

The second Skills Insight JSC Stakeholder Forum meeting was held at the PARKROYAL Hotel, Melbourne Airport, and virtually, on Wednesday 18 September 2024. Present at the meeting were representatives, proxies, guests and observers. The CEO and Board of Directors also attended for the first 30 minutes of the meeting.

All participants were welcomed and there was an acknowledgement of Country.

Introductions

The Forum welcomed new representatives: Jo Kerr representing First Nations Workers Alliance and Michael O'Connor representing CFMEU Manufacturing Division. This was followed by each participant introducing themselves and sharing a 'top of mind issue'. A common theme that emerged was the concern around slim training markets; attraction, retention and training of workers; lack of qualified trainers in the industry, particularly in regional and remote areas; skills shortages; and limited RTOs.

Workforce planning

The Forum noted that the current criteria for the Workforce Plan primarily focuses on activities, with less emphasis on collaboration and influence. As a result, members were asked to consider that the Workforce Plans incorporate these elements. The initiative received support, with members acknowledging the general framework of the Workforce Plan and highlighting the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach after the implementation of the next Workforce Plan.

Forum members highlighted the need for a comprehensive list of data sources, with a focus on both current trends and future developments, especially regarding technology investments in certain sectors. They called for contemporary, evidence-based data to inform skills priorities and expressed frustration with outdated information and difficulties in proving specific job needs. There was interest in new data from Jobs and Skills Australia and Skills Insight's role in addressing industry-level inaccuracies. Additionally, members advocated for long-term strategies in Workforce Plans, proposing a framework outlining priorities over 12 months, 3 years, and 5 years.

Industry stewardship

Members highlighted the need for a realistic Workforce Plan that addresses immediate challenges, proposing short-term (12-month) work plans with clear deliverables and a

functional governance structure. The need for practical solutions and collaboration across diverse sectors was discussed, with a call to represent not just larger organisations but all members. Clear communication on data collection timelines and leveraging insights from Skills Insight to diagnose and devise solutions to problems were deemed essential, along with transparency about challenges and steps forward.

Key JSC updates

The Forum was updated on Qualification Reform, which is a key element of the government's skills reform agenda to improve the VET system. The new approach views competency as an ongoing process, leveraging units to cultivate transferable skills and develop flexible training products, with skill development continuing within the workplace.

Members noted that Skills Insight is establishing virtual communities for the 13 industries, with plans to launch them by the end of the year.

Future structure sub-committee

Skills Insight recognised that further work is needed before considering the future structure of the Forum, based on discussions from the Forum and a sub-committee of Forum representatives. The sub-committee concluded that while the current Forum structure is not ideal, it effectively amplifies industry voices (although opinions may have shifted during this meeting). Systems have been put in place to ensure that Forum representatives receive regular updates from their Stakeholder Engagement Manager regarding industry engagement, with ongoing briefings planned between Forum meetings. In response to concerns about the volume of requests from various Skills Insight staff, Skills Insight will work to streamline these requests, enabling members to focus on key priorities without being inundated by multiple communications.

Other Business

The Forum noted that several new projects had been approved to commence by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. It was also noted that the department has assigned two major initiatives to all Jobs and Skills Councils: qualification reform and the VET blueprint project, which aims to enhance access to trainers for RTOs.

Meeting closed at 3.06pm

Next meeting: Wednesday 19 March 2025, in person only