



Innovative  
Research  
Universities

# Innovative Research Universities

Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry —  
*Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 [Provisions]* and  
*Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal)  
Bill 2022 [Provisions]*.

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**Committee Secretary**

Senate Education and Employment Committees  
PO Box 6100  
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Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry — *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022 [Provisions]* and *Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022 [Provisions]*.

The Innovative Research Universities (IRU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the *Jobs and Skills Australia Bill 2022* and the *Jobs and Skills Australia (National Skills Commissioner Repeal) Bill 2022*.

**Support for Jobs and Skills Australia**

While the bills before the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee are largely procedural in nature, the IRU recognises the important role Jobs and Skills Australia will play in understanding how the nation can address future workforce capability and capacity issues and is keen to work closely with government to address these challenges.

Universities play a critical role across all sectors of the economy and society by equipping graduates with knowledge and skills to support Australian innovation and productivity. The position of the IRU is that ongoing engagement with universities should be explicitly addressed in the creation of Jobs and Skills Australia.

Analysis from the National Skills Commission (NSC) in 2020 found that:

Of the near 1 million jobs that NSC expects to be created over the five years to November 2025, more than nine out of 10 of those jobs will require a post-secondary school qualification.

The NSC analysis also found that over half of these jobs will require a university-level education. Nearly 250,000 of these jobs will be in health care, 130,000 in professional, scientific, and technical services and nearly 120,000 in education and training. The bill rightly identifies these sectors as a particular focus for the new agency and these are all areas where the IRU makes a significant contribution to education and training across the country. Our universities educate young Australians and also actively support lifelong learning and re-training for those already in the workforce.

Jobs and Skills Australia will play an important role in forecasting future workforce and capacity needs for both existing and emerging industries. The IRU encourages the new agency to balance short-term analysis (of immediate skills shortages) with a longer-term view of areas where Australia will need to maintain and develop capabilities over time to prepare for future opportunities. There should be a clear mechanism to connect this to the longer-term higher education policy analysis that will be undertaken as part of the Australian Universities Accord.

### **Access and equity**

Across the Australian tertiary education system, there is unfinished business in achieving equity in access and participation. The IRU position is that this should be a consistent focus across higher education and skills policy – continuing to open up access and focus on equity will help to address immediate skills needs while also delivering major long-term benefits across society.

Already 50 per cent of IRU students are the first in their family to attend university. IRU universities teach over 230,000 students and graduate disproportionately high numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, regional and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The IRU would like to see equity explicitly included as part of the analysis undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia and in its plan for engagement with education and training providers.

### **Global perspective**

Australia's economic future will be influenced by broader geopolitical and technological trends, and analysis of our future workforce and skills needs should be informed by this global perspective.

Through both international education and research, universities deliver significant benefits to the Australian economy and society. There should be a clear link between the analysis undertaken by Jobs and Skills Australia and international education and migration policy.

Australia's success in the global economy will require the full range of knowledge and skills, across all fields of study. Skills in humanities, arts and social science disciplines will be as important as science, technology and engineering skills. Jobs and Skills Australia should ensure there is a focus on a balanced approach to identifying priority skills, between disciplinary areas and between short- and long-term needs.

### **Conclusion**

Australia's current skills and labour shortages are a challenge, but they also present us with the opportunity to strengthen the evidence-based framework for developing the capabilities that Australia will need to innovate and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The aim should be to ensure that no Australian, regardless of their background, misses out on the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills to enable them to secure employment in a rapidly changing and globalised economy, and to contribute fully to society.

This will require a coordinated and joined-up approach across government, industry, and education providers, with universities explicitly included in the work of Jobs and Skills Australia.

### **About the IRU**

The IRU is a group of eight universities, across every mainland State and Territory, committed to inclusive education and innovative research that advances our communities. Through constructive engagement in public policy, collaboration, innovation and international engagement, the IRU enhances the impact of our universities for the future of Australia.