Draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy

Submission prepared by SkillsIQ Ltd

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Content

1.0 Introducing our submission

SkillsIQ welcomes the opportunity to contribute feedback on the *Draft National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy* (the Strategy). The overarching vision of the Government '*for a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care and support with decent jobs*' is one that **we share and whole-heartedly endorse**. Having worked extensively with government and a range of public and private stakeholders in three of the sectors of focus, early childhood education and care (ECEC), aged care and disability support, we are well versed in the challenges (and opportunities) which each faces regarding quality, productivity and long-term sustainability.

A coordinated reform approach to review the sectors, with the inclusion of veterans care, is recognised as a positive move to better identify and capitalise on common solutions. While the Strategy outlines common macro-level economic and social factors shaping the care and support economy, it is important to recognise the micro-level nuances of each sector that may challenge a 'one size fits all' approach.

We therefore put forward commentary for careful consideration by the Taskforce which reflect some important regulative and operational issues for national planning. Our knowledge and experience position us well to provide specific commentary in context to the Goals and Objectives addressing **skills and training, jobs and the workforce.** These themes are covered regularly across the Strategy; therefore, our feedback is summarised collectively (in Section 3.0) rather than referenced to a specific section of the Strategy.

SkillsIQ welcomes the opportunity to support the Taskforce and discuss in more detail any of the points raised in the submission.

2.0 About SkillsIQ

SkillsIQ is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that is committed to the transparency and quality of training and education. We are passionate about the role that skills and training play in addressing industry needs. SkillsIQ's expertise and experience includes:

- Workforce planning (including policy and strategy)
- Workforce development (including the development of industry skills forecasts)
- Vocational Education and Training (VET) Training Package development
- Industry engagement
- Research (including conducting annual skills surveys and developing Discussion Papers on topical training and workforce issues).

For the seven years (2016 – 2022 inclusive) SkillsIQ was contracted to the Commonwealth Government to act as a Skills Service Organisation (SSO) to support 19 Industry Reference Committees (IRCs), including all those in scope within the **Care and Support Economy (i.e. Children's Education and Care, Aged Services and Disability Support**). In this role SkillsIQ supported the Commonwealth Government, the VET sector, and a range of industries in VET training product development projects to ensure skills training standards aligned to the current and future needs of workplaces. We are now continuing with our work on developing international standards, supporting employers and State/Territory and Federal Governments in industry engagement and workforce development.

During our time as an SSO, we undertook with the direction of the respective IRCs the review and update of standards for key qualifications that are being used for skilling a majority of the care and support economy workforce. Examples of job roles of focus and projects conducted include:

- **Personal Care Workers** (workforce size 276,600),[1] with updates in the *Certificate III in Individual Support* reflecting requirements of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Workforce Capability Framework and the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety* to establish a skilled and sustainable workforce with career and learning pathways.
- **Enrolled Nursing** (workforce size 34,000),[2] with recent updates ensuring units of competency in the *Diploma of Nursing* program are accredited by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC), supporting pathways to a *Bachelor of Nursing*.
- **Children's Education and Care workforce**, including ECEC (with a workforce size of over 200,000 staff)[3][4], school based education support and outside school hours care, involving the review of six (6) nationally recognised qualifications with associated skill sets and Units of Competency (i.e. Training Package products).

Recurring issues voiced throughout these projects are echoed in the Strategy, including:

- crippling workforce and skills shortages impacting service provision and contributing to a significant level of unmet demand for services
- poor workplace culture
- lack of recognition of skills
- low wages
- a lack of applicants

- applicant perceptions that the job is unattractive.

All issues are further exacerbated in regional and rural communities.

This project work along with our ongoing engagement with industry has positioned us uniquely to provide observations based on intel gathered directly from both industry, research and government.

3.0 Commentary for consideration

The issues listed below provide a foundation of context for consideration when setting workforce development actions and priorities for the care and support economy at a national level.

- Whilst the segments share key challenges regarding productivity and workforce and skills shortages, it is important to note that in most cases they **do not share client cohorts**. We must **not lose sight of the distinctiveness of the clients** which each support, for this distinctiveness set the foundation of requirements regarding service delivery, care model, jobs and skills needs of each workforce. The client base of each segment reflects vulnerable cohorts and therefore require suitably trained workforces to address the sensitivities of each. Examples of job roles specifically trained to segment populations include:

  - ECEC – **Children** (0-5 years) supported by educators, early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, learning support officers etc.
  - Aged care – **Older Australians** supported by personal care workers specialised in geriatrics.
  - Disability support – **People with disability** supported by disability support workers and NDIS registered workers.
  - Veterans care – **Veterans** supported by veteran's community care workers and veteran's support workers.

