Skills and Workforce Ministerial Council

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Skills and Training

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 Paul Kirby MLA
Northern Territory
Minister for Business, Jobs and Training

The Hon Simone McGurk MLA
Western Australia
Minister for Training, Water and Youth

Mr Chris Steel MLA
Australian Capital Territory
Minister for Skills

The Hon Gayle Tierney MLC
Victoria
Minister for Training and Skills

Senior officials observed the meeting for the New South Wales Government

COMMUNIQUE

MEETING OF FEDERAL, STATE AND TERRITORY SKILLS MINISTERS

Federal, State and Territory Skills and Training Ministers met on Friday, 25 August 2023 to further progress the development of a new National Skills Agreement (NSA) and associated reforms, and continue important discussions on the VET sector's role in meeting governments' commitments in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

5-year National Skills Agreement Skills

Skills Ministers continued discussions on a new 5-year NSA, reaffirming governments' shared commitment to have the NSA commence on 1 January 2024, that delivers on National Cabinet's shared vision and principles for VET.

Skills Ministers agreed that the NSA will be the first to embed a model for shared national stewardship to provide national and State and Territory leadership on skills delivery shared priorities – including:

- Gender equality
- Closing the Gap
- Foundation Skills
- Supporting the Net Zero transformation
- Sustaining essential care services
- Developing Australia's sovereign capability and food security
- Ensuring Australia's digital and technology capability
- Improving the quality of apprenticeships and improving completion rates
- Delivering reforms to improve the regulation of VET qualifications and quality, and
- Boosting VET workforce capacity

Skills Ministers emphasised that the focus on national priorities will complement state priorities and local contexts to ensure that the VET sector provides high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity and support Australians to obtain the skills they need to participate and prosper in the modern economy.

TAFE Centres of Excellence

Skills Ministers also agreed that the NSA will establish nationally networked TAFE Centres of Excellence to provide skills for strategically important industries and meet economic challenges that demand a coordinated national response. Nationally networked TAFE Centres of Excellence will partner with industry and universities to address skills needs and support productivity in key sectors.

Skills Ministers discussed priorities for TAFE Centres of Excellence under the NSA, to help grow the skills needed for high-potential and strategically important industries nationally. Skills Ministers and their departmental officials will work closely with TAFEs to expedite delivery on this commitment. National priorities for Centres of Excellence will include supporting transformation to a net zero economy, sustaining essential care and support services, ensuring Australia's digital and technological capability and sovereign capability.

Fee-Free TAFE

Skills Ministers noted that Fee-Free TAFE enrolments have been extremely successful, exceeding the national target of 180,000 enrolments under the 2023 12-month Skills Agreement. Skills Ministers welcomed progress on an extension to the existing 12-month Skills Agreement to deliver an additional 300,000 Fee-Free TAFE places for students across Australia over three years from January 2024.

Consistent with the Commonwealth's commitment to put TAFE at the centre of the VET sector, these places would provide further opportunities to upskill for priority groups such as First Nations peoples, women, young people, people out of work, unpaid carers, and people with disability, in areas of national priority such as the care sector, technology and digital, hospitality and construction.

Closing The Gap

Skills Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap as a national priority in the proposed National Skills Agreement and to increase their combined efforts to realise better skills, training and career outcomes for First Nations people. Catherine Liddle, Deputy Convenor Coalition of Peaks, attended to speak with Skills Ministers on the importance of partnership with First Nations peoples and embedding the Priority Reform areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to ensure that government policy development processes and decision-making drives real and meaningful change for First Nations people. This included:

- examples of how partnerships and shared decision-making between all levels of government and First Nations peoples can work in practice,
- the importance of investing in and supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sector's and its workforce,
- the critical role that Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) play in developing a strong and sustainable sector workforce and the need to support the development of RTOs, and
- the importance of ongoing partnership and engagement with First Nations peoples and organisations at all stages of policy, strategy and program design, implementation and evaluation.

Jobs and Skills Australia establishment

Skills Ministers noted the passage of the *Jobs and Skills Australia Amendment Bill 2023* through Federal Parliament. Jobs and Skills Australia has a crucial role in identifying and analysing the skills needed for the future workforce. Skills Ministers acknowledged Jobs and Skills Australia is essential to shared national stewardship of the training system because it will provide data and analysis to enable evidence-based decision making on national VET system reforms.

National VET Completions Project

Skills Ministers welcomed the *National Vocational Education and Training Completions* report that outlines approaches to improve the number of people completing their VET training. Skills Ministers acknowledged the work by the tripartite National VET Completions Taskforce, led by the South Australian Government, and the valuable contribution of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Jobs and Skills Australia, and governments.

Skills Ministers noted the report and agreed that its important findings may be used to inform future completion policy initiatives, including through the National Skills Agreement. The report will be released soon.

Western Australia VET Initiatives

Skills Ministers had the opportunity to view a demonstration of the state-of-the-art interactive maritime simulator on their site visit to the South Metropolitan TAFE campus in Fremantle.

The simulator's world-class technology enables training for a broad range of operations, such as navigation, ship handling, bridge watch-keeping, communication and Global Maritime Distress and Safety Systems, preparing future shipmasters, officers and engineers for their maritime careers.

The simulators allow for training in new and emerging maritime technologies and maritime engineering studies, and highlights the investment the Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments are making in skills.

Skills Ministers noted the success of Western Australia's TAFE sector in building the skills needed for clean energy transformation through place-based solutions.

Quality Reforms: RTOs Standards and VET Workforce Blueprint update

Skills Ministers noted progress on the VET Workforce Blueprint and agreed to progress a range of early changes to the current *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015* in areas where there was broad support from the sector through recent consultation.

This includes changes to alleviate pressures on the VET workforce through expanding the workforce pool and enabling the broader use of industry experts. The Standards will also be amended to reflect the new training products from the updated Training and Education Training Package.

Skills Ministers discussed the importance of reforms underway to Standards for RTOs embedding quality aspirations, articulating clearly and strongly characteristics required of RTOs and reflecting the central role of TAFE as trusted providers. Reforms should embed the value of quality skills and training provision. Officials will be tasked with developing a program for Skills Ministers to fully embed quality aspirations into the Standards.

New Fit and Proper Person Instrument - requirements for RTOs

Skills Ministers agreed to amend the Fit and Proper Person Requirements under the *Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTO) 2015* as a key step towards strengthening integrity in the sector.

These amendments will enable the VET Regulator to increase scrutiny of persons and organisations seeking to become RTOs and make more informed assessments through expanding the range of matters that can be considered by the Regulator in assessing whether those in management and operational positions in an RTO are fit and proper.

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