



NATIONAL FORUM  
TOMORROW'S SKILLS, UNLOCKED TODAY



**Future Skills Organisation National Forum**  
**Summary Insights**  
**Industry Workshops**  
**14 – 15 March 2024 | Melbourne**

## Introduction and Background

The Future Skills Organisation (FSO), as the Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) for Australia's finance, technology, and business (FTB) sectors, hosted its inaugural National Forum in March 2024 in Melbourne with the theme 'Building a Skilled Workforce'. The National Forum was aimed at bridging skills gaps and understanding the workforce's readiness for future skills demands by bringing together a range of stakeholders from across FTB including employers and industry, unions, community groups, education and training providers, experts, other JSCs, and government agencies.

### Approach and Activities

The two-day forum facilitated strategic discussions and networking opportunities, leveraging thought leadership panels, design thinking workshops, and an audience Q&A with Minister O'Connor to foster collaborative solutions. The sessions were designed to validate and build upon themes identified in FSO's Initial Workforce Plan.

## Key Insights and Themes

Day One of the National Forum identified and discussed critical issues around supply into the FTB workforces, changes in workforce demand and barriers to entry, with a special focus on increasing equity, diversity and inclusion. On Day Two, attendees participated in workshops where they were tasked with further detailing and prioritising challenges affecting the FTB workforce and developing potential solutions.

Common challenges across FTB included the misalignment of training with industry needs, underutilisation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the need to improve stakeholder collaboration between training providers and industry, enhancing the perceived value of Vocational Education and Training (VET) to industry, supporting teacher/trainer currency, prioritising skills development over qualifications, and the need for greater diversity and inclusion.

## Actions for Consideration

Actionable solutions to address these and other challenges included considering how to align education and training programs with industry demands, improvements to RPL, strategies for increasing diversity and inclusion, methods for supporting educator currency, and ideas on how to improve the perception of VET. Further detail can be found in the table below.

## Day One - Emerging Themes

The dialogue, audience questions and answers, along with online responses captured through the discussions were systematically compiled for each panel discussion. Analysis of this data identified five key themes from each panel.

### Panel Discussion - 'Skills for now and the future, an industry perspective'

<b>Technology Integration and Workforce Transformation</b>	Discussions centred around the use of Artificial Intelligence and other emerging technologies to create healthier workplaces, enhance work/life balance, and bridge the skills gap through innovative pathways. It underscored the necessity for industries to evolve alongside technological progress while addressing employee readiness and support.
<b>Skills Recognition and Development</b>	Discussed the challenge of knowing what skills are needed by industry, the importance of enterprise skills and ways of acknowledging skills that those in industry have already developed. Strategies for recognising industry training within VET and promoting continuous learning and upskilling were emphasised.
<b>Education and Training Flexibility</b>	Considered the need for education and training programs to adopt shorter and more flexible formats, aiming to better meet industry demands and facilitate reskilling and upskilling in response to changes in the workforce.
<b>Collaboration for Workforce Preparedness</b>	Highlighted the importance of collaboration among educational institutions, employers, and industry bodies in closing skills gaps, enhancing workforce readiness, and supporting educators' professional development/industry currency to effectively impart emerging skills and soft skills.
<b>Barriers and Challenges to Education and Employment</b>	Addressed various entry and advancement barriers within industries, including reluctance to employ VET graduates, the mismatch between educational outcomes and industry requirements, and issues including educator burnout, resource limitations, and resistance to change.

### Panel Discussion - 'A focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, what works?'

<b>Learner-Centric Education</b>	Discussed the importance of placing the learner at the centre of education and training to achieve what industry needs, and prioritises skills for job roles, which may lead to a qualification, over traditional qualification pathways.
<b>Inclusive Skill Development and Recognition</b>	Discussed how skills-based approaches within industry could help support diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace.

<b>Support and Flexibility for Diverse Training Needs</b>	Highlighted the need for RTOs to have the tools and support they need to develop training that offers support and flexibility to improve access, participation and successful outcomes for priority groups currently underrepresented in the industry, including First Nations people, people with disabilities and women.
<b>Funding and Policy Support for Vulnerable Cohorts</b>	Recognised the importance of enabling Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and educational institutions to effectively train and support vulnerable cohorts.
<b>Leadership in Fostering Inclusivity and Collaboration</b>	Emphasised the role of industry leadership in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace, and the shared responsibility among RTOs, educational institutions, employers, and industry bodies to foster an inclusive culture through collaboration.

