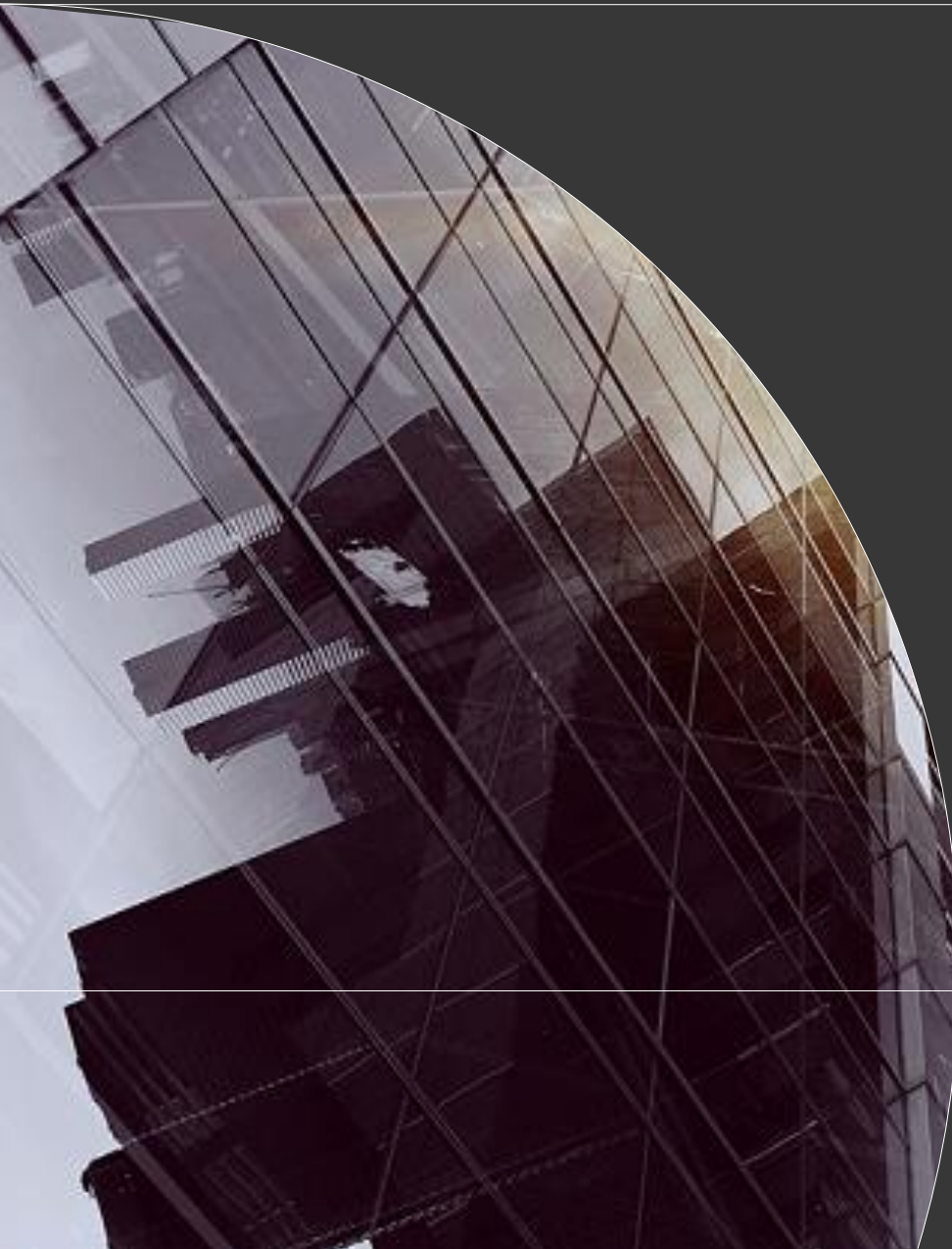


# Jobs and Skills Summit – policy paper

Addressing skills shortages and getting  
our skills mix right over the long-term

August 2022



BCA

Business Council of Australia

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# 1. Overview – a reset on skills

## The problem

- Too many young Australians are leaving school without the basics and are ill-prepared for further study or work.
- Tertiary education is too divided between higher education and vocational education and training (VET), and still leaves some people behind.
- Post-school qualifications take too long to update and become detached from current industry needs.
- Australians have limited options to quickly retrain and upskill mid-career, or to collate and share their credentials.
- A lack of coordination exists in mapping our workforce needs and combining skills and migration to respond.

## The reset we need

- Pathways from senior-secondary school to ensure students leave with strong foundational skills, a clear view of career opportunities, and a learner profile that outlines their capabilities and experience, not just their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).
- A nationally consistent foundational skills guarantee, as a fully funded right for all Australians.
- An interoperable tertiary education system that better connects (and more evenly funds) VET and higher education, enabling Australians to undertake a mix of university and TAFE courses more easily.
- A VET system that meets the needs of a modern and technology-driven economy, with funding support and careers information that guide Australians towards training in areas of need.
- Investment in apprenticeships, traineeships and other forms of on-the-job training, with support to boost completions, access digital careers and create more VET pathways for women and disadvantaged groups.
- A digitally-enabled skills sharing system that supports validation of skills acquired in the workplace and across providers, and better recognition of prior learning.
- Expanded options for lifelong learning and micro-credentialing, with learners and employers at the centre, and portability based on alignment with industry-driven skills standards.
- Improved workforce planning, with Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) playing a central role in mapping out Australia's future workforce and coordinating efforts to prioritise education and training to areas of skills shortage.
- Recognition for employers with a strong record of training and hiring locally, including through a 'Trusted Trainer' model that facilitates access to skilled migration (see box below).

