



The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

By email: eec.sen@aph.gov.au

March 24, 2023

Re: Jobs and Skills Australia Amendment Bill 2023 [Provisions]

I write in response to the request for submissions to The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee (committee) into its inquiry into the Jobs and Skills Australia Amendment Bill 2023. NECA are pleased to provide input into the establishment of Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), and offer our feedback and suggestions.

We note that NECA is highly engaged in this space, and the eventual form taken by JSA will significantly affect NECA members' activities with regard to skills, vocational education and training, and employment. As a sector impacted heavily by current skills shortages and the highly skilled and technical nature of our members vocations it is critical to our sector and the Country that Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) succeeds as detailed by the Government.

NECA is supportive of the further development and improvement of the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) and wishes to engage fully and positively with the Government to ensure it successfully delivers to the expectations set by the Government and industry. Our members, training organisations and industry wish to remain involved in further engagement with the government as it evolves.

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak body for Australia's electrical and communications industry, which employs 340,370 people and turns over more than \$82bn annually. NECA represents more than 6,000 member businesses performing works including the design, installation, and maintenance of electrical and electronic equipment in the construction, mining, air conditioning, refrigeration, manufacturing, communications, and renewables sectors.

NECA's view is that in establishing JSA, the Department would be well served by reviewing previous activities of Skills Service Organisations (SSOs) that have operated in this space for much of the past decade and the Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) that delivered these functions prior to the establishment of SSOs. NECA believes the process of establishing JSA could be substantially simplified by revisiting the structure, charter and remit that applied to ISCs, as these served the interests of industry, employer, government and union stakeholders at a superior level to the successor SSOs.

NECA's remarks are informed by experience of ISCs through directorships on the former ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council. NECA also believes the former ISC Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be a better fit for stakeholders and should be restored with the formation of JSA.

In considering the KPIs that applied to the former ISCs, one related to the provision of an annual "Environmental Scan," informed by industry feedback and input on an ongoing basis. If the Department truly wants to gather grassroots-level intelligence from industry as part of JSA, NECA believes the inclusion of a KPI requiring Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) to provide State of the Industry reports on no less than an annual basis is imperative.

The Environmental Scan was a snapshot of industry including the workforce, emerging skills needs, training challenges, forecast workforce shortages and future skills needs. It was extremely valued by government and industry, and its reinstatement would provide the answers to a lot of the questions in the discussion paper. Indeed, feedback from the proposed new Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) could provide the bulk of the information required by JSA to guide its priorities, and to assist its development of workplans, and would provide answers to the majority of the questions posed in the Department's discussion paper.

Further, the governance structure that applied to ISCs, comprising senior representation from both employer and union stakeholder organisations, is imperative to ensure all desired outcomes from JSA are realised. NECA would also suggest that the training package approval processes for VET will match the pace of industry and as such the JSA is well placed to be responsible for approving minor changes or modifications to training packages.

NECA has noted that within the structure of JSA there is not a mechanism specifically for the guidance at a national level for apprenticeships within JSA. An advisory committee reporting to JSA for apprenticeships would provide insights and advice for future structures of apprenticeships, barrier removal, integration with the education system, alternate pathways and career guidance methodologies. Such an approach may assist to examine gender balance within sectors and pathways to improving attractiveness to a broader cohort of the community.

In summary, NECA's vision for the purpose, formation and operation of JSCs, notwithstanding its preference to revert to a structure similar to the old ISCs that existed prior to their abolition and replacement with SSOs, would be:

- Build and maintain national training standards; and
- Be the interface between the industries involved and government to provide timely, accurate advice that JSA may use to inform policy development and implementation.

NECA opines that the role of JSA is critical to guide the Vocational training system and strengthen workforce planning by working together with employers, unions and the industry led training providers. NECA seeks to work constructively with the Department, and the government, on this important task. To arrange NECA's further participation in the establishment of JSA, or should you wish to discuss any

matter relating to the electrotechnology industry, please contact NECA's Head of Government Relations and Regulatory Affairs, Kent Johns.

Yours sincerely

Oliver Judd
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National Electrical and Communications Association