15 May 2026

Jobs and Skills Australia 2026 – 2027 Work Plan

Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, the ETU acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all First Nations peoples today.

Introduction

The Electrical Trades Union of Australia ('the ETU')[1] welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this consultation on Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)'s workplan for 2026/27. The ETU is the principal union for electrical and electrotechnology tradespeople and apprentices in Australia, representing well over seventy thousand workers around the country.

The electrical workers that we represent are a critical part of the trades workforce that will deliver critical government priorities. It goes without saying that the energy transition is one big electrical training project: from building large scale renewables and storage, to installing the transmission and distribution networks to move their electrons, all the way through to installing the EV chargers and induction stoves that will allow Australian households to electrify and drive down their power bills. But electrical workers will also be required to electrify industry to build a *Future Made in Australia,* and to deliver the housing that will address the current crisis.

All of this requires a significant acceleration of investment to build up a skilled electrical workforce of sufficient size and skill level. This investment is beginning off an already low base. As JSA notes, electrical trades have been in persistent and acute shortage for over two decades in every State and Territory across the country.[2] And despite the introduction of significant new investments to incentivise enrolments in the electrical trades, NCVER data shows that electrical commencements have been falling from a peak in 2022.

JSA's 2023 report, *The Clean Energy Generation: Workforce Needs for a Clean Energy Future,* was a critical intervention in the Australian policy landscape, providing a deep and clear-eyed analysis of the jobs and industries that would be required to implement the Australian Government's clean energy policies and ambitions.[3] It identified current and projected workforce shortages and analysed the ability for the existing energy workforce to transition into new roles as the economy is decarbonised.

As we argue in this submission, there is an urgent need to build on the work in the *Clean Energy Generation* report to identify how competition between sectors is exacerbating the labour shortages identified in that report, and to develop an overall strategy to address these shortages. JSA has a critical role, alongside its Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs), to undertake this work, as it can engage all relevant federal departments and their state counterparts to develop the holistic picture of the issues and solutions to our current workforce crisis.

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[1] Being a division of the CEPU, a trade union registered under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009* (Cth).
[2] JSA (2023), *Skills Priority List September 2023 – Historical*.
[3] JSA (2023), *Clean Energy Generation: Workforce needs for a Net Zero Economy*.

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Clean Energy Generation report does not provide a holistic picture of trades shortages

The *Clean Energy Generation* report founds that Australia will require an additional 42,500 electricians by the end of the decade, growing to nearly 100,000 extra electrical workers by 2050 to meet the Australia's energy transition requirements.

Significantly, this report was released prior to explosion of data centre proposals and construction and does not factor in the workforce required to build the state and federal government's housing or broader infrastructure agenda – including the Brisbane Olympics – which means that it significantly underestimates the shortfall or clean energy trades, including electricians. And critically, it did not factor in data centres. To give a sense of the scale of new data centre and AI factory developments, the ETU has recently been advised that an upcoming build in Melbourne will require 2000 electricians. If this proves correct, this one data centre will have the largest single electrical workforce in Melbourne's history. And it is just one of dozens.

Looking at just a few examples beyond energy, AIG's *Australian industry Outlook for 2026* surveyed 225 business leaders from across manufacturing, construction, technology and supply chains, technical services regarding the key risks that they saw for their business in the coming year.[4] 1/3 of businesses report being affected by workforce shortages in 2025 – however in construction this increases to 69% for lower and 78% for higher skilled occupations (compared to 44% and 54% in manufacturing). Significantly, they note that this will only increase with the current public works infrastructure pipeline continuing, and with the addition of construction to meet housing targets. Similarly, 1/3 of leaders surveyed cite workforce shortages as the top ranked negative impact factor for their business.[5]

Construction Skills Queensland found an increasingly tight labour market in the Queensland construction industry, that was only projected to get worse without significant and targeted interventions. For example, they found that job vacancy rates (an indication of how well labour supply is matched to demand) continued to grow in 2025 and were 40% higher than they were 5 years ago. This noted that these rates will be further exacerbated the construction build for the 2032 Olympics:

