



## Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council

**The Hon Andrew Giles MP**  
Minister for Skills and Training

**The Hon Jo Hersey MLA**  
**Northern Territory**  
Minister for Education and Training

**The Hon Steve Whan MP**  
**New South Wales**  
Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education

**The Hon Gayle Tierney MLC**  
**Victoria**  
Minister for Skills and TAFE

**The Hon RosBates MP**  
**Queensland**  
Minister for Finance, Trade, Employment and Training

**Ms Jodie Hanns MLA**  
**Western Australia**  
Parliamentary Secretary for Skills and TAFE

**The Hon Blair Boyer MP**  
**South Australia**  
Minister for Education, Training and Skills

**Mr Michael Pettersson MLA**  
**Australian Capital Territory**  
Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Senior officials observed the meeting for the Tasmanian Government.

**JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**  
5 December 2025

# COMMUNIQUÉ

## MEETING OF FEDERAL, STATE AND TERRITORY SKILLS MINISTERS

Federal, state and territory Skills Ministers met in Darwin today for their final meeting of 2025. This meeting takes place ahead of the Skills Ministers' attendance at Australian Training Awards. The Awards celebrate excellence and the benefits of vocational education and training (VET), skill-based careers and skills excellence.

### Stewarding Reform

Ministers reflected on achievements made over the course of 2025. Strong collaboration across all governments and partners has contributed to significant progress in strengthening the system, expanding access, and lifting quality. These achievements are already delivering real benefits for learners, employers and communities, and will have a lasting impact on Australia's workforce and economy.

Skills Ministers noted, in particular the following milestones which set the course for 2026 and beyond:

- **Free TAFE** is now permanent, enabling hundreds of thousands of enrolments.
- The **National Foundation Skills Strategy** is expanding access to literacy, numeracy and digital skills.
- **14 TAFE Centres of Excellence** are already driving innovation in priority sectors—clean energy, housing, care services and digital technology—supported by the **National TAFE Network**.
- The **VET Workforce Blueprint** and new **2025 RTO Standards** are strengthening teaching quality and regulatory integrity.
- Progress on **Closing the Gap** continues, with an Interim First Nations Partnership Committee in place and the work underway on the approach to a nationally-networked First Nations VET Policy Partnership.
- The **Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System** is shaping improvements to apprenticeship support.
- Around \$760 million have already been agreed for **policy initiatives** under the National Skills Agreement such as supporting foundation skills, improving completions, strengthening the VET workforce and partnering with and strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled RTO sector. Detailed plans are published on the [Federal Financial Relations](#) website.
- Under the NSA's joint stewardship model, a **Balanced Scorecard** is underway which will track progress and drive continuous improvement to the skills and training system across jurisdictions.

### Future Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Skills Ministers discussed items of national strategic priority related to apprenticeships and traineeships. This included the importance of the user experience for apprentices and employers across the apprenticeship system and consideration towards strengthening training capacity. This included the importance of the user experience for apprentices and employers and consideration towards strengthening the capacity of the VET system, with TAFE at the heart.

Skills Ministers discussed the current state of higher-level apprenticeships and like models that are emerging across jurisdictions, including relevant case studies and policy development. Skills Ministers noted the ongoing work to examine the potential role that scalable, sustainable and quality higher-level apprenticeships could have in addressing skills shortages across the economy.

## Improving Student Completions and Outcomes

Skills Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to lifting student completions as a key reform priority under the National Skills Agreement. Ministers reflected on a strong program of actions being delivered across all jurisdictions, funded by the National Skills Agreement, to achieve better outcomes for learners and industry. These include:

- Strengthening apprentice wellbeing and safety to support successful training journeys
- Providing clear, accessible course and career information to enable informed decisions
- Identifying students at risk of non-completion early and delivering proactive support, including targeted financial assistance.

These measures are designed to reduce delays, boost retention, and ensure apprentices graduate with qualifications valued by industry, build a stronger skilled workforce and drive alignment with the objectives of the National Skills Agreement.

## Progressing National Priorities: Gender Equality and Closing the Gap

Skills Ministers committed to accelerating gender equality in VET. Drawing on findings from Jobs and Skills Australia's [Gender Economic Equality Study](#), Ministers agreed to develop actions to reduce occupational segregation, close pay gaps, and address barriers for First Nations people, those with disability, and carers for Ministerial consideration in 2026. This work will strengthen VET pathways and ensure equal access to training and jobs.

Skills Ministers considered the First Nations VET Policy Partnership - including the proposed approach to implementation- which sets out for the first time, plans to establish and support a nationally networked VET policy partnership to ensure active engagement with First Nations partners to help meet Closing the Gap skills targets. Establishment in early 2026 was proposed; with Queensland noting that its involvement is subject to the jurisdiction formalising government positions where required.

