

From Industry Training Advisory Bodies to Jobs and Skills Councils

A Contribution to the History of Sector Skills Councils in Australia

Erica Smith

Abstract *This paper throws light on the history of skills councils in Australia from their formal introduction in the 1990s to the present day. Skills councils are important elements of the vocational education and training system, providing two key, and linked, inputs into the vocational education and training (VET) system: they develop the competency standards underpinning the qualifications delivered in VET (Training Packages), and they provide information about industry needs for VET training. They are highly political, as stakeholder groups vie for control of the system; hence during the past thirty years there have been several reorganisations of the system. There has been little research on the topic. The paper describes the four main iterations of the skills council systems over time, using key documents, some no longer available publicly, as well as the author's own experience in and with the system, and her own research, some unpublished, into the topic. To illustrate the political nature of the system, a case study is provided of the interventions over time by one of the three major economy-wide employer peak bodies. The paper ends with suggestions for further research, and an Appendix documents the major reports of the 2000s and 2010s, including brief summaries, to assist future researchers.*

Title *From Industry Training Advisory Bodies to Jobs and Skills Councils: A Contribution to the History of Sector Skills Councils in Australia*

Keywords *Skills Councils, Industry Input to VET, VET Stakeholders, VET Curriculum*

Prof. Dr. Erica Smith (Federation University);
e.smith@federation.edu.au;

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0891-7388>;

© Erica Smith 2025, published by transcript Verlag.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (BY) license.

1 Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the development of sector skills councils in Australia from the 1990s to 2023. *Sector skills council* is a commonly-used term internationally to refer to entities representing industry sectors, with the primary purpose of providing advice to governments about skills need in their industries, but often with additional responsibilities. As the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2021, p. i) states, “a sectoral approach to skills development allows key stakeholders to identify the skills challenges in their sector and to collectively develop solutions. It allows greater ownership of the problems and solutions, and enables new partnerships to be formed, often amongst actors that have not worked together before on skills issues. Sectoral approaches typically require some form of institutional set-up that brings together key stakeholders”. Formalised skills council arrangements were introduced in many countries in the 1990s (ILO, 2021, p. xv); this pattern was seen in Australia, although informal arrangements existed previously. Terms for the entities vary from country to country; in Australia, over most of the period 1990 to 2025, four main terms have been used successively, as arrangements have changed, with the two iterations *Industry Training Advisory Body* (ITAB) and *Industry Skills Council* having the most longevity. The current term is Jobs and Skills Councils, named to align with a recently-formed national body Jobs and Skills Australia.

The evolution of sector skills councils in many countries (e. g. in Chile Contraras, 2023; in the UK Perryman, 2023) shows contestation and controversy. This is not surprising, considering that skills councils bring together representatives from differing stakeholder groups, with the tripartite partners – government, employers and trade unions – being the most common core; these groups have differing goals and agendas. To add to the complexity, in Australia, as in some other countries, there are skills councils at jurisdictional level as well as national level. Australia has six States and two, smaller, Territories. As States and Territories (hereafter called states for the sake of brevity) provide funding for the training taking place in their jurisdictions, VET structures differ considerably across states (Smith, 2014), and skills councils often do not align across states.

This is a complex and ever-changing field, and little is written about skills councils and their development. This paper was written as *a contribution to the history*, adopting the term used by Churchill in his books on the Second World War; he considered that they could not be described at that point as “history” (Churchill, 1948, p. vii) due to the recency of the events. Churchill had been the British Prime Minister throughout the war, and based his books largely on his own experiences and written records. In the same way, but with my experiences at a lower level, of course, I have incorporated my own experiences in and with skills councils into this otherwise “untold or neglected story” (Schrag, 2021, p. 91), which also reports, in part, on recent events.

The paper is based on a number of primary sources, published and unpublished (Neuman, 2012, p. 333): government reports, consultancy reports and other documents. Some reports are no longer publicly available, or were never published, but I had retained copies, primarily hard copies. Additionally, the paper draws on my own working experience and research. I have had experience as a manager and advisory committee member in national and State skills councils in two sectors over several points of time and worked with several skills councils as partners in a range of funded research. I have

used records of my own correspondence and notes, for example notes from meetings, in the same way as Churchill (1948) did, albeit at a different level. I have utilised my recollections (Neuman, 2012, p. 334), albeit my own and not others, as is more common. In a sense my role could be seen as that of a research 'informant' (Denzin, 1989, p. 73–74) or an 'observant participant' (Seim, 2024).

I have also included data from my own specific research into skills councils at key points over the past 25 years: for example, research in 2004 into the aftermath of the removal of national funding from ITABs, participation in a review of a State ITAB system (2007), an international comparison of skills councils (2010) and a recent comparison of State ITAB-like entities within Australia (2024).

The topic is explored here chronologically, with periodisation (Schrag, 2021, p. 77) by different iterations of skills council structures. The paper provides a complete chronical of formalised skills councils in Australia, which began in the 1990s as in other countries (ILO, 2021, p. xv). While it describes the Australian situation, from time to time international comparison (Schrag, 2021, p. 88; Neuman, 2012, p. 439) is used to help explain the significance of Australian developments.

This topic is not well-documented or researched, and policy developments have tended to become lost. A key source of VET policy history is the 'inquiries and reviews' section of the knowledge bank (VOCEDplus, n.d.) maintained by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, a government-supported body responsible for collecting VET-sector statistics and for supporting and carrying out research requested by Australian federal and States governments. But only one national review of skills councils is listed, the 2010–2011 'Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils' by the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The other inquiries and reviews on skills councils listed in the knowledge bank are reviews carried out at State level, and only four of those are reported, two from the 1990s (Victoria and Queensland), one from the 2010s (Western Australia) and one from the 2010s (New South Wales). Reference to some of these and to other state-level reviews at other dates can be found in the literature, but copies are not publicly available. Some of the other national reports about VET in the 'knowledge bank' contain content on skills councils, which has been used to justify changes in skills councils policy and structures; the most notable of these is the 'Joyce review' of 2019. But it is not apparent from their titles that they discuss skills councils. It seems, then, that much of the history of skills councils in Australia is hidden from view, and the intent of this paper is to uncover and explain that history.

Following a literature review and a brief overview of the evolution of the Australian system of skills councils, the four major sections of the paper cover the four iterations of sector skills council history in Australia since the 1990: ITABs, Industry Skills Councils, Industry Reference Committees supported by Skills Service Organisations, and Jobs and Skills Councils. Within each section there is an overview of developments, and, where relevant, an account of the author's involvement in the field and the author's relevant research. A major theme of the history is the actions of stakeholder groups, particularly employer bodies. Following the four main sections of the paper, a case study documents key interventions of one such body, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. An Appendix to the paper provides a listing of relevant government reports and discussion papers, some of which are not publicly available

The VET system in Australia, as in other countries (Burgi & Gonon, 2022), changes constantly. It is important to state that this paper does not set out to provide a history of the VET architecture over the period covered, but only of skills councils, with other structures mentioned only where directly relevant.

2 Background and Literature

Skills councils are generally viewed as prime examples of industry-VET linkage. It is interesting to note that, although skills councils are designed to improve the supply of skills to national economies (among other features), they generally only link with VET systems, rather than with higher education systems as well. Skills councils straddle the ‘macro’ level and ‘meso’ level of industry linkage (Hoang Dang, 2016): ‘macro’ because they involve governing bodies, but ‘meso’ because they are at an industry sector level. ‘Micro-level’ involvement refers to local engagements between the VET sector and employers. Raddon and Sung (2006) argue that skills councils are the best way of engaging employers in VET, to move from a ‘supply-side’ focus for VET to a ‘demand-side’ focus.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), an agency of the United Nations, as part of its ‘decent work’ agenda advises countries on setting up skills councils systems, and has developed a 68-page resource guide (ILO, 2021), with a shorter 12-page policy note that was developed for Indonesia, but which has relevance for all countries (ILO, 2019). The ILO (2021, p. 31) states that skills councils are commonly tripartite and are formed along specific industry lines, for example construction or health. Coverage may be wide or quite narrow, and/or may focus on priority sectors, sometimes sectors that are important for economic strategy or to trial the concept before rolling it out more widely (ILO, 2021, p. 3).

The ILO (2021) discusses advantages and disadvantages of three models: ‘employer only’ models, tripartite models and also of what they call ‘tripartite plus’, where other sector stakeholders are include. The document provides examples of countries adopting the different models, with, for example Singapore and Chile utilising the employer-only model; Australia and Sri Lanka the tripartite model, and India and New Zealand the ‘tripartite plus’ model (ILO, 2021, p 31). An international comparison by Raddon and Sung (2006) identified several different models, one of which was ‘employer-involved’, including voluntary engagement of employers in skills councils, statutory engagement of employers in financing VET (presumably via a levy); and employer-owned skills councils which employers funded.

Despite their importance, skills councils have been relatively neglected in recent international literature, a similar situation to that noted in earlier Australian literature (Wooden, 1997; Butterworth, 1993). In the UK, Ashton (2006) attributes the lack of attention to the fact that sector skills councils focus on the role of employers, a factor often under-researched in scholarly literature.

While more recently there has been more literature on employer linkages with VET, a continued lack of scholarly attention to skills councils was highlighted by Smith & Somers (2024). The authors trawled the contents of five major VET journals and the proceedings/papers from four conferences, for papers on industry-VET linkages for

the ten years 2013–2023. The journals analysed were the following: *International Journal of Training Research, Vocations and Learning*, *International Journal of Training and Development*, *TVET@Asia*, *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. The four conferences were those of the International Network on Innovative Apprenticeship (INAP), the Journal of Vocational Education and Training, the Australian VET Research Association, and the Researching Work and Learning conference (only part available),

While 37 journal articles and 54 conference papers were found to be about industry-VET linkages, these focused almost entirely on local linkages (Pan, 2019) or on apprenticeship arrangements, especially in Europe (Duemmler, 2023). There were no journal articles, and only three conference papers (Contreras, 2023; Smith, 2022; Whatmore et al., 2019), specifically addressing skills councils. Contreras (2023) reported on mixed views among stakeholders about the role of skills councils and even queries whether their objectives were achievable.

While there is a lack of scholarly literature, two detailed international examples, the UK and South Africa, were provided in a 2023 international webinar on skills councils presented by the International Labour Organization to 490 government and other stakeholder. They provide insight into the ways in which skills councils may constantly evolve and change, or alternatively may have more stable histories. Simon Perryman, a former UK government official, reported on the UK. The UK had 18 Sector Skills Councils in 2023. The Sector Skills Councils had been strongest in the 2000s, with 25 in place overseen by a Sector Skills Development Agency. At that time, they were responsible for developing the then National Occupational standards. Perryman (2023) reports that there were only 18 in existence by 2023 and that they were weaker, diffuse, and no longer funded by government. They had moved towards an employer focus rather than tripartite arrangements, and relied on project funding. They had reportedly 'lost status as trusted partners' (Perryman, 2023) and employer satisfaction was uneven across industry areas and overall lukewarm.