> Average labour demand is expected to rise from approximately 126,600 in 2025-26 to a peak of 148,300 in 2027-28, representing an increase of 17%. Beyond this peak, average labour demand is forecast to remain high at above 130,000 workers. […] With many of Queensland's high-demand occupations mirroring national shortages, the state faces a critical challenge in securing the construction workforce needed to deliver its growing pipeline.[6]

Finally, Infrastructure Australia found that labour shortages remain "the most critical delivery risk" for infrastructure delivery across the country.[7] The found that shortages are projected to surge and could reach 300,000 workers by 2027.[8]

[4] AiG (2026), *Australian Industry Outlook for 2026*.
[5] AiG (2026), *Australian Industry Outlook for 2026*, p. 19.
[6] CSQ (2026), *Horizon 2032: Imagining Queensland's Future Construction Workforce: 2026 Edition*, p. 16.
[7] Infrastructure Australia (2025), *2025 Market Capacity Report*, p. 7.
[8] Infrastructure Australia (2025), *2025 Market Capacity Report*, p. 9.

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Significantly, the workforce shortages identified above do not exist in isolated sectors. Many of the trades in critical shortage – including electricians – are mobile, with workers frequently moving between key sectors (e.g. transport, energy and water, and housing, manufacturing, energy). In light of this, there is an urgent need to develop a more fulsome picture of the total demand for skilled trades across the economy, to allow for commensurate investment in skills and training. A failure to do so, will result in costly delays and increases in labour costs. This is not an Australian only problem, the IEA found that:

> In 2024, a combination of labour shortages and long lead times for equipment procurement led to the delay of around 53 GW of solar projects in the United States. In India, similar delays and cost increases are affecting solar panel and storage battery manufacturers as employers struggle to hire enough skilled workers to meet planned capacity expansions.[9]

Clean Energy Generation report does not outline a strategy for addressing shortages

While the *Clean Energy Generation* report provided robust and necessary analysis, that report was not tasked with identifying the solutions to the workforce shortages it identified.

As we argue below, JSA has significant role to play in identify pipeline of work and assessing the gap between projected demand and available workforce across key government priority areas and identifying the solutions to address these shortages. As a Commonwealth body, JSA – in collaboration with its JSCs - has the ability to gather information from across government departments at a state and federal level, to provide a holistic review of demand pressures and cross-government strategies.

JSA's workplan should include the provision expert advice to government departments and ministerial offices on what strategies – including localised investment in training and education – are required to address workforce shortfalls in order to meet these priority policies. For example, a key area of engagement for JSA should be providing expert advice on the government's sector decarbonisation plans.

This is aligned to two of the key functions of JSA, namely to:

- "… provide advice to the Minister of the Secretary in relation to […] the adequacy of the Australian system for providing VET, including training outcomes"; and
- "… to undertake research and analysis on the resourcing and funding requirements for registered training organisations (within the meaning of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011) to deliver accessible quality VET courses".

While DCCEEW was tasked with developing the New Energy Workforce Strategy to provide this advice, we note that this has not been released – almost a year after the sector plans were developed. Furthermore, given the mobility of a significant proportion of critical occupations into and out of the 'new energy' sector (for example housing and infrastructure), it is clear that the development of a plan that only addresses energy would only provide part of the picture. As such, it would fail to provide the necessary advice to state and federal governments as they embark on the negotiation of the next iteration of the National Skills Agreement (NSA).

In light of this, JSA should engage with the relevant JSCs and departments across key industries

[9] IEA (2025), *World Energy Employment 2025*, p. 52.

involved in sector decarbonisation, to develop an expanded strategy and implementation plan.

The ETU looks forward to collaborating with JSA and broader industry to shape this research and its potential implementation.

Where evidence gaps most constrain good decisions across jobs, skills and workforce participation and where Jobs and Skills Australia has an unique ability to provide analysis and advice?

At a high level, a lack of supply of apprentices to meet future demand can be attributed to three things:

- A lack of supply of people wanting to commence an apprenticeship
- A lack of employers wanting to hire and train apprentices
- A lack of training places in VET

The ETU has observed that the current issues with falling completions are not due to a lack of potential apprentices. Where good quality apprenticeships exist, they are significantly oversubscribed. To take just two examples:

- **Sydney Rail** had 1400 applications for only 96 electrical apprenticeships. Of those, 685 applications were deemed suitable, and 258 progressed to an in-person interview.
- **Energy Queensland** had approximately 7400 applications for only 170 apprenticeships.