## Legislated Review of the Jobs and Skills Australia Act

Skills Ministers received a briefing from Dr Michele Bruniges AM, Independent Reviewer of the *Jobs and Skills Australia Act* legislated review, outlining key outcomes from stakeholder consultations.

Ministers noted these insights and agreed to consider relevant recommendations from the final report when it is delivered in 2026.

## Jobs and Skills Councils

Skills Ministers met with Chief Executive Officers of Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) to strengthen collaboration on critical issues. Together, Ministers and JSCs are working to align national priorities with emerging workforce needs, drive workforce agility, and accelerate reform. JSCs provide the essential link between industry and the VET system, fostering partnerships across governments, industry, unions and educators to boost productivity and support a future-ready workforce.

Skills Ministers acknowledged the JSCs efforts to implement qualification reform under the updated Training Package Organising Framework, following agreement in December 2024 and commencement from 1 July 2025. Skills Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to qualification reform. Successful implementation of qualification reform is a shared responsibility across the sector, requiring coordinated support from states and territories, training providers, peak bodies, and other stakeholders.

Ministers agreed to Skills Senior Officials working with JSCs to pursue increased collaboration between qualification developers, purchasers and deliverers of national training packages to advance the shared objectives for the VET qualification system, as a high-performing, future-focused system that is easy to navigate, supports innovation and excellence, ensures safety and quality outcomes, and builds a resilient and adaptable workforce.

## **Driving Integrity in VET**

Ministers acknowledged critical actions by the Australian Skills Quality Authority's (ASQA) to strengthen integrity and quality in the VET system by targeting fraudulent and non-genuine providers that seek to exploit training. These efforts are essential to protect students, uphold quality standards, and maintain confidence in the national training system.

Beyond the immediate focus on ASQA's enforcement activity, Ministers agreed to consider regulatory settings to ensure they are sufficiently robust to address persistent compliance pressures.

Ministers also noted the ASQA's Cost Recovery Review for 2026/27 and upcoming public consultation on its draft Cost Recovery Impact Statement (CRIS) in early 2026.

## **A Joined Up Tertiary System**

Skills Ministers discussed efforts underway to create a more joined up tertiary system and confirmed their continued and shared commitment to this critical economic reform to drive higher productivity and participation. Ministers highlighted opportunities to leverage existing VET reforms to make it easier for students to move in both directions between VET and higher education, and how this can support broader efforts necessary to place TAFEs and universities on an equal footing.

Skills Ministers agreed the need for the Tertiary Roadmap being led by the Australian Tertiary Education Commission to incorporate significant reform to enable a joined-up approach that places VET and higher education on an equal footing and give learners flexible pathways to gain the skills needed for Australia's future workforce.

## **National VET Data Policy and Standards**

Skills Ministers agreed to strengthen data access and standards to improve policy, delivery and oversight driving a stronger, smarter training system through better data, unlocking insights that will improve policy, enhance delivery, and ensure rigorous oversight. All government will have equal access to and use of high-quality VET data, creating a more effective basis for decision-making and innovation.

Ministers endorsed updates to VET Provider and Apprentice/Trainee Standards, including reporting on the Occupational Standards Classification for Australia, Free TAFE, and Australian Business Numbers. These changes will make data fit for purpose, enabling transparency and performance monitoring across the sector.

These commitments will support better outcomes for learners through evidence-based policy and targeted support, a more responsive skills system that adapts to industry needs and future jobs, and greater accountability and trust with clear, relevant standards.

## Foundation Skills

Skills Ministers noted progress implementing the National Foundation Skills Strategy 2025–2035, and agreed new actions under the Access and Inclusion focus area. These actions will identify and engage people who need foundation skills training, improve access to tailored support, and promote positive community attitudes towards foundation skills.

## National TAFE Network Strategic Plan 2025-2028

Skills Ministers agreed to the National TAFE Network's Strategic Plan 2025-2028, which establishes a roadmap for driving collaboration, innovation and excellence across Australia's TAFEs. The National TAFE Network is an essential piece of architecture that complements and maximises the benefits of initiatives under the National Skills Agreement, including TAFE Centres of Excellence, and this marks a critical milestone in the establishment and operation of this foundational element of the National Skills Agreement policy initiatives.

The goals and priorities of the Strategic Plan will guide the development of projects to be funded and delivered under the National TAFE Network. The Strategic Plan 2025-2028 will be made available on the National TAFE Network Coordination Hub website: [NTN – National TAFE Network](#)

## National Skills Plan

Skills Ministers endorsed the [National Skills Plan 2025-2026](#) developed under the National Skills Agreement. This is the second edition of the Plan and provides an update on the progress made since the inaugural publication in September 2024. Updates include action to implement policy initiatives under the National Skills Agreement, address shared national priorities, and strengthen the national VET system.

**FRIDAY, 5 December 2025**

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