South Africa's situation was presented by Thabo Moshongoane, from the Mining Skills Authority, a skills council. In 2023 there were 21 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA), carrying out a range of activities, including describing industry skill needs, promoting work placements, and allocating grants to employers, training providers and workers. SETAs had been in existence since 2000, evolving from previous 'Industry Training Bodies'; there had been some changes over time, including SETA amalgamations. (Moshongoane, 2023). The SETAs were highly structured, with tripartite representation, a wide range of functions, and links to the Department of Higher Education and Training and were embedded into national skills processes (Moshongoane, 2023). They all had clear titles reflecting their industry areas. e.g. Manufacturing, Engineering and Related SETA (MERSETA), and Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA). SETAs were funded through a process introduced via a Skills Development Levies Act 1999. The levy is paid by employers to DHET, depending on industry area; 80 % was then directed to the relevant SETA and 20 % to the 'national skills forum'. It was, however, reported that the SETAs were short of funds, and that there was no specific training program for staff of the SETAs.

A recent desk-based study by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (Siekmann & Circelli, 2021), focusing on higher-level engagement of industry with VET,

helps to fill the gap in the absence of scholarly literature. The authors found differing methods of industry involvement among six countries which they investigated, selected as having relatively similar VET systems to Australia's (Siekmann & Circelli, 2021, p.11). They found that only two anglophone countries, Canada and UK, had clear skills councils systems. New Zealand's strong Industry Training Organisation system was at that time about to be restructured to a system of Workforce Development Councils. The new system has been implemented (Tertiary Education Commission, n.d.), although Industry Training Organisations still exist, and a recent change in government in New Zealand has made the future of the country's Workforce Development Councils unclear (Chan, 2024).

Siekmann and Circelli (2021) regard the network of skills councils (which at that time, Industry Reference Committees and Skills Service Organisations) as an important element of industry's links to VET as one example of their category 'industry councils appointed by government' (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Industry representation in VET in Australia



Note. From *Industry's role in VET governance: Using international insights to inform new practices* (p. 3), by G. Siekmann & M. Circelli, 2021, NCVER. Copyright 2021 by NCVER.

Figure 1 also illustrates other ways in which 'industry' can be involved with the VET system and its policy, including the direct involvement of employer associations and trade unions, and/or their peak bodies (for example, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry); and involvement of individual employers.

While many of these types of industry bodies can be seen in other countries, the authors of Figure 1 point out that differences in governance structures, and historical and socio-cultural differences mean that it is difficult to compare countries' systems (Siekmann & Circelli, 2021, p. 6); this problem, of course, applies to most aspects of VET systems.

3 Brief Overview of Australia's Skills Council History

Industry advisory arrangements had been in place before 1990 in the jurisdictions (states and territories), but they were not formalised or standardised. The advent of competency-based training, however, meant that bodies were needed to develop the CBT curriculum, which by 1997 was manifested in national Training Packages (Smith & Keating, 2003). This role was given to national ITABs, which normally involved the State entities too. The role of sector skills councils in Training Package development has continued to the present (Smith, 2023), but the skills councils have undergone many changes.

A brief timeline is provided below, followed by a short description of the changes:

- 1990: National competency-based training (CBT) began with the National Training Board developing competency standards.
- 1992: National Framework for the Recognition of Training for CBT curriculum.
- 1997: The advent of Training Packages, to be developed by Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) – Commonwealth and State – for all industry areas.
- 2002: Commonwealth Funding removed from State ITABs.
- 2003: National ITABs replaced by Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), with committees for constituent industry areas. 11 ISCs were formed, from 23 national ITABs¹.
- 2015: ISCs replaced by six Skills Service Organisations (SSOs), 'servicing' 67 Industry Reference Committees.
- 2020: The demise of Skills Service Organisations announced, ceased operations end of 2022. Three pilot 'Skills Organisations' were funded by government, and the formation of 'Industry Clusters' began.
- 2023: 10 Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) progressively confirmed (replacing the 'industry clusters' plan), and commenced operations.

As can be seen from this timeline, many changes occurred to these bodies. The network of national and State ITABs collapsed first, as the Commonwealth government removed funding in 2002 from State ITABs, which had been co-funded by national and State governments. Then in 2003, national ITABs were replaced by Industry Skills Councils. There were only 11 of these, replacing 29 national ITABs in existence in 2003 (Smith & Keating, 2003, p.). As the Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) necessarily covered a range of industries, each ISC established a number of industry or 'advisory' sub-committees, for example committees for training for the retail industry or the security industry. The sub-committees oversaw Industry Skills Council staff in the maintenance and review of national Training Packages, and a number of ancillary activities, including the development of what were known as 'Training Package support materials' which typically included teacher guides to assist with delivering the material, and learner workbooks.

Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) were themselves abolished after only 12 years of existence, and replaced in 2015 by a new model where Training Packages were developed by 'Industry Reference Committees' which were 'serviced' by 'Skills Service Organisations' (SSOs). As the Skills Service Organisations often lacked expertise, a 'Training Package

1 At some point the 11 Industry Skills Councils became 12, but the date of this change is unclear.

Quality Assurance Panel' of consultants was established, who could be hired to assist Skills Service Organisations in Training Package work. The reason for the change to this new system was not publicly stated, but it seems likely it was due to employer body pressure. (Later in this paper, an example is provided of a series of interventions by one such body.) The new system was quickly found to be flawed (Joyce, 2019, to be discussed in detail later in the paper) and SSO contracts were renewed only for a short period (due to COVID). After the advent of a new government in 2022, Jobs and Skills Councils were then created.

While many factors influence the changes to the systems, it is worth recording the nature of the governments over this period of recent history (Table 1). In Australia, two conservative parties – the Liberals and the Nationals – unite to form governments; the Labour party is left-leaning.

Table 1: Political parties forming government over the period 1991–2025

Labor government (left-leaning) and relevant prime minister(s)	Liberal-National government (right-leaning) and relevant prime-minister(s)
1991–1996 (Keating) 2007–2013 (Rudd, Gillard then Rudd) 2022-date (Albanese)	1996–2007 (Howard) 2013–2022 (Abbott, Turnbull, then Morrison)

It is generally accepted that trade unions have more influence in national policy under a Labor government. Differences arising from the political orientation of the government may be discernible in the 'privatisation' of the skills council system in 2015 under a Liberal-National government, and the initial formation of 'industry clusters', which were also privatised. After Labor's accession to power in 2022, the 'industry cluster' plan became 'Jobs and Skills Councils' which had mandatory trade union representation on their Boards. The name for the entities aligned with a tripartite Jobs and Skills Summit which the new Labour government held in September 2022, and with a renamed national skills body, Jobs and Skills Australia.

The paper now moves onto a detailed discussion of the four manifestations of skills councils since the 1990s: ITABs, Industry Skills Councils, Industry Reference Committees supported by Skills Service Organisations, and Jobs and Skills Councils. The Appendix lists and briefly summarises a number of government reports and discussion papers from 2000 to 2019, some of which are not publicly available. These reports provide the background to many of the changes discussed in the paper.

4 First Manifestation: Industry Training Advisory Bodies

4.1 Industry Training Advisory Bodies: Description

The origins of ITABs (industry Training Advisory Bodies) are not clear. Butterworth (1993, p. 26), at the time a senior official in the NSW TAFE Commission, described ITABs as ‘hav(ing) been with us for a considerable period at both the national and state level’ and having ‘significant input’ into the VET system. Similarly, Misko et al (2005, p. 21) refer to ITABs and similar bodies ‘that had been operating in the past’. While there is very little available literature on their prior development, Wooden (1997, p. 7) provides some insight. He refers to Industry Training Committees or Councils which had been set up, with ‘modest subsidies’ in the 1970s. He mentions overlap with existing ‘apprenticeship advisory committees’ within states, and the eventual merging into State-based ITABs by the early 1980s (Wooden, 1997, p. 7). Wooden notes that in their early days they often operated as training providers, but that this ceased by the end of the 1980s due to the removal of commonwealth funding for that activity. Wooden (1997) states that in the early 1990s there were found to be 176 industry advisory bodies but that following a review in 1993, only 18 national ITABs remained by 1995, with the State networks being rationalised.

What did ITABs do? Butterworth (1993) states that ITABs, representing sometimes one industry or sometimes a group of similar industry areas usually had industry, union and government representatives – i.e. a typical tripartite representation (Burgi & Gonon, 2022; International Labour Organization, 2021) – and that the relevant layer of government provided executive support. The relevant government provided a ‘charter’ for the spheres of operation; generally the purpose of ITABs was to determine industry’s training needs, but some had other activities, for example some delivered training.

A key feature of the national training reform agenda was the development of the Australian system of competency-based training (CBT). CBT became utilised in VET in the late 1980s in certain industries at the same time as it was being adopted in other countries, such as the U.K. CBT became more embedded in Australia when a body called the National Training Board was instituted by the Commonwealth (national) government, with the agreement of the eight state and territory governments in 1990, to oversee the development of competency standards. The development was undertaken through approved ‘Competency Standards Bodies’, who were often the ITABs (Smith & Keating, 2003, p.126). The bodies were required to be tripartite (Misko et al., 2005, p 21).

While ITABs had existed previously, they became more prominent at this point because of their role in developing competency standards. In 1997 the introduction of national Training Packages to replace the more disparate competency standards led to further consolidation and regularization of ITABs’ position. National ITABs were given the role of, and funding for, developing Training Packages (Bowman & McKenna, 2016, p. 15–16), usually with the assistance of their state counterparts. Training Packages consist of a number of qualifications and constituent units of competency, with consistent structures and content; they are generally industry-based (Smith & Keating, 2003)². By

2 Training Packages, qualifications and units of competency are publicly available on the national training register, at www.training.gov.au.

the early 2000s there were over 80 Training Packages, although a process of consolidation has since reduced the number, to 55 in 2025. Competency based training has had many opponents from the beginning, and still does; the arguments around the nature of CBT, and the system of CBT in Australia over thirty years, are described by Smith (2022).

