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JOBS AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA DISCUSSION PAPER, JANUARY 2023

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Discussion Paper, January 2023.

RUN is a national collaborative group of seven regional Australian universities: Charles Sturt University, CQUniversity Australia, Federation University Australia, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Southern Queensland, and the University of the Sunshine Coast.

This submission reflects the positions of RUN institutions, and in doing so, also aims to represent the views of the communities which RUN universities serve; the one-third of Australians who live outside of metropolitan centres in regional, rural and remote locations.

Discussion questions on structure and governance:

Are there other design considerations that could further strengthen Jobs and Skills Australia's ability to provide advice to government?

RUN supports the common themes identified by previous consultations as they relate to the role of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and welcomes in particular the economy-wide focus on the provision of data/analysis as it applies to regionality, traditionally disadvantaged Australians, migration settings, and the higher education sector. RUN would encourage a nuanced approach to ensure the differences that manifest within regional Australian communities and economies are captured in JSA's advice, rather than taking an aggregate view of non-metropolitan Australia.

RUN is supportive of the statutory independence of JSA, and the broad range of stakeholders identified as being within the engagement remit of JSA. With regard to the proposed tripartite advisory body, RUN would wish to see the explicit and permanent membership of bodies/individuals representing regional Australia, the higher education sector, and in particular, regionally-based education and training providers/peak bodies.

Discussion questions on Jobs and Skills Australia functions:

What principles could be used to guide Jobs and Skills Australia's priorities, and the development of its workplan?

RUN welcomes the proposed economy-wide perspective of JSA, particularly the more explicit inclusion of the role universities play in skilling Australians, regional workforce development, and the enhanced and nuanced analysis of regional skills and labour needs.

How could Jobs and Skills Australia seek broader input into the development and refinement of its workplan?

RUN would support JSA's regular engagement with stakeholders as it develops its annual workplan via feedback mechanisms such as stakeholder surveys, issues papers, online events, regional roadshow consultations, and JSA's representation at key industry events.

How could Jobs and Skills Australia engage tripartite partners, experts and other interested parties in its major studies?

Publishing the Terms of Reference of JSA studies for public comment is an engagement and transparency mechanism that RUN would welcome. This extends to the use of focused engagement groups to better inform study scope. RUN would encourage JSA to ensure regionally-nuanced perspectives are captured as standard practice. RUN would support JSA running public and competitive tendering processes for its research projects/studies (including limited/targeted tenders).

What new information should Jobs and Skills Australia be collecting through its engagement to build a stronger evidence base?

RUN would be supportive of JSA compiling and publishing longitudinal data on the migration of education and training graduates between regional and metropolitan areas, so to more effectively understand the patterns of migration between place-of-study and eventual workforce settlement locations. This is a current gap in workforce development understanding that regional education and training providers and regional employers might otherwise use to be more effective in retaining or recruiting workforces.

RUN would also support JSA tracking accreditation requirements – especially between States and comparable industries – as a means to not only drive standardisation, but to encourage best practice and facilitate movement and consistency between/within jurisdictions. Furthermore, RUN would welcome JSA developing information about the requirements of work placements to establish best practice and to encourage coordination. This information might look at issues such as the cost to participants and the additional challenges found within regional areas.

Discussion questions on functions and ways of working:

How can Jobs and Skills Australia expand its engagement to include a broader range of skills and industry stakeholders in its work?

In the context of university workforce development, RUN would welcome efforts by JSA that seek to improve employers' understanding of skills insofar as there is often a prevailing focus upon a university graduate's level of content/knowledge gained at university rather than their acquired skills. RUN acknowledges that universities also have a role to play in strengthening this understanding amongst employers.

RUN also welcomes JSA's efforts to engage beyond the obvious industry peak bodies in its consultative approach.

What types of outreach could Jobs and Skills Australia use to increase visibility and use of its products and advice?

This may include those initiatives outlined under Discussion Question 3, particularly those that seek to capture regionally specific contexts.

How can Jobs and Skills Australia present data and analysis to best inform your work?

RUN would support JSA data sets being open-source and publicly accessible – the Department of Education's (DoE) student and staff data sets and associated tools being a good example here. However, DoE data sets contain significant lag. Employers and other groups (including universities) would welcome data that is current and refreshed – at least annually – and as such RUN would be open to data collection being automated as much as possible, while linking to other relevant public data sets.