## The guiding principles

- Employers have a responsibility to train their workers.
- No financial barriers should stand in the way of Australians acquiring a senior-school certificate (or equivalent) along with initial post-school VET or higher education qualifications.
- Foundational skills in reading, writing, maths and digital literacy should be guaranteed, with funded access for all Australians, including people who missed out at school or need to catch-up later in life.
- Education and training in Australia should be centred around the needs of learners and their employers, rather than providers, supported by an interoperable, responsive vocational and higher education system.
- All Australians should have options for lifelong learning and recognition of the skills they acquire, with individuals, employers and government bearing a shared responsibility for investing in skills and education.

## The actions

- Governments should recommit to implementing the Shergold Review of Senior Secondary Pathways, including:
  - Setting ambitious proficiency standards for the basics and providing extra help for students falling behind.

- Improving career advice through best-practice digital resources for students, parents and teachers, delivered by the National Careers Institute with strong backing from state and territory governments.
- Equipping all students with a Learner Profile that they can build on and curate over their career.
- Federal and state governments should recommit at the Summit to sign an ambitious new National Skills Agreement that combines ongoing additional investment in skills and training with substantial reform. Priorities to be outlined in an updated Heads of Agreement before the end of 2022 should include:
  - Improved transparency over expenditure and accountability for improving learner outcomes.
  - Increasing funding parity with higher education, via expansion of loan support for higher-level VET courses.
  - Support for lifelong learning, including accredited and/or industry-recognised micro-credentials.
  - Guaranteed foundational skills for all Australians who need to catch up on basics, including digital literacy.
  - Better aligned support for apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships to boost on-the-job training, including expanded options in high demand emerging fields (e.g. digital cadetships/traineeships).
- Governments commit at the Summit to develop an integrated skills sharing system, that allows Australians to build and share a portfolio of education and skills accrued over a lifetime, and collate formal qualifications along with non-accredited training and micro-credentials that accord with the National Micro-credentials Framework
- The federal government should consider ways to better support lifelong learning in Australia, including developing a Lifelong Skills Strategy and piloting a Lifetime Skills Account that offers financial support for Australians aged 30+ to upskill and reskill, as well as incentives (and recognition) for work-related training.
- Industry, unions and governments (federal and state) should support the establishment of (JSA as a national body that can perform workforce planning, and that helps advise upon and coordinate skills, employment and migration settings to meet industry needs and provide opportunities for all Australians.
  - To inform training priorities, JSA should have clear links with the new Industry Skills Clusters being established to drive industry engagement in the VET system, including consultations on targeting of apprenticeship, traineeship and cadetship subsidies, and direction of the Skilling Australians Fund (SAF).

## Trusted Trainer employers - proposed model

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Accredited employer sponsors of skilled migrants could be assessed as ‘Trusted Trainers’ where they demonstrate a strong track record of responsible visa sponsorship and of training/hiring locally.

This would require candidate employers to provide data demonstrating their on-the-job training activity and/or the amount they spend on training new or existing employees through approved education and training providers. Training activity could be assessed on completions, not just on commencements.

Trusted Trainer employers would be recognised with greater flexibility and benefits when they sponsor skilled migrants, including relaxed labour market testing requirements, five- or ten-day visa processing benchmarks, open eligibility for higher salary skilled migrants, and credits against, or exemptions from, the SAF levy.

This model would reward employers that go above and beyond to hire and train locally, while also creating better visibility and data on the training that employers are delivering in their workplaces, including outside the formal qualification system. It recognises that skilled migration and local training can complement and reinforce each other.

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## 2. Key Facts

*The pathways between senior secondary school and further study and work are critical for future success*

- Around 80 per cent of school leavers who complete year 12 go on to participate in further education, training or work by the age of 24, compared to less than 60 per cent of those who only complete years 10 or 11.<sup>1</sup>

*We need to raise the level of education and training in Australia to match the needs of future jobs*

- Over 90 per cent of the 1.2 million new jobs created out to 2026 will require a post-school qualification, with half requiring a bachelor's degree or higher, and the remaining 40 per cent typically needing a VET qualification.<sup>2</sup>
  - For unemployed Australians using employment services, only 44 per cent have a post-school qualification (including 12 per cent with a bachelor's degree). The other 56 per cent have no post-school qualifications.<sup>3</sup>

*We've made good progress on expanding higher education participation, but VET attainment has stalled*

- The share of 25-34-year-old Australians with a bachelor's degree or higher has increased substantially from around 1 in 10 in the early 1980s, to around half of women in that age group today, and just over one-third of men.
  - Meanwhile, the share of people this age whose highest qualification is a VET certificate or diploma has declined over the last 40 years to just under 40 per cent of men, and 30 per cent of women.

