



ACS submission Jobs and Skills Australia January 2023 Discussion Paper

National Secretariat

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To the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

ACS submission
Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper January 2023

10 February 2023

Dear Sir or Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to join in this exciting process of establishing a framework for consultation for the new department. The formation of Jobs and Skills Australia provides a tremendous opportunity to uplift government understanding of the Australian workforce and its needs, and ultimately improve Australia's employment policy and work-related spending programs.

In the following pages we've given an overview of our role and what we can offer to the discussion, as well as responded to the specific questions in the discussion paper.

If you would like to discuss any part of this response or simply seek further clarification or input, please feel free to contact myself by email at troy.steer@acs.org.au or by phone on 0417 173 740.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Troy Steer', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

Troy Steer
Director of Policy, Advocacy and Communications
Australian Computer Society



About the ACS

The Australian Computer Society (ACS) is the peak professional association for Australia's information and communications technology sector. We represent over 35,000 members working in all sectors and across the nation.

The ACS works to grow the technology sector while making sure IT professionals act ethically, responsibly, and in keeping with the best interests of not only their employers, but the wider community.

We also have extended professional advisory boards and undertake notable research activities into the IT and broader workforce, producing a number of publications dedicated to workforce issues, including:

- *Australia's Digital Pulse*¹, which provides an annual snapshot of the IT profession.
- *Guide to IT Professions*², which breaks down the professions by role, and looks at the Australian and regional demand for particular jobs, skills and wages.
- *Technology Impacts on the Australian Workforce*³ which examines the long-term impact of machine learning and AI on the total Australian workforce.

The role of professional societies

We're pleased to note that the current list of stakeholders does include professional bodies, which tend to be undervalued in policy discussions.

Most professional bodies, including the ACS, the Australian Medical Association, Engineers Australia, the Law Society and others are non-profits with a mandate to set standards for their profession, advocate on behalf of the profession and uplift the ethics and skills of the workforce.

Notably, nearly every professional body has primacy of the public good in its Objects. These bodies work first and foremost in the interests of the Australian people, and can deliver non-partisan advice around the public interest.

¹ <https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/reports-publications/digital-pulse2022.html>

² <https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/reports-publications/ACS-guide-to-IT-professions-2022.html>

³ <https://www.acs.org.au/insightsandpublications/reports-publications/technology-impacts-on-the-australian-workforce.html>



Professional bodies can typically offer unrivalled advice on:

- the state and composition of the profession
- future requirements for the profession
- skills and training requirements
- ethical and moral issues related to the profession
- notable issues (such as AI) that will affect the skills market going forward.

The ACS (along with other industry bodies) undertakes leading research into the workforce and future technologies, as noted above. We also have extensive advisory boards, comprised of expert and experienced professionals. We have both general and specific advisory boards (for example, AI or Blockchain).

Responses to questions

Discussion questions on structure and governance:

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

1. *Incorporating ethics*

We would suggest that Jobs and Skills include ethics in its remit and include ethics advisory bodies in its consultations. While we understand that its mandate is focussed around maximising employment and employment opportunities, the need for ethical practices (in both employment and action) must be considered as well. Professional bodies can help in some areas with this, but engaging other ethical advisory bodies can help deliver outcomes in the broader public good.

Discussion questions on Jobs and Skills Australia functions:

2. What principles could be used to guide Jobs and Skills Australia's priorities, and the development of its workplan?
3. How could Jobs and Skills Australia seek broader input into the development and refinement of its workplan?
4. How could Jobs and Skills Australia engage tripartite partners, experts and other interested parties in its major studies?
5. What new information should Jobs and Skills Australia be collecting through its engagement to build a stronger evidence base?



2. As noted above, a broader remit than maximising employment/wages/workforce distribution would be useful. These things are worthy, but only inasmuch as they serve the broader public good. Jobs and Skills has the opportunity to look at the bigger picture, and drive the policies that will position Australia for the future and ensure the greatest public good. It can, for example, offer framing advice on:

- the role that technology (such as AI) will play in the future workforce, including growing and shrinking sectors and their forecast skills needs
- megatrends that will shape the workforce in the decades to come
- income distribution in an increasingly automated world
- changing requirements for employment, including remote work, working hours, use of overseas labour and basic conditions.

