

ATN Universities Review of the JSA Act Submission 2025

31 October 2025

Key takeaways:

1. Expand JSA's remit to include higher education alongside VET in the skills system, and publish a future skills outlook every 2 years to provide a horizon scan in emerging and strategic domains
2. Establish statutory data-sharing and interoperability duties that make JSA a "hub" for workforce and skills data standards
3. Clarify institutional boundaries between JSA and other data-gathering agencies to prevent duplication and support cooperation

The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN Universities) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the legislated review of the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Act. JSA plays a crucial role in our skills and workforce planning systems. That role would be strengthened with better integration of higher education in skills policy workforce planning, a remit across workforce data standards and a regular future skills outlook report. In doing so, these reforms must support the reduction of unnecessary regulatory and administrative burden that diverts resources away from students and towards compliance activities.

ATN Universities are deeply connected with industry and are committed to educating the future workforce. We represent Australia's most industry-engaged institutions: Curtin University, Deakin University, RMIT University, The University of Newcastle, University of South Australia, and University of Technology Sydney.

ATN strongly supports the continuing role of Jobs and Skills Australia as a trusted national institution providing authoritative workforce intelligence. JSA plays a vital role in ensuring Australia's workforce system is forward-looking, evidence-based, and coordinated across education sectors, industry, and government.

1. Expand JSA's remit to include higher education alongside VET in the skills system, and publish a future skills outlook every 2 years to provide a horizon scan in emerging and strategic domains

Jobs and Skills Australia's statutory remit currently reflects its origins in the skills portfolio. While this foundation has enabled it to provide valuable labour market analysis and VET-focused skills insights, it does not yet fully capture the role of higher education (HE) in developing Australia's future workforce. In practice, JSA's work spans the whole economy, including areas of strategic importance where HE plays a central role such as advanced manufacturing, clean energy, digital technologies, health, and defence industries. To reflect this reality and enable a more coherent, future-focused skills system, the JSA Act should be amended to embed a more equal representation of both VET and higher education in its scope and governance.

Specifically:

- Section 9, "Functions of Jobs and Skills Australia", should be reformed to clarify that JSA provides advice to skills and education ministers on the functioning of both the higher education and vocational sectors, particularly with respect to skills and workforce needs.
- Part 3 of the Act should ensure that JSA Commissioners, taken collectively, have deep expertise across both the VET and HE sectors.

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- Section 16B should be amended to guarantee that education providers are represented on the Ministerial Advisory Board, ensuring that front-line perspectives from across the tertiary system are consistently integrated into JSA's strategic advice.

In addition to structural reform, JSA should be given an explicit mandate to play a stronger role in long-term forecasting. The establishment of a legislated future skills outlook report, to be published every two years, would provide a regular horizon scan of emerging and strategic workforce needs. This outlook should be developed independently by JSA, drawing on input from stakeholders across the tertiary education and industry sectors. Priority domains may include artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, green energy, defence industries, and Indo-Pacific workforce mobility. JSA should also embed longitudinal studies in its work programs to measure effectiveness of workforce and skills policy over different timeframes out to the long term.

This deliverable would complement the existing Jobs and Skills Report required under Section 27A of the Act, which provides a valuable snapshot of the current labour market. Together, these reports would enable more proactive planning, help align education and training investments with national priorities, and better position Australia to anticipate and prepare for long-term workforce shifts. JSA has already demonstrated its value in modelling and economic planning, and its mandate should be guaranteed over the long term to provide continuity and confidence in this work.

These reforms would help position JSA as a truly national body supporting a unified tertiary system and would more effectively align its outputs with Australia's sovereign capability and applied innovation agenda.

2. Establish statutory data-sharing and interoperability duties that make JSA a “hub” for workforce and skills data standards

Modelling and reporting done by JSA or others in the workforce and skills space should be built on consistent, trusted, and shareable data. To underpin a more integrated and efficient tertiary system, Jobs and Skills Australia should be given legislative authority to act as the central hub for workforce and skills data standards and interoperability. This statutory foundation would also support JSA's work around the Skills Taxonomy, and support related priorities like the National Skills Passport, My eEquals, and pilot projects on recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit transfer. This alignment would support better integration of qualifications, reduce duplication across systems, and create clearer pathways for learners and workers.

Better data standards around workforce development are also needed to more accurately capture the true picture of modern work. In addition to keeping skills up to date, changing careers is now very commonplace. Workers need responsive education systems to enable this lifelong learning as they upskill and re-skill. This is especially true for people with disabilities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds. ATN members are committed to providing these opportunities; we educate one in four university students who have a disability and one in five from a low socio-economic background. Workforce and education data standards need to be carefully designed to support data gathering that is accurate and useful for supporting students.

A key principle should be a “single request, many users” approach, whereby education providers and industry are not burdened by repeated data requests from multiple government agencies. Instead, data collected once should be shared securely across government through coordinated frameworks.

JSA should be empowered to pursue memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with key agencies involved in education, skills, and workforce data collection. These should include: the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations; Department of Education; the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC); the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA); the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER); the Department of Home Affairs; and the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

ATN Universities has consistently advocated for the prioritisation of national infrastructure such as the Skills Passport and a harmonised skills taxonomy. Progress on both will be accelerated by a centralised data standards function, led by JSA. We acknowledge that this work will require technical and legal coordination across portfolios. These challenges can be managed through clear scoping and sequencing of work, supported by strong ministerial oversight and consultation with the sector.

3. Clarify institutional boundaries between JSA and other data-gathering agencies to prevent duplication and support cooperation

JSA's role overlaps with a number of other statutory and regulatory agencies, including ATEC, TEQSA, NCVER and various state skills bodies. Coordination between these entities is essential to avoiding duplication, inefficiency and confusion for both providers and users of workforce data.

The JSA Act should embed mechanisms for coordination and role delineation across these agencies. This could include:

- Role maps that delineate the responsibilities of JSA, ATEC, TEQSA, NCVER and others across functions such as data management, quality assurance, and migration advice.
- Joint work programs in areas of intersecting mandates (such as data modelling, skills forecasting, and the coherence of the tertiary system) so that outputs are complementary.

These changes would meaningfully reduce the administrative burden associated with data collection and improve user clarity on which agency is responsible for which outputs. Clear boundaries and improved collaboration also reduce the risk of mandatory reporting diverting resources away from core activities like student support and delivery of education.

We acknowledge the complexity of this task. However, rather than seeking to comprehensively define all boundaries at once, early progress can be made by focusing on high-impact areas of duplication as identified by education providers and industry stakeholders.

ATN Universities stands ready to support these reforms and looks forward to continuing our collaboration to ensure the skills system is aligned, responsive and equipped to meet future challenges.

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