

JOBS AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA DISCUSSION PAPER SUBMISSION

DATE 10 FEBRUARY 2023

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Independent Schools Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper and to convey the important role that the Independent school sector plays in educating young people for the future and helping build a skilled workforce to meet Australia's future needs.

The Independent school sector is a key contributor to skills and training education. Independent schools:

- provide vocational education and training (VET) onsite as a registered training organisation (RTO) and organise placements for students in external VET courses or school-based apprenticeships.
- offer careers advice to students, regularly upskilling staff to provide the most up to date careers information.
- form critical relations with industry and business to ensure robust and engaging VET courses and apprenticeships.

ISA strongly recommends the inclusion of ISA as the national peak body representing the Independent school sector on the Jobs and Skills Australia Advisory Body and relevant sub-committees to ensure mutual knowledge sharing and collaboration and to enable the forging of links between industry, employment and the Independent school sector.

2. ABOUT ISA

Independent Schools Australia (ISA) is the national peak body representing the Independent school sector. It comprises the eight state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs). Through these Associations, ISA represents 1,187 schools and over 667,000 students, accounting for approximately 16 per cent of Australian school enrolments.

ISA's major role is to bring the unique needs and contributions of Independent schools to the attention of the Australian Government and to represent the sector on national issues.

Independent schools are a diverse group of non-government schools serving a range of different communities. The latest available data shows that one in six Australian school students attends an Independent school with more than one in five secondary students and 23% of senior secondary students attending an Independent school.

Independent schools make a valuable contribution to education in Australia. They are long-established partners in Australia's education system, alongside government and Catholic schools, contributing to society and the learning and wellbeing of Australian children.

Independent schools are committed to playing their part in improving educational opportunities for young Australians and contributing to a robust and successful national schooling system.

Independent schools include:

- Schools affiliated with Christian denominations for example, Anglican, Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Uniting Church, Quaker and Seventh Day Adventist schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Schools constituted under specific Acts of Parliament, such as grammar schools in some states
- Community schools
- Indigenous community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities
- Schools that cater for students at severe educational risk due to a range of social/emotional/behavioural and other factors.

Most Independent schools are set up and governed independently on an individual school basis. However, some Independent schools with common aims and educational philosophies are governed and administered as systems, for example Lutheran schools. Systemic schools account for 20 per cent of schools in the Independent sector. Four out of five schools in the sector are autonomous non-systemic schools.

3. ABOUT THIS SUBMISSION

ISA prepared this submission in response to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper

ISA consulted with the state and territory Associations of Independent Schools (AISs) in preparing this submission.

4. INTRODUCTION

ISA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper and to highlight the crucial role that the Independent school sector plays in VET, careers advice and upskilling young people for future employment.

In the Independent school sector, VET is regarded as a highly valued opportunity for young people to learn important knowledge and skills and have an opportunity to develop employment-based skills and gain relevant certification.

VET is increasingly becoming a focal point in education for senior students, providing not only transition into apprenticeships and further education and training, but also as entry into university through alternate entry programs or directly into employment.

AISs support Independent schools in the VET sector with advice, professional development and assisting schools to build ongoing strategic partnerships and relationships with industry and local businesses. For example, Independent Schools Tasmania has formed strategic relationships with the Mineral Council, Seafood Industry Council, TasTAFE, Beacon Foundation and Wool Industry Australia. They can then advise their member schools and support them in setting up school-based apprenticeships.

The Association of Independent Schools NSW (AISNSW) is an RTO for over 125 Independent schools offering over 35 VET qualifications. In Queensland over 175 Independent schools are RTOs offering VET courses or school-based apprenticeships and are supported by Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) through rigorous accredited training of educators.

AISs support Independent schools with professional development for careers advice and share career resources with schools. They also provide advice to schools on various state initiatives such as the Queensland Gateway to Industry Schools Programs (GISP), a state funded program which provides schools with an opportunity to engage with industry through expos, work opportunities, employers visiting schools etc.

As the national peak body for the Independent school sector, ISA is represented on a range of key national education policy groups including myfuture, an initiative to provide resources to explore career pathways and tools to develop self-knowledge to help with career decision-making.

ISA also gathers information on key issues from AISs in order to create a national picture and to understand the opportunities and challenges regarding VET, careers advice, funding, student training costs, staff skills accreditation and to be aware of ongoing and new initiatives in the sector.

5. STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE

Are there other design considerations that could further strengthen Jobs and Skills Australia's ability to provide advice to government?

ISA supports the design for the tripartite advisory group and strongly recommends including representation from the Independent school sector on the advisory body. Doing so would enable key stakeholder perspectives, knowledge and expertise to inform the work of Jobs and Skills Australia and to contribute to future workplans so that they encompass all aspects of VET provision.

