# National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper

**National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper**

DEWR Consult hub

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**9** Lessons from existing taxonomies

As recognised by the Discussion Paper, developing a meaningful and useful NST would be a complex and difficult undertaking. Particularly when it is intended to apply across tertiary education and workplace contexts and anticipate future skills needs. Many existing skills taxonomies have not achieved what they intend to achieve. Key limitations include:

• being too narrowly cast, and not accommodating the three dimensions of occupational knowledge (procedural, conceptual and dispositional)

• failing to acknowledge the diverse ways in which occupations are practised and therefore what constitutes skilled performance

• seeking to overly specify skilfulness at the canonical occupational level

• being overly complex and difficult to use in any way

• being poorly implemented, leading to limited uptake

If pursued, the development of a new NST should be based on a comprehensive and shared understanding of the limitations and weaknesses of existing systems for naming, classifying, and grouping skills.

The Discussion Paper indicates that the Australian Skills Classification (ASC) will be decommissioned, highlighting questions about the utility of the ASC to achieve the aim of a more joined-up tertiary education system and limited awareness has resulted in a lack of systemic uptake.  Recognising the time and costs involved in developing and diffusing a new system of skills classification, more detailed insights from the ASC consultation should be presented as critical context to understand why a new NST may be the way forward and the ways in which it would avoid the failures and problems of the ASC.

**10** Potential use cases for a National Skills Taxonomy

Challenges to overcome

If pursued, the development of a NST could serve national, individuals, employers, and educators needs if it:

• avoided being overly prescriptive at the national level

• was sensitive to and acknowledged the diverse ways in which occupations are practised and, therefore, skillfulness is manifested in actual occupational practice

• acknowledged the diversity of occupational expertise within the workforce as not

being uniform for reasons of situational performance requirements (i.e., it is not singular)

- assisted employers to understand the range and depth of capacities that are required for skilled performance, including critical thinking skills
- provided licence for tertiary educators to be responsive to local student and employer needs rather than being constrained by an overprescribed national framework
- anticipated and addressed unintended consequences. For example, one consequence of including vaguely defined skills such as 'personal attributes', 'behavioural skills' or 'cultural competency' could open opportunities for employment discrimination or present an obstacle to meaningful accreditation.

Overarching vision

The "Vision Statement" as currently drafted does not provide a clear vision or purpose for the NST, rather it presents a "shopping list" of potential outcomes. Greater emphasis should be placed in any "Vision" on acknowledging and identifying how to develop and recognise skilfulness, rather than being framed as an administrative tool.

We recommend the process needs to start with a clear vision and purpose that does not attempt to be too broad in scope to support the development of a NST that is simple and useable. This would lead to specification of the essential principles, the design process, and the performance implementation.

## 11    Building a National Skills Taxonomy – design considerations
Definitions

Aligning on a common set of definitions and differentiations of terms used to describe skills is a critical first step in building a new NST. While some definitions of 'skills' are included in Appendix B, an account of skilful work needs to progress beyond some of the terminology used which is outdated and does not appear to be based on input from experts. Definitions of key terms should be based on a comprehensive literature review that is informed by key skills experts.

Alignment to other taxonomies

Detail of the relationship between a proposed NST and the Australian Qualifications Framework requires further elaboration. For universities, the interaction between the NST and the AQF will be critical.

## 12    Building a National Skills Taxonomy: Implementation considerations
Getting the purpose clearly and simply articulated is an essential precursor specification of the essential principles, the design process, and the performance implementation.

The Academy would welcome the opportunity to connect Jobs and Skills Australia with key skills experts within our Fellowship to further inform the development of the NST.

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