



Australian Education Union

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19 August 2022

Senator Tony Sheldon
Chair
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Sheldon,

**Re: AEU submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 and the Jobs and Skills Australia
(National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022**

Please find attached the Australian Education Union's submission to the inquiry into the Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 and the Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022.

Please contact me if you have any questions in relation to this submission.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Bates
Federal Secretary



Australian Education Union

Submission

to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 and the Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022

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Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) represents over 198,000 educator members employed in the public primary, secondary, special, early childhood, TAFE, Adult Migrant Education and Disability Education sectors throughout Australia.

This submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee is made on behalf of AEU members across these crucial sectors. The submission addresses matters related to the *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022* and the *Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022*.

The AEU welcomes the bill and notes that the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) was the first legislative act of the Albanese government. In particular we welcome that “Jobs and Skills Australia will give effect to the Government’s commitments to tripartism”¹ and that JSA will “genuinely consult and work with the State and Territory governments and other key stakeholders including, for example, employer associations, unions, training providers and regional organisations.”²

The AEU also welcomes the strategic focus that JSA will have in providing evidence informed workforce planning across all industries, and we recognise that the *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022* is designed to allow “its critical work to commence immediately while more extensive consultation on the permanent model for Jobs and Skills Australia occurs.”³ It is essential that in both its interim and permanent form JSA implements a broad and innovative program of research and analysis that allows Australia to stay ahead of emerging workforce trends, with an approach which seeks to identify potential shortfalls before they reach crisis point. . This is particularly important in schools, Early Childhood Education (ECE) and TAFE. Teachers in TAFE, schools and ECE are struggling with unprecedented working hours and continually intensifying workloads, insecure employment and low and declining real wages. Systems across all education sectors are struggling with nationwide shortages of teachers, education support staff and early childhood educators due to huge workloads and rapidly increasing attrition rates.

All of these issues have been known for years, but a distinct lack of national planning has seen them repeatedly unaddressed. We are encouraged by the proactive role in workforce planning that is envisioned for JSA and hope that this will result in measures to address the significant and often systemic issues currently impacting upon teachers and education support workers in schools, ECE and TAFE. The recommendations that the AEU makes in this submission are offered so that JSA in its interim form can plan and accommodate the functions and governance structure that will be required for it to operate effectively in its permanent form.

¹*Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 and Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022*, Explanatory Memorandum, p.2, retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/ems/r6880_ems_0ee3eaa2-44fe-40a1-a80f-1ec8a171e2a6/upload_pdf/JC007019.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

TAFE must be the anchor of vocational education in Australia

The AEU recommends that there should be a specific mention of TAFE as the primary public provider of Vocational Education and Training (VET) included in the Bill, and that ‘*training organisations including TAFE as the public provider*’ replace ‘*training provider*’ at Section 10.

Australian students have the right to quality, accessible vocational education and TAFE excels at providing practical, occupational, and academic knowledge, skills and qualifications. However, for the last decade the absolute prioritisation of the market in vocational education has occurred at the expense of a properly funded, planned and executed public vocational education system. The market typically fails to deliver quality VET opportunities in regional and remote Australia, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and for people with disability. Conversely, public VET delivers on its social contract with Australian workers, and public VET provides high quality qualifications for those that undertake it and provides Australia with long lasting and significant societal and economic benefits. As the public provider of vocational education, TAFE should be the anchor for developing Australia’s skills pipeline and fostering and supporting TAFE should be a priority for JSA. Restoring the billions of dollars cut from the sector over the last decade, and rebuilding the TAFE system, including investing in the TAFE teaching workforce and state of the art TAFE facilities should be a key component of the work of the JSA.

The damage inflicted on the sector over the last decade as a result of marketisation, and the chronic underfunding of TAFE and publicly delivered vocational education is immense. Despite the clear and undisputed societal and economic benefits that a robustly funded and administered TAFE and vocational education sector provides, there has been a concerted and continual drive from the previous Commonwealth Government over the last nine years to marketise vocational education and deprioritise TAFE, resulting in the shift of public money to for-profit private providers, and disinvestment by governments in vocational education.⁴ This marketisation has been undertaken for its own sake and without any explicit justification, and without any evidence showing that it improves the quality of existing vocational education provision.

