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Australian Government
**Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations**

EC25-003066

Acting Secretary
Tania Rishniw

The Hon Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Skills and Training
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister Giles

STATEMENT OF INTENT
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Vocational Education and Training Student Loans and Skills Assessing Authorities

This Statement of Intent (SOI) responds to the Statement of Expectations (SOE) provided by you as Minister for Skills and Training on 27 August 2025, concerning the regulation of VET Student Loans under the *VET Student Loans Act 2016* (VSL Act) and the *VET Student Loans (Charges) Act 2016* (VSL Charges Act) and exercising powers under regulation 2.26B of the Migration Regulations 1994 (Migration Regulations). As the Accountable Authority of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), I set out below how I will meet the expectations you have outlined.

DEWR's regulatory role and operating environment

DEWR's regulatory purpose is to support the Australian Government's commitment to building a skilled and adaptable workforce, delivering quality training that meets national skills priorities, improving employment outcomes for students, and a fit-for-purpose skills assessment sector for skilled migration purposes.

The majority of powers and functions set out in the VSL Act sit with DEWR Secretary. Under the VSL Act, DEWR approves, monitors and regulates VET Student Loan (VSL) approved course providers, ensuring loans are provided to students for education and training that meets workplace needs and improves employment outcomes. The VSL Charges Act imposes a cost recovery charge on approved course providers to fund the costs incurred by the Commonwealth in administering the program.

These regulatory functions work alongside other Commonwealth, state and territory regulators being the Tuition Protection Service (TPS), Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), the Training Accreditation

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Council Western Australia (TACWA) and Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA). These regulators perform important regulatory functions including:

- **TPS:** determining levy amounts and collection, assessing whether education providers have not met their obligations to students under relevant legislation, and managing relevant tuition protection funds.
- **ASQA:** registering and regulating Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), accrediting VET courses, and undertaking compliance monitoring and enforcement.
- **TACWA:** regulating education and training in Western Australia, including ensuring training providers and courses meet quality standards through registration, accreditation, monitoring, and acting on non-compliance of providers.
- **VRQA:** regulating education and training in Victoria, including by registering, monitoring and accrediting providers, regulating apprenticeships and traineeships, and protecting the interests and safety of students.

We will continue to engage with these regulators as appropriate.

Under regulation 2.26B of the *Migration Regulations 1994*, the Minister for Skills and Training, as the Skills Assessment Minister, has powers to approve assessing authorities, impose conditions on that approval, or revoke that approval. DEWR supports the Minister by providing recommendations relevant to these powers, monitoring compliance with the conditions and providing policy advice to operationalise the Minister's regulatory functions. DEWR will continue to engage closely with the Department of Home Affairs in relation to its regulatory and policy functions relating to skilled migration and broader oversight and administration of Australia's migration system.

DEWR operates in an evolving environment, responding to changes in technology, industry practices, and community expectations. Our regulatory approach is risk-based, evidence-driven and tailored to the diverse needs of VSL providers and assessing authorities.

VSL Act and VSL Charges Act

The VSL program provides income contingent loans and is designed to remove financial barriers for eligible students undertaking higher level VET courses (diploma and above) that address workplace and industry needs, creating better opportunities for employment. Regulatory functions to support the program include:

- restrictions on providers and courses that can be funded through VSL
- a provider application process that emphasises financial viability and student outcomes, with approvals granted for limited periods
- payments made to providers in arrears
- a robust reporting and payment framework, which includes the assessment of annual financial statements
- system controls that ensure payments are issued only for eligible loans

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- investigation and enforcement powers including imposition of conditions on approval of VSL providers and the power to undertake targeted auditing of VSL approved providers to ensure compliance with the VSL Act and genuine student enrolment
- a prohibition on providers using brokers to recruit students
- transparency obligations requiring providers to publish a range of information to ensure students are well-informed consumers.

The quality of the VSL program and its providers is maintained through system controls monitoring, and transparent publication of program related information, such as high-quality data, user friendly reporting, and the ability to correct records when required with an appropriate audit trail. System controls also include guidance for providers and validation rules to ensure approved processes are followed, (e.g. verification for genuine students).

DEWR will continue to actively engage with and support VSL providers, applying corrective actions where necessary, such as imposing conditions on providers' approvals; issuing non-compliance notices; invoking civil penalties; or suspending or revoking approval to ensure high standards are upheld.

Regulation 2.26B of the Migration Regulations

DEWR will support you in exercising your powers relating to assessing authorities, as we operationalise the regulatory functions following the December 2024 amendments to the Migration Regulations.

As a foundational step to enhancing skills assessments, the *Guiding Principles and Standards for Skilled Migration Assessing Authorities* (the Guide) was developed with extensive consultations across the sector, migrant communities, and other key stakeholders. The purpose of the Guide, which took effect on 1 October 2025, is to (1) provide guidance for conducting skills assessments in line with the Best Practice Principles and Standards; and (2) set out how the government conducts assurance of assessing authorities.

Building on this, DEWR will support you by developing conditions that you can impose on the approval of skilled migration assessing authorities under the Migration Regulations, and enable the principles in the Guide to be broadly enforced.