  Note: We recognise that the segments at times can share an overlapping client base (e.g. an Older Australian with disability, a veteran may also be an Older Australian with disability) and have been brought together to align policy and industry practices. Moving forward however, it is critical to account for the distinct nature of each and sensitivities to ensure quality outcomes are not compromised for the vulnerable clients each segment supports.

- The segments are **governed by different legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks** reflecting the service and skills needs of each sector further reiterating the different clients, outcomes and workforces each segment addresses. This is in addition to the state and territory jurisdictional frameworks. ECEC is an example of a sector supported with a national regulatory framework, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) setting out a national approach to achieve quality. Minimum qualification attainment standards for staff are defined which is not currently the case for the other segments. The operating ecosystem provides different opportunities to say aged care and disability support. It is important not to duplicate or erode national frameworks and/or minimum standards when taking forward the planning (and implementation) of Action Plans to achieve the Strategy's set Goals.

- Specifically focussing on ECEC, this is a sector which has been working hard to establish itself more so as an 'educative' service rather than solely as a 'care-based' sector. Job roles in the workforce are today referred to as 'educators' rather than 'child care workers', signifying the real shift in scope and demarcation of the duties and responsibilities of workers, and their recognition in society.

- Leadership and management are an ongoing issue across the segments, with severe skill shortages noted at senior levels. These skills shortages along with an ageing workforce is compounding the ability to succession plan and threatening long-term service delivery. Research we embarked on specific to aged care to better understand an individual's journey into the sector and uncover reasons for leaving a job, and the sector, **highlighted the pivotal role organisational leadership and culture play in retention**. The Longitudinal Study of Student Outcomes in Aged Care project tracked a student cohort enrolled in a VET aged care qualification into the workforce and uncovered important triggers for leaving the sector:[5]

  - Over the course of three years, the workforce 'leaving' rate nearly doubled from 9% to 16%.
  - As individuals spend time working in the aged care sector, satisfaction levels fall noticeably. This transitions into decisions to leave the sector either in the short-term or long-term.
  - The majority of leavers went to work in a different sector and confirmed they were happy with their new jobs therefore suggesting little intention to return to aged care.
  - **A key trigger for leaving the sector included poor workplace treatment and the lack of support and recognition of work achieved.**

  This research focused on one segment of the care and support economy; however, recommendations are certainly applicable to the other segments.

  The Strategy has noted the need to '*improve leadership and management capability across the care and support economy*' (Goal 2.5) and SkillsIQ encourages this to be aligned with **further commitment to improve workplace culture and recognition**. Getting this right will undoubtedly have long-term sustainable effects in both attracting and retaining skilled workers, and improve the perception of the segments as 'places of choice' to work in.

- There is an extensive amount of policy and industry-based activity underway in terms of reviewing and developing future strategies that address services, outcomes and workforce issues in the care and support economy. The Strategy lists a number of past and upcoming policy and strategic reviews which complement its delivery. Additional policy developments and actions in context to workforce development are outlined below for further consideration in the Strategy's implementation:

  - Shaping Our Future, the National Children's Education and Care Workforce Strategy (2022–2031).
  - The Royal Commission into early childhood education & care in South Australia.

- o The 2019 NQF Review which recommended changes to the *Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Act 2022* and are due to be implemented mid-2023.
- o The 14 Strategic Actions from Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy.
- o The Department of Health and Aged Care's Home Care Workforce Support Program.
- o The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's NDIS Workforce Capability Framework.

The segments are not economic markets nor are they social welfare states. Determining how the economic, social, community welfare and equity aspects that the role of the care and support economy plays in society needs to consider the broad context of how all of these aspects can be best integrated to achieve outcomes. It needs to consider a broad context of all of these aspects.

Endnotes and references

[1] Australian Government Jobs and Skills Australia. Occupation Profiles ANZSCO ID 4231 [Viewed 19 June 2023]
[2] Australian Government Jobs and Skills Australia. Occupation Profiles ANZSCO ID 411411 [Viewed 19 June 2023]
[3] Australian Government Department of Education and Social Research Centre (August 2021) 2021 Early Childhood Education and Care National Workforce Census [Viewed 23 March 2023]
[4] This figure may include double counting as some staff will have more than one part-time position with different employers. It also excludes dedicated preschools/kindergartens.
[5] SkillsIQ (2021) Longitudinal Study of Student Outcomes Wave 3 Report. SkillsIQ, Sydney.