

UA response to Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024-25 work plan development consultation paper

22 December 2023

Universities Australia (UA) is the peak body for Australia's 39 comprehensive universities. Our member universities are spread across Australia in both regional and metropolitan areas. They educate more than a million students each year, undertake all of the university research in Australia and engage globally to add to the country's stock of knowledge, as well as Australia's economic and social wellbeing.

UA welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Jobs and Skills Australia 2024-25 work plan development on proposed focus areas for work and opportunities for JSA to deliver on their mission. UA recommends focus areas that allow JSA to contribute to the current reform agendas that impact tertiary education and work to create alignment and synergy between the various ongoing reviews.

JSA areas of focus – delivering on our mission and role

1. What issues, topics and research questions, studies, projects would you suggest Jobs and Skills Australia explores as part of our 2024-25 work plan?

Universities play a vital role in shaping Australia's workforce. Their aim is to align the skills of their graduates with the needs of the nation's workforce as well as building Australia's knowledge base. In addition to in-depth sectoral analysis and broader economy-wide forecasts, JSA is well placed to provide insights into the many disruptions – including environmental, geopolitical, Artificial Intelligence and other technological advances – likely to impact on Australia's workforce in coming years and the skills needed to address those significant structural changes. We would encourage JSA to work with universities in developing these insights.

Recognising that each of the Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) has its own workplan, including HumanAbility, we do note that there is a real opportunity to better link education data with other workforce data to assist in workforce planning or how we expand and sustain placements and other workplace experience. This is particularly the case for health and care workforce education/training. Lack of placement capacity constrains workforce growth. As part of this work, JSA could engage with relevant stakeholders to develop a national clinical placement council, to look at how to develop sufficiently high-quality, diversified placement capacity to support health and care sector workforce growth. Consideration could also be given to assessing the barriers that prevent Australia from growing its health workforce, because challenges in health appear to be more severe than those in the economy more broadly. In the Skills Priority List 2023, JSA found that 82 per cent of all health professions are in shortage (see Table 1). This figure does not include the sub-groups of psychologists and social workers, which JSA also judge to be in shortage. By comparison, in non-professional occupations, only 30 per cent of occupations are in shortage.

JSA Skills Priority List: Shortages across occupations (2023)

Classification	Number of occupations	Occupations in shortage	Share of occupations in shortage
Health professions	82	67	82%
All other professions	245	90	37%
All other occupations (non-professional occupations)	589	175	30%
Total	916	332	36%

Source: JSA Skills Priority List Data 2023; UA calculation

Table 1: JSA Skills Priorities List: Shortages in health occupations vs all other occupations (2023)

JSA's projections suggest employment in health professions is set to grow from 743,000 to 844,000. This is relatively strong. In percentage terms, this growth (14 per cent) is equal strongest amongst all occupation groupings (equal with legal, social and welfare professionals).¹ In terms of the subgroups mentioned above, employment of psychologists and social workers is set to grow by 16 per cent.

Additionally, the draft work plan also considers a variety of cross-sector work, particularly across training and education. UA emphasises the importance of a joined-up approach and recommends that the work plan includes the creation of a roadmap that lays out how the reforms, studies, and projects across these sectors align. This will help avoid fragmentation of approach, inefficient use of resources, and prevent duplication or gaps.

JSA areas of focus – towards a national skills roadmap

2. Which do you view as most important in the short-term (1-2 years)?

Focus Area 4) Work with Jobs and Skills Councils to assess how the range of reforms implemented as a result of the National Skills Agreement, the Australian Universities Accord and migration reforms, help meet the skills needs of industry.

3. Why have you chosen this roadmap opportunity?

Area four is the most suitable for a short-term goal, given that if this goal is not achieved urgently, JSA may miss the opportunity to do meaningful and transformative work in this space at a time when this work is most needed. Moreover, evaluating how the outcomes of these reforms can be understood and may impact the education and training landscape will establish a solid foundation for any further work done in the other focus areas. The other focus areas require a depth and breadth of evidence to be successful. Focus area four not only has value as a standalone item but can also be a catalyst to build a stronger base for future skills work.

4. Which of these opportunities would have the most impact on your own work?

Focus Area 3) Support the reform of the VET, higher education and migration systems by providing advice and analysis and monitoring achievement of progress against their objectives. This should be done in a way that highlights the synergies between the 3 reform processes.

¹ Jobs and Skills Australia, Projections to 2033

5. Why have you chosen this roadmap opportunity?

While UA only represents the university sector, we believe it is critical that work is conducted to highlight the synergies between the VET and higher education sectors and that reform efforts are not siloed. Current higher education reviews, particularly the Universities Accord, are considering how to create greater interoperability between the two sectors. UA supports reducing barriers to collaboration between the two and recommends continued consultation with the university sector on any progress on focus area three.

6. What new or additional issues/questions would you suggest we explore to expand the evidence base required to progress the potential roadmap opportunities and achieve the strategic objectives of the national jobs and skills roadmap?

Currently, there are several national health workforce strategies, reviews, and reports either being implemented or in development. All have health care workforce implications. UA recommends that these various pieces of work should be strategically considered to identify gaps and overlaps. Furthermore, health care is one of the areas where significant planning will be needed to meet the skills needs of the next decades and there is an opportunity for JSA and the HumanAbility JSC to address contemporary concerns such as studies and planning to address increasing sufficient, diverse quality placements/clinical experience to enable the necessary growth in the healthcare workforce needed for the future.

UA has also recommended in other contexts the need for a broad and deep analysis of the nation's defence workforce needs, across the full defence ecosystem, to send the most accurate demand signal to the tertiary education sector and to prospective students. In a time of strategic regional instability, the significant workforce gaps and shallow pool of skilled workers in the defence area are of critical national importance. However, we also understand that this is at least partially the remit of the Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance and that significant work is already underway across government.

7. Are there any changes to or additional roadmap opportunities that you would like to see (i.e. what is missing)?

The current 14 focus areas are comprehensive. Many of the topics will also have input from other areas outside of JSA where new recommendations and challenges will emerge that respond to, and could expand, the focus area topics. Given the breadth and level of detail already included in the current 14 focus areas, beyond noting the comments in the previous section, UA does not recommend any further additions.

Additional Input

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us, to contribute to the development of the key outcomes and priorities for Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024-25 work plan?

UA appreciates and encourages continued collaboration on the integration across the tertiary education system, strategically bringing together the kinds of skills and knowledge people acquire at university with those they acquire through VET. Ultimately, supplying the workforce with skilled

workers requires the involvement of both systems. Further, rapid advances in technology and changes to the Australian, and global, workforce demonstrate a growing need for lifelong learning that is both flexible and high quality.

UA supports the developing roadmap and reiterates the importance of the tertiary education sector, including universities, playing an active role in the planning and execution process to ensure the implementation of sustainable improvement measures in the long term.