3. Partnering and engaging with existing networks will be a key method to gather comprehensive and consensus inputs.

Many existing professional organisations and industry bodies have extended networks that can be tapped to provide a unified response. The ACS, for example, has a large number of issue-specific advisory boards, whose members are in turn connected to standards bodies, to businesses and to educational institutions. Focusing on those networks, rather than individual companies or stakeholders, will produce more balanced responses that are closer to the consensus position.

4. Most professional and industry bodies are more than happy to provide expert advice for studies and positions. One simple method would be to create a voluntary (but curated) register of parties for engagement on specific issues, and contact organisations on that register when expert advice is needed.

One important thing not to underestimate in this process is the value of qualitative advice. Look for organisations that can provide balanced, expert advice from experienced individuals rather than those pushing an agenda. Often, a half-hour talk with an expert in the field will yield much more useful information than a survey of hundreds!

5. Skills are a key area in which there is often poor information. Most current Australian government data gathering focuses on professions, and there is a flawed but workable taxonomy for such in ANZSCO.

Information around skills is much more diffuse, however. We are glad to see that Jobs and Skills in continuing the work of the National Skills Commission to provide a common taxonomy in the Australian Skills Classification and we



would recommend working with the ABS to gather better data, keep the taxonomy up to date and link it comprehensively to ANZSCO.

We would also recommend strong engagement with individual industry bodies. In IT, medicine, law, and many other professions and jobs there are existing bespoke skills/competency frameworks – such as IT’s Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA). In some cases, there are multiple competing frameworks.

These are often richer or more nuanced than the Australian Skills Classification, offering multi-dimensional assessment of skills (for example, levels of experience and autonomy) and it would be extremely useful to have some kind of standard mapping of those taxonomies to the Australian Skills Classification. Conversely, those frameworks – and the data gathered by users of them – can better inform the Australian Skills Classification and provide Jobs and Skills with a richer data set.

The establishment of common frameworks can ensure that everyone is ‘speaking the same language’ around occupations, skills and outcomes. As noted above, the National Skills Commission was previously undertaking this work, and it should be continued, with Jobs and Skills acting as a kind of centre of gravity and source of ‘truth’ on matter of employment and skills.

Beyond that, greater information on career journeys and on employment journeys for skilled migrants can better inform policy. How did most employed programmers get qualified, for example? Are skilled migrants finding employment in the fields for which they applied on their visa? Answers to these questions can drive better policies.

Discussion questions on functions and ways of working:

6. How can Jobs and Skills Australia expand its engagement to include a broader range of skills and industry stakeholders in its work?
7. What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?
8. How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?

6. As noted in our response to 3 above, prioritising engagement with existing networks over the creation of new ones will be a key bootstrapping tool for Jobs and Skills.
7. Building ongoing relationships with key stakeholders, involving regular roundtables and personal meetings, is one possible tool that Jobs and Skills can



use for outreach. Most relevant stakeholders *want* to engage – they just need to be given the opportunity.

We would also recommend engaging stakeholders during the drafting process for positions and recommendations, rather than waiting for a ‘complete’ position before sharing. The stakeholders might have insights and understandings that Jobs and Skills will find useful.

8. Manipulable data sources are incredibly useful when planning workforce and education policy. The Department of Education, for example, does a very good job of this – formerly through uCube and now through Power BI tables⁴. Extractable, de-identified data is also extremely valuable.

With the Australian Skills Classification (and data published related to that classification), an API-based query tool would also be very useful in building tools for educators and career planners. An example of this in action is CareerBrain, created by York University in Canada⁵ (and based, like the Australian Skills Classification, on the Lightcast taxonomy). This tool uses the taxonomy to identify common skillsets across occupations, and helps people map out career paths that can employ existing skills.

Thank you again for the time and opportunity to respond to this. We’re incredibly excited to see what Jobs and Skills Australia can do, and as the representative for Australia’s IT professionals we look forward to working with you in the future to drive better employment outcomes for Australia.

ENDS

⁴ See <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.careerbrain.ai/>