*Employer satisfaction and learner outcomes for VET have slipped, and so has use of informal work-related training*

- Over the last decade there has been a five-percentage point decline in the share of employers who are satisfied with the VET system and the share of VET graduates whose employment outcomes have improved after training.<sup>4</sup>
  - At the same time, the share of Australians participating in work-related training (not leading to a formal qualification) has declined from around 27 per cent in 2013 to around 23 per cent in 2021, though the share for employees of large businesses (41 per cent) is more than twice that of small businesses (16 per cent).<sup>5</sup>

*Lifelong learning is becoming increasingly critical to keeping up with technological advances and economic transition*

- On average, around one-in-five tasks in Australian jobs are expected to substantially change each decade, resulting in a need for continual upskilling and reskilling to keep pace.<sup>6</sup>
  - In response, by 2040 Australians will need to increase their average time spent on education and training by one-third, including a doubling of the share of learning they undertake after the age of 21.

<sup>1</sup> Productivity Commission. 2022. *Report on Government Services 2022*. Note: data is for school leavers aged 17-24.

<sup>2</sup> National Skills Commission. 2022. *Employment Outlook (five years to November 2026)*. See Figure 1 at Appendix

<sup>3</sup> Workforce Australia. 2022. *National Workforce Strategy 2022-2027*.

<sup>4</sup> Productivity Commission. 2022. *Report on Government Services 2022*. See Figure 3 at Appendix

<sup>5</sup> ABS. 2022. *Work-Related Training and Adult Learning, Australia, 2020-21*. Note: data is for Australians aged 15-74.

<sup>6</sup> AlphaBeta. 2018. *Future Skills*.

## 3. Key Issues

### 3.1 Boosting skills and education for all Australians

Despite big increases in post-school educational attainment in recent decades, we are still falling short of where we need to be. With nine out of 10 new jobs requiring a further qualification after school, we need to continue to expand access to tertiary education for young Australians. The task is particularly important for Australians facing educational barriers and disadvantage. For instance, less than two-thirds of 25-34-year-old Australians in outer regional areas have a post-school qualification (including just one-fifth with a bachelor's degree), compared to over three-quarters of Australians of the same age living in major cities (with around one-half having a bachelor's degree).<sup>7</sup>

There are similar or worse divides for other groups facing disadvantage, including Indigenous Australians, who are 30 percentage points less likely to have completed a Certificate III or higher than non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>8</sup> Too often, educational barriers start at school or even earlier, so it's critical that we firm up that foundation, as well as building on it through the tertiary education system. With higher-level skills increasingly the key to securing well-paid jobs, we can't let these educational gaps persist and turn into an unbridgeable divide between haves and have-nots.

In our schools, we need to do more to tighten the connections between secondary schooling and further education, training and work. An underlying challenge is to ensure young people complete their schooling and leave with proficiency in foundational skills, including English, reading, writing, maths and digital literacy. Senior school retention rates have slipped somewhat in recent years, following earlier increases, and proficiency in math, science and literacy have fallen over the last two decades, as measured by PISA scores for 15-year-olds.<sup>9</sup> For those who missed out at school or need to catch up, we need a nationally consistent foundational skills guarantee ensures Australians (and migrants) have fully funded access to the basic skills that enable them to succeed and undertake further learning.

Another priority is to build up flexible pathways within and beyond secondary school that accommodate the full set of opportunities for young Australians once they graduate. This should include high-quality careers advice, with equal consideration of further education options in VET and higher education, and up-to-date information on the jobs, industries and skills needed now and into the future. Informed by this advice, students should be able to exit school with a Learner Profile that looks beyond an ATAR to their broader skills, experience and capabilities.

In our tertiary education system, the federal government has committed to expand access, with 465,000 fee-free TAFE places (including 45,000 new places), and 20,000 extra university places over the next two years. These initiatives will help maintain the momentum of the last couple of years when COVID-19 stimulus programs like JobTrainer and apprenticeship subsidies resulted in an uplift in investment and enrolments in training. It's critical that these additional education and training places are prioritised toward fields in high demand that will drive Australia's future industries and innovation and lead to high-skill, high-wage careers. JSA should have a clear role in providing robust advice on the priorities, informed by workforce plans developed in collaboration with industry.

A new National Skills Agreement can also deliver extra investment in the VET system, but negotiations with the states and territories need new impetus to ensure extra funding delivers more quality, transparency and accountability for learner outcomes. There is no need to go back to the drawing board, and no time to lose on protracted negotiations.

The Heads of Agreement signed in 2020 by federal and state governments provided a good common basis for reform, building on the National Vision for VET agreed by COAG in 2019. Governments should commit at the Summit to sign an updated Heads of Agreement by the end of 2022 that accounts for the federal government's plans to rebuild TAFE, offer fee-free places, and stand up JSA in place of the National Skills Commission.

The new agreement should also aim to create a more level funding system between higher education and VET, by expanding VET student loans to all courses by approved providers at Certificate IV level and above (excluding courses with poor completion or labour market outcomes as necessary). This change would boost take-up of higher-level VET qualifications and support greater interoperability between VET and higher education, while maintaining controls to ensure the integrity of government financed courses.