**Panel Discussion - ‘Supplying the skills needed, a perspective from the education and training sector’.**

<b>Funding and Qualification Bias</b>	Discussed how the funding system predominantly favours full qualifications over short-form training, indicating a need for a more balanced approach that equally values and supports skill acquisition, in order to quickly meet a broader range of pressing industry skill needs.
<b>Innovative Learning Pathways</b>	Identified the emergence of short courses and non-accredited programs as just-in-time (JIT) opportunities for learning, which offer more flexible and relevant pathways, reflecting a shift towards more adaptive and responsive educational offerings.
<b>VET Perception and Systemic Bias</b>	Emphasised and considered the challenge posed by perceived bias towards Higher Education, manifesting in a lack of trust and undervaluation of VET pathways, highlighting the need for significant efforts to shift societal attitudes and build understanding and trust in VET.
<b>Adaptation to Technological Advancements</b>	Recognised the VET sector's awareness and adaptation to technological changes, including AI, and the emphasis on collaboration and upskilling graduates to meet future skills needs, demonstrating a commitment to innovation in education and life-long learning.
<b>Systemic Challenges and Need for Reform</b>	Identified challenges in the VET system, such as regulatory complexity and compliance requirements, which were seen to detract from quality teaching and learning

## Day Two - Challenges and opportunities

Participants were separated into three groups: finance, technology and business. Through facilitated discussions and structured questioning in design thinking workshops, they were tasked with providing further detail on the issues facing each sector and developing solutions to address those challenges.

### Common challenges and opportunities identified across FTB

<p>Alignment with Industry Needs</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>Across all sectors, there was a significant emphasis on aligning training and education programs with the demands of the industry, ensuring that qualifications, skills, and training are relevant and up-to-date with current industry standards.</p> <p><u>Potential opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish mechanisms to align VET funding with industry demand.</li> <li>• Develop qualifications that are directly relevant to industry requirements.</li> <li>• Enhance collaboration between employers, training providers, and government to ensure training programs meet industry needs.</li> <li>• Improved speed to market for updating training products</li> </ul>
<p>Collaboration between Stakeholders</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>All workshops reinforced that effective collaboration between employers, training providers, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders is crucial for addressing the needs of the industry and ensuring that learners receive quality education and training.</p> <p><u>Potential opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish regular communication channels, online or in-person between industry and training providers and other stakeholders as relevant.</li> <li>• Identify industry leaders to champion collaboration.</li> <li>• Identify best practice in collaboration between training and industry.</li> </ul>
<p>Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>It was identified in all workshops that the VET system did not effectively recognise and assess the skills and knowledge that learners bring from prior experiences, whether from previous education, work, or life experiences.</p> <p><u>Potential Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement streamlined systems for RPL.</li> <li>• Explore technological solutions to support effective and consistent RPL where possible.</li> </ul>
<p>Relevance and Perceptions of VET</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>Each workshop reported concerns on the perception and value of VET among employers and learners, and the need to demonstrate the value and relevance of VET pathways in preparing learners for the workforce.</p>

	<p><u>Potential Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showcase successful real-world applications and outcomes.</li> <li>• Educate students about the scope of careers in FTB.</li> <li>• Foster partnerships between industry and training providers.</li> <li>• Develop targeted, flexible, and recognised training programs that align with industry needs and offer clear pathways to employment.</li> </ul>
<p>Skills Development</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>All sectors focussed on the need to develop and deliver the necessary workplace skills and technical competencies required for jobs. This included ensuring that learners have access to contextualised learning experiences and acquiring transferable skills that are adaptable to evolving job roles and industries.</p> <p><u>Potential Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift the focus from qualifications to skills development (skill sets), highlighting the importance of transferable skills and career adaptability.</li> <li>• Design training programs that prioritise skill acquisition over compliance.</li> <li>• Enhance partnerships between industry and training providers to increase contextualisation of training and provide real-world examples.</li> </ul>
<p>Diversity and Inclusion – attraction and retention</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>There was acknowledgement of the lack of diversity across all sectors and the need to address systemic barriers to improve representation.</p> <p><u>Potential Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase efforts to attract diverse talent, such as through targeted programs in secondary schools.</li> <li>• Offer more flexible training options.</li> </ul>
<p>Teacher/trainer capability</p>	<p><u>Challenge:</u></p> <p>Attendees identified that VET educators could benefit from additional industry support to maintain currency. Investing in the professional development of VET teachers/trainers was felt to be critical in the delivery of high-quality training programs.</p> <p><u>Potential Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support for educators to stay current and competent in their fields.</li> <li>• Invest in recruiting and retaining more trainers with industry-relevant expertise.</li> <li>• Support easy-in approaches for industry to become involved in training delivery.</li> </ul>

**For Finance, some of the distinct challenges identified by stakeholders also included:**

- Challenges in attracting talent to finance careers.
- Remote work impacting on-the-job learning.

**For the Technology sector, further challenges included:**

- Shortage of teachers in secondary schools with expertise in technology.
- Slow speed to market and the pace of change within the tech industry resulting in out-of-date training products.
- Linear career pathways not supporting workforce re-entry.

**For Business, challenges not raised in other sectors included:**

- Misalignment of VET funding with market demand.
- Insufficient preparation of learners for the workplace and specific technical demands.

## Next Steps

The FSO National Forum marked a significant step towards creating a collaborative ecosystem where industry needs and educational offerings are in harmony, with the aim of fostering a skilled, diverse, and adaptable workforce for Australia's critical sectors of finance, technology, and business.

Following on from this, a full report from the National Forum is being prepared for the upcoming Workforce Plan. Contributions received throughout the National Forum will be integrated into the Plan.

The solutions identified during these workshops are being triaged and further explored by the FSO. A number of suggestions are already being progressed.

This feedback will continue to inform the FSO's activities in addressing the key challenges outlined across the two days.