Thus by the late 1990s the role of ITABs became clearly linked to the development of Training Packages. At this time, 23 national ITABs and six other recognised bodies covered most industry areas and were each managed by Boards which contained representatives from industry, unions and other stakeholders (Smith & Keating, 2003). By the end of the 1990s the list of ITABS was as follows (Smith & Keating, 2003, pp. 149–151):

- Australian Light Manufacturing ITAB (ALMitab)
- Australian Seafood Industry Council
- Automotive Training Australia Ltd
- Business Services Training Australia
- Community Services and Health Training Australia
- Construction Training Australia
- Culture Research Education & Training Enterprise Australia (CREATE Aust.)
- Electrocoms and Energy Utilities Qualifications Standards Body of Australia (EE-OZ)
- Forest & Forest Products Employment Skills Company Ltd
- Information Technology & Telecommunications (IT&T) ITAB
- Manufacturing Learning Australia
- Manufacturing, Engineering & Related Services ITAB
- National Finance ITAB
- National Food Industry Training Council Ltd
- National Mining ITAB
- National Training Advisory Ltd (Local Government ITAB)
- National Wholesale Retail & Personal Services Industry Training Council (National WRAPS)
- Property Services Training Australia
- Public Safety ITAB
- Rural Training Council of Australia Inc.
- Sport & Recreation Training Australia Pty Ltd
- Tourism Training Australia
- Transport & Distribution Training Australia (TDT Australia)

There were also some non-ITAB bodies which performed similar functions. After ANTA was formed they became 'ANTA Recognised Bodies'. The bodies were:

- Australian Drilling Industry Training Committee Ltd
- National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council
- National Correctional Services Advisory Committee
- Public Service Education and Training Australia
- Racing Training Australia
- National Printing Industry Training Council

At the State level, ITABs sometimes matched the industry area of the National ITABs but were sometimes aligned differently. In smaller States and Territories there were generally fewer ITABs, with wider industry coverage. Highly political organisations, and underfunded for the work they did, ITABs were constantly under threat from employer bodies keen to access the available government funding for liaison with industry, and differences between State and National ITABs in some industry areas led to inefficiencies. ANTA spent a great deal of effort on reviewing ITAB operations around the turn of the century but early in 2002 a surprise announcement as part of the Commonwealth (federal) Budget removed federal funding for State ITABs, over a transition period. As State governments only supplemented federal funding (sometimes dollar for dollar but sometimes at a lower rate) this left most State ITABs very vulnerable, and some closed down or amalgamated.

To improve industry links with Training Packages, national ITABs used strenuous efforts to involve relevant industries and enterprises as widely as possible. The State ITABs performed a different and often under-estimated role. They represented the needs of their industry areas to their State and Territory governments, advocating for funding and changes in course and module offerings, as well as promoting the value of training, and recognised training in particular, to enterprises. Moreover, State as well as national ITABs were often utilised by many stakeholders as the first point of contact with industry training, for example when carrying out research, evaluation or best practice projects. For organisations with such a pivotal role in the VET system, they were surprisingly underfunded with around \$17m AUD per annum allocated federally in 2001. State ITABs in particular found their perceived under-funding a barrier to effective performance. In other countries, such as New Zealand by contrast, Industry Training Organisations at that time were relatively well-funded and perform a wider range of functions (Williams, 2001).

Despite the pivotal role played by ITABs, there was relatively little published about their operations. Much of the literature tended to fall into three main categories:

- Description of ITAB operations and the main roles of ITABs (e.g. Butterworth, 1993, as discussed above; Fitzpatrick, 1997; Paton, 1998)
- Reports and recommendations on ITAB governance and effectiveness (Bodman, 1994; Department of Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR), Queensland, n.d.; Office of Training & Further Education (OTFE), Victoria, 1999; South Australian Training Development Group (TDG), 2000)
- Studies of employer perceptions of ITABs (Sylow, Driessen & Robertson, 1995; Wooden, 1997a, 1998)

Few major studies were carried out. The exceptions were a project which identified the major functions of ITABs through the use of 'best practice' case studies (Marson, 1995), and Wooden (1997b) the larger study on which the journal paper on employer perceptions was based. The larger study included consultations with over 20 ITAB staff as well as with a telephone employer survey of employers (n=293). The Australian National Training Authority commissioned a review of national ITABs, by the consulting group Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) in 2001, which is listed and discussed in the Appendix to this paper.

4.2 Author's Experience in ITABs

From late 2000 until early 2002, in a break from academic work, I was Executive Director of the Wholesale, Retail and Personal Services (WRAPS) ITAB in the state of South Australia. Retail had been my own industry area before working in VET and then universities; hence I was able to bring industry knowledge to the role. I contributed to the development and review of seven national Training Packages and their support materials, coordinated by the national WRAPS ITAB, which was a tripartite Board. The seven Training Packages were: Wholesale, Retail, Community Pharmacy, Hairdressing, Beauty, Funeral Services and Floristry. My involvement included contributions to national meetings with industry leaders and state governments.

I was employed by a management committee of industry stakeholders. The ITABs received very limited Commonwealth and State funding, and some earned additional income. In the case of my ITAB, this income was from research projects, sub-letting rooms in its leased office space, and producing manuals for certain industry sectors. At one point I needed to make my own job part-time to manage the finances until the next funding instalment. Despite having only one other staff member, I also produced a three-year industry training plan for the seven industries for the State, liaised with TAFE (the public VET provider) and other registered training organisations (RTOs) in these seven industry areas, worked closely with the state department responsible for VET, and contributed to South Australian developments in VET in Schools, industry plans, and in apprenticeships and traineeships. I was part of an active State network of ITABs in all industry areas, and a national network of State ITABs in the WRAPS area; all of the latter had similar industry coverage. The collective knowledge and expertise were immense.

4.3 Author's Research Into ITABs

4.3.1 Qualitative Research Into State ITAB Networks 2004

While the Commonwealth government ceased funding State ITABS and some closed, most States rallied and reformed their networks. I was interested in how both the closures and the rallying occurred. With a colleague from the State ITAB network, I commenced a small project, never published, to examine the situation following the withdrawal of Commonwealth funding. The interviews which I carried out, and for which I have retained notes, were with:

- A representative of the Commonwealth department at that time responsible for VET (the Department of Education, Science and Training).
- A representative of the Australian National Training Authority, a government agency at that time responsible for many national VET arrangements and structures. (ANTA was itself closed in 2005, with all of its functions transferred to the Commonwealth department.)
- Two State government representatives of the departments at that time responsible for VET (New South Wales, the most populous state, and Tasmania, the least populous State).

- The director of the Industry Skills Council for the service industries (also director of the prior national ITAB in that area).

The interviewees were asked about the purposes of ‘an ITAB-type body’, about the strengths and weaknesses of the prior system, and about what was needed for ‘ITAB type bodies’ to operate effectively. Only a small amount of the research can be reported here, and so for brevity, the findings of the two national interviews were selected. The government interviewee indicated that the government had found the state ITAB system too unwieldy to manage (“too much of a bureaucracy in its own right”) but the decision to withdraw funding was “not easy”; the Department still appreciated and utilised the expertise that existed within the remaining bodies. The ANTA interviewee said that the removal of funding had made it difficult to negotiate with state governments as there was no funding lever, and reported that the new national Industry Skills Councils were experiencing difficulties with the emerging differences among states. Both interviewees reported a preference for industry expertise rather than VET expertise among staff, while stating that the interests of employers and VET should be balanced. They saw ITAB staff needing extra skills in industry areas that had less history and culture of training.

4.3.2 Information Arising From a Western Australian Project on State ITABs 2007

As the result of an invitation to assist a consultancy firm with a review of the Western Australian ITAB systems, one of the state reviews mentioned earlier, I was provided with a useful summary document of State ITAB arrangements across Australia³. This document showed the following situation in 2007, illustrating the continuation of the ITAB network, but in different forms in different States.

- New South Wales: 20 industry advisory bodies were funded, at \$50,000 AUD each by the State government. Most had only one part-time staff member. They provide advice on industry skill needs, but did not produce an Industry Training Plan.
- Queensland: Some ITABs amalgamated and continued to operate on State funding, but those contracts expired at the end of 2006. Five Skills Alliances were funded for various broad industry areas, receiving \$250,000 AUD each per annum. Four contracts went to prior ITABS.
- South Australia created nine Industry Skills Boards in 2005, receiving \$140,000 per annum.
- Victoria had 11 ITABs and five Industry Advisory Bodies, funded to a total of \$1m per annum.
- Tasmania had no State-funded ITABs. A building and construction ITAB was funded by a levy. Three government officials performed the work previously undertaken by ITABs.
- Northern Territory had six Training Advisory Councils.
- The Australia Capital Territory had five ITABS which were funded ‘on a fee for service basis’. The contracts were due to expire in 2007.

3 Document ‘Industry Advisory Arrangements in Other States’ (As of February 2007).

At the time of the review, Western Australian ITABs were funded for \$115,000 AUD each p.a. As part of the consultancy project, there were consultations with peak industry bodies, a government Skills Taskforce, ITABs, and stakeholders. There were also two public consultations, with large numbers of attendees. I participated in six interviews, covering industry peak bodies and associations, major employers and ITAB committee members, and contributed to the main report.

The report that was produced for the steering committee for the project (Quantum Consulting, 2007) identified attributes of successful and not-so-successful ITABs. The attributes of successful ITABs included the presence of a high quality executive officer, broad industry representation on the board, with amicable relationships; they produced data that were forward-looking and which were used by government or stakeholders, and they had additional funded projects, which not only brought in extra income, but also improve relevant knowledge (Quantum Consulting 2007, pp 3–4). At the time, the state government also utilised time-limited ‘industry working groups’ which provided advice on specific matters; these were also evaluated. The report also examined the interactions of the State government’s Department of Education and Training (DET) with the ITABs, and the expressed support of stakeholders for a range of alternative models of industry advice. The conclusion reached by the consulting group was that the State Government should retain but refine the current ITAB model.

5 Second Manifestation: Industry Skills Councils

5.1 Industry Skills Councils: Developments

As noted earlier, national industry skills councils commenced in 2003 and continued until the end of 2015, when they were wound up to be replaced by the Skills Service Organisation-Industry Reference Committee system. There were only 11 Industry Skills Councils, replacing 29 national ITABs in existence in 2003 (Smith & Keating, 2003). As the smaller number of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) meant that each necessarily covered a range of industries, each ISC established a number of industry sub-committees. Table 2 shows the Industry Skills Councils and the Training Packages which they managed.

ISCs had two main roles: one relating to Training Packages, and the other to the provision of advice about industry developments. The first role of the ISCs was to develop, maintain and review national Training Packages, and to undertake a number of ancillary activities, including the development of what were known as ‘Training Package support materials’ which typically included teacher guides to delivering the material, and learner workbooks. In addition, the national ISCs were responsible for industry advice to government. They produced ‘Environmental Scans’ for each of their industry areas each year. These covered industry developments and the associated labour market developments, workforce development needs and the implications for VET. They also included Training Package information that would be useful for stakeholder groups. The Service Skills Australia 2010 Environmental Scan, for example (Service Skills Australia, 2010), was 32 pages long, and had 23 additional pages of appendices including details of all changes to each Training Packages and detailed mapping of occupations in demand.

