INDEPENDENT HIGHER EDUCATION AUSTRALIA

Mr Trevor Gauld
Acting Commissioner
Jobs and Skills Australia
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9828
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Mr Gauld

Jobs and Skills Report 2026 and the contribution of independent higher education providers

On behalf of Independent Higher Education Australia (IHEA), I am writing regarding Jobs and Skills Australia's recently released Pathways to Success: Jobs and Skills Report 2026.

IHEA welcomes the report's emphasis on improving skills utilisation, strengthening pathways between education and employment and supporting lifelong learning. Its recognition that meeting Australia's future workforce needs requires more than increasing qualification supply is particularly important.

As you know, IHEA represents Australia's independent higher education sector, including private universities, university colleges and specialist higher education providers. These institutions contribute to workforce development across priority areas, including health, education, professional services and digital technologies, while providing diverse pathways into higher education, employment and further study.

As JSA progresses its research and policy advice on skills and tertiary education reform, independent providers would welcome opportunities to contribute their perspectives and experience to this work.

We would particularly welcome consideration of three areas.

Recognising the contribution of the whole higher education sector: National workforce planning can benefit from recognising the contribution of all higher education providers, across different institutional types. Independent providers offer specialist, industry-focused and flexible education that can respond to changing workforce needs, including in areas experiencing skills shortages. Their demonstrated capability, educational quality and graduate outcomes can provide a useful basis for considering their contribution.

Supporting broad participation in tertiary education reform: IHEA welcomes the report's emphasis on improving credit transfer, recognising prior learning and experience, and developing a National Skills Taxonomy. We would value opportunities for independent providers to contribute to JSA's research, consultation and policy advice on these initiatives. This could help ensure reforms support student mobility across public and independent providers, and between higher education and VET, while maintaining academic standards and professional accreditation requirements.

Supporting flexible and accessible learning pathways: The report identifies time and cost as significant barriers to tertiary education participation and highlights the growing importance of lifelong learning. Independent providers contribute through specialist qualifications, flexible study options and opportunities for mid-career upskilling and retraining. Their experience may be useful in considering ways to recognise existing skills and experience, particularly for working adults, regional communities and underrepresented learners. In our February 2025 submission to JSA's 2025–26 Workplan, IHEA also suggested exploring an Australian Lifelong Learning Entitlement, drawing on the United Kingdom's approach, to support more flexible access to education and training across higher education and VET. We consider this could be a worthwhile area for further consideration.

These priorities are consistent with the report's broader objective of developing a more connected, inclusive and responsive tertiary education system.

IHEA and independent providers would welcome further engagement with JSA on national credit transfer arrangements, skills recognition and lifelong learning initiatives and would be pleased to share relevant examples and perspectives from independent providers.

Thank you for considering these suggestions. We look forward to continuing our constructive engagement with Jobs and Skills Australia.

Yours sincerely



The Hon. Dr Peter Hendy
Chief Executive Officer
Independent Higher Education Australia
26 October 2026