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Chief Executive Officer

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Professor Barney Glover AO
Commissioner, Jobs and Skills Australia

Response to the consultation on Jobs and Skills Australia's 2026-27 Work Plan

Dear Professor Glover,

Universities Australia (UA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on Jobs and Skills Australia's (JSA) 2026-27 Work Plan consultation paper. UA supports JSA's role in providing independent, evidence-based advice on Australia's labour market and skills system, to strengthen alignment across workforce, education and migration policy.

Australia's universities are central to the national jobs and skills system. Our members – including six dual sector institutions delivering both vocational and higher education and training – educate around 1.5 million students each year. Universities develop the pipeline of highly skilled workers needed in priority sectors, supporting productivity through research and innovation, and expand opportunity for students and communities across the country. It is therefore important that JSA's 2026-27 Work Plan recognises and reflects the critical role of higher education within Australia's broader jobs and skills architecture.

UA recommends that the 2026-27 Work Plan:

- maintain a strong focus on higher education as a core component of workforce planning, productivity and participation policy
- strengthen analysis of the entire tertiary system, including pathways between higher education and VET
- build the evidence base on graduate outcomes, skills utilisation and future workforce capability
- continue examining the intersection between tertiary education, migration and labour market settings to meet current and future skills needs, and
- engage universities as core system partners in shaping priorities, analysis and advice.

UA particularly welcomes the consultation paper's focus on learner outcomes, system responsiveness, pathways between sectors and recognition of prior learning. Learners increasingly move between higher education, VET and employment across various stages of life, often combining study and work or returning to education to reskill. Better evidence on these pathways is essential to support more coherent policy, stronger workforce planning and a more responsive tertiary system.

In this context, UA would welcome a clear timeline and commitment to implementation of the National Skills Taxonomy during 2026-27. The taxonomy has significant potential to improve understanding of the relationship between qualifications, occupations and skills across the tertiary system.



It is also important that JSA's future-focused work reflects the long-term nature of university planning and investment. Universities make sustained decisions about courses, staffing, infrastructure and capability development, particularly in national priority areas such as health, teaching, engineering, construction and digital capability. Workforce modelling is most valuable when it supports medium- and long-term planning, helping institutions and governments anticipate future demand for advanced knowledge, professional capability and transferable skills.

The consultation paper's emphasis on participation and inclusion is also important. Universities play a critical role in improving access to skilled work for students and communities facing persistent disadvantage, including students from regional and remote Australia, First Nations students and students with disability. JSA's work will be particularly valuable where it supports a more complete understanding of the student and workforce journey – from access and participation through to completion, employment and longer-term outcomes.

There are several areas where JSA is well placed to make a distinctive contribution to the national evidence base. These include graduate outcomes beyond first-destination measures, skills utilisation and transferability, pathways between higher education and VET, recognition of prior learning, international student transitions into employment, regional workforce capability, and the relationship between research, innovation and productivity. These issues require coordinated national analysis and are difficult to address through fragmented or single-sector approaches.

UA supports JSA's move toward a more enduring and programmatic work plan. For universities, the greatest value in the 2026-27 Work Plan will come from analysis that strengthens understanding of the tertiary system, improves evidence on future workforce needs and graduate outcomes, and supports more joined-up policy across higher education, VET and migration. This will better equip governments, institutions and employers to respond to workforce challenges, lift productivity and expand opportunity.

Yours sincerely

Luke Sheehy

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