and across the VET sector.
5. The JSA research program should include a specific component of research on the equity and inclusion capability of the VET workforce, including an analysis of existing capability gaps.
6. JSA's program of VET workforce research should be scoped to not duplicate work already in progress by the TAFE Centres of Excellence.
7. JSA should include student voice as a core principle underpinning the research program and as a consistent source of data across the VET workforce research program.