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16 September 2025

Five Pillars of Productivity Inquiries

Productivity Commission

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Five Pillars of Productivity Inquiries

Public Skills Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Productivity Commission regarding the Five Pillars of Productivity Inquiries.

About Public Skills Australia

Public Skills Australia is appointed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) as one of 10 Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs). Public Skills Australia works with employer and employee representatives (career and volunteer) from the Public Safety and Government industry, which includes Correctional Services, Defence, Federal, State/Territory, and Local Government, Fire and Emergency Services and Police, to undertake the following functions:

- Workforce Planning as the underpinning intelligence-gathering on emergent skilling priorities and informs for strategic planning.
- Training Product Development for VET training packages in line with the intent of Skills Ministers to improve the quality, speed to market and responsiveness of training products.
- Implementation, Promotion and Monitoring by partnering with training providers and agencies to align workforce planning objectives and national training products with career advice and 'on the ground' training delivery.
- Industry Stewardship by distilling industry intelligence on workforce issues affecting the Public Safety and Government industry and providing advice on the national training system.

In line with Public Skills Australia's remit, this submission will largely focus on the 'Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce' Pillar. However, we would also like to bring attention to the importance of Public Safety and Government sectors to ensuring economic security and 'Creating a More Dynamic and Resilient Economy' and the importance of 'Harnessing Data and Digital Technology' for our workforces.



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Creating a More Dynamic and Resilient Economy

The Public Safety and Government industries are fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of a robust and safe society. In protecting the sovereignty, state-hood, law and order of Australia, the Public Safety and Government industries provide the stable platform on which private businesses and individuals can meaningfully contribute to GDP. Maintenance of well-trained public safety and government workforces is key to ensuring this stable platform is enduring. The current operational environment has seen a politicisation of the training environment, which often creates tensions between training needs and operational requirements. For agencies within Public Safety and Government, the maintenance of enterprise registered training organisations (eRTOs) has been resourced by drawing those resources from operational requirements. This creates a tension between the need to deliver high-quality training which can ensure highly skilled personnel and the continued call for increased visibility and effectiveness of public safety and government agencies through increased 'boots on the ground'. Training delivery is further impacted by current reductions in governmental spending on public sector staff¹. These reductions have and will continue to adversely affect the operations of training organisations and comes at the same time increases in operational capacity is required to deal with occupational shortages² and expanded readiness requirements³. The Productivity Commissions recommendation detail a clear focus on the incentivisation of private business to drive productivity but may also wish to consider the importance of building sufficient resourcing and capacity to support effective workforces within public safety and government sectors to ensure GDP growth.

Harnessing Data and Digital Technology

We offer our strong support for this pillar as the effective deployment of technologies is closely interlinked with building a skilled and adaptable workforce and subsequently, workforce planning. For many Public Safety and

¹ See for example current restructuring of the Victorian Public Sector workforce being brought down to find efficiencies in service delivery: <https://www.afr.com/politics/victorian-public-service-changes-begin-ahead-of-cost-cutting-report-20250725-p5mhpu>

² See for example reporting on the vacancy rate for police officers across Australia: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-28/police-officers-shortage-overwork-unions/104384048>

³ See for example announcement from the Albanese Government addressing increase in Defence expenditure: <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2025-03-25/albanese-government-grows-accelerates-defence-spending>



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Government industries, technology such as AI offers an opportunity to free up workforce capacity, reduce mental health impact and increase well-being of the workforce. It may also offer opportunities to reduce the risk of physical harm to workers during emergency events. Investment in technologies and systems could likewise enhance information sharing. Technology and data are fundamental to Public Safety and Government work and it is anticipated skills development in this area will be required to further enhance occupational outcomes.

Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce

The Public Safety workforce are also unique in requiring applicants to be employed before undertaking training. For Police, Defence, Fire, Correctional Services and others, applicants interested in joining the workforce must first pass through rigorous pre-employment processes including fitness, psychological and aptitude testing before progressing to an academy. Traineeships in the government sector have a similar feature in which a trainee will formally be employed into a trainee program before undertaking training. It is recommended that the Productivity Commission seek deeper consultation on these entry pathways, as this feature is not unique to trade-based occupations as suggested in the interim report⁴

Discussions on the challenges of *recognition of prior learning* (RPL) are well established in Public Safety and Government agencies. As eRTOS, many agencies have expressed concern with the impact of RPL processes to already constrained resourcing. Strict regulation of RPL has resulted in a significant compliance burden which is unworkable for many agencies, including eRTOS managed by volunteering agencies. In some cases, industry have indicated simply requesting staff to re-do qualifications is less burdensome than engaging with RPL. Some agencies have sought to supplement internal capacity by engaging external training providers, including TAFEs to undertake RPL for staff. Outsourcing RPL compliance to organisations positioned as the primary deliverers of VET is attractive for eRTOS as a way to manage capacity concerns but comes financial burden, which is not feasible for all agencies. External training organisations may also lack the operational context required for an effective public safety workforce.

⁴ Productivity Commission, 2025, [Building a Skilled and Adaptable Workforce - Interim Report](#), viewed 12 August 2025, p. 68. This quote references Productivity Commission, 2020, National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development Review, Study Report, Canberra p. 332.



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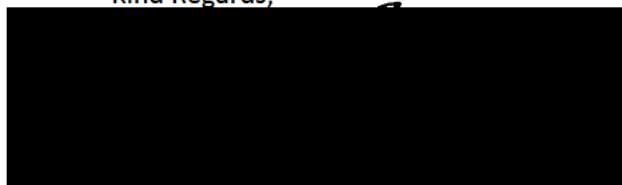
Public Safety and Government agencies recognise the importance of workforce mobility and cross-industry skilling. However, the feasibility of RPL is further impacted by differing practice, operating procedures, legislation and regulation across state/territory lines. The varied nature of the operating context can cause disparity in course materials and content which makes assessment of the evidence provided challenging and increases the resource impost for eRTOS. Further constraint of resourcing is likely to make engagement of RPL even more challenging, despite the interoperability between some public safety sectors when responding to critical events.

Recommendations requesting an increase in the use of RPL and credit recognition must also consider the operational context and burden these systems place on eRTOS. Consideration of the financial, operational and capacity burden of compliance with current RPL systems must be incorporated.

Conclusion

Public Skills Australia greatly values the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry and looks forward to on-going consultation on the challenges identified.

Kind Regards,



Milan Orgad

A/Chief Executive Officer

Public Skills Australia