With renewed momentum and common purpose, the new National Skills Agreement can be in place by the middle of 2023, which would help to ensure Australia's skills pipeline is in place to support recovery and growth.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2021. *Education and Work, Australia, May 2021*. See Figure 2 at Appendix

<sup>8</sup> Productivity Commission. 2021. Closing the Gap Information Repository. *Note*: data is from the 2016 Census and is for 25-34-year-olds.

<sup>9</sup> ABS. 2022. *Schools*; Productivity Commission. 2022. *Report on Government Services 2022*.



## 3.2 A responsive skills system, with support for lifelong learning

Much of the focus in our education system is on the skills Australians develop in their first 20 to 30 years. However, in an economy looking to adapt to change and develop new industries, it is critical that systems and incentives are also in place for people to develop new skills throughout their careers. The days of relying on an increasingly dusty certificate or degree over a 40-to-50 year career are long gone. Australians need to be able to refresh and update their skills over their lifetime, and they need a better set of options for acquiring new skills that match and track industry needs.

To keep pace, the training system needs to strike a better balance between regulation and responsiveness to industry. Reforms underway to streamline VET qualifications and improve industry engagement will help with this and it is critical that momentum on these is not lost. A key change here is to move past a narrow focus on qualifications that align with traditional occupations, and to think instead about the skills standards and competencies that cut across qualifications, occupations and industries. This flexible approach will allow the training system to facilitate greater labour mobility and recognition of prior learning and make it easier to integrate short courses and skillsets that meet the needs of individuals looking to upskill or reskill, as well as their employers.

To remain up to date in the 21st century and drive forward lifelong learning, we need to increase delivery and integration of these short, stackable training options, including industry-delivered micro-credentials, consistent with the new National Micro-credentials Framework. This kind of education and training is particularly suited to mid-career Australians and parents looking after young children who are more likely to have existing qualifications and working or caring responsibilities that make it difficult to engage in full-time or long-term study.

For short courses and micro-credentials to have their full impact, it is critical that they can be properly recognised, recorded and rewarded for the capabilities they signify. As it stands, skills and training undertaken outside formal qualifications often go unrecognised. That is why the Business Council supports development of an interoperable skills sharing system to recognise education and skills accrued over a lifetime, and collate formal qualifications along with non-accredited training and micro-credentials. This kind of system would link together the various initiatives being developed by industry and state and federal governments (e.g. Education Wallets, Skills Passports, Learner Profiles). It can also better account for and reward non-formal work-related training, which had been on the decline leading into the pandemic, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses.

With the right settings in place, Australia can strengthen its post-secondary education and training system so it is set up to facilitate lifelong learning and support Australia's future economy. The goal should be to expand the learning and career options available to Australians, and provide more choice and control in the skills and education pathways they take. The Business Council has long called for the introduction of a Lifetime Skills Account approach (similar to the SkillsFuture Credit system used in Singapore), and the time has come to make it a reality.

A Lifetime Skills Account would empower Australians to update their skills and retrain for new and better jobs. This should ultimately be available for all Australians, but a first step would be to pilot the model and get the settings right before scaling it up. Initial cohorts could include parents of young children returning to the workforce; aged, disability or childcare staff looking to upskill; and employees of industries facing disruption, including through the transition to renewables. The Productivity Commission has backed this cohort-specific pilot approach for older Australians.<sup>10</sup> The Employment White Paper is an opportunity for the government to consult on this and other measures to develop a comprehensive Lifelong Learning, Strategy and then task JSA to develop a pilot model that could be scaled up over time.

## 3.3 Bringing skills and migration together to meet workforce needs

It is clear we need to provide more opportunities for young Australians to build their educational foundation, and then make it easier for all working-age Australians to upskill and reskill mid-career as they position for the new jobs that are emerging. We also need to complement these educational and training pathways with the world-class skills and talent we can draw on from abroad through skilled migration. In this way, we can create a rich skills ecosystem, with the right mix of technical and higher education, and of local and global talent.

For example, some of the areas of highest projected jobs growth in coming years are in future-focused tech roles that will underpin Australia's success as an increasingly digital economy. Over 1.2 million tech sector workers are projected to be demanded by 2030, which is a 40 per cent increase on today's workforce.<sup>11</sup> Achieving this target will require over

<sup>10</sup> Productivity Commission. 2021. *National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review*.

<sup>11</sup> Tech Council of Australia. 2022. *Getting to 1.2 million – our roadmap to create a thriving Australian tech workforce*.

650,000 new roles to be filled, with one quarter from entry-level university/VET graduates, another quarter from newly arriving skilled migrants and around half expected to be met by upskilling and reskilling existing workers.

We face similar workforce challenges in other areas of strong future jobs demand, including aged and disability care, nursing, teaching, engineering, defence industry, and advanced manufacturing. We need a plan for each sector, but we also need to consider the workforce connections that span across industries and across interstate and international borders. One of the problems highlighted by our current spate of workforce shortages is the lack of a single body within government that does this. We need to get better at coordinating planning and policies to meet skills and workforce needs (e.g. training priorities and migration/visa settings) and use this coordinated approach to inform and bolster the various employment services aimed at providing jobs and skills pathways for unemployed Australians.

