

## ARA AND NRA SUBMISSION

### REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE *JOBS AND SKILLS AUSTRALIA ACT 2022*

NOVEMBER 2025

The Australian Retailers Association (ARA) and National Retail Association (NRA) welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on the review of the effectiveness of the operations of the *Jobs and Skills Australia Act 2022* (the Act) to the Australian Government.

The ARA and the NRA (the Associations), which propose to amalgamate to form the Australian Retail Council (ARC), represent a \$430 billion sector that employs 1.4 million Australians—one in ten workers—making retail the nation's largest private sector employer and a cornerstone of the Australian economy.

Our combined membership spans the full breadth of Australian retail: from family-owned small and independent businesses, which comprise 95% of our membership, to the largest national and international retailers that support thousands of jobs and sustain communities across both metropolitan and regional Australia. Our industry operates more than 155,000 retail outlets nationwide, with the majority of those also represented by an online or e-commerce presence.

A strong retail sector delivers widespread benefits to all Australians, with a significant portion of every dollar spent in retail flowing back into employees, suppliers, superannuation funds, and local communities. We are united in advocating for the policy settings, reforms and collaboration that will drive growth, resilience, and long-term prosperity for Australian retail and the millions who rely on it.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Associations welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Act. Retail is Australia's largest private sector employer and a key driver of participation and productivity. We support practical, industry-led solutions that help retailers find and attract skilled people, train and retain them, and that support career growth.

The Review is a timely opportunity to keep Jobs and Skills Australia focused on the real economy and to equip it to deliver timely, trusted and usable advice that employers can act on. The breadth of JSA's legislated functions is sound, but there is a clear opportunity to sharpen priorities, lift the usefulness of core products, streamline engagement and preserve independence while speeding up delivery.

The Associations submission focuses on preserving what works, supporting the removal of duplication, and implementing targeted improvements that produce clear benefits for employers and workers in retail. These improvements support the Associations' long-standing priorities to lift participation, enable practical flexibility and invest in skills pathways that match labour market needs.

#### FUNCTIONS

The functions in section 9 are comprehensive. The opportunity is to focus on where JSA can add the most value to employers. Retail needs fine-grained workforce intelligence that reflects how jobs are organised on the ground and advice that connects skills, training and migration settings.

Forecasts should reach below occupation titles to the skill clusters that matter in stores, supply chains and support

centres. Pathway and foundation skills work should be visible and integrated, with trial periods in retail that link short form credentials, traineeships and school to work transitions with steps into higher level study where relevant. A standing link between shortage signals and migration settings would support planning ahead of peak trading periods.

JSA's annual work plan and the annual jobs and skills report should clearly signal priorities, any method changes and where retail specific evidence will be developed so employers and training partners can align programs and investment with the areas of greatest need.

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVICE AND PRODUCTS**

Members use JSA data, dashboards and reports to shape recruitment, training and bargaining. The constraint is timing and accessibility. Decisions in retail are seasonal and fast and data must be current, consistent and easy to integrate into business tools. Regular, concise updates that bring together shortages, vacancy trends and applicant to vacancy ratios would improve day to day usefulness. Stable application programming interfaces with simple documentation and practical guidance would help small and medium retailers turn insights into action. Short method notes for major models would improve trust and support informed use.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

The Associations support tripartite engagement. Employers value consultation that is coordinated, predictable and closes the loop. Current processes can duplicate effort across JSA and Jobs and Skills Councils. A single intake for retail topics with one calendar, one template and a shared evidence base would reduce burden and improve the quality of input. Publishing short feedback summaries alongside major outputs would make clear how stakeholder input influenced the outcome. Advisory structures should reflect the mix of small and medium enterprises and large employers and include regional voices.

## **OPERATING MODEL AND INDEPENDENCE**

Independence underpins trust and should be preserved. The focus should be on speed to insight and clear accountability for delivery. Target timeframes for work plans and major studies, supported by light touch change control for emerging priorities, would improve responsiveness. Where JSA uses departmental services, service levels should protect analytical independence, data integrity and the delivery of secure and reliable data access. Ongoing investment in data engineering, labour market economics and human centred design will help ensure products are rigorous and easy to use. The Associations support transparent publication of any ministerial ways of working directions that affect process or timing, consistent with the Act's independence settings.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *Refocus functions for practical retail impact*

- Refocus Jobs and Skills Australia's functions to deliver clear, actionable outcomes for employers and workers. This should include improving the depth and consistency of forecasting so the industry can rely on it for workforce planning, and ensuring pathway and foundation skills work is coordinated through one program with visible outcomes.
- Jobs and Skills Australia should also maintain a clear connection between skills shortages, training investment and migration settings, supported by transparent reporting on how these elements interact.
- Each work plan and annual report should outline priorities, expected results and how progress will be measured, so stakeholders can clearly see where JSA's advice is driving change.

#### *Enhance data products and accessibility for practical industry use*

- Improve products so they are current, reliable and easy to apply.
- Publish a quarterly retail labour update that brings together key indicators such as job vacancies, shortage trends and applicant ratios.
- Ensure data is accessible through stable application programming interfaces with clear documentation, allowing employers and training partners to use it directly in their planning.
- Include regional and store type breakdowns to reflect how retail operates day to day, and provide short, plain language notes explaining the methods behind each dataset.
- Accompany major releases with simple guidance and examples that show small and medium employers how to put the insights into practice.

#### *Streamline consultation processes and strengthen stakeholder representation*

- Streamline engagement so consultation is coordinated, consistent and outcome focused.
- Establish a single intake process for retail topics across Jobs and Skills Australia and the relevant Jobs and Skills Councils, supported by one calendar, one template and a shared evidence base.
- Publish short feedback summaries alongside major outputs to show how stakeholder input has been considered.
- Ensure advisory structures capture the diversity of the sector, including small and medium enterprises, large employers and regional perspectives.
- Where Jobs and Skills Australia draws on external data or consultations, the process should be transparent, predictable and aligned with existing work by state, territory and national data agencies to avoid duplication.

#### *Strengthen governance, capability and transparency while maintaining independence*

- Strengthen the operating model while maintaining clear independence.
- Introduce target timeframes for work plans and major studies, with flexible processes to accommodate emerging priorities such as changes in trading conditions or supply chain disruptions.
- Ensure any departmental support arrangements uphold Jobs and Skills Australia's analytical independence, data integrity and secure data management.
- Continue investing in the technical and analytical capability of the organisation so outputs remain robust, relevant and easy to use.
- To enhance transparency, publish a simple record of ministerial directions or interactions that influence scope or timing.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Associations support a strong and independent Jobs and Skills Australia that is focused on practical outcomes for employers and workers. By sharpening priorities in the functions, improving the usefulness and accessibility of

core products, streamlining engagement and preserving independence while speeding up delivery, JSA can provide timely, trusted and usable advice that retailers can act on. We are ready to work with the Review and JSA to put these improvements into practice, so the system delivers clear benefits across the retail workforce.

The Associations thank the Australian Government for the opportunity to outline our position and remains available for further engagement on policy settings that support the growth and sustainability of the retail sector.

Any queries in relation to this submission can be directed to our policy team at [policy@retail.org.au](mailto:policy@retail.org.au).