Skills-first

What is a ‘skills-first’ approach?

A skills-first approach focuses on what people can do, alongside the qualifications they hold and the jobs they have had.

We develop skills in many ways, including through education and training, work experience, workplace learning, volunteering, caring responsibilities, community participation and everyday life. A skills-first approach helps make these skills more visible, recognised and valued.

Skills-first does not replace qualifications, occupations or industry expertise. Qualifications remain important and trusted signals of learning and achievement, including for licensing, safety, professional recognition and quality assurance.

Instead, skills-first helps us see the skills within qualifications, occupations and experience more clearly. This gives us a fuller picture of what people can do and how their capabilities could be applied in different settings.

Why does it matter?

Australia’s workforce is changing. Technology is reshaping work, people are working for longer and industries need workers who can adapt as jobs and skill requirements evolve.

Our education, training and employment systems have traditionally organised information around qualifications, occupations and job titles. These remain important, but they do not always show the full range of skills a person has developed or how those skills could transfer to another role, industry or learning pathway.

Skills information already exists across qualifications, occupations, job descriptions and workforce data. However, different systems do not always describe skills in the same way. This can make it harder for:

- people to explain what they can do and identify their next step
- employers to identify and develop the capabilities they need
- education and training providers to recognise existing learning and support transitions
- governments and industry to understand and respond to workforce needs.

A skills-first approach uses skills as a common language across learning and work. It complements existing information about qualifications, occupations and experience rather than replacing it.

What can a skills-first approach enable?

- Better recognition - Skills developed through formal education, work, caring, culture, volunteering, community participation and life experience can become easier to identify and recognise.
- Better matching - Clearer information about the skills people have and the skills roles require can help connect people with suitable work and learning opportunities.
- Better mobility - Making transferable skills more visible can help people understand how their capabilities relate to different jobs and industries. This can support career transitions, upskilling and reskilling throughout working life.
- Better learning pathways - A clearer view of existing capability can support recognition of prior learning and credit transfer, reducing unnecessary duplication and helping people build on what they already know and can do.
- Better workforce planning - More consistent skills information can help employers, industry and governments understand workforce capability, identify emerging needs and make better-informed decisions.

Making skills-first practical

Skills-first is built on the foundation of a clear definition of skill, which gives us a shared understanding of what a skill is.

The National Skills Taxonomy supports this foundation by developing a clear, common language for describing and comparing skills across education, training, work and experience. Together, the skills definition and the National Skills Taxonomy set the scene for more connected systems that make people's skills visible, portable and transferable.

Skills-first is ultimately about people. It helps us recognise what people can do, connect them with opportunity and support them to continue building and applying their skills throughout their working lives.

Further information

For further information, feedback or collaboration opportunities, please contact NationalSkillsTaxonomy@jobsandskills.gov.au.

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Roadshow 2026