This is the role that JSA can perform once established – charting a course ahead, coordinating effort, and providing independent advice to governments on priority areas for government support, such as directing the federal government’s commitment of fee-free TAFE places (proposed model at [Appendix B](#)). With better alignment across and between governments, close industry engagement, and sophisticated use of data, we can map out the workforce we will need, and combine education and training with skilled migration to meet the challenge. We cannot predict all the skills and jobs required in every industry, and where or when we’ll need them, but that does not mean we should fly blind or leave it to luck.

To be a success, JSA needs genuine engagement with employing businesses, along with industry expertise on its board. One way to facilitate this would be to link into and leverage the new Industry Clusters that are being formed in the VET system to undertake industry-specific workforce planning, training development and stewardship. These new bodies can provide necessary breadth and depth of insight into workforce demand across multiple sectors, as well as some of the levers needed to deliver. For instance, the Industry Clusters could help inform eligibility for apprenticeship and traineeship subsidies, which are due to become more narrowly targeted from mid-2024. They could also direct funding for industry-relevant training raised by a revamped SAF levy (see Migration Policy Paper).

It is also essential that JSA is not established with a one-eyed focus on skills delivered through the VET system, to the exclusion of higher education or other pathways. VET plays an integral role in delivering technical skills for many roles across our economy, but assessments of workforce needs should be based on the experience, education, and skills required by employers, rather than preferencing a given type of provider. JSA can only achieve its potential if it has the scope to consider all parts of the education and skills ecosystem (including migration). In this way, it can help build a more unified tertiary education system, with better connections between universities, TAFE and other providers.



## 4. Priorities

### 4.1 Immediate – delivered at the Summit or in the next six months

#### *Boosting skills and education for all Australians*

- Federal and state governments should recommit at the Summit to sign an ambitious new National Skills Agreement that combines ongoing additional investment in skills and training with substantial reform. Reform priorities should include:
  - Improved transparency over expenditure and accountability for improving learner outcomes.
  - Increasing funding parity with higher education, via expansion of loan support for higher-level VET courses.
  - Support for lifelong learning, including accredited and/or industry-recognised micro-credentials.
  - Guaranteed foundational skills for all Australians who need to catch up the basics, including digital literacy.
  - Better aligned support for apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships to boost on-the-job training, including expanded options in high demand emerging fields (e.g. digital cadetships/traineeships).
- The Business Council supports all governments signing an update to the Heads of Agreement on Skills Reform before the end of 2022. This should maintain the current priorities for the new agreement but with changes to account for new government commitments, including the role of JSA, free TAFE places, and a revised implementation timetable.

#### *Bringing skills and migration together to meet workforce needs*

- Industry, unions and governments (federal and state) should commit to support the establishment of JSA as a national body that can perform workforce planning, and that helps advise on and coordinate skills, employment and migration settings to meet industry needs and provide opportunities for all Australians. JSA should be set up with strong industry connections, and with a remit to consider skills pathways that span across all forms of education and training (model at [Appendix B](#)).
- The new Industry Skills Clusters being established to drive industry engagement in the VET system should have clear connections into JSA and should inform the targeting of ongoing apprenticeship and traineeship subsidies. Industry Clusters could also help direct funding for industry-relevant training raised by a revamped SAF levy (as below).
- Support reforms to the SAF and its associated levy to incentivise ‘Trusted Trainer’ employers who undertake their own training and allow Industry Skills Clusters to help guide how and where levy revenue is spent to meet industry needs (see the Business Council’s Migration Policy Paper for recommendations on reform of the Skilling Australians Levy).

This model would strengthen the connection between Australia’s skilled migration and training system. By contrast, calls to increase the existing SAF levy (so that each time an employer sponsors a skilled migrant they have to pay for an additional training place) ignore the fact that many sponsoring employers already undertake significant local hiring and training, and that many skilled migrants are complementing local workers, rather than substituting for them.

### 4.2 Medium term – delivered in the next 12-18 months

#### *Better supporting lifelong learning*

- Federal and state government could commit at the Summit to develop a portable skills sharing system, that allows Australians to build and share a portfolio of education and skills accrued over a lifetime, and collate formal qualifications along with non-accredited training and micro-credentials.

This system could be based around the yet-to-be-established National Credentials Platform and Digital Identity Framework, and connect with state government initiatives, including Learner Profiles (NSW and South Australia) and Education Wallets (NSW).

There should be further consideration of this model through the Employment White Paper and development through the National Cabinet Skills Committee.