Table 2: Industry Skills Councils and their Training Package scope

Industry Skills Council	No. of Training Packages	Training Package names
Agri-food Industry Skills Council	5	Food, beverages and pharmaceuticals; Rural and related industries; Meat processing; Seafood; Racing.
Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council	2	Community services; Health
Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council	2	Property services; Construction.
ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council (EE-Oz)	4	Electrotechnology; Gas sector; Generation sector; Transmission, distribution and rail.
Forestry, Wood, Paper and Timber Products Industry Skills Council (ForestWorks)	2	Pulp and paper manufacturing; Forest and forest products.
Government and Community Safety Industry Skills Council	6	Correctional services; Water industry; Public safety; Public sector; Local government; Translating & interpreting.
Innovation and Business Industry Skills Council (Innovation and Business Skills Australia)	6	Business Services: Financial Services; Information and communications technology; Printing and graphic arts; cultural and related industries; Education.
Manufacturing Industry Skills Council	12	Manufacturing; Automotive manufacturing; Automotive retail sales and repair; Aerospace; Chemicals hydrocarbons and refining; Competitive manufacturing; Furnishing; Laboratory operations; Manufactured mineral products; Metal and engineering; Plastics, rubber and cablemaking; Textiles, clothing & footwear.
SkillsDMC National Industry Skills Council	4	Drilling; Mining; Quarrying; Civil infrastructure
Services Industry Skills Council (Service Skills Australia)	11	Beauty; Community pharmacy; Floristry; Funeral services; Hairdressing; Holiday parks and resorts; Hospitality; Sport, fitness and recreation; Retail; Tourism; Wholesale.
Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council	5	Road transport; Rail; Warehouse and storage; Maritime; Aviation.

Initially, training providers were excluded from the governing bodies of VET and from Training Package development processes, with those responsible claiming that industry should own all processes, but this decision was reversed during the decade, with training providers allowed to participate in important committees and to comment on

Training Packages. The Boards of ISCs included employer and trade union representatives, who were sometimes at odds over the content and format of Training Packages and qualifications, with trade unions, for example, seeking to protect industrial relations privileges including preferential arrangements for apprenticeships (Smith, 2010). Even after agreement on Training Packages had been reached through Boards, further steps needed to be followed. Firstly, all State and Territory governments had to be consulted and then the new or revised Training Package was submitted to a national committee for endorsement.

While the Industry Skills Councils continued for 12 years, there were periods of uncertainty. ISCs had been set up from 2004 as private companies, receiving \$15 million AUD per annum each, to map industry skill needs and to develop Training Packages. As they were private companies they relied on the government income, and in 2006 several were on the verge of bankruptcy when the federal government threatened to withdraw funding (Morris, 2006).⁴ While the ISCs' funding was then assured for an additional 15 months, there were further periods of uncertainty.

5.2 Author's Experience With Industry Skills Councils

I worked closely with several of the Industry Skills Councils in a range of ways. For example, I was commissioned by Service Skills Australia to undertake two research projects, and incorporated several industry skills councils as industry partners or project reference group members on national research projects which I led. In addition, I frequently interviewed ISC managers and staff in other research projects. I also collaborated with the Industry Skills Council Innovation and Business Skills Australia, responsible for VET teacher qualifications *inter alia*, in another capacity.

As a detailed example, one of my research projects, about skill in occupations, included two ISCs as formal industry partners, providing a deep insight into the operations of ISCs and their benefits for the system. An extract follows from a submission to the 2014 government review 'Industry engagement in Training Package Development', submitted on behalf of the team of researchers which I managed (Federation University, 2014). As explained in the 'Third manifestation' section of this paper, the 2014 government review was seeking to remove Training Package Development from ISCs, and the submission was written to explain the expertise residing in ISCs. The extract is:

This paper argues that the system for Training Package development should be left with the Industry Skills Councils, in accordance with the current practice. The system works well on the whole, and any problems with particular Training Packages or industry areas should be addressed individually within the current system.

The paper is written on behalf of a team of researchers who have been working with Industry Skills Councils for three years on a project funded by the Australian Research Council: '*Recognising the skill in jobs traditionally considered unskilled*'. In this research project we examined, in detail, nine occupations from a range of industries that are covered in total by three Industry Skills Councils (ISCs). Two of the ISCs (Manufacturing

4 An evaluation report was undertaken by the Department of Education, Science and Training- see Appendix.

Skills Australia and Service Skills Australia) have contributed funding and staff time for three years towards the project, and the third, the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council, has contributed staff time as the project developed.

Our experiences working on this project have confirmed our previous experiences that ISCs form an essential part of the VET system. They possess an immense amount of knowledge and experience both about the VET system and about the industries which they serve. Staff display a passionate commitment to their industries and occupations, to attracting the right people to their industries through careers and other initiatives, and to producing qualifications that are high quality and meet the needs of industry. In this project we have seen first-hand the deep contacts that ISCs have within their industries. They have been able to gather high-level industry personnel (from small and big businesses alike, as well as employer and employee associations) to attend consultation forums on products of our research, and to consult by telephone. An example of such events was a series of consultations on the findings from our industry-level interviews and company case studies.

These consultations, arranged by the ISCs, took place in Sydney in November 2013, and up to 20 people attended each of the nine events. The ISCs have since forwarded our analyses to their internal and external Training Package expert developers for comment. They have devoted the time of their own senior managers to liaising with us and providing advice on our research so that the best possible results are obtained for their industries and for Australia.

They are open to ideas for improvement, and shared their ideas and Training Package update information with us willingly. In our visits to companies, many of which we arranged independently from the ISCs, we have learned first-hand about the engagement of those companies with their ISCs and the close relationships that exist and that have been developed over time. In short, our experience indicates close and trusting relationships between industry and ISCs (Federation University, 2014, p. 1–2).

The activities reported in this submission were typical of, if more intensive than, my other research project engagements.

5.3 Author's Research Relating to Industry Skills Councils

Based on international contacts made during international visits and research projects, I began a project, with a colleague, involving comparative desk research into Skills Councils in four countries in 2010. The research showed that there were far fewer entities in Australia than in the other countries. New Zealand, with a much smaller population than the other countries, had the greatest number of skills councils at that time.

- Australia: 11 Industry Skills Councils
- New Zealand: 39 Industry Training Organisations
- U.K.: 24 Skills Councils
- Canada: 33 Industry Skills Councils

Canada was the only country which appeared to have a peak body for Skills Councils: The Alliance of Sector Councils.

The Training Package listing for each Industry Skills Council in Australia (see Table 2) was utilised to prepare a comparison of industry areas for the skills councils across the four countries. Table 3 provides a summary of the comparison that was undertaken.

Table 3 indicates the uneven matching across countries, which of course potentially becomes more uneven each time a country re-organises its own system. International linkages by industry bodies and trade unions will inevitably be affected by the uneven matching and constant changes.

Table 3: Comparison of Skills Councils of United Kingdom, Canada and New Zealand with those in Australia, 2010

Australia	United Kingdom	Canada	New Zealand
Agri-food Industry Skills Council	Improve- Food and drink Sector Skills Council	BioTalent Canada; Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council; Canadian Council of Professional Fish Harvesters; Canadian Food Industry Council; National Seafood Sector Council	Agriculture Industry Training Organisation; New Zealand Primary Industry Training Organisation; New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Limited; NZ Equine Industry Training Organisation; New Zealand Horticulture Industry Training Organisation
Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council	Skills for Health; Skills for Care & Development	Child Care Human Resources Sector Council; Human Resource Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector (HRVS)	Community Support Services ITO Limited; Te Kaiawhina Ahumahi Social Services Industry Training Organisation Inc
Construction and Property Service Industry Skills Council	Asset + Skills; Construction Skills; Summit Skills	Construction Sector Council	Building and Construction Industry Training Organisation; Opportunity - The Training Organisation; Building Service Contractors of New Zealand Incorporated; Joinery Industry Training Organisation; REINZ (Real Estate Industry) Industry Training Organisation; InfraTrain New Zealand

Australia	United Kingdom	Canada	New Zealand
ElectroComms and Energy Utilities Industry Skills Council Ltd (EE-Oz Training Standards)	Energy and Utility Skills	Electricity Sector Council	Electricity Supply Industry Training Organisation; ElectroTechnology Industry Training Organisation; Plumbing, Gasfitting and Draining ITO
Forestry, Wood, Paper and Timber Products Industry Skills Council (Forest Works)	Lantra	Forest Products Sector Council; Environmental Careers Organization of Canada (ECO); Wood Manufacturing Council	Forest Industries Training and Education Council (FITEC)
Government and Community Safety Industry Skills Council	Government Skills; Skills for Justice-Developing Skills for Safer Communities	Police Sector Council	Fire and Rescue Services Industry Training Organisation; Local Government Industry Training Organisation; Public Sector Training Organisation
Innovation and Business Industry Skills Council (Innovation and Business Skills Australia)	Creative and Cultural Skills; E-Skills UK; Lifelong Learning-UK; Financial Services Skills Council; Skill Set	Canadian Printing Industries Sector Council (CPISC); Cultural Human Resources Council; Aboriginal Human Resources Development Council of Canada; Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC); Contact Centre Canada	Communications and Media Industry Training Organisation; Creative Trades Industry Training Organisation Incorporated; Community Support Services ITO Limited

Australia	United Kingdom	Canada	New Zealand
Manufacturing Industry Skills Council	Cogent Skills for Science Based Industries; Proskills-making skills work; The Institute of Motor Industry Skill Fast- UK; Semta	Apparel Human Resources Council; Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council; Council for Automotive Human Resources; Canadian Plastics Sector Council; Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress; Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council (CSCSC); Petroleum Human Resources Council of Canada; Textiles Human Resources Council	Apparel and Textile Industry Training Organisation; Boating Industry Training Organisation; NZ Extractive Industries Training Organisation; NZ Flooring Industry Training Organisation; NZ Motor Industry Training Organisation Incorporated; Plastics and Materials Processing Industry Training Organisation Incorporated; Competenz
Services Industry Skills Council	People First; Skills Active-Shaping skills for the future; Skillsmart Retail	Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council	Aviation, Tourism and Travel Training Organisation; Hospitality Standards Institute; New Zealand Sports Turf Industry Training Organisation; NZ Hairdressing Industry Training Organisation Inc; Pharmacy Industry Training Organisation; Retail Institute; Retail Meat Industry Training Organisation Inc; Skills Active; Funeral Service Training Trust of New Zealand
SkillsDMC National Industry Skills Council		Mining Industry Human Resource Council (MiHR)	NZ Extractive Industries Training Organisation
Transport & Logistics Industry Skills Council	Go Skills-Moving Skills Forward; Skills for Logistics	Canadian Aviation Maintenance Council; Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council; Motor Carrier Passenger Council of Canada	Tranzqual ITO; Aviation, Tourism and Travel Training Organisation

6 Third Manifestation: Skills Service Organisations and Industry Reference Committees

6.1 Skills Service Organisations and Industry Reference Committees: Developments

Australian government discussion papers led to the abolition of Industry Skills Councils. Papers issued by the Department of Industry (2014a; 2014b) for consultation proposed a 'contestable' model for Training Package Development with more industry involvement, canvassing three different options. There was more detail about Training Package content in the second paper. These two government papers were followed by a third paper (Department of Education and Training, 2015) which outlined the new system. (See the Appendix for more detail about the papers.)

The system replacing Industry Skills Councils comprised:

- The Australian Industry and Skills Committee, consisting of industry representatives;
- Industry Reference Committees (IRCs) (n=67) for specific industry areas, established by the AISC; and
- Six Skills Service Organisations (SSOs), funded by the Australian government, which were to provide 'technical, operational and Secretariat' functions for the IRCs. (Whatmore et al., 2019).

