



Jobs and Skills Australia
National Skills System Branch
GPO Box 9828
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

By email: NationalSkillsTaxonomy@jobsandskills.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Re: National Skills Taxonomy Discussion Paper

Master Builders Australia (Master Builders) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Jobs and Skills Australia's *National Skills Taxonomy* consultation.

Master Builders is the nation's peak building and construction industry association which was federated in 1890. Master Builders' members are the Master Builder state and territory associations. Master Builders is the only industry association that represents all three sectors: residential, commercial and civil construction.

Master Builders members represent over 32,000 businesses, including the top 100 construction companies.

The Master Builders network includes registered training organisations (RTOs) and group training organisations (GTOs) that provide apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship services, as well as continuing professional development to people in the building and construction industry.

Building and construction is one of the largest sectors of the Australian economy. With more housing needed than ever before, the industry workforce needs to grow significantly in coming years. At least half a million new workers will be needed by the end of 2029, with even more required to meet the National Housing Accord and net zero transformation targets.

Over the year to December 2023, a total of 41,935 new apprentices started in the building and construction industry. This represents a 22 per cent reduction on the previous 12-month period.

Despite this reduction, building and construction remains by far the largest employer of apprentices of any industry. Latest figures show that 116,560 building and construction apprentices were in training in this industry at the end of December 2023 – representing 34 per cent of all Australian apprentices.

To become skilled in a trade is no easy feat. It takes years of learning and finessing one's craft. The educational journey of a tradesperson usually starts with a pre-apprenticeship, then an apprenticeship, then further study to obtain licensing. On top of this is a need for continuing professional development, White Card training, asbestos awareness, and other short courses to upskill and ensure relevance in the ever-evolving regulatory and working environment.

Building and construction truly is an example of an industry where lifelong learning is critical. Skilling up is important, for example a carpenter becoming a project manager, or a project manager starting a building company.

A National Skills Taxonomy that allows people in the industry to continue learning, across different pedagogical environments, throughout their career is valuable, albeit complex to deliver.

Master Builders had the opportunity to attend the roundtable in Sydney and is supportive of a National Skills Taxonomy in principle. However, it is difficult at this stage to see how it would be impactful, or practically applied in the building and construction industry.

The training system on which this industry is built has explicit rules. Apprenticeships are inflexible and licensing frameworks are strict. Mobility is limited because qualifications are the vital underpinning of trades workers and technicians. You cannot be a licensed plumber without a *Certificate IV in Plumbing*, which you cannot gain without undertaking a plumbing apprenticeship. You cannot be a home builder without a *Certificate III or Certificate IV in Building and Construction*. You cannot be licensed without it and significant work experience.

A plumber does not build a house. A builder does not run plumbing pipework for a bathroom. Mobility is not simple in skilled or licensed trades.

A taxonomy that details the skills needed for roles in building and construction would be helpful, especially for those considering commencing a career in the industry. It is also of use to those in professional roles. But it is difficult to comment beyond that at this stage of the consultation process because there is a lack of clarity around what the proposed National Skills Taxonomy is seeking to achieve, particularly for those in rigid occupations that are underpinned by important qualification and licensing frameworks.

Master Builders welcomes the opportunity to engage on this matter, but asking consultation questions about how to implement a National Skills Taxonomy without more making a case for its need outside of the higher education sector is difficult. We note that it is a recommendation of the Australian Universities Accord and take the view that a National Skills Taxonomy may have a valuable impact on the higher education system – particularly given its ability to self-accredit – but its rollout across building and construction pedagogy, VET and continuous learning is likely to be less impactful.

VET already has skills taxonomies in place – Industry Skills Packages – which, while they are not necessarily working as well as they could be, nevertheless, do not need to be reworked into a National Skills Taxonomy. A National Skills Taxonomy must be informed by Industry Skills Packages, not the other way around.

Master Builders would like to continue consulting on this matter when further information is available as to the way a National Skills Taxonomy would apply to the building and construction industry and its educational framework.

In the meantime, if you have any questions or need further information, please contact Liz O'Grady at liz.ogrady@masterbuilders.com.au.

Kind regards,



Denita Wawn

Chief Executive Officer

Master Builders Australia