

Friday 8 May 2026

The Regional Universities Network (RUN) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) 2026-27 Work Plan Public Consultation Paper.

RUN is a national collaborative group of six regional Australian universities:

- Charles Sturt University,
- CQUniversity Australia,
- Federation University Australia,
- Southern Cross University,
- University of New England, and
- University of Southern Queensland.

This submission reflects the positions of RUN institutions, and in doing so, also aims to represent the views of the communities which RUN universities serve; the one-third of Australians who live outside of metropolitan centres in regional, rural and remote locations. RUN believes that all Australians, regardless of background or geography, should have access to an equitable standard of university opportunities, tertiary facilities and research services.

Overview

RUN believes the JSA's 2026-27 Work Plan is effective in setting clear priorities and foci for the year ahead, which indicate that JSA's attention will continue to remain relevant, impactful, and grounded in real world experience. RUN is also broadly supportive of the six focussed programs and the associated lines of enquiry as identified by the Work Plan, however RUN does offer more granular feedback to individual programs below.

Furthermore, RUN acknowledges the comprehensive and genuine consultation processes that continue to inform JSA's evolving priorities. The 2026-27 Work Plan is another important step in ensuring regional education and employment outcomes remain established as a national interest imperative. RUN looks forward to contributing to the ongoing direction and effectiveness of JSA and its activities.

Specific Feedback to the JSA 2026-27 Work Plan

RUN notes the extent to which the JSA's 2026-27 Work Plan seeks to align with Government priorities. While an alignment to Government priorities makes sense, it does raise questions as to how this charter may interact with the objective of providing anticipatory evidence to Government.

RUN would prefer to see JSA utilise its considerable expertise and capabilities to bring issues that may not be on the national policy radar as priorities to the fore.

Program Three

RUN welcomes the strong focus upon the performance and design of the national skills system. RUN would urge JSA to ensure its focus here – and the lines of enquiry it undertakes – includes a broad capture of all components of the national skilling system. Beyond the welcomed focus upon TAFEs and individual public university providers, it would be beneficial for JSA to work closely with the Australian Tertiary Education Commission, the private VET sector, and the public/private school sector.

Program Four

RUN believes there is the opportunity for JSA to adopt a more proactive suite of enquiries into the role played by migration in Australia's ongoing productivity and economic growth needs. Public discourse on the social and economic impact of Australia's migrant intake is becoming increasingly politicised, resulting in unclear and inconsistent policy implementation particularly as it relates to the international student visa system and the migration pathways that follow which are having detrimental impacts on regional Australia. RUN believes that JSA should play a more active advisory role in shaping not just the Government's skilled migration pathway agenda, but the national discussion more broadly.

Program Five

RUN welcomes JSA's role in examining the barriers that limit full participation in the labour market including education and training. RUN also endorses the explicit focus upon underrepresented groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, women, and/or people living in regional and remote Australia. In undertaking the work for this important program, RUN would like to see the JSA utilise its depth of expertise to generate new and deeper layers of data and analysis that better informs our relatively superficial understanding of how disadvantage contributes to underrepresentation in employment, education and training.

Program Six

RUN agrees with the prioritisation of broad stakeholder engagement in informing JSA's ongoing work. JSA's track record in effective engagement with peak bodies and key stakeholder representatives has been exemplary, and RUN would welcome a continuation of the JSA's dialogue-first ethos. However, RUN would urge the JSA to reconsider whether program six remains a discrete, stand-alone program with the 2026-27 Work Plan, or if it should instead be positioned as the fundamental overarching ethos of JSA's organisational activity. RUN firmly believes that JSA's philosophy of engagement and informed dialogue should feed into every aspect of the JSA's Work Plan, rather than existing as a stand-alone program.

As a final remark broadly related to the work scope of the JSA moving forward, RUN would like to offer its appreciation of the work that went into creating the JSA's outputs such as the Jobs and Skills Atlas, and the Jobs and Skills Roadmap for Regional Australia. Both pieces of work are an incredible resource that RUN frequently utilises and promotes. It affords all Australians – not just those directly facing the education, training and employment sectors – a comprehensive and consistent base of evidence that strengthens informed decision-making practices. However, RUN notes that general awareness and utilisation of these essential pieces of work amongst key stakeholders is weak. RUN sees the tremendous value of this resource and believes they should be more readily utilised by a wider cross-section of groups (for instance, Local Governments, economic development bodies, chambers of commerce, peak bodies, schools and career advisers etc...). RUN urges JSA to prioritise the greater promotion of their outputs.

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