The six Skills Service Organisation were as follows:

- SkillsIQ
- Artibus Innovation
- Skills Impact
- PwC's Skills for Australia
- Australian Industry Standards
- IBSA Manufacturing

Skills Service Organisations primarily worked on Training Package development. They were not required to produce environmental scans as Industry Skills Councils had done. Instead, Skills Service Organisations produced less comprehensive documents: 'Industry Skills Forecast and Proposed Schedule of Work', focused primarily on justifying proposed Training Package development work. For example, one with which the author was involved, covered the VET sector workforce and the Foundation Skills teaching workforce. Although the document was 46 pages long, it only included 12 pages about the industry's skills needs ('Industry Skills Forecast and proposed Schedule of Work', Education Industry, May 2018), which had previously been the main focus of the previous environmental scans.

This clearly cumbersome system was relatively short-lived. In a small-scale research study undertaken in 2018, Whatmore, Wyman and Seznov (2019) reported favourable comments from some stakeholders about the new system, for example approving of

the chance for more industry people to be directly involved in Training Package development. However, problems quickly emerged. A report commissioned to examine Australia's skill system (Joyce, 2019) found problems with the system (see Appendix for details of this report). Joyce was critical of the SSO model, citing slow development of qualifications as one problem, and recommended a new type of entity to be called 'Skills Organisations'. They were to be 'industry-owned and government registered' (Joyce, 2019, p. 2). As Siekmann and Circelli (2021) note, these proposed changes aligned with those in New Zealand which the consultant had initiated when he was Education Minister in that country in 2018. Three Skills Organisations were established as pilots and were later subsumed into the new system of Jobs and Skills Councils in the early 2020s (see below). The Skills Service Organisation contracts were renewed for only a short period of time, which, however, lengthened due to the advent of COVID-19. Their work, and that of the Industry Reference Committees, continued until 2022.

6.2 Author's Experience With SSOs and IRCs

I was appointed to the Education Industry Reference Committee in 2017 as an 'Industry Expert', serving alongside a number of VET sector stakeholders. This Industry Reference Committee was responsible for the Training and Education (TAE) Training Package (for VET teachers) and the Foundation Skills (FSK) Training Packages. The Skills Service Organisation was PwC's Skills for Australia, which looked after a number of other Industry Reference Committees as well. During the late 2010s in that role, I was a member of a national cross-industry Project Reference Group to develop national units of competency in Teamwork and Communication. I was also a member of working groups on various issues relating to approval of the Foundation Skills Training Package in 2019. I was then involved in the very intense and highly political work to redevelop the Training and Education Training Package, which had begun in early 2020 but was quickly halted due to COVID, and resumed in 2022.

The Skills Service Organisation, PwC's Skills for Australia, was a branch of PwC formed for this purpose. At that time PwC had a wide range of government business.⁵ Initially the staff resisted any substantial changes to the TAE Training Package, which were sorely needed, but eventually acceded. Compared to the skills and knowledge exhibited by the ITABs and Industry Skills Councils with which I had previously been involved, including the ISC responsible for the TAE Training package, the SSO staff mostly had very little understanding of VET, which was, of course, in this instance also the industry area with which they were dealing. They relied on Industry Reference Committee members to do most of the development work; yet, on the other hand, we were sometimes handed documents for approval which we had not contributed towards. An external Training Package expert was engaged by the Skills Service Organisation in the latter stages of the work.

5 It is interesting to note that PwC subsequently lost most of its government business following a scandal over disclosure of insider information about tax laws to companies. The matter was made public in 2022, but instances cited dated back to 2015 – the time the SSO contract was awarded.

My experiences with this Skills Service Organisation contrasted greatly with those I had experienced as a member of a quasi-ITAB, the ‘National Assessors and Workplace Trainers body’, during the period 2000–2003, in the development of the first Training Package in training and assessment, i.e. in the same industry area. In that role, I saw collective decision making, inclusion of the committee members in meetings with stakeholders, and knowledgeable staff.

My own experience of membership of an Industry Reference Committee was therefore less than satisfactory. I soon found that I was not alone. I was invited to government consultations in late 2019 for the development of the National Careers Institute, and National Skills Commission (later to become Jobs and Skills Australia). The National Skills Commission discussion included the proposal for Skills Organisations. I happened to be seated at a table where there were, including myself, three members of Industry Reference Committees, each serviced by different Skills Service Organisations (SSOs). In conversation, each person stated that his/her own SSO was dysfunctional – i.e. half of all SSOs.

7 Fourth Manifestation: Jobs and Skills Councils

7.1 Jobs and Skills Councils: Developments

This section commences with a brief description of the preliminary work which led to Jobs and Skills Councils: initial work on ‘industry clusters’ and Skills Organisations, and the transition to the new system of Jobs and Skills Councils.

7.1.1 Preliminary Work: Skills Organisation Pilots and Industry Clusters

Three Skills Organisations Pilots — in the human services care, digital technologies and mining industries — were established in 2020, in accordance with the recommendations of the Joyce review (2019). The contracts of the existing Skills Service Organisations had been extended, due to COVID, until the end of 2022. A consultants’ report on the pilots for the government department (Urbis 2022) reported that there had been confusion about their future role, but that it had been resolved with the announcement of industry clusters. The report also stated that the pilots’ projects were mainly being carried out through sub-contractors.

Work on the permanent new replacement structure commenced in late 2021. The formation of ‘Industry Clusters’ was advertised: “groups of aligned industries with a strategic leadership role to identify, forecast, and respond to the current and emerging skill needs and workforce changes of their industries”⁶. A two-stage grant application process was established, with a ‘dating website’ for organisations which might want to work together. While the tender documents suggested nine possible industry groupings, applicants could propose their own. \$292.5 million AUD was allocated for funding for the

6 This quotation is from an email sent to me in my capacity as an Industry Reference Committee member.

program over four years, and \$750,00 was available for each cluster for start-up costs. In essence, this was the same contestable model as the Skills Service Organisations.

Out of interest, I followed the tender process, signing up for email updates, and attended one of the information webinars, with permission from the government department. It was interesting that at the latter event, the department representatives were supported by a legal officer. I noted the immense amount of support offered to applicants, including a series of ‘frequently asked questions’ documents and information about very basic VET and workforce matters such as the Australian industry classification structure. 21 ‘addenda’ were added to the tender documents over a period of time. A new Labor government in 2022 continued with the Industry Clusters selection process, simply renaming the successful bodies Jobs and Skills Councils.

7.1.2 The New System: Jobs and Skills Councils

The new Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) were announced in late 2022/early 2023, and have contracts until the end of 2026. Their Boards are required to have equal representation from employers and unions. It is not yet clear whether all Jobs and Skills Councils have the same arrangements for industry advice. One example is the Industry Skills Australia, covering transport and logistics, which has Strategic Workforce Planning Committees for each of the constituent industry areas, which meet three times a year to direct and guide workforce development and Training Package development. Technical Committees are established to develop the various Training Package products identified, and proceed in a similar process to the previous SSO model (Industry Skills Australia, n.d.).

JSCs are responsible for the following four core functions, according to the government website (Australian Government, n.d.):

- **Workforce Planning:** Workforce Planning is the strategic centrepiece for JSCs and informs the other functions. Workforce planning will underpin intelligence-gathering for strategic priorities and will be a critical focus to guide strategic planning.
- **Training Product Development:** Training product development requires JSCs to develop training products in line with standards set by Skills Ministers to improve the quality, speed to market and responsiveness of training products.
- **Implementation, Promotion and Monitoring:** JSCs will partner with training providers and organisations to align workforce planning objectives and national training products with career advice and ‘on the ground’ training delivery.
- **Industry Stewardship:** JSCs will act as a source of intelligence on workforce issues affecting their industries and provide advice on national training system policies.

Table 4 shows the ten Jobs and Skills Councils and their scope.

Table 4: Jobs and Skills Councils, listed in order of number of Training Packages covered

Name	No. of Training Packages	Scope, according to government web site
Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance	12	<i>Manufacturing:</i> Covering industries of manufacturing and engineering, light manufacturing including pharmaceuticals, print, food and advanced manufacturing. Emerging industries include defence and space technologies.
Skills Insight	9	<i>Agribusiness, Fibre, Furnishing, Food, Animal and Environment Care:</i> Covering industries of primary production — plants and animals — as well as textiles, clothing and footwear, forestry, timber and furnishing. Emerging industries include natural resources security and environmental management.
Service and Creative Skills Australia (formerly Skills Equipped)	6	<i>Arts, Personal Services, Retail, Tourism and Hospitality:</i> Covering 'high street' human services such as hairdressing, floristry, travel, hospitality as well as the creative economy with fine art, ceramics, music, dance, theatre and screen. Wholesale and retail services, including emerging industries such as online sales.
Public Skills Australia	6	<i>Public Safety and Government:</i> Covering industries directly involved in public service (e.g., local government, police, corrective services, public safety).
Build Skills Australia	5	<i>Building, Construction, Property and Water:</i> Covering industries that provide property services, small or large scale construction services, traditional building as well as large scale civil infrastructure services and water infrastructure operations.
Powering Skills	4	<i>Energy, Gas and Renewables:</i> Covering the industries of electricity, gas, renewable energy and storage or the use of resources in the production of energy. Emerging industries include hydrogen.
Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance *	4	<i>Mining and Automotive:</i> Covering industries involved in mineral exploration and extraction operations, and automotive. Emerging industries include driverless automotive technologies.
Future Skills Organisation *	3	<i>Finance, Technology and Business:</i> Covering professional services or otherwise supporting the needs of a successful business including marketing, accounting, human resources, digital literacy, and information and communication technologies. Emerging industries include cyber security, financial technologies, artificial intelligence and the internet of things.

Name	No. of Training Packages	Scope, according to government web site
Industry Skills Australia	3	<i>Transport and Logistics:</i> Covering industries involved in warehousing and distribution operations as well as transport, including rail, maritime, aviation, and logistical support and supply chains. Emerging industries include omnichannel logistics and distribution and air and space transport and logistics.
HumanAbility*	3	<i>Aged and Disability, Children's Education and Care, Health, Human Services, Sport and Recreation:</i> Covering industries that offer community services and support such as aged care, disability services, mental health, early childhood education and health, and sport and recreation services.

Note. Adapted from <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/jobs-and-skills-councils>. Copyright 2025 by Australian Government.

*Indicates that the JSC developed from a prior pilot Skills Organisation.

It is interesting to note that of the ten Skills Council names, only six out of ten clearly reflect the industry areas covered. Originally it was only five; Service and Creative Skills Australia, changed its name very soon after its formation; it stated this was in response to stakeholder feedback on lack of recognition and understanding of its original name, SkillsEquipped.

The only Training Packages not covered by a Jobs and Skills Council are the Training and Education Training Package and the Foundation Skills Training Package, both formerly overseen by the Industry Reference Committee (supported by PwC’s Skills for Australia SSO) of which I had been a member. The federal government department overseeing VET has temporary oversight of these Training Packages, stating on its web site: “In the interim, the department has established a small time-limited TAE/FSK Training Package Technical Reference Group (TRG) to assist the department in responding to enquiries about the TAE and FSK training packages.”⁷ This ‘temporary’ arrangement was put in place in early 2023 and still holds in mid-2025. Considerable difficulty has been caused by the lack of advice on implementation of the new version of the TAE Training Package (Smith, 2025).