6. JOBS AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA FUNCTIONS

What principles could be used to guide Jobs and Skills Australia's priorities, and the development of its workplan?

It is important that Jobs and Skills Australia recognises that effectively skilling our own senior secondary students whilst in school is an essential driver to alleviating the skills shortage issue in this country. Areas for consideration include:

- a concerted focus on the training and continued professional learning of VET teachers in secondary schools (whether they are employed by the school or are a trainer and assessor attending the school on behalf of an external RTO) to understand the fundamentals around delivering adult learning to secondary school students.

- scheduling the right amount of training required for ‘first time learners’ in line with industry skills requirements, as it is not just about the achievement of the certificate, it is about ensuring the acquisition of industry relevant skills and application of knowledge.
- ensuring that equitable vocational education learning opportunities are promoted across school sectors.

How could Jobs and Skills Australia seek broader input into the development and refinement of its workplan?

Independent schools are located in metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote areas and our schools and student cohorts are diverse.

Nationally Recognised Training would play a key role to further opportunities to acquire industry relevant skills for identified student cohorts, irrespective of their target destination so that skills and certification are transferable across jurisdictions and regions.

ISA recommends the inclusion of regional analysis in the Jobs and Skills Australia workplan so that targeted initiatives can improve access to VET in regional and remote areas.

How could Jobs and Skills Australia engage tripartite partners, experts and other interested parties in its major studies?

VET equips students with the skills and knowledge required by local industry and communities and also serves to engage learners through to school completion. VET can provide students with purpose and opportunities to discover their own strengths and interests and may invoke a heightened drive to personally succeed.

It is important to engage current and emerging senior secondary students and confirm the importance of VET to parents who want their children to remain engaged in purposeful education.

Major studies could include key elements of workforce needs such as foundational work skills, learner profiling and other initiatives within the provision of vocational education and training. Information and advice regarding transferable skills that industry requires such as literacy and numeracy skills, commitment, collaboration, accountability, good work ethic, motivated application, courtesy in the workplace and organisational skills will be essential.

ISA recommends that to be highly effective, major studies must include experts in education engagement. By engaging expert professionals and upskilling VET training providers, further focus on the needs of industry could be aligned to the school sector.

What new information should Jobs and Skills Australia be collecting through its engagement to build a stronger evidence base?

ISA recommends that Jobs and Skills Australia consider the following:

- Continued review and monitoring of the quality of VET being provided in all school sectors to ensure the skills and knowledge acquired meet industry requirements in current and emerging job roles.
- Ensuring that smaller, private RTOs who are recognised for their expertise in key fields pertaining to localised industry need are supported and included in the collection of information.

- Ways to improve VET data collections without adding additional reporting burden could also be investigated.

[How can Jobs and Skills Australia expand its engagement to include a broader range of skills and industry stakeholders in its work?](#)

ISA recommends that Jobs and Skills Australia engages fully with the Independent school sector as a key stakeholder to assist the future focus of school to work transitions.

[What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?](#)

ISA has the capacity to link Jobs and Skills Australia with the Independent school sector. AISs highly value VET and have direct outreach to their member Independent schools, VET providers and practitioners who deliver and manage VET programs. AISs support careers guidance officers, industry liaison officers and work experience coordinators, all of whom play a key role in assisting senior secondary students through their learning pathways to future study or employment.

ISA recommends that Jobs and Skills Australia works closely with ISA as the national peak body for Independent schools to ensure the right messages and information regarding job skills and opportunities are being effectively communicated and feedback from our sector can be provided.

[How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?](#)

ISA greatly values the availability of key data and recommends the following data would be of value to our sector:

- Destination data and trends of school leavers entering specific industries.
- Areas of industry need across localised areas that may inform schools of current and emerging job roles.
- Employer satisfaction (specifically related to employment of students emerging from schools).
- Analysis of the quality provision of RTO training and assessment services to students in schools.

However, any new data collection would need to be weighed against the increased data reporting burden on providers.

7. CONCLUSION

The Independent school sector is a key contributor to skills and training education.

ISA's submission to the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper highlights the important role that the Independent school sector plays in educating young people for the future, the importance of VET in schools and equitable access to VET opportunities for senior secondary students.

Given the Independent school sector's key contribution in creating a skilled workforce for Australia's future needs, it is our view that the sector should be represented, through ISA, on the Jobs and Skills Australia Advisory Body and relevant sub-committees.

This will ensure mutual benefit for knowledge sharing and collaboration, forging a link between industry, employment and the Independent school sector to develop key priorities and inform advice to government and the development of key priorities.