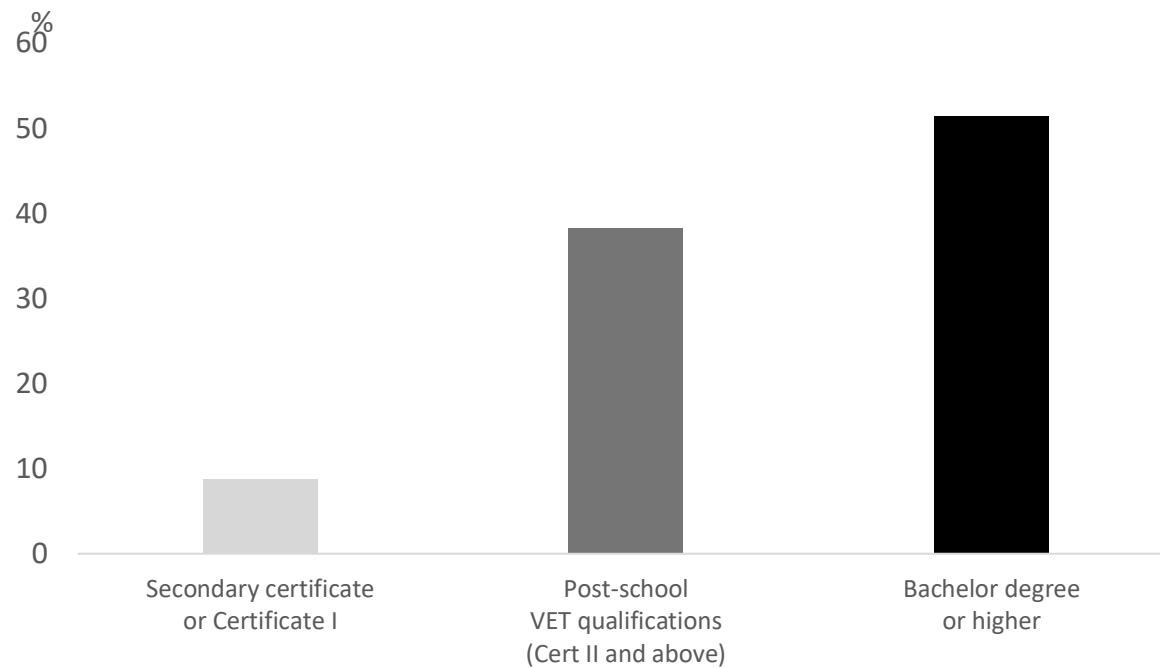
- The federal government should consider ways to better support lifelong learning in Australia, including a Lifetime Skills Account approach that offers financial support for Australians aged 30+ to upskill and reskill.

Consultation on, and development of, a comprehensive Lifelong Learning Strategy should be included in the terms of reference for the Employment White Paper, including options for a piloted Lifetime Skills Account model that could be targeted at specific cohorts initially, and then scaled up over time.

