

10 February 2023

Jobs and Skills Australia
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601

By email: jsaengagement@dewr.gov.au

Dear Professor Peter Dawkins

Re: Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper

headspace National welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Jobs and Skills Australia Discussion Paper. Please accept this letter by way of a response to selected aspects of the discussion paper that we hope will be helpful.

About headspace

headspace, the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, provides early intervention mental health services to 12–25-year-olds across Australia. headspace centres form the largest national network of youth mental health services, with over 150 centres embedded in local communities across metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Through headspace, young people can access multidisciplinary support in-person and online across four core streams: mental health; physical health (including sexual health); alcohol and other drugs; and work and study. Place-based collaboration is central to the headspace centre model. Each centre is run by a local agency supported by a consortium of local service providers and community members. This ensure that the service is deeply embedded within the local system and community.

Stakeholder engagement

headspace views the proposed focus on research, data analysis and stakeholder engagement as critical features of the operating model of Jobs and Skills Australia in understanding workforce needs.

We would welcome consideration of how the expertise and value from a range of stakeholders could assist Jobs and Skills Australia to undertake its functions and progress its workplan.

headspace, for example, provides vocational support as one of its core streams of our service provision, providing young people with uniquely integrated vocational and mental health support to engage with or remain in work and/or study. It is therefore important that Jobs and Skills Australia ensures its key stakeholders and its definition of “employment service providers” considers and includes organisations such as headspace National.

In particular, there are two key areas where headspace National can add valuable knowledge and expertise, including:

1. the experiences, needs and challenges that young people face in finding and engaging with work, including how this interacts with mental health
2. the importance of integrated and cross-sectoral approaches in supporting young people to successfully engage in work and study, as reflected in success of the vocational support services offered through headspace.

Young people as a priority cohort

headspace National encourages Jobs and Skills Australia to consider young people as a priority cohort, in addition to those identified in the discussion paper.

Almost one in five young people aged 17-25 accessing headspace centres (over 5,000 young Australians annually) are not engaged in any form of employment, education or training.

Young people aged 15 to 24 years are at an increased risk of disengagement from education, employment and training due to often challenging transitions experienced during these years – moving from late adolescence into early adulthood, completing school, making career choices, seeking employment and/or training and beginning employment.

Young people who are disengaged from employment and education are at increased risk of long-lasting negative outcomes including socio-economic exclusion, long-term welfare dependency, and poor mental health. Young people are also at a time of heightened vulnerability to mental health problems. Participation in education or employment is recognised as a strong protective factor for young people's mental health, whilst non-participation is a major risk factor.

Young people have also been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, with the social isolation they have experienced likely to have long lasting impacts on this cohort, including engagement in work and study.

headspace is a critical access point for young people who may not engage or be eligible for mainstream employment services. These young people often 'fall through the cracks' after leaving or disengaging from school; vocational support offered by headspace provides a soft entry point to support that is easy and attractive for young people to access and is integrated with clinical support.

During 2022, young people told headspace that employment and education are key priorities for them. When asked what they are most looking forward to in the future, 54 per cent of young people surveyed said "developing their career" and 21 per cent said "further study". Fourteen per cent of respondents indicated that youth unemployment was one of the issues that most urgently needs to be addressed. For young people from multicultural backgrounds, these percentages were even higher.

Given the concern that young people have about their future employment and study opportunities, the impacts of COVID-19 and the negative consequences of disengagement in work and study, it is critical that young people are a key focal point for research and advice to government. headspace strongly supports a collaborative effort to address these issues by working with young people and employers.

Particular issues that should be considered specifically in relation to young people include: equipping young people for an uncertain and casualised job market; key blockers to engagement in work or study such as cost of living pressures and access to transport; and strategies for returning to work or study following 2 years of working or studying online.

The importance of integrated approaches, and integrated services offered by headspace

As outlined above, disengagement from employment, education and training can have significant impacts on other areas of people's lives and are interconnected with mental health, access to housing, costing of living pressures and welfare dependency. In providing advice on workforce, training and skills needs, it is critical that Jobs and Skills Australia considers all of these factors, and cross-sectoral approaches to responding to the needs they create.

headspace has been progressive in implementing programs that provide young people with integrated vocational and mental health support that is focused on helping them remain engaged in work and/or study.

The **Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model** is operating in 50 headspace centres nationally, providing integrated clinical support and career mentoring to young people whose mental health is a barrier to finding or participating fully in work. IPS is an effective and cost-effective approach to supporting young people to overcome barriers to employment, build their security and dignity, and improve the life chances of a cohort facing long-term welfare dependency and socio-economic disadvantage. Studies have found the IPS program to be highly cost-effective, delivering favourable employment and education outcomes achieved compared to other employment service programs. It is now being picked up internationally and headspace is at the forefront of IPS in Australia.

headspace Work and Study Online (hWS) is a national digital program that integrates employment and education support with clinical mental health and psychosocial support for young people whose mental health would otherwise prevent them from participating fully in work and study.

Career mentoring, which is a component of hWS, connects young people with an online mentor. headspace has developed partnerships with a range of industry organisations to deliver this program. This unique service also delivers impact for partner industry organisations and their staff, building the skills of mentors, furthering mental health awareness and reducing stigma.

These vocational programs have had positive outcomes for participants and the program experiences and lessons learned could be a valuable input into the work of Jobs and Skills Australia.

Workforce supply in high-needs professions

Jobs and Skills Australia might also be interested in the headspace **Early Career Program (ECP)**, an exemplary workforce attraction and growth model operating in a sector facing acute supply challenges. ECP places allied health students and graduates in headspace centres in regional and rural locations and supports them to deliver services, while developing their skills for long term careers in youth mental health, with bespoke packages of training and clinical supervision. The recruitment round for the 2023 intake was heavily oversubscribed, and headspace's university partners report that headspace placements are the most competitive placement opportunity for allied health students.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes of this consultation process, and would welcome continued engagement within the stakeholder network available to support Jobs and Skills Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Jason Trethowan
Chief Executive Officer