7.2 Author’s Experience With Jobs and Skills Councils

Since their inception, the Jobs and Skills Councils have been advertising for partner organisations and individuals to assist with their work. I noted that some actually planned to outsource Training Package development, a core function of JSCs. Out of interest I

7 In the interim, the department has established a small time-limited TAE/FSK Training Package Technical Reference Group (TRG) to assist the department with the TAE and FSK training packages.

responded to an approach from one Skills Council for potential partners, and was successful in being placed in two relevant categories. The JSC then made supplier details available (with permission) to other suppliers. This Skills Council was not seeking people to develop its Training Packages.

7.3 Author's Research Relating to Jobs and Skills Councils

As part of a project on industry links with VET (Smith & Somers, 2024), I compared the stated functions of Jobs and Skills Councils with the 16 ILO-proposed (2021) roles for sector skills bodies with the stated function of the Australian Jobs and Skills Councils (Table 5). Much of the table needed to be inferred from the stated functions, which are somewhat vague and overlapping.

Table 5: Jobs and Skills Councils' roles mapped against the ILO roles for sector skills bodies (2021)

JSC functions (according to DEWR website)	ILO 'potential roles and responsibilities'
<p><u>Workforce Planning</u> Workforce Planning is the strategic centrepiece for JSCs and informs the other functions. Workforce planning will underpin intelligence-gathering for strategic priorities and will be a critical focus to guide strategic planning.</p>	<p>Providing policy advice and feedback Generating and/or interpreting skills and labour market information</p>
<p><u>Implementation, Promotion and Monitoring</u> JSCs will partner with training providers and organisations to align workforce planning objectives and national training products with career advice and 'on the ground' training delivery.</p>	<p>Promoting the benefits of training Promoting careers information, advice and guidance Supporting quality assurance of training providers, courses and assessors (unclear) Managing government training initiatives and programmes (to some extent)</p>
<p><u>Training Product Development</u> Training product development requires JSCs to develop training products in line with standards set by Skills Ministers to improve the quality, speed to market and responsiveness of training products.</p>	<p>Developing and maintaining skill standards Developing qualifications Developing curriculum and learning resources (unclear)</p>
<p><u>Industry Stewardship</u> JSCs will act as a source of intelligence on workforce issues affecting their industries and provide advice on national training system policies.'</p>	<p>Generating and/or interpreting skills and labour market information (repeated from 'Workforce Planning') Co-ordinating training in the sector (unclear)</p>

The following potential roles and responsibilities listed by the ILO (2021), are not covered by JSCs:

1. Developing apprenticeship pathways
2. Contributing to training delivery and assessment

3. Supporting the professional development of teachers, trainers and assessors
4. Managing and promoting apprenticeships
5. Ministering levy funds
6. Managing assessment

This discrepancy indicates possible misalignment with skills councils in other countries, although it could be argued that the missing functions are not part of the Australian skills council tradition.

In the same research project, we mapped current Australian State networks of current ITAB-like ‘entities’ (Table 6).

Table 6: State ITAB-like entities in 2024

State/Territory	Network of ITAB like entities?	Number and names of entities
NSW	Yes	10 ITABs
Victoria	Yes	10 Industry Advisory Groups established 2022
WA	Yes	8 Industry Training Councils
QLD	Yes	12 Industry Skills Advisors. (Contracts run 2020–2023)
SA	Yes	Ten Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) set up during Feb. 2024, aligning ‘largely’ with the JSCs.
TAS	No	
NT	No	Industry Skills Advisory Council NT. formed in 2015 after earlier entities disbanded.
ACT	No	Skills Industry Advisory Group. Established 2021, meets biannually.

These show incomplete and inconsistent industry coverage. The Northern Territory has one entity covering all industries, with staff specialising in particular industry areas, and the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania appear to have no industry engagement mechanism at all. Inspection of the coverage of the entities showed that only South Australia appeared to have deliberately matched its Industry Skills Councils with Jobs and Skills Councils.

8 A Case Study of Industry Influence on the Skills Council System: Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

As explained earlier, and as evidenced in the reports described in the Appendix, a range of bodies have an interest in influencing the skills council system. In Australia, there

are many industry-specific employer associations, which often provide submissions and other representations to governments on the topic. There are also three industry peak bodies, operating across the economy and with membership from sectoral employer associations. One of these, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), was selected for this case study as being the most diverse, covering small businesses as well as large companies. The other two major peak industry bodies in Australia are the Australian Industry Group and the Business Council of Australia.

ACCI makes formal submissions to government inquiries and reviews on VET, as well as informal representations directly to Ministers and their advisers. While its web site displays only formal submissions since 2023, I have copies of several of ACCI's submissions and other representations about skills councils from 2001 to 2016, which are briefly summarised here as an example of direct employer influence on skills council developments.

ACCI's web site states that its purpose is to 'provide a voice for Australian businesses at national and global levels' (Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, n.d.). Its membership comprises the state and territory 'Chambers', a large number of industry associations, from 'Accommodation Australia' and over 30 of 'business leaders' from individual companies including large organisations such as Amazon. ACCI is active in the VET area, with a director responsible for 'skills, employment and small business.' The web site states: "Skilled workers are the product of well-resourced education and training institutions and on-the-job learning. Both require government support."

In March 2001 ACCI wrote to the CEO of the Australian National Training Authority reporting an increase of 'disquiet' among its members, with a number of members 'considering withdrawing support from the industry advisory arrangements', particularly at State level. The letter claimed, *inter alia*, that State ITABs served governments rather than industry; that industry did not have 'ownership' of ITABs; that 'alternate models' should be considered for Training Package development and industry plans, and that employer organisations rather than ITAB staff, should be recognised as crucial sources of industry advice. The letter referred to the development of an ACCI 'position' on ITABs

Accordingly, in August 2002 a paper was produced ('ACCI Review no. 90'). The paper supported National ITABs, while stating that they needed "clear and measurable performance indicators" and stating that their only role should be the development and promotion of Training Packages, and that they should not be funded to offer industry advice. ACCI advocated for a pool of "industry champions". At this point, the Commonwealth had already announced the cessation of federal financial support for State ITABs. ACCI considered that the continuation of State ITABs should be the decision of each jurisdiction, noting that only two States at that time (2000–2001 figures) provided more funding for their ITABs than the federal government did.

In 2007 an ACCI 'issues paper' on the Industry Skills Council (ISC) model raised a number of concerns. It claimed that some ISCS had too broad a coverage, citing Service Skills Australia as an example, advocating separate ISCs for retail and hospitality. The paper stated that the structures were too inflexible and needed to be able to evolve. On process issues, ACCI claimed that sometimes its members were not properly consulted during Training Package development and that direct industry advice would be better. An Industry Panel model was proposed, instead, to oversee Training Package development

and to provide Industry Chairs for that purpose. Peak organisations would nominate *ad hoc* steering committees for individual Training Packages rather than having standing industry advisory committees. The paper advocated open and transparent declaration of ISC funding, assets, and other sources of income, implying a mistrust of ISCS expanding operations into non-Training Package matters.

In August 2010 ACCI wrote a lengthy submission to the Senate Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils (ACCI, 2010). (See the Appendix for the 2011 report of that Inquiry.) While supporting the existence of ISCs, a number of criticisms were raised, including the ways in which industry voice was represented, the composition of ISCs, and the engagement processes with industry. Concern was raised about variable performance across ISCs, and variability in the ways in which national ISCs worked with their state counterparts and in which the range of industries were appropriately represented on ISC Boards. ACCI stated that ISCs were successful “where there is genuine industry, engagement, support and ownership” (p. 6). They referred to some ITABs and ISCs only consulting with the “usual suspects”.

ACCI also criticised the dominant role of government, stating that an ‘industry-led’ system should be bipartite (employer and union organisations) not tripartite. This implied a perception that government saw ISCs as the ‘voice of industry’ and was referred to as “unplanned creep” in the role of ISCs (ACCI, 2010, p.11). The submission stated that the environmental scans were too generalised to be useful. Finally ACCI criticised the configuration of industry coverage in ISCs and stated there should be more, citing the greater numbers in the UK and New Zealand. examples. Three recommendations were made:

1. An evaluation of ISCs to look at how effectively they met the needs of industry and expended the funding provided.
2. Development of a new way of gathering industry negligence.
3. An evaluation of the industry configurations of ISCs.

In 2016 a TVET forum in Seoul, Korea, organised by the ILO and the Korean government, contained a session of keynote speakers on sector skills councils. I was also an invited speaker at this event, on a different topic. ACCI’s director, at that time, of employment, education and training presented on the Australian skills council system (Lambert, 2016). The presentation was highly critical of the Australian Industry Skills Council system prior to 2015, in contrast to other countries’ presentations which were more factual, although providing measured critiques. The presentation claimed that skills councils had become “masters rather than servants of industry”, that some were self-interested, and that some had become “very union dominated”; there were also claims that the sector advisory committees developing Training Packages “could be overruled” by ISC Boards. The presentation discussed the new arrangements (Skill Service Organisation-Industry Reference Committee model) approvingly, explaining that the new model meant that the SSOs provided a service to the industry committee rather than overseeing its operations.

These documents indicate a prolonged campaign by ACCI to move power away from skills councils (particularly, but not only, in their industry advice role) towards ‘industry’ (or more accurately, towards industry representative bodies. Underlying the submis-

sions and other documents appears to be a fear that governments were listening to other voices, apart from the industry bodies, in the evaluation of industry needs. There are also indications of conflict on the Boards of ITABs and ISCs; and a fear of trade union influence. The 2016 international presentation signalled clearly that ACCI had been a major driver in the move from Industry Skills Councils to the Skill Service Organisation-Industry Reference Committee model. There are also possible indications that ACCI may have also been a prime mover in the earlier dismantling of the State ITAB network.

9 Conclusion

Skills councils have been under-researched, although they are important features of the VET policy and practice landscape. It is unclear why this is so. As noted earlier, Ashton (2006) suggests that it may be because the role of employers is under-researched in VET, but in fact there is literature on many employer engagements in VET, but not specifically on skills councils. The answer is perhaps that skills council research requires an understanding of policy environments, layers of government, and the important role of individual actors; it is fraught with sensitive issues. It is also rarely 'visited' by outsiders.

As reported earlier, the ILO (2021) discusses advantages and disadvantages of three models: 'employer only' models, tripartite models (employers, trade unions and governments) and also of what they call 'tripartite plus', where other sector stakeholders are involved.

