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Foundational Skills Survey Team

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**Australian
Chamber of Commerce
and Industry**

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Dear Foundational Skills Survey Team

RE: JSA Foundational Skills Study Discussion Plan

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry appreciates the opportunity to comment on the development of the foundational skills study.

Guaranteeing foundational skills in language, literacy, numeracy and digital capability was highlighted as a key priority in the Statement of Common Interests on Skills & Training ACCI along with Ai Group, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Trade Unions released prior to the Jobs and Skills Summit. As the economy moves out of the COVID-19 crisis, there is an urgent need to address the foundational skills of Australia's workforce, as well as those seeking to enter it. Many employers report low levels of literacy and numeracy among their workers, which is of serious concern. People without adequate foundation skills are at greater risk of disengaging from learning and face barriers to fully participating in the workforce as well as society. Poor language, literacy and numeracy levels constrain productivity, labour mobility and the capacity of the economy to achieve the higher skills needed for an increasingly knowledge-based and digital economy.

As noted in the discussion paper, getting the design of the foundational skills study right is critical to ensuring the study delivers on the promise of building an evidence base for foundational skills in Australia. The most recent national data available on adult foundation skills (literacy, numeracy and problem solving) is the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey, the latest of which was run in 2011/12. We note Australia has temporarily withdrawn from the PIAAC Cycle 2 program (due to be run in 2023), however, we understand that Australia is considering participating in the PIAAC Cycle 3 program. As such, it is important for Australia's foundational skills study to be as comparable as possible to the PIAAC survey. This will ensure data can be compared internationally, and also enable Australia to measure progress between past and future surveys, thereby having a meaningful comparison point. As such, Australia will be able to more accurately measure the impact of any measures to increase foundational skills of Australians. We note however that in order to ensure meaningful data is collected, there may need to be some additions, for example, data that can be broken down into a level of geographical granularity, which the PIAAC has not been able to produce in the past.

The Discussion Paper highlights digital literacy, which has emerged as another critical foundational skill. Digital skills require continual updating to keep pace with technological change. Individuals need access to digital training, both in the workplace and in order to gain access to employment and services. As our economy evolves and skills and education

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become increasingly essential to securing future jobs, it is critical that we don't leave Australians behind just because they have missed out on the basics. In terms of a proposed definition for digital literacy in the foundational skills study, as set out above, ensuring as much consistency as possible with the OECD / PIAAC definition is preferred, as it will allow a comparable data point internationally, as well as in future years if Australia participates in the Cycle 3 program. However, ACCI notes the OECD / PIAAC definition lacks the specificity sought in relation to digital literacy, and we support additional data being collected.

Two definitions of digital literacy were proposed in the discussion paper. However, we are aware of a number of additional definitions being used in Australia, including for example the definition used by the Department of Education in Victoria,¹ the UNESCO definition of digital literacy referred to in the Digital Literacy Skills Framework,² and a different definition by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority.³ It would be beneficial to conduct an analysis of current definitions of digital literacy to allow for the ability to provide informed feedback and ensure an appropriate definition is developed (and steps are taken to ensure consistency across the board).

The Discussion Paper also asks how data relating to foundational skills is, or has been, used. A better understanding of the size and distribution of foundational skills across the Australian population, including differences by age, gender, and geography would help identify areas where targeted interventions and policies are needed to improve the skills and certain groups and reduce inequalities. The data can play an important role in determining future reform efforts around education policy, particularly in relation to schools, including informing the National School Reform Agreement. Getting foundational skills right at the school level sets individuals up with the right platform to continue learning and underpin the skills needed to function in the workplace, so it is vitally important to focus efforts at this stage of learning. To this end, we note that the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare has announced the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Expert Panel to inform a Better and Fairer Education System. ACCI recommends the work of JSA proceeds in conjunction with the Expert Panel work, as the terms of reference are highly relevant to the work JSA is undertaking.

In addition, the data is also useful to inform other initiatives for adults. As set out the Statement of Common Interests on Skills & Training referred to