



Jobs and Skills Australia Work Plan

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) 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 values the role played by Jobs and Skills Australia in undertaking research and analysis on the labour market and Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, and welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the 2026–27 Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) work plan development. BSL endorses the proposed focus on integrated evidence to support employment services reform, including how training, pathways and skills development interact with employment outcomes. BSL makes three recommendations in response to the consultation paper.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: JSA should establish an annual equity and inclusion report card that presents national, state and regional data on access to, completion of and outcomes from entry and re-entry to VET; specifically for priority groups and under-represented learners.

Recommendation 2: JSA should trial longitudinal tracking of enrollees who do not complete a qualification, with a focus on priority and under-represented learners. This can identify key high-risk attrition points and patterns, and inform the effective targeting of investments to address non-completion.

Recommendation 3: JSA should undertake modelling to identify alternative subsidy and payment schemes to increase the uptake of ‘earn while you learn’ pathways in critical sectors (including early years, aged care, disability care and digital technology occupations).

Annual equity and inclusion report card

A lack of detailed and specific data remains a barrier to effectively addressing inequities in access to and outcomes from VET for priority cohorts and under-represented groups. We propose that JSA establish annual national and jurisdictional reporting on the equity performance of the VET system. At present, data on who is accessing, completing and benefiting from training is inconsistent and lacks transparency. This limits stakeholders’ ability to identify where the system is failing learners experiencing disadvantages. A coordinated reporting framework would provide a clearer picture of outcomes across key equity groups including people with disability; First Nations learners; women; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; learners with low educational attainment; and learners in regional and remote parts of the country. Crucially, this reporting must extend beyond enrolments and completions to include detailed insight into post-training outcomes and rates of return to training for upskilling and career progression.

This approach aligns with the broader ‘skills-first’ agenda. It enables better diagnostics on the return on investment in training, including how skills are being deployed in the labour market, how they contribute to economic value, and whether they support mobility and progression. This work should build on JSA’s existing VET National Data Asset (VNDA) program to support transparency on the trends and patterns of inclusion and exclusion for key priority and disadvantaged learner groups. These insights should inform funding decisions and policy development, ensuring that resources are directed where they are most needed.

Recommendation 1

JSA should establish an annual equity and inclusion report card that presents national, state and regional data on access to, completion of and outcomes from entry and re-entry to VET; specifically for priority groups and under-represented learners.

Trialing longitudinal tracking of non-completers

A lack of robust, learner-level longitudinal data on non-completion remains a major barrier to understanding and addressing persistent attrition in the VET system. This is particularly the case for priority and under-represented learners. We propose that JSA trial a longitudinal tracking program of learners who enrol but do not complete qualifications, with a focus on priority cohorts including learners with disability, learners with low prior educational attainment, First Nations learners, and those in regional and remote areas. Current non-completion data is largely snapshot-based, and offers limited insight into when learners disengage; the cumulative factors driving attrition; or whether learners re-engage with training, education or employment over time. This limits the system’s ability to identify high-risk attrition points and to design targeted, evidence-based interventions. A longitudinal approach would enable a more granular understanding of

non-completion patterns across equity groups and provide critical evidence on post-exit pathways, including transitions into work, return to training, or long-term disengagement.

At present, VET policy often assumes some non-completion reflects ‘positive’ exits where learners gain sufficient skills without completing a credential. However, there is little reliable evidence to test this assumption. Longitudinal tracking would strengthen skills-first diagnostics by clarifying the real return on investment in training and identifying where additional supports, flexible delivery or wraparound services are most likely to improve retention and outcomes.

Recommendation 2

JSA should trial longitudinal tracking of enrollees who do not complete a qualification, with a focus on priority and under-represented learners. This can identify key high-risk attrition points and patterns, and inform the effective targeting of investments to address non completion.

Modelling subsidy and payment scenarios for growing ‘earn while you learn’ uptake

Despite strong policy emphasis on growing ‘earn while you learn’ options, the uptake of employment-based training pathways in Australia remains low. Persistent workforce shortages in critical sectors cannot be addressed through supply-side training alone. This is particularly true where learners face financial and practical barriers to participation. Current incentive and subsidy settings are fragmented and insufficiently targeted to priority sectors such as early childhood education, aged care, disability care and digital technology. This limits employer participation and excludes learners who cannot afford to forego income. This fragmentation also drives inconsistent, in-house employer-delivered models with limited system oversight and protections for participating learners.

We propose that JSA undertake modelling to identify alternative subsidy and payment scenarios to expand high-quality ‘earn while you learn’ pathways, including apprenticeships, traineeships and other paid work-integrated learning models. This should include an exploration of the role of social security payments as a critical support that enables participation in education and training. This modelling, which can build on the VNDA work showing strong income support exits for qualification completers, should explore whether current payment settings adequately support training pathways for underrepresented groups and identify potential improvements. In undertaking this work, it would be valuable for JSA to collaborate with the Department of Social Services, to better understand how income support settings influence training access, completion and outcomes for priority cohorts and under-represented learners.

A coordinated modelling exercise would allow JSA to test alternative payment mechanisms. These could include learner income supports, employer wage subsidies, loadings for priority cohorts and place-based incentives. They should also assess the payments’ likely impact on participation, completion and workforce supply. Importantly, this work should consider differential impacts for under-represented learners and small or not-for-profit employers, who often operate with limited capacity to absorb training costs. By identifying scalable, evidence-based funding scenarios, JSA can

support the design of subsidy settings that better align training with workforce demand, improve learner accessibility, and strengthen retention in essential services. These insights would support more strategic investment decisions and help ensure earn while you learn pathways are a viable and attractive option in the sectors where skills shortages are most acute.

Recommendation 3

JSA should undertake modelling to identify alternative scenarios for subsidy and payment schemes to increase the uptake of 'earn while you learn' pathways in critical sectors (including early years, aged care, disability care and digital technology occupations).