24 January 2024

David Turvey
Acting Commissioner
Jobs and Skills Australia
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9828
Canberra
ACT 2601, Australia

Dear Mr Turvey

Subject: Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024-25 work plan development consultation

The University of Melbourne welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on Jobs and Skills Australia's 2024-25 work plan development consultation paper.

We are pleased to note that most of the roadmap opportunities identified consider reforms to both vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. This joined-up approach is crucial; as argued in the University's submission to the *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*, Australia will need a fundamentally redesigned tertiary education system to meet looming challenges. This would involve a shift away from the current one-size-fits-all system towards a varied tertiary education ecosystem, with students able to move seamlessly between teaching-intensive, research-intensive, and vocational training institutions. This system would put networks of collaboration between institutions at its core.

The University supports the roadmap opportunities identified. Opportunity 3 (monitoring achievement of progress against objectives under VET, higher education and migration reforms) should be a priority for Jobs and Skills Australia. The Thodey Review found that the Australian Public Service's "approach to evaluation is piecemeal in both scope and quality, and that this diminishes accountability and is a significant barrier to evidence-based policy-making."[1] Ongoing evaluation by Jobs and Skills Australia will ensure that reforms are working as intended and ongoing improvements to policies are identified. Considering the three sets of reforms in tandem will also ensure that policies are not working at cross-purposes or leading to unintended consequences.

In relation to opportunity 10 (shaping a national skills taxonomy to underpin a more joined-up tertiary education system), consideration should be given to how this work intersects with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Review. The 2019 AQF Review proposed a revised AQF taxonomy, made up of eight bands of knowledge and six bands of skills, where the application of knowledge and skills is not rigidly locked to bands. This would allow the AQF to move beyond the current hierarchical structure, which implies linear one-way movement from VET to higher education.

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[1] Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Our Public Service, Our Future. Independent Review of the Australian Public Service,* 2019. https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/independent-review-aps.pdf

In addition to the opportunities outlined, Jobs and Skills Australia could identify the sectors where a collaborative, sector-based approach to education and training may be appropriate. For example, medical technology (medtech) is a rapidly growing sector in Victoria. The [Victorian Medtech Skills and Device Hub](#) was launched last year to accelerate Victoria's medical technology development ecosystem, boosting advanced manufacturing capabilities, skilled job opportunities and access to cutting-edge medical care for Australians.

The $10.77 million Hub, led by the University of Melbourne and backed by the Victorian Government, brings together businesses and universities (including dual sector providers) to develop medtech VET courses, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, and internships. It will deliver 1,000 industry-based training places, investment ready start-ups and support for local companies to develop and manufacture medtech products onshore and expand exports to the booming global market. Supported by Jobs and Skills Australia's analysis, this model could be replicated in other sectors to encourage collaboration across higher education and VET and offer end-to-end education and training that meets emerging industry needs. In the immediate term, for example, clean energy and the care sectors have pressing needs for a large number of appropriately qualified people from across the VET and higher education sectors. Retraining and upskilling will also need to be a feature of the education and training offering, which lends itself to the medtech model described. Advancing innovative delivery will require public policy champions from across government to facilitate more flexible and responsive approaches to skills and education. This approach spans roadmap opportunities 1,5 and 9.

Jobs and Skills Australia is to be commended for working across agencies and jurisdictions to advance an education and training system that is responsive to labour market needs. This should also include identifying policies that have been inconsistently applied across government, leading to unintended consequences that work against government objectives. An example, relevant to roadmap opportunity 6, is the altered interpretation of eligibility for students studying a degree and concurrent diploma that saw students denied access to income support. This outcome can prevent a student from continuing with their studies, and particularly impacts language study and mathematics, both of which have long been recognised as supporting priority skills.

Despite approaches to the Department of Social Services/Services Australia, the department refused to review its changed interpretation. One of the University's impacted students took the matter to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), with the Tribunal finding in the student's favour. Services Australia however has not applied the ruling to other students in the same situation. These types of impediments, when they arise, should be addressed quickly and fairly to ensure coherent delivery of policy objectives across the whole-of-government. This will ensure that one agency is not creating barriers to the skills and training that are so important for Australia's national interest. The University looks forward to continuing to work with Jobs and Skills Australia on its work plan and national jobs and skills roadmap.

For further information or to discuss the submission, I can be contacted at gek@unimelb.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

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