Instead, there is a persistent and growing lack of training capacity, and insufficient uptake of apprentices by employers. In light of this, the ETU proposes a follow-up to the *Clean Energy Generation* report, that maps existing and potential training capacity in clean energy skills to understand the sector's capacity to train sufficient workers to meet projected workforce needs.

Mapping of Training Capacity

State and Federal governments are about to embark on negotiations for the next round of the National Skills Agreement. However, in addition to there not being a single picture of projected workforce shortages in critical industries over the medium to long term, nor is there a clear understanding of the training capacity required to meet this shortfall and where this capacity is most needed.

This significantly impacts governments' ability to assess the funding required to deliver the training that will sufficient and suitable to meet the projected pipeline of public and private works. It also impedes decision making regarding appropriate migration settings.

To name just a few examples of issues caused by this data gap, the ETU and employers have raised concerns with federal and state governments regarding:

- **Training droughts:** this relates to an identified lack of electrotechnology courses in areas earmarked for substantial government investment in renewable energy infrastructure and green manufacturing. For example, apprentices in the New England REZ are required to drive over four hours each way to access electrotechnology courses, significantly impacting on developers being able to attract and retain apprentices in the region.
- **Training backlogs:** even where the courses do exist, the ETU has observed a significant backlog in multiple trade schools at present, which impacts their capacity to engage more apprentices. A survey of ETU apprentices conducted in 2025, found that almost 10% were

experiencing over a 12-month delay between commencing employment and enrolling in training.[10] This finding aligned with anecdotal evidence from industry contractors looking to enrol their apprentices in training.

The ETU proposes that JSA undertake comprehensive mapping of existing training places, and any current backlog of apprentices waiting to access training. JSA should also look to disaggregate total demand for electrical workers by region, taking into account current policy settings for the energy transition. A comparison of this data would allow JSA to identify critical gaps in training capacity that are likely to put the energy transition at risk, and to make recommendations to planners about where new places and/or new training centres should be created. Finally, the analysis should include the VET sector's capacity to put sufficient trainers into classrooms.

JSA is already collecting and communicating critical data that could inform this work, including through their employment projections, regional labour market indicators, and the Jobs and Skills Atlas. However, they will need to work closely with training providers, employers and government to understand the pipeline of projects required to meet government policy ambitions and how this translates to localised investment in education and training.

Capacity of Employers to Hire Apprentices

In addition, there is no reporting on the capacity of industry to employ more apprentices, and of the parts of industry that are doing the heavy lifting to train apprentices, and where apprentice employment is lagging. This information is needed to properly inform government investment in the VET sector, and to contemplate the appropriate incentives and conditionality through Government investment to enable Australia to deliver on each of the Sector Decarbonisation Plans. This assessment should be included as an input in the workforce strategy described above.

No strategy to deliver the workforce needed to deliver government priorities

As the above examples make clear, while there is a long-standing recognition of workforce shortages in critical occupations needed to deliver on government priorities, and an understanding that these shortages will only become more acute without a comprehensive strategy to address these issues, there is currently no strategy – nor current activity to develop a strategy – to deliver this workforce.

The Sectoral Decarbonisation Plans all recognised workforce as a critical enabler of the workforce plans, and that the *New Energy Workforce Strategy* would develop the strategy to meet the workforce needs identified in the plans. However, this strategy has never been release, which is a fundamental limiter on how government can plan appropriate and sufficient investments in training, especially as they embark on the next round of National Skills Agreement (NSA) negotiations.

JSA, working in collaboration with its JSCs, should be tasked with completing this strategy, with a view to expanding beyond energy to consider critical *and competing government priorities* that will draw on the same pool of trades workers. If a more limited scope is required, the strategy should be aligned to the industries and sectors that are subject to sector decarbonisation plans. The strategy must be wholistic and provide cogent advice to Government on how the skills crisis can be ended.

[10] ETU (2025), *Shocked by the Job, Failed by the System*.