



Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP

Minister for Skills and Training

The Hon Steve Whan MP

New South Wales

Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education

The Hon Blair Boyer MP

South Australia

Minister for Education, Training and Skills

The Hon Felix Ellis MP

Tasmania

Minister for Skills, Training and Workforce Growth

The Hon Dianne Farmer MP

Queensland

Minister for Training and Skills Development

The Hon Joel Bowden MLA

Northern Territory

Minister for Skills, Training and International Education

Mr Chris Steel MLA

Australian Capital Territory

Minister for Tertiary Education

The Hon Gayle Tierney MLC

Victoria

Minister for Skills and TAFE

Senior officials observed the meeting for the Western Australian Government

COMMUNIQUE

MEETING OF FEDERAL, STATE AND TERRITORY SKILLS MINISTERS

Federal, State and Territory Skills and Training Ministers met in Hobart today to discuss implementation of the new 5-year National Skills Agreement (NSA), national priorities for skills and training, and to set the agenda for the Council's national reform work in 2024.

Skills Ministers discussed the Council's progress in 2023, including delivering on the shared vision of the vocational education and training (VET) sector through the NSA; positioning the VET sector to support a fair and productive economy; improving the quality and relevance of VET to industry and students through delivery of reforms and the success of Fee-Free TAFE in expanding access to skills in areas of high need across the economy.

National Skills Agreement and work priorities for 2024

The National Skills Agreement is a partnership between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, working in collaboration to ensure that the national VET system provides high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity, deliver national priorities and support Australians to obtain the skills and capabilities they need to obtain well-paid, secure jobs.

A new National Stewardship model will coordinate strategic investment by governments in skills across the economy and support delivery of skills needed in national priority areas, as well as providing States and Territories with flexibility to meet local industry skills needs.

Key Priorities for the Council in the coming year include: embedding the new model of stewardship to deliver national priorities; placing TAFE at the heart of the VET sector, building sector capability and establishing TAFE Centres of Excellence; delivery of key National Skills Agreement initiatives and reform of foundation skills; and First Nations engagement including Closing the Gap.

The *2024 Priorities and Indicative Workplan* and updated *Terms of Reference* for the Council, which reflect the new stewardship arrangements enshrined in the National Skills Agreement, will be published on the Skills Commonwealth-State Relations [website](#).

First Nations Engagement and Partnership

Now, more than ever, there is a need to deliver on Skills Ministers' commitment to listen and be guided by First Nations peoples on matters which directly affect them. The National Skills Agreement presents a unique and timely opportunity to change the way governments work together and with our First Nations partners to create real change, achieve better skills and training outcomes and importantly, Close the Gap.

Consistent with Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, all governments have committed to work in partnership with First Nations peoples on the design, delivery and evaluation of policies and programs that impact them.

Through the National Skills Agreement, all governments will engage and partner with First Nations organisations and communities in a joined-up way to design Closing the Gap initiatives in the VET system. This will ensure that our investment meets the needs of First Nations peoples and effectively contributes to our shared Closing the Gap priority reform commitments.

Skills Ministers agreed First Nations engagement is a key priority for the Council in 2024.

Net Zero Economy

Skills Ministers discussed the inaugural national priority of supporting the Net Zero transformation under the NSA, and received an update on the recent work of the Net Zero Economy Agency from its Chair, the Hon Greg Combet AM.

The Net Zero Economy Agency looks forward to working in partnership with State and Territory Governments to support regional communities and workers affected by the impacts of decarbonisation.

Mr Combet spoke about the vital role skills and training will play in supporting workers in emissions-intensive industries to access new opportunities in clean energy sectors. Once legislated, the Net Zero Authority will promote an orderly and positive economic transformation ensuring the communities that have powered Australia for generations can diversify their economies and take advantage of the opportunities net zero presents.

The National Skills Plan, to be finalised by June 2024, will set out how governments deliver on this and other national priorities.

Fee-Free TAFE

Skills Ministers welcomed the Commonwealth's additional \$414 million investment to deliver an additional 300,000 Fee-Free TAFE places over three years, from 2024.

Consistent with the outstanding success of Fee-Free TAFE in 2023, these places will provide further opportunities to skill and upskill for priority groups such as First Nations peoples, women, young people, people out of work, unpaid carers and people with disability, in national priority areas such as the care sector, technology and digital, hospitality, construction and the VET workforce.

Quality Reforms

Skills Ministers were updated on progress on the VET Workforce Blueprint and endorsed the need for timely responses given the importance of the VET workforce as a critical enabler in ensuring skills development across the economy, through the delivery of high-quality nationally recognised training. The VET Workforce Blueprint will identify effective strategies and immediate priorities to build the VET workforce including through attraction, retention, career development and succession planning. It will set out a roadmap for action over the short, medium and long term.

Skills Ministers acknowledged the valuable contribution of the tripartite Steering Group established to guide the development of the VET Workforce Blueprint, the critical importance of hearing from stakeholders across the skills and training sector through the national consultation processes that are currently underway, and the need for rapid action to continue to build VET workforce capacity and capability.

Tasmanian VET and workforce initiatives

Skills Ministers noted the success of Tasmania's community-led place-based Regional Jobs Hub Network. Facilitated through *Jobs Tasmania*, the Hubs work with a range of service providers, community organisations and employer groups to support increased employment outcomes, workforce participation and re-engagement with work, education or training.

Comprising seven hubs across the state, including support for King Island and Flinders Island, the hubs feature cross sector representation and local leadership, as well as data-informed decision making and focus on programs to assist those who are not able to access other supports or face additional barriers to labour market entry. Critically, employers work with hubs to better position themselves in the labour market.

Skills Ministers discussed how features of the Regional Jobs Hub model could be translated to other jurisdictions to support training outcomes especially in regional areas, for small business and job seekers.

Australian Training Awards

Skills Ministers welcomed the opportunity to be in Hobart for the 2023 Australian Training Awards, the 30th anniversary of the awards. The Awards celebrate the amazing stories and success of the VET system and showcase the best students, apprentices, trainees, teachers, businesses and training organisations from across the nation.

Skills Ministers were impressed to see the breadth of nominations across industries, from regional and rural Australia, to women in non-traditional trades and emerging industries.

Finalists in the 2023 student categories are training in a diverse range of qualifications, including in areas of national priority such as: health and care, energy, government, education, the arts, construction, hospitality, cyber security, maritime, automotive, information technology and sport and recreation.

The 2023 Finalists are available on the Australian Training Awards [website](#).

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