Delivering the Government's regulatory reform, policy priorities and meeting expectations

DEWR is committed to delivering the Government's policy priorities through a regulatory approach that promotes productivity and efficiency, aligns with the regulatory reform agenda, and upholds the principles in Resource Management Guide 128 (RMG128), continuous improvement and building trust; risk-based and data-driven approaches; and collaboration and engagement. This includes balancing risk mitigation with growth and dynamism, supporting access to skills and training to drive employment and economic prosperity, strengthening the VET sector, and ensuring a fit-for-purpose skills assessment system. By embedding continuous improvement, transparency, and proportionate, risk-based regulation, DEWR aims to reduce unnecessary burden, streamline processes, and maintain integrity and compliance across the sector.

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To deliver on these priorities and contribute to regulatory reform, DEWR will:

- engage early, frequently, and meaningfully with stakeholders to understand user experiences and provide timely, tailored information
- collaborate with VSL providers to encourage voluntary compliance and improve provider and student experiences
- support you in exercising your regulatory powers to ensure the integrity, quality and timeliness of the skills assessments that assessing authorities deliver
- employ an appropriate mix of education, compliance, monitoring and enforcement tools to support continuous improvement, while proactively preventing, managing and addressing key risks
- use intelligence and data to inform a risk-based approach to regulatory engagement, targeting industries or activities of concern
- identify and address systemic non-compliance through evidence and stakeholder feedback
- ensure regulatory approaches evolve with changes in technology and industry practices and identify proportionate risk-based approaches to using technology to enhance regulatory actions
- seek opportunities to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden and improve efficiency and productivity by removing duplication and streamlining processes
- strive for continuous improvement against the principles of regulator best practice as set out in Resource Management Guide 128 (RMG128)
- be transparent in operations, policies and decision-making, including publishing formal regulatory decisions, performance results, and updates on emerging issues.

These actions will help improve efficiency, foster economic growth and resilience, and ensure regulatory practices enable innovation while maintaining essential safeguards.

DEWR will engage with you through direct communication, policy advice, reporting on performance and supporting you in your responsibilities for portfolio agencies, policy setting and government initiatives.

Section 103A of the VSL Act prescribes a requirement for the Secretary to publish information relating to the operation of the VSL program. Information is required to be published within 42 days after the end of each six-month period, beginning on 1 January and 1 July each year. Published on the DEWR website, these six-monthly statistical reports provide general information about VSL and focus on students whose tuition fees were paid (whether in whole or in part) using VSL.

The VSL program has two reportable key performance measures:

- Proportion of students who report that financial barriers to training were removed by participation in the VSL program
- Proportion of units of study successfully completed by VET student loans students

DEWR has implemented a new digital solution to manage the VSL program, providing greater departmental efficiency, productivity and improved quality of service for providers and students. DEWR will continue to explore and implement new technologies to support and streamline current processes.

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Relationship with our stakeholders

DEWR collaborates with VSL providers, assessing authorities, peak bodies, state and territory governments, and other key stakeholders to co-design policies, provide clear guidance, and ensure compliance. Regular engagement focuses on emerging trends, provider performance, and shared risks. This engagement includes:

- DEWR consulting with and providing guidance to VSL providers and assessing authorities, ensuring clarity on how the Secretary and you will exercise your powers
- sending newsletters to VSL providers, advising of upcoming policy changes, reminders regarding obligations under the VSL program, and other news items of interest
- sending bulletins to assessing authorities, advising of upcoming policy changes, reminders regarding obligations as assessing authorities, and other news items of interest
- convening a VSL Provider Reference Group, capped at 12 members from public and private VSL providers, and representatives from 3 peak bodies (TAFE Directors Australia (TDA), Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA) and Independent Tertiary Education Council Australia (ITECA)) which meets quarterly to consult, engage, and communicate on policy and operational issues
- convening Assessing Authority Workshops to consult, engage, and communicate on policy and operational issues
- working collaboratively across government to support VSL providers and students, including monthly meetings between DEWR (VSL), the Department of Education, and the Australian Taxation Office to discuss best practices, share information, and collaborate on joint risks
- holding meetings between VSL and ASQA to discuss matters of mutual interest, such as VSL providers of interest, registrations, compliance, trends, data, and intelligence in relation to registered training organisations
- hosting VSL webinars and attending provider conferences as platforms for engagement with stakeholders, allowing questions and sharing of relevant information.

Organisational matters, accountability and continuous improvement

To deliver the Government's policy priorities, DEWR has embedded good governance, accountability, transparency and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and reflection in all that we do. This includes complying with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act), associated instruments and policies and aligning our approach with the Government's 6 principles of the Regulatory Policy, Practice and Performance Framework. Through this approach we are building a focus on public service stewardship while upholding and promoting the APS Values and Code of Conduct.

DEWR also recognises that delivering our regulated programs requires having appropriate controls and a positive risk culture. We have built appropriate frameworks and systems to oversee our enterprise risk management arrangements and have a clear understanding of the department's strategic and operational

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risks. This drives our thinking, including having appropriate controls in place for information security risks and unauthorised disclosures.

DEWR continues to meet its performance reporting responsibilities as set out in the PGPA Act and associated instruments and policies, such as through our corporate plan and annual report. We regularly review our performance measures and key activities to mature our reporting practices, tools and guidance to foster a strong performance culture across the department. Further, the department continues to mature its regulatory performance framework to ensure it is fit for purpose and reflects best practice principles. We will publish our Statement of Intent and your Statement of Expectations on our website. We will also publish them on the Department of Finance's Regulator Stocktake website.

Yours sincerely



Ms Tania Rishniw
Acting Secretary
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

30 January 2026