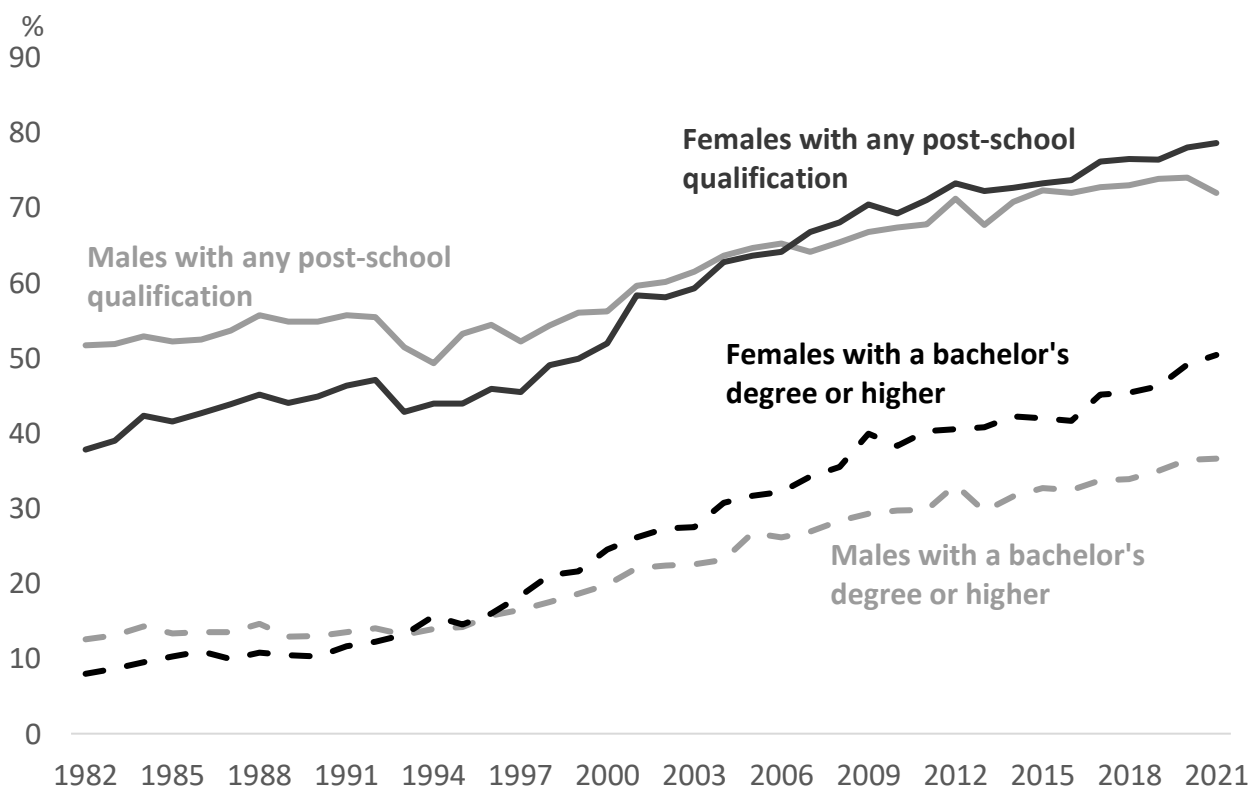
# Appendix A

## Charts

**Figure 1: Projected new jobs (2021-2026) by skill level and occupational group<sup>12</sup>**



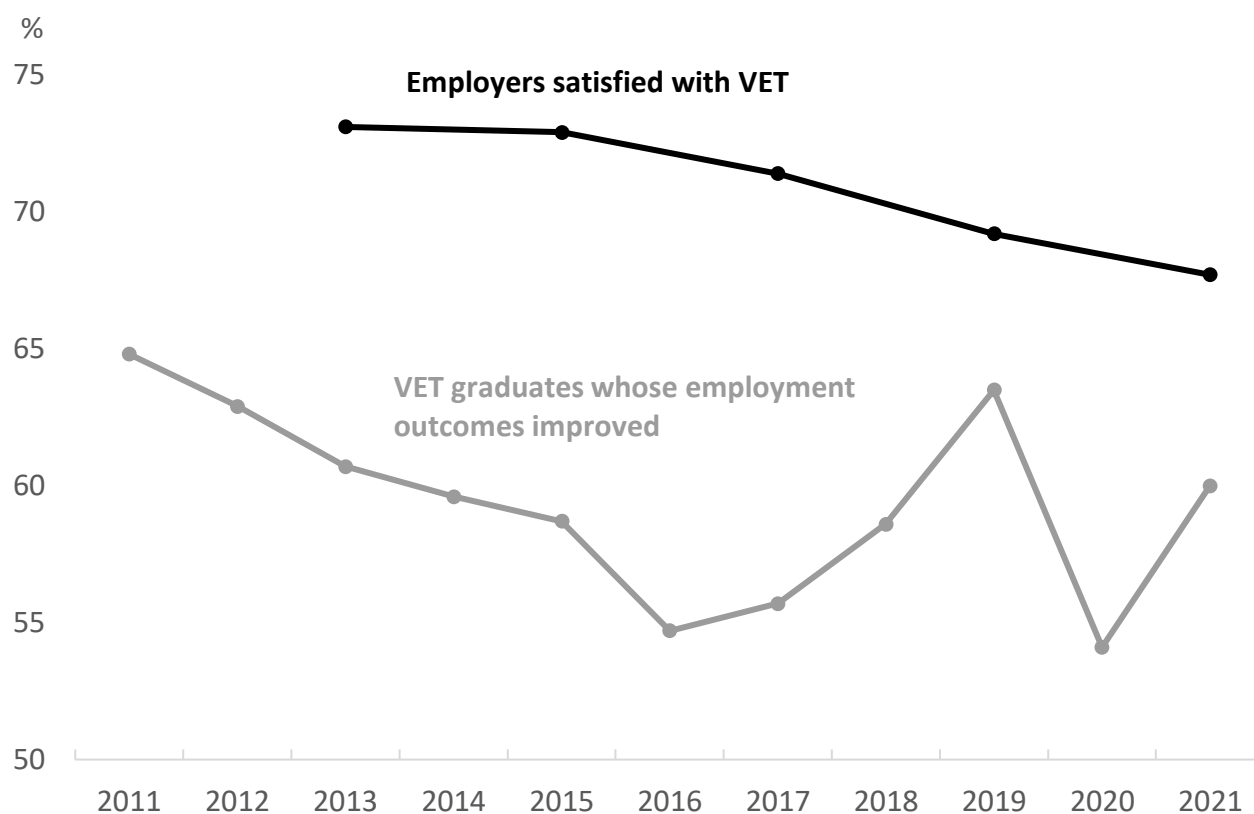
**Figure 2: Post-school educational attainment – 25-34-year-olds<sup>13</sup>**



<sup>12</sup> National Skills Commission. 2022. *Employment Outlook (five years to November 2026)*.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). 2021. *Education and Work, Australia, May 2021*.

