27 February 2025

Re: Jobs and Skills Australia 2025-26 Workplan Development Public Consultation

About the ETU

The Electrical Trades Union of Australia ('the ETU')[1] is the principal union for electrical and electrotechnology tradespeople and apprentices in Australia, representing well over sixty-thousand workers around the country.

The electrical workers we represent will form the backbone of Australia's clean energy workforce across all sectors and stages of the transition. The ETU acknowledges the significant task ahead of building up a skilled workforce capable of delivering Australia's clean energy revolution, noting that there already exists a shortage of electrical tradespeople in every State and Territory across the country. This challenge is made more complex when considering the necessary balancing act between recruiting and training new skilled workers including previously underrepresented cohorts, ensuring they have access to relevant training modules and are trained on contemporary electrical equipment, successfully complete their training, as well as ensuring that existing workers with high energy literacy and with transferable skills in declining fossil fuel industries are provided the opportunity for a just transition into secure jobs in the clean energy sector.

Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, the ETU acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples today.

[1] Being a division of the CEPU, a trade union registered under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009* (Cth).

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Powering Australia's Future

JSA's 2023 report, *The Clean Energy Generation: Workforce Needs for a Clean Energy Future,* was a critical intervention in the Australian policy landscape, providing a deep and clear-eyed analysis of the jobs and industries that would be required to implement the Australian Government's clean energy policies and ambitions, identified current and projected workforce shortages, and analysed the ability for the existing workforce to transition into new roles as the economy is decarbonised.

Based on that report's estimates, and noting the Commonwealth's commitment a Future Made in Australia, Australia will require an additional 42,500 electricians by the end of the decade, growing to nearly 100,000 extra electrical workers by 2050 to undertake the energy transition.

This shortfall is already acting as a handbrake on the implementation of priority government policies – including projects to decarbonise the economy and address critical housing shortages.

JSA's workplan should include the provision expert advice to government departments and ministerial offices on what strategies – including localised investment in training and education – are required to address workforce shortfalls in order to meet these priority policies.

For example, a key area of engagement for JSA should be providing expert advice on the government's sector decarbonisation plans, and into the overall development and implementation of the New Energy Workforce Strategy.

This is aligned to two of the key functions of JSA, namely to:

- "… provide advice to the Minister of the Secretary in relation to […] the adequacy of the Australian system for providing VET, including training outcomes"; and
- "… to undertake research and analysis on the resourcing and funding requirements for registered training organisations (within the meaning of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011) to deliver accessible quality VET courses".

JSA must be properly funded to provide this critical work.

As part of undertaking this work, JSA should extend the research conducted in for the *Clean Energy Generation Report* and examine the capacity of the current VET system to deliver these apprentice numbers at the pace and in the locations required for the energy transition nor does it currently map the capacity of industry to employ more workers, particularly apprentices. This information is needed to properly inform government investment in the VET sector, and to contemplate the appropriate incentives and conditionality through Government investment to enable Australia to deliver on each of the Sector Decarbonisation Plans.

In keeping with these functions, the ETU proposes a follow-up to JSA's *Clean Energy Generation* report, that looks at mapping existing and potential training capacity in clean energy skills to understand the sector's capacity to train sufficient workers to meet projected workforce needs.

For example, the ETU and industry have raised concerns with state and federal governments about a lack of electrotechnology courses in areas earmarked for substantial government investment in renewable energy infrastructure and green manufacturing. For example, apprentices in the New England REZ are required to drive over four hours each way to access electrotechnology courses, significantly impacting on developers being able to attract and retain apprentices in the region.

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Furthermore, even where the courses do exist, the ETU has observed a significant backlog in multiple trade schools at present, which impacts their capacity to engage more apprentices. In some instances, the union has observed apprentices experiences a 12 – 18-month delay between a first year commencing their apprenticeship and then getting into their first block of training.

The ETU proposes that JSA undertake comprehensive mapping of existing training places, and any current backlog of apprentices waiting to access training. JSA should also look to disaggregate total demand for electrical workers by region, taking into account current policy settings for the energy transition. A comparison of this data would allow JSA to identify critical gaps in training capacity that are likely to put the energy transition at risk, and to make recommendations to planners about where new places and/or new training centres should be created. Finally, the analysis should include the VET sector's capacity to put sufficient trainers into classrooms.

JSA is already collecting and communicating critical data that could inform this work, including through their employment projections, regional labour market indicators, and the Jobs and Skills Atlas. However, they will need to work closely with training providers, employers and government to understand the pipeline of projects required to meet government policy ambitions and how this translates to localised investment in education and training.

The ETU looks forward to collaborating with JSA and broader industry to shape this research and its potential implementation.

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