The impact on the sector has been catastrophic. Contestable funding has flooded the market with inferior private providers. There are now over 4,600 active registered training providers in Australia, but only 96 of these providers have more than 100 full time students. It is plainly evident that quality cannot possibly be maintained at a system level when that system is populated by thousands of tiny individual private providers, some of whom have participated in recruitment and enrolment practices that can best be described as skirting the edge of legality.⁵

This wholesale shift of public funds from the TAFE sector to often small, private for-profit providers, has resulted in the established TAFE and vocational education sector bearing the

⁴ Wheelahan, L., (2018) *New figures quantify the extent of the TAFE disaster*, retrieved from http://stoptafecuts.com.au/blog/new-figures-quantify-extent-tafe-disaster?ccm_paging_p=3

⁵ Bachelard, M., Cook, H., & Knott, M., (2015) *Vocational Education, the biggest get-rich quick scheme in Australia*, *Sydney Morning Herald* retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/vocational-education-the-biggest-getrich-quick-scheme-in-australia-20150916-gjqgwe.html>

burden of being the lowest funded of all the education sectors in Australia. TAFE has also been caught up in increasingly onerous regulatory requirements designed to monitor private providers.

In 2020 real terms government expenditure on VET was \$1.1 billion, 15.9% lower than it was at the 2012 peak of \$7.9 billion, and every year since that peak an average of \$1.13 billion in government funding has been lost to the VET sector. On a per capita basis, real terms government expenditure in 2020 was \$346 per person aged 15-64 years, down from a peak of \$461 in 2012. This is a real reduction in funding per person of 25% from 2012.⁶ The damage inflicted on the sector has eroded the viability of TAFE colleges and undermined confidence in the system. As a result of this continual assault, TAFE enrolments have declined steadily in recent years, from nearly 1,194,000 in 2012 to 871,000 in 2021.⁷

An ever increasing portion of government funding continues to be directed towards training and often non-accredited courses offered by private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Nationally, TAFE student numbers have fallen by 27% in the last decade, as most states and territories endure cuts to campuses, courses and staff.⁸ From 2012 to 2021 the total number of students enrolled in nationally-recognised AQF accredited programs through all types of providers has increased by only 11.9%, and at the same time, students enrolled in subjects not delivered as part of a nationally-recognised AQF accredited program (usually delivered by private providers) increased by 120.0%.

The latest 2021 apprenticeship and traineeship completion data shows that completions have declined to 48.1% of all occupations and 42.0% for trade occupations.⁹

The Productivity Commission has used uncommonly strong language recognising that vocational education in Australia is “fractured” and “a mess”, and has called for immediate government action.¹⁰ Industry stakeholders, such as the Business Council Of Australia, recognise the central role TAFE plays in vocational education, and have called for appropriate funding.¹¹ With TAFE a direct contributor to the labour force’s productivity through the provision of skills, capacities, and qualifications, there is ample opportunity for JSA to bring TAFE to the forefront of Australia’s skills and workforce strategy.

It is well known that skills shortages are rife across many industries - the Institute for Workplace Skills & Innovation (IWSI) reported in 2020 that there are 200,000 roles with

⁶ Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2022, Part B Child care, education and training: 5 Vocational Education and training*, retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training>

⁷National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2022), *Government Funding of VET 2021: data tables*, retrieved from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/historical-time-series-of-government-funded-vocational-education-and-training-from-1981-to-2021>

⁸ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2022), *Government Funding of VET 2021: data tables*, retrieved from <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/historical-time-series-of-government-funded-vocational-education-and-training-from-1981-to-2021>

⁹ https://www.ncver.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0033/9674052/Completion-and-attribution-rates-for-apprentices-and-trainees-2021.pdf

¹⁰ Productivity Commission, *Shifting the Dial: 5 Year Productivity Review*, 2017, p 86, accessible [here](#).