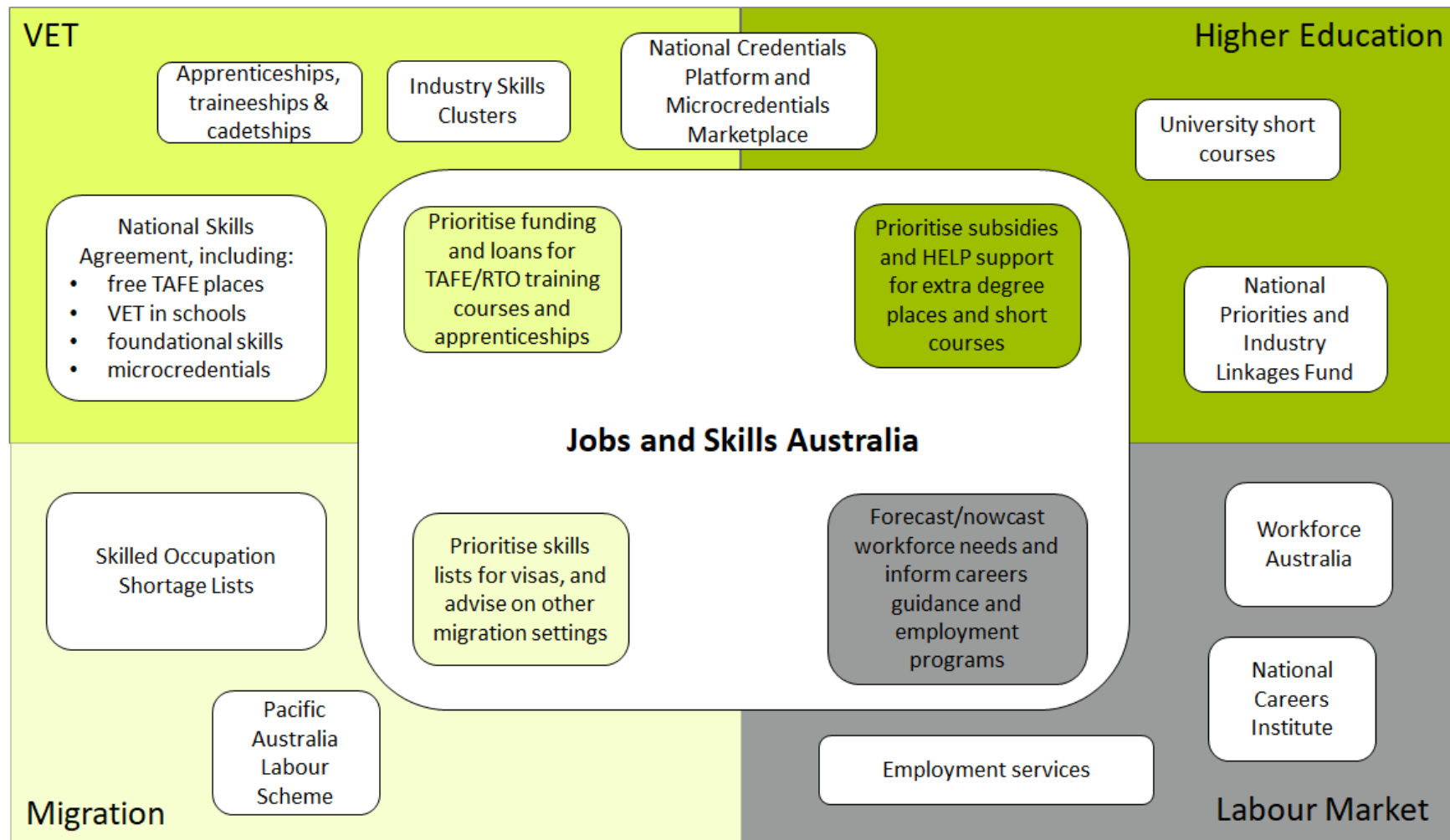
**Figure 3: VET employer satisfaction and graduate outcomes<sup>14</sup>**



<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission. 2022. *Report on Government Services 2022*.

# Appendix B

## Jobs and Skills Australia – proposed role and key functions



## Key Functions for Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)

### **Assessing skills and workforce needs, now and into the future**

- JSA should map out Australia's current and future skills and workforce needs through regular economy-wide and sectoral scans and capacity studies, and produce detailed nowcasts and forecasts at a national and regional level.
  - Deep dives and capacity studies on specific sectors should be undertaken at the direction of the Minister, but also at the discretion of the Board.
- Workforce mapping should be undertaken in conjunction with industry (including with the new Industry Skills Clusters) to reflect and support industries' own planning and initiatives.
- Workforce and skills data should be made publicly available to the greatest extent possible, to support state governments, industry and education/training providers as they undertake their own workforce plans.

### **Advising on policy settings and system changes to meet workforce needs**

- JSA should have an expert advisory role, providing advice to federal and state governments on barriers and challenges, as well as recommended changes to policy settings that can help to meet future workforce needs.
  - Advice should be provided at the request of the Minister, but JSA should also be funded to publish independent advice on issues that it identifies (similar to the Productivity Commission's study reports).
- JSA's assessments of skills shortages should form the authoritative basis for skilled visa settings and subsidy and loan support for training places, apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships.
- JSA's focus should extend beyond training pathways and policy levers in the VET system, and include pathways and policy settings relating to higher education, migration, and industry-delivered training (e.g. non-accredited micro-credentials) that can support upskilling and reskilling.
- In VET, JSA should advise on priorities for fee-free TAFE places and other training subsidies (including short courses), and support for on-the-job training including apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships.
  - JSA should also use improved data on VET student outcomes to provide assessments of high (and low) quality training that can influence future funding and propagate best-practice, including industry-led training.
- In higher education, JSA should account for how education and skills needs are being met through existing funding settings and provide advice on prioritisation of non-CGS course funding (e.g. university short courses, National Priority and Industry Linkages funding, and additional Commonwealth Supported Places for priority fields or cohorts)
- On migration, JSA should advise on priorities for skilled visas, and on changes to visa settings that can help to attract and retain skilled migrants in areas of current and future demand.
  - JSA could determine eligible occupations for skilled migration based on assessments that go beyond identifying skills shortages, and that also account for industry plans to meet these shortages through an uplift in education and training.
- In the labour market, JSA should feed into or incorporate the National Careers Institute, ensuring that its insights on future skills and workforce needs are translated into high quality careers advice that reaches school students, teachers, parents and people looking for a career change later in life.
  - JSA should also link in with (and provide advice to) employment services delivered at a federal, state and local level to help unemployed and other disadvantaged Australians find new or better jobs, with a focus on demand-driven employment opportunities and bespoke skills and training programs.



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