This may seem straightforward, but one problematic factor is the bodies represented on skills councils. It is common to ask 'Who speaks for industry?' Do employers only (or their associations) represent 'industry'? As Wolf (2002) points out, it may be convenient for governments to 'consult' by speaking to peak bodies, or to individual industry associations, and as in the Jobs and Skills Summit in Australia, that includes trade unions as well as employer associations, but such associations have their own agendas and may or may not represent the views of 'industry' as a whole. It is less common to ask 'Who speaks for trade unions?' It is also appropriate to ask which extra voices, if any, should be heard; for example workers in industry (as opposed to trade unionists) or students in VET. These 'extra voices' are referred to in the 'tripartite plus' model of the ILO (2021). Such fundamental questions are not asked in Australia.

Another fundamental policy issue is that the functions of skills councils in Australia are narrower than those in many other countries, as shown in the comparison of Jobs and Skills Council functions with those suggested by the ILO (2021). Essentially Skills Councils produce Training Packages, and feed information about industry developments and skill needs to governments. A potential expansion of their role does not seem to have been considered in successive policy developments.

The turbulent 30-year history of skills councils in Australia does, however, display many features of skills councils across the world. As bodies providing a link for governments between industry and the VET system, they are prone to rapid changes in government and changes in government policy, as reported for the UK by Perryman (2023). In Australia, the skill council system has moved between the ILO classifications of employer-only and tripartite (ILO, 2021) in an uncertain and rather messy way, and has also

moved between a more government-run model and a privatised model, a categorisation not fully covered in the literature.

Since the time of the regularisation of the system, with the allocation of Training Packages to ITABs, the Australian government has always funded national skills councils, unlike the Raddon and Sung (2006) 'employer-funded model'. However, it provides no funding to state skills councils, leaving that role to state governments. It has displayed a predominantly 'hands-off' approach to skill council operations, meaning that the only response to problems has been either to threaten to withdraw funding (as happened in 2006) or to reorganise the system. This difficulty has some resonance with comment by Contreras (2023), writing about Chile, about whether skills councils' objectives are actually achievable. The problems are compounded by aggressive interventions by powerful interest groups, as documented in the case study above. These interest groups expect training systems, including employer-based components, to be funded by governments, as evidenced in the case study.

These difficulties suggest that a satisficing solution is all that can be expected unless governments become more involved. Butterworth (1993) reported that in the early days of ITABs, the relevant layer of government (national or state) provided executive support to ITABs. Involvement of this nature would ensure that the skills council system would become truly tripartite instead of bipartite and would also educate relevant government officials about the skills council system, enabling problems to be recognised and better policy decisions to be made. For example, the lack of expertise that followed the dismantling of the Industry Skills Councils, that had been warned by many writing submissions to the 2010 inquiry into ISCs, may have been recognised earlier. However, more government engagement may be a false hope. A direct involvement by governments in skills councils would be at odds with a policy environment where privatisation is routine (Cahill & Toner, 2018) and consultants are used for most policy development (Howlet & Migone, 2013). Both major changes to the skills council system since 2015 have essentially involved privatisation and the entry of consultancy firms to the skills council market; and as noted above, Jobs and Skills Councils are themselves contracting out core functions.

While the recent formation of Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) appear to offer some stability after a period of disarray in Australian skills councils history. There are some similarities between JSCs and the former Industry Skills Councils (2003–2015), but Jobs and Skills Councils, having arisen through a tendering process commenced by the previous government, were not appointed by government to manage pre-determined entities, but arose from bodies forming alliances to win a tender. While not so overtly privatised as the intervening 'Skills Service Organisations', this degree of privatisation may detract from the 'trustworthiness' of the Jobs and Skills Councils, a feature of skills councils regarded as vital by Perryman (2023). It should be emphasised, also, that Jobs and Skills Councils need to work with strong state-based entities, but it is clearly shown in this paper (see Table 6) that the situation across the states is uneven and patchy. In previous decades, policy attention has been paid to the relationships between national and state bodies but there seems to be no interest in this matter currently.

The paper therefore implies some potential considerations for policy development: the potential involvement of government staff in skills council operations, a wider pool

of people with input into skill councils, and a consideration of a wider remit for skills councils, which could have the added bonus of potentially increasing the expertise and knowledge base of skills council staff (a need identified, for example, in South Africa). Minor (but still important) issues arising from the research include the importance of descriptive names for skills councils, to increase recognition among stakeholders. Again, South Africa provides a good exemplar on this matter.

As noted, this is a neglected area for research, with key documents not available publicly. The Appendix to this paper provides information about a number of such documents. Arrangements have been made to provide the author's copies of the unpublished reports to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research for safekeeping, for potential policy development and to assist future researchers.

This paper has provided a detailed case study of one employer organisation's interventions into skills council policy development. The role of other employer organisations besides ACCI, and the role of trade unions, also need to be researched. The nature and role of State ITABs also needs investigation, with a view to regularising the situation across the country to improve practice.

References

- Ashton, D. (2006). Lessons from abroad: Developing sector-based approaches to skills, *SSDA Catalyst*, Issue 2. Sector Skills Development Agency.
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (2010). *ACCI submission to Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee Inquiry into Industry Skills Councils: ACCI response to the Skills Australia discussion paper*. ACCI.
- Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. (n.d.). *Our vision and purpose*. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://acci.com.au/Web/About/Our-Vision-and-Purpose.aspx>
- Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). (2014). *ACTU submission in response to the discussion paper on Industry Engagement in Training Package Development – Towards a Contestable Model*. ACTU.
- Australian Government. (n.d.). *Jobs and Skills Councils*. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/jobs-and-skills-councils>.
- Bodman, K. (1994). *Is there a better way of doing it? Training reform and state ITABs* [Unpublished Masters of Quality Management thesis]. Queensland University of Technology.
- Bowman, K., & McKenna, S. (2016). *The development of Australia's national training system: A dynamic tension between consistency and flexibility*. NCVER.
- Bridgford, J. (2017). *Trade union involvement in skills development: An international review*. International Labour Organization.
- Burgi, R., & Gonon, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Governance revisited: Challenges and opportunities for vocational education and training*. Peter Lang.
- Butterworth, P. (1993). ITABs: What are they? *Australian Training Review*, 8, 26–27.
- Cahill, D., & Toner, P. (Eds.). (2018). *Wrong way: How privatisation and economic reform backfired*. Latrobe University Press.

- Chan, S. (2024, December 9—10). *The importance of VET teacher education at a time of change: Some learnings from Aotearoa NZ* [Conference presentation]. Making a difference: Elevating the role of VET teachers: 10th Annual ACDEVEG conference, Brisbane, Australia.
- Churchill, W. (1948). *The Second World War* (Volume 1: The gathering Storm). Cassell.
- Contreras, P. (2023, July 19—21). *Understanding the implementation of Sector Skills Councils in Chile: Insights from the perspective of employers and TVET providers in two sectors* [Conference presentation]. The context and purpose of VET: JNET 10th International Conference, Oxford, Great Britain.
- Denzin, N. (1989). *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Prentice-Hall.
- Department of Education & Training (2015). *New arrangements for training product development for Australian industry*. Department of Education & Training.
- Department of Industry. (2014a). *Review of training packages and accredited courses: Discussion paper*. Department of Industry.
- Department of Industry. (2014b). *Industry engagement in training package development: Discussion paper towards a contestable model*. Department of Industry.
- Department of Training & Industrial Relations (DETIR). (n.d.). *ITABs: The way ahead*. DETIR.
- Duemmler, K. (2023, July 19—21). *Supervising the quality of training in companies within the Swiss VET system* [Conference presentation]. The context & purpose of VET: JNET conference, Oxford, Great Britain.
- Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee. (2011). *Industry Skills Councils: Final report*. The Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House.
- Federation University. (2014). Response to discussion paper 'Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses'. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://federation.edu.au/institutes-and-schools/ieac/research/rave-researching-adult-and-vocational-education/recent-research/recognising-the-skill-in-jobs-traditionally-considered-unskilled>
- Fitzpatrick, G. (1997). ITABs – where do they fit in and what's their role? *VET Matters: Vocational Education & Training*, 6, 6–7.
- Hoang Dang, V. (2016). The relationship between the vocational education and training providers and enterprises: Theory and practice. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies*, 4(2), 47–53.
- Howlett, M., & Migone, A. (2013). Policy advice through the market: The role of external consultants in contemporary policy advisory systems. *Policy and Society*, 32(3), 241–254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2013.07.005>
- Industry Skills Australia (n.d.). *Our Industries*. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://www.industryskillsaustralia.org.au/our-industries>
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2019). *Sector skills councils: Policy note (Indonesia)*. ILO. https://www.ilo.org/jakarta/whatwedo/publications/WCMS_738640/lang-en/index.htm
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2021). *A resource guide for sector skills bodies*. ILO. https://www.ilo.org/skills/areas/skills-policies-and-systems/WCMS_818528/lang-en/index.htm

- Joyce, S. (2019). *Strengthening skills: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system*. Commonwealth of Australia. https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets_1.pdf
- Lambert, J. (2016, October 5–6). *Australian vocational training arrangements – industry skills committees* [Conference presentation]. Jobs, skills and strategies for the future: Perspectives from Asia-Pacific. International Labour Organization; Korean Ministry of Employment and Labour and; HRD-Korea, Seoul, South Korea.
- Marson, L. (1995). *Creating industry training partnerships*. NSW Board of Vocational Education & Training.
- Morris, S. (2006, October 26). Training system crisis, In *Australian Financial Review*.
- Moshongoane, T. (2023). Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) System in South Africa [webinar]. *The Skills Bridge Masterclass Series*. International Labour Organization.
- Neuman, W.L. (2012). *Basics of social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Pearson.
- Office of Training and Further Education (OTFE). (1999). *Organisational self-assessment manual for industry training boards*. OTFE.
- Pan, H. (2019, March 21–22). *An empirical study on motivation and policy validity of enterprises' participation in vocational education* [Conference presentation]. Contemporary Apprenticeship Reforms and Reconfigurations, 8th International INAP Conference, Konstanz, Germany.
- Paton, R. (1998). Manufacturing training perspectives. In P. Curtin (Ed.), *Future training issues in Australia's industries*. A collection of the papers presented at the NCVET 1998 conference: Industry Training Outlook (pp. 01–103). NCVET.
- Perryman, S. (2023, August 29). *Sector Skills Councils in the UK* [webinar]. The Skills Bridge Masterclass Series, International Labour Organization.
- Quantum Consulting Australia. (2007). *Review of industry advisory arrangements: Consultant's observations*. Quantum Consulting.
- Raddon, A., & Sung, J. (2006). *The Role of Employers in Sectoral Skills Development: International Approaches*. Working Paper 49, Centre for Labour Market Studies. University of Leicester. https://www.skillsforemployment.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/wcmstest4_169858.pdf
- Schrag, Z. (2021). *The Princeton guide to historical research*. Princeton University Press.
- Seim, J. (2024). Participant observation, observant participation, and hybrid ethnography. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 53(1), 121–152.
- Service Skills Australia. (2010). *Environmental Scan 2010*. Service Skills Australia.
- Siekman, G., & Circelli, M. (2021). *Industry's role in VET governance: Using international insights to inform new practices*. NCVET.
- Smith, E. (2010). A review of twenty years of competency-based training in the Australian vocational education and training system. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 14(1), 54–64
- Smith, E. (2014). The context of teaching in vocational education and training (VET) in Australia, In R. Brennan Kemmis & L. Atkins (Eds.), *Teaching in the VET sector in Australia* (pp. 1–19). David Barlow Publishing.