¹¹ Business Council of Australia, *Future-proof: protecting Australians through education and skills*, October 2017, p 77, accessible [here](#).

employers that cannot be filled due to a skills mismatch.¹² The current Skills Priority List includes 153 professions with current shortages, 57 of these will also have strong future demand and another 87 occupations are classified as having moderate future demand.¹³ Similarly, the National Skills Commission has consistently recorded extreme shortages in many essential trade and technical industries and ACEEQA has identified a need for an additional 39,000 Early Childhood Educators including 9,000 additional Early Childhood Teachers by 2023.

A properly funded TAFE sector has the capacity to address this mismatch between demand and skills supply, to assist with Australia's pandemic-related economic recovery and rebuilding by skilling, reskilling up-skilling Australian workers and to provide career pathways for all Australians.

While these current skills shortages can be in part attributed to border closures and a decline in immigration since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the problems existed prior to the pandemic, and have been exacerbated by a range of complex factors. These factors include a lack of consultation and engagement with a broad range of stakeholders by the previous Commonwealth Government, including those in the community sector and a wide range of unions, a lack of deep analysis from the previous Government on the barriers to entering further education and the workforce, a lack of creative understanding of how new industries will emerge and the resulting need for a complex of multiple qualifications, and the impositions caused by the primacy of the contestable funding model and the steady reduction in funding to public TAFE.

The benefits of properly funded TAFE to the individual learner and to society as a whole extend far beyond employment and productivity. TAFE develops the whole individual and facilitates lifelong learning. TAFE is the centrepiece of Australian VET and makes significant contributions to Australia's broad social and economic development. TAFE promotes regional labour market outcomes, bridges access to jobs pathways, promotes social cohesion, reduces income inequality, and compared to other VET providers, provides greater access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability.¹⁴

In a ground-breaking 2020 report quantifying the contribution of TAFE to Australia's national wealth and wellbeing, the Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute found that, despite years of significant funding cuts and "policy vandalism", the TAFE system continues to make a strong and disproportionate economic and social contribution to Australia.¹⁵ The report measures the continuing economic and wider social benefits of Australia's historic investment in TAFE, in terms of higher earnings and productivity for TAFE graduates and the resulting increased tax revenues and profits to employers, the additional economic footprint of TAFE purchasing and supply chains and the fiscal benefit of reduced social assistance and public healthcare expenditure arising from TAFE's contribution to lowering unemployment and

¹² Australian Apprenticeships & Traineeships Information Service, 'VET and Australia's future: where we've been and where we're headed in Australia's post-COVID-19 recovery', p 10, accessible [here](#).

¹³ National Skills Commission, *Skills Priority Lists Occupation Reports*, retrieved from <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/publications/skills-priority-list-occupations/anzsco-sub-major/education-professionals>

¹⁴ Pennington A., 'The Economic and Social Benefits of the TAFE System', *The Australian TAFE Teacher*, Spring 2020, accessible [here](#).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 8.

supporting a healthier workforce and society.¹⁶ The annual economic benefits of historical and current TAFE investment include \$6.1 billion produced by the TAFE sector’s economic footprint, \$1.5 billion in fiscal savings and social benefits and a substantial \$84.9 billion in higher earnings and productivity.¹⁷

The AEU recommends that JSA have additional functions to allow it to review and monitor the relationship between funding, regulation and the quality of RTO service provision

The public funding available to providers is not put to equivalent use in the public and private sectors. Private providers focus on courses and qualifications that are relatively cheap to run but fully funded by public subsidies - such as business studies, media studies, tourism and community services courses and neglect to provide higher cost trade based courses that are resource intensive, while TAFE providers continue to dominate training provision to disadvantaged learners and learners with disability, as well as in areas of high-cost training, and specialised and in-shortage skills.¹⁸ TAFE delivers a much higher level of provision, at a significantly larger cost than the offerings of most private providers. TAFE has superior infrastructure, provides a higher level of pastoral care and guidance than the standard private RTO model and has made substantial historical and contemporary investments in forming and maintaining wide ranging community and industry links.

For these reasons we suggest that an additional function is inserted as Section 9(a)(iv), and that the functions of JSA include to provide advice to the Minister on “*the impact of funding decisions on registered training organisations including TAFE as the public provider*” and that this additional function is retained in any future Bill to establish the permanent functions of JSA.

The AEU believes that there should be an urgent review of the relationship between government funding of VET and the skills-based training services that are provided by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). We suggest that Jobs and Skills Australia will be an appropriate body to review this relationship and its impact on skill and qualification levels and economic benefits with a specific focus on TAFE as the public provider. This is in line with the description in the Explanatory Memorandum that “Its research and analysis will consider the resourcing and funding requirements for registered training organisations to deliver accessible quality VET courses which will assist students and learners and better support government’s investment decisions in the sector.”¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p7.

¹⁸ Hamdhan, A., (2013) *Contestable funding in the VET sector: implications on the role of public TAFEs – a cause for concern*, cited in Australian Education Union (2015) *Submission to the Inquiry into the operations, regulation and funding of private vocational education and training (VET) providers in Australia*, p.10.

¹⁹ *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 and Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022*, Explanatory Memorandum, p.2, retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/ems/r6880_ems_0ee3eaa2-44fe-40a1-a80f-1ec8a171e2a6/upload_pdf/JC007019.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf. 2

The terms of reference for this review could include:

- What is the impact in regional and remote areas that do not provide a viable market for private VET providers, but which have already lost their TAFE institute?
- How will the range of regional and cultural differences across the country be factored into government funding allocations?
- How do course pricing mechanisms account for all the activity and investment that TAFE undertakes to serve the public good?
- How can government act to prevent an imbalance in offerings resulting from private RTO's rent seeking by only offering training from higher subsidy groupings?
- How can government ensure that the full breadth of high-level courses are available to all who want to undertake them?

The requirement for JSA to undertake such a review could be inserted at Section 9 (d) of the Bill.

An additional function of both the interim and permanent JSA could also be inserted at Section 9(a)(v) on *the impact of regulations on a) the operations of registered training organisations including TAFE as the public provider, and b) the quality of service that is experienced by students*. The intent of this insertion is to monitor the quality of service experienced by students as the end user of regulatory decisions.

Marketisation has resulted in a severe contraction of the depth and quality of vocational education in Australia. We suggest that a proposed review could examine inputs as well as outcomes. This is particularly important in relation to the curriculum hours available to teachers and lecturers to support students. The focus needs to be on the quality of training and further education whereas presently the focus is almost solely on assessment. Currently, many of the key performance indicators used to judge the sector, and audit outcomes, do not facilitate deep analysis of the issues facing TAFE.

Further, the focus on audit documentation has become counterproductive in that practitioners now have much less time to actually develop innovative learning resources and support their students. For example, TAFE educators have consistently reported to the AEU that an Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) audit has generated an acceleration of managerial practices whereby the operations of TAFE are increasingly reduced to numerical scales and compliance activities at the expense of building a culture of quality training. The insertion of the function shown above would allow JSA to act as a body to investigate and report to government, and to draw attention to unforeseen consequences of the decisions and actions of government and governance bodies.

JSA must have a strategic focus on addressing the decline in quality apprenticeships and traineeships, and the rapid decline in completions

In order to rebuild Australia's economy and workforce a clear and strongly supported national workforce strategy to support apprentices and trainees is required.

Apprenticeships offered alongside TAFE qualifications offer a clear pathway from school to a career, unlike those gained through many private RTOs which may offer unaccredited fragments of qualifications and narrow traineeships, often with minimal ongoing support.

However, and despite the additional \$1.5 billion apprentice 50% wage subsidy to employers announced in conjunction with JobTrainer in July 2020, there are now 83,000 less apprentices and trainees than there were in 2013. Further, the 50% wage subsidy instigated by the previous Commonwealth Government offers no ongoing security to apprentices once they have completed their training. The AEU has heard anecdotal evidence that large numbers of employers are abusing this to hire first year apprentices as cheap labour, with no intention of employing them throughout the full three years of their apprenticeship. These anecdotes are supported by the dismal contact completion figures detailed above. The additional wage subsidies of 10% for second year and 5% for third year announced in September 2021 will do little to rectify the rotting of the apprentice subsidy program.

This subsidy should therefore be more evenly spread across the term of an apprenticeship and contingent on apprentices having their employment maintained for at least twelve months from the conclusion of their apprenticeship.

The AEU recommends that the interim JSA immediately consider ways in which apprentice and trainee subsidies can be better targeted to support a long term and secure commitment from employers toward apprentices and trainees, and that the permanent JSA continue to review the effectiveness of the distribution of these subsidies.

There is also a pay discrepancy in regard to the difference in pay between trades and traineeships and the cost of the courses between trade apprenticeships and courses undertaken by trainees. Trainees' wages are lower than apprenticeship wages and the course costs higher with traineeships. This is a significant issue with regard to gender equity as traineeships are in predominantly feminised industries and traditional trades are predominantly male dominated.

The previous Commonwealth Government's skills strategy in response to the pandemic was limited to rolling out a series of online, short, and largely micro credentialed courses. This was a transparent attempt at a quick fix resulting in increased under employment and increased insecurity of work which only temporarily masked the issue and will not lead to long term skills gains or provide the boosted productive capacity that Australia needs.

A true strategy for workforce renewal can only be achieved through the national support for TAFE, and by making use of TAFE's longstanding partnerships with industry – the job of rebuilding Australia's skills base cannot be left to private, for-profit RTOs.

The AEU urges the Committee to recognise the importance of TAFE and public vocational education as a public good, and to ensure that JSA can make the most of the contribution that TAFE can make to Australia's skills and jobs strategy and eventual economic recovery.

The AEU urges the Committee to recommend that JSA positions TAFE at the forefront of Australia's employment and skills strategy by an immediate increase to federal funding including a significant capital investment in TAFE infrastructure, both in terms of improvements to existing campuses and the redeployment of closed campuses in regions without sufficient VET provision.

We urge the Committee to recommend that JSA is able to examine the true cost of training including the cost of purchasing, installing and maintaining new plant, information and communication technologies, support for students not able to access new technologies, and

general maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure to ensure dynamic and state of the art learning and training facilities. We also urge that JSA examine the benefit that could be reaped through a significant reinvestment in the TAFE teaching workforce, attract and retain TAFE teachers, to replace the many tens of thousands who have been driven out of the sector over the last ten years, and to alleviate the current unsustainable workloads.

JSA would benefit from a Board that reflects the Commonwealth Government’s tripartite commitment

Part 2, Section 7 of the Bill states that:

Jobs and Skills Australia consists of the following:

(a) the JSA Director;

(b) staff made available to assist the JSA Director under sections 14 and 15

The AEU is encouraged by the Government’s tripartite approach to JSA and its commitment to extensive consultation on its permanent form. In that spirit, the AEU recommends that JSA would benefit from a diverse Board consisting of representatives from VET Providers, TAFE, unions, community organisations (for example those who support people with disability or the homeless), employer and industry groups, small business groups and other key stakeholders. Such a Board would allow for better oversight of Australia’s skills strategy and would ensure that the priorities of all key stakeholders are taken into account. Diversity in the membership of a JSA Board would encourage transparency on national decisions regarding key issues associated with Jobs and Skills development.

An example model that JSA could adopt is that used by Jobs Queensland, which consists of an Executive Director and a Board of eight members who represent employer and employee groups, industry and regions across the state.

The functions of JSA should specifically include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobs and skills.

There is currently no national advisory body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobs and skills. The AEU proposes that the interim JSA urgently begin planning and support for a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Training Advisory Council comprised of industry, provider and community representatives, similar to that convened in the 1990s. The function of the Council should be to provide advice to the JSA on how it can embed the Closing the Gap targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and employment.

Specifically, JSA should have regard to Closing the Gap target 6 “Students reach their full potential through further education pathways”, target 7 “Youth are engaged in employment or education” and target 8 “Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities”²⁰ and actions to achieve progress against these targets should be included in both the interim and permanent JSA’s functions.

