

Briefing for Professor Barney Glover and Mr David Turvey re: Public hearing into the Free TAFE Bill 2024 [Provisions]

VNDA - VET graduates' outcomes

- The Vocational Education and Training (VET) National Data Asset (VNDA) is a collaborative project between JSA and the ABS. VNDA links a wide range of government administrative data in the Person Level Integrated Data Asset (PLIDA) to track economic and social outcomes of VET students.
- VNDA's comprehensive, longitudinal and granular data makes it an invaluable tool for tracking VET students' outcomes, particularly among equity cohorts that are the focus of Fee Free TAFE and Free TAFE, such as First Nations people, women, young students, income support recipients, and people with disability.
- JSA's VNDA analysis highlights the strong economic and employment benefits of VET:
 - The median income uplift in the year following completion was \$11,800. First Nations graduates attained a median income uplift of \$13,000.
 - 84% of VET graduates were employed after completing their VET qualification, representing a 15-percentage point increase from before enrolment.
 - Among VET graduates who received income support prior to study, 39% had transitioned off income support two years after completion.
 - The importance of VET in creating pathways to higher-level training is also apparent. Approximately 8% of all VET graduates pursued higher education after completion and 16% enrolled in a higher-level VET qualification.

VNDA - strengthening evidence-based policy and evaluation

- JSA is committed to continuing strengthening the evidence base for Australia's tertiary education system. As an enduring integrated data asset, VNDA enables rigorous, real-world, and cost-effective evaluations of VET policies and programs, ensuring investment in VET is evidence-driven and responsive to Australia's skills and workforce needs.
- JSA is further enhancing its analytical capacity in VNDA to generate deeper insights into the effectiveness and performance of the VET system. Planned initiatives include:
 - Understanding the economic and social benefits of partial VET completion (i.e. completing some units within a full qualifications) and different types of program completions (e.g. completing skill sets and micro-credentials).

- Assessing how the VET system addresses workforce shortages, particularly in regional and remote Australia. For example, tracking VET graduates' geographic mobility.
- Conducting intersectional analysis to focus on equity cohorts, ensuring the insights and advice support inclusive growth and equitable opportunities across all sectors of the workforce.
- VNDA's unique capability allows JSA inform and evaluate major policy and programs, such as:
 - The effectiveness of Fee-Free TAFE and Free-TAFE: As more data become available, VNDA will support a comprehensive evaluation of employment, economic and social outcomes for Fee-Free TAFE and Free TAFE graduates
 - Quasi-experimental evaluation of VET programs: Leverage advanced statistical techniques to provide costs-effective rigorous evidence of the real-world impact of VET study.
- These advanced analysis and insights provided by JSA will guide evidence-based policy improvements, and future investment, ensuring Australia's VET system remains a key driver in addressing Australia's current and future skills shortages.

Fee Free TAFE in Victoria

- According to the [Victorian Skills Plan for 2024 into 2025](#) (28 Jan 2025), 170,500 Victorians accessed Free TAFE since its TAFE's introduction in 2019, saving them \$460 million in tuition fees.
- A [joint media release by the Prime Minister, Minister for Skills and Training and Victorian Minister for Skills and TAFE](#) (31 Jan 2025) states that, as part of the Free TAFE program in Victoria,
 - Between January 2023 and September 2024, there have been:
 - more than 13,300 enrolments in the construction sector.
 - more than 34,300 in the care sector.
 - more than 5,900 in the agriculture sector.
 - more than 9,900 in the technology and digital sector.
 - more than 5,500 in the early childhood education and care sector.
 - This new data also shows popular Free TAFE courses in Victoria were:
 - Diploma of Nursing with students saving up to \$17,150.
 - Diploma of Building and Construction (Building) with students saving up to \$9,257.
 - Certificate IV in Training and Assessment with students saving up to \$5,368.
 - Certificate IV in Cyber Security with students saving up to \$4,108.
 - Certificate IV in Accounting and Bookkeeping with students saving up to \$3,597.
 - Students from regional areas comprised more than a third of all enrolments.

- "Victoria is the birthplace of Free TAFE. Since 2019, almost 190,000 Victorian Students have accessed Free TAFE, saving over \$550 million in tuition fees" (Quotes attributable to Victorian Minister for Skills and TAFE Gayle Tierney)

Rebalancing VET and Higher Education and supporting alternative pathways

- Fee Free TAFE is an important way of rebalancing incentives between VET and Higher Education
 - While most domestic students who commence a bachelor degree can access the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP), Vet Student Loans (VSL) are only available for some courses at Diploma level and above.
 - Further, the conditions of VSL compared to HELP (for example application fees and caps) could push students towards Higher Education when VET might otherwise suit them better.
 - In 2019, [KPMG](#) found that 94% of VSL students reported that without their loan, they wouldn't have been able to afford their course fees – indicating that funding represent a barrier to learning for many potential students.
- Fee Free TAFE can help in creating alternative pathways to Higher Education
 - Preparatory courses help equity groups transition into higher education when they do not have an ATAR. For example, the [fee-free Foundation Studies at UniSA](#) is a six month program aimed at students with no previous qualifications. Students develop writing, communication, numeracy, research, and study skills. Upon successful completion, they can progress into an Undergraduate Certificate in University Studies or a Diploma with a chosen specialisation. From there, they can use their competitive grade point average (GPA) to apply for a UniSA bachelor degree.
 - Increasing the availability of these programs and continuing to ensure they are fee free will support the tertiary harmonisation ethos of expanding tertiary education access to more students who wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity, in both an equitable and supportive way.
- Fee Free TAFE can also address shortages in occupations by creating a pathway
 - TAFE Queensland has structured its Bachelor of Nursing program to allow graduates with a Diploma of Nursing to fast track into the second year of the degree. While the Bachelor of Nursing is not currently a Commonwealth Supported Place, the Diploma of Nursing is eligible for Fee-Free TAFE, making this option more affordable for students.
 - Where Fee Free TAFE align with further Higher Education study, they can lead to significant savings, potentially opening degree pathways to a wider range of students.