



3 April 2023

Senator Tony Sheldon
Chair
Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
Parliament House
Canberra

By email: eec.senate@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair

Jobs and Skills Australia Amendment Bill 2023 [Provisions]

Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on the Jobs and Skills Australia Amendment Bill 2023 (the Bill). As the peak body for the universities sector, Universities Australia (UA) advocates for the significant social, economic and cultural value of higher education and research.

UA welcomed the creation of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and we support this Bill. We commend the Government and Minister O'Connor on the thorough consultation that was undertaken in the development of JSA's establishing legislation, and the consultation that continues on the work that JSA will undertake.

UA particularly welcomes the creation of a Ministerial Advisory Board in this Bill under proposed section 16B. The Advisory Board will include representatives from state and territory governments, unions, employers and experts.

JSA has a clear remit to provide advice to the Minister and the Secretary on current, emerging and future skills needs, as well as pathways into and between VET and higher education and opportunities to improve higher education outcomes.

This remit is of fundamental importance to the functions and effectiveness of JSA. Nearly all of the new jobs that will be created over the next decade will require some form of post-secondary qualification. Lifelong learning strategies and upskilling of the existing workforce will be critical in order to meet the demand for skilled workers in the future.

Equally, universities and other tertiary providers require timely, economy-wide, and sectoral workforce analysis in order to continually match graduate outputs with the nation's skills needs.

As such, UA recommends that:

- the proposed Ministerial Advisory board be legislated to include at least one representative from each of the vocational education and higher education sectors; and
- specific reference be made to 'universities' as an area of experience or knowledge relevant to eligibility for appointment to the Ministerial Advisory Board.

Amending proposed section 16B(1) to include these representatives will ensure that the Minister and Secretary have access to timely advice on opportunities to improve vocational and higher education outcomes, particularly for those cohorts that are experiencing labour market disadvantage and exclusion.

Amending proposed section 16B(4) to make specific reference to 'universities' will ensure that a person appointed to the Ministerial Advisory Board to provide advice on higher education issues will have direct experience dealing with or working within a university. This would be invaluable expertise when providing advice to the Minister or Secretary on increasing vocational and higher education pathways and opportunities to deliver better outcomes.

In an upcoming submission to the Australian Universities Accord, UA will recommend that Government continue to explore ways to improve pathways between vocational education and universities. We know that in order to meet the workforce challenges of the decades ahead Australians must be able to seamlessly transition between different types of post-secondary education and education providers.

If there is any more information that I can provide the Committee on this Bill please do not hesitate to contact me at ceo@universitiesaustralia.edu.au.

Yours sincerely,

Catriona Jackson
Chief Executive