²⁰ *Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes*, retrieved from <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>

The foreword of the 2022 Closing the Gap Report states:

*The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Agreement) is a significant agreement – committing to outcomes that have been developed in partnership between Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations. The Agreement enables new ways of doing things through its Priority Reforms, including that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now share in the decisions made to close the gap. The Agreement also focuses on the outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to see if the gap is closing.*²¹

The establishment of a defined stream of JSA focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and skills, and specifically focused on achieving the Closing the Gap targets 6,7 and 8 would support the commitment that all Australian governments made in the National Agreement for Closing the Gap to work with, and have shared decision making with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve the Closing the Gap targets.

Part 5, Section 6 (1) of the Bill states:

*The Minister may give the JSA Director directions about the way in which the JSA Director is to carry out any of the functions of the JSA Director or of Jobs and Skills Australia.*²²

The AEU recommends that Ministerial Directions under this clause should also relate specifically to the achievement of the National Agreement for Closing the Gap targets.

The functions of JSA should be expanded to specifically address the needs of smaller and thin VET markets, and to include specific reference to the needs of learners with disability

Section 9 of the Bill states that:

Jobs and Skills Australia has the following functions:

- (a) *to provide advice to the Minister or the Secretary in relation to the following:*
 - (i) *Australia’s current and emerging labour market, including advice on workforce needs and priorities;*
 - (ii) *Australia’s current, emerging and future skills and training needs and priorities (including in relation to apprenticeships);*
 - (iii) *the adequacy of the Australian system for providing 16 VET, including training outcomes*

The AEU recommends that these interim functions be expanded to include consultation with State and Territory Governments to include specific state and territory needs and priorities, and that these functions are continued in the permanent JSA model. This inclusion would

²¹ *Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2022*, p.1, retrieved from <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/report/closing-the-gap-annual-data-Compilation-report-july2022.pdf>

²² *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022*, p. 12, retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/legislation/bills/r6880_first-reps/toc_pdf/2257b01.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

recognise that each jurisdiction exhibits different skills and employment trends that may not always align with national trends, and that thin VET markets in regional, rural and remote areas, and in states with small populations, have unique skills and employment requirements.

The AEU suggests that the funding & resourcing for disadvantaged learners and learners with disability is included in the functions of both the interim and permanent JSA. There is currently a dearth of specialised vocational and further education for these students, despite there being a strong tradition of TAFE provision to the disadvantaged and students with disability cohorts. Vocational and further education for students with disability, and particularly neurodiverse students, desperately needs to be supported as a priority.

JSA should have an explicit focus on a creative and innovative future for TAFE

Much of the employment and skills focus of the previous Commonwealth Government was on actions and interventions that were short term in nature, were uncreative, and did not consider Australia's emergent needs. That sole focus on immediate employment outcomes and on subsidising apprenticeships and traineeship commencements missed the great need to offer further training and reskilling people to meet future demand as industries shift and change.

The establishment of JSA is an opportunity for the new Commonwealth Government to create a dynamic body that supports the public vocational education sector to produce students who are innovative, creative and who have an enhanced capacity to problem solve. In order to encourage and support our TAFE institutes to respond and grow new ideas, new technologies, and new industries in flexible and dynamic ways, JSA needs to seed new and emerging industries rather than just observing and responding to immediate and current labour market needs as the National Skills Commission has done. Offering new training opportunities can create new industries and this should be cultivated at the same time as providing for expected growth in current industries. This will inevitably involve challenging the established orthodoxies of VET marketisation, as to respond to future needs we need creativity, innovation and investment. However, TAFEs are currently significantly restricted in their offering of courses that do not immediately achieve a narrowly defined vocational outcome. This limits, for example, the innovation that can grow from the dynamic interaction between creative skills and skills and knowledges from non-related areas and industries. JSA should facilitate and encourage with cross-fertilizations of skills, knowledge and ideas within public VET and TAFE so that Australia is best placed to meet and create future opportunities for individuals, employers, industries and communities.