- Smith, E. (2022, April 28–29). Industry Skills Councils in Australia: Past, present and future. *Are we there yet? Building a research community to shape VET's future, AVETRA annual conference*, Melbourne and online.
- Smith, E. (2023). Thirty years of competency-based training: How Australia painted itself into a curriculum corner. In R. Tierney, F. Rizvi, K. Ercikan & G. Smith (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* (4th edition, pp. 491–503). Elsevier.
- Smith, E. (2025). The oversight of VET teacher-education in Australia. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2025.2521817>
- Smith, E., & Keating, J. (1997). *Making sense of training reform and competency-based training*. Social Science Press.
- Smith, E., & Somers, P. (2024, January). *The role of industry in VET* [Report]. Victorian Skills Authority & Australasian VET Research Association. <https://avetra.org.au/VSA-Project-2>
- South Australian Training Development Group (TDG). (2000). *ITABs in the future*. Report of the 'ITABs in the future' sub-committee of the TDG [Unpublished report].
- Sylow, K., Driessen, P., & Robertson, J. (1995, September 25–27). VET game: All players welcome. In *5th National workshop on vocational teacher education* (pp. 131–135), Launceston, Tas.
- Tertiary Education Commission. (n.d.). *Workforce Development Councils (WDCs)*. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://www.tec.govt.nz/vocational-education/vocational-education/strengthening-vocational-education/workforce-development-councils-wdcs>
- Urbis Consulting. (2022). *Skills Organisation pilots evaluation, Project 1: Implementation review report*. Department of Education, Skills & Employment.
- VOCEDplus. (n.d.). *VET Knowledge Bank*. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank-policy-initiatives-inquiries-and-reviews>.
- Whatmore, S., Wyman, N., & Seznov, A. (2019, March 21–22). *The creation of the Australian Industry and Skills committee: The governance and operational reform lessons of the new Australian curriculum development model*. Contemporary Apprenticeship Reforms and Reconfigurations, 8th International INAP Conference, Konstanz, Germany.
- Williams, P. (2001, March 28–30). *Knowledge has left the academy*. Research to Reality: Putting VET Research to Work, 4th Annual conference of the Australian VET Research Association, Adelaide, Australia.
- Wolf, A. (2002). *Does education matter? Myths about education and economic growth*. Penguin.
- Wooden, M. (1997a). Employer knowledge of, and satisfaction with, ITABs: Survey evidence. *Australian Vocational Education Review*, 4(1), 38–51.
- Wooden, M. (1997b). *The role of Industry Training Advisory Bodies*. NCVER.

Appendix: Hidden and Little-Known Australian Government Reports on Skills Councils

Three phases of reports are listed and briefly described here. Unfortunately there are no pre-2000 Commonwealth (federal) reports. A report, referenced by Wooden (1997a, p. 3–4), of a working party on the National ITAB network in 1993, is missing from the record. That report, according to Wooden (1997a) was undertaken by the Australian National Training Authority and a body called VEETAC (the Vocational Education Employment and Training Advisory Committee).

Phase 1: 2000–2011 – From ITABs to Industry Skills Councils

These reports relate to the period leading up to the replacement of ITABs with Industry Skills Councils, and the scrutiny of ISCs during their existence.

2000. *Aspiring to Excellence: Report into the quality of vocational education and training in Australia* Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education Committee. Contains a section on consultation with industry. *Publicly available.*

A summary of comments received about ITAB was that there was sometimes lack of co-operation between national and state ITABS, that ITABs focused on larger rather than smaller employers, that the voice of VET educators was not heard, and, from the ITAB point of view, that ITABs were often bypassed with ANTA directly consulting industry, and that Training Package development timelines were too short. The report recommended the inclusion of people with VET experience in all VET bodies.

2001. *PwC (Price Waterhouse Cooper) Review of National ITABs.* *Not publicly available.*

While the full report is not publicly available, an appendix with examples of good practice in National ITABs was made available to the ITAB sector. The examples were gathered under the headings: Industry relationships; Ability to deliver goods and services; and Future capability. A short summary of good practices among the ‘Recognised Bodies’ was also provided.

2003. *National strategic planning and industry advisory arrangements for vocational education and training. Confidential discussion paper, ANTA.* *Not publicly available.*

This is the paper which proposed the setting up of Industry Skills Councils. The paper stresses the importance of industry leadership of VET. Chairs of their Boards, rather than the CEOs of the Industry Skills Councils, would be involved in national decision-making. Funding would be provided on a three-yearly basis. The roles and responsibilities clearly covered the twin pillars of development of ‘training products’ (a term used in Australia VET to describe Training Packages, accredited qualifications and ‘skill sets’ comprised of individual units of competency), and the provision of industry intelligence to government and the VET sector, and also advice to industry. Eight industry skills councils were

proposed in this paper, with a mapping of employer bodies, employee bodies and regulatory bodies for each.

2006. Evaluation of Industry Skills Councils. Department of Education, Science and Training. *Not publicly available.*

This 81-page evaluation by department staff, with advice from a consulting group on governance and finance issues, found that 'overall the ISCs have achieved considerable progress'. The report grouped the Industry Skills Councils into three groups: higher performing (n=4), medium performing (n=4) and lower performing (n=2). The lower-performing ISCs were 'ElectroComms and EnergyUtilities', and 'Transport and Logistics'. The evaluation process included analysis of ISC reports against the performance indicators for ISCs; discussions with Boards and staff of all ISCs; consultation with all state training authorities and with peak bodies of employers, unions and VET providers. The report included funding provided for the 2005/2006 financial year, showing that funding ranged from just over \$1million AUD to \$2million AUD, appearing to vary with the number of Training Packages covered. It was suggested that the lower performing Industry Skills Councils could have their next funding period reduced, or their Training Packages could be reallocated.

2011. Industry Skills Council, Final report. Senate Education, Employment and Workplace relations References Committee. *Publicly available.* Report listed on NCVER's VOCED database, with a link to the Parliamentary page with the full report, at <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:45628>

The inquiry examined, *inter alia*, (1) the role and effectiveness of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) in the operation of the national training system particularly as it relates to states and territories and rural and regional Australia; (2) accountability mechanisms in relation to Commonwealth funding for the general operation and specific projects and programs of each ISC; (3) corporate governance arrangements of ISCs; (4) Commonwealth Government processes to prioritise funding allocations across all ISCs; and (5) ISC network arrangements and co-operative mechanisms implemented between relevant boards. 119 submissions were received, and are listed on – but not linked from – the web site. The largest groups were government departments, employer groups, industry skills councils themselves, with smaller numbers from trade unions, individuals and training providers.

The report made 10 recommendations. Six related to general funding, governance and accountability matters, with one additional point explicitly recommending the inclusion of a clause in ISC contracts giving the government the right to renegotiate coverage during the lifetime of the contract if necessary. The others were: ISCs should collectively develop templates for environmental scan documents; ISCs should undertake regular reviews of consultation processes, especially relating to small businesses; and that the relevant government department should develop best practice principles for consultations and incorporate them into the next round of funding contracts.

Phase 2: 2014 -2015 – Beyond Industry Skills Councils

This second tranche of discussion papers relate to the transition from Industry Skills Councils. The reports note that they stem from the six objectives for reform of the vocational education and training (VET) system, agreed in April 2014 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Industry and Skills Council (national and state ministers for skills). In these documents references to the future of work including digital technology, advanced manufacturing, and the growth of the care sector appear for the first time in skills council papers.

2014: Industry Engagement in Training Package Development. Discussion Paper: Towards a contestable model. *Publicly available* via NCVER's VOCEdplus database <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A65950>

The introduction states that the purpose of a 'contestable' model is to ensure that representatives of industry have avenues to contribute to the development of VET qualifications. In the paper, it is explained that the Australian Industry Skills committee (AISC) will be set up to oversee industry advice and will be operational by the end of 2014. The paper proposed that industry could directly approach this committee to make a case for new Training Packages. Three 'approaches' are suggested: One, that there are no bodies to develop Training Packages, with the AISC simply determining needs and engaging people from a panel of 'technical writers' to develop them; Two, that 'industry sector committees are set up, which would access the same panel; and Three, that that 'designated VET sector bodies' would be appointed for contract periods, with six being suggested.

The discussion paper received 300 submissions in response. A submission from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (2014), the peak union body, pointed out that these proposals were confused and there was no case for not continuing with Industry Skills Councils, which they considered to be effective, although not without room for improvement.

2014: Review of Training Packages and Accredited Courses Discussion Paper. *Publicly available* via NCVER's VOCEdplus database <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A65949>

This paper was released at the same time as the 'contestability' discussion paper. As the paper states, 'The two papers are linked, but have a different purpose. The move to a more contestable funding model is about the "how" of training packages and this paper is about the "what".' A number of issues relating to the content of training packages and their implementation are canvassed, but no clear suggestions are put forward for discussion, apart from an increased focus on assessment.

2015: New Arrangements for Training Product Development for Australian Industry. Publicly available via NCVER's VOCEDplus database <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A68337>

This paper sets out the decisions about the changes to Training Packages which, it states, 'industry has told us' are needed. It refers to a 'revitalisation' of industry engagement. The paper sets out the arrangements for Industry Reference Committees, supported by 'Skills Service Organisations' to support the development of Training Packages. This appears to be a mixture of Approaches Two and Three which were proposed in the 'Contestability' paper. There is an implication in the paper that industry reference committees already existed within ISCs, although in fact those advisory committees had different names and functions. The paper states that the Skills Service Organisations' do not need to represent industry sectors; the industry reference committees would provide that expertise. A new Australian Industry and Skills Committee would oversee the operations.

Phase 3: Towards Jobs and Skills Councils

Post-2015 changes to the skills council system have not generally been accompanied by specific government reports or discussion papers on skills councils. The 'Joyce review' on VET contains one relevant section, and there was a short discussion paper on skills organisations.

2019. Strengthening skills: Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system [Joyce review]. Section on 'Speeding up qualification development.' Publicly available.

The report's major concern about the skills council system appeared to be the length of time to develop qualifications and the cumbersome approval processes. It proposed "Industry-owned and government-registered Skills Organisations to be set up to take responsibility for the qualification development process for their industries and to control their training packages." (Joyce, 2019, p. 58). The emphasis was on industry agency.

2019. Skills Organisations: National Co-design Discussion Paper. Not publicly available

This paper provides more detail about the proposed Skills Organisations and was used as the basis for consultation with stakeholder groups in late 2019. However, in the end only three pilot Skills Organisations were established, which themselves became Jobs and Skills Councils in the next evolution of the skills council system.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people with whom I worked in the research activities mentioned in the paper and in other skills-council related capacities: Dr Malcom MacIntosh, Dr Emma Siesmaa, Paschal Somers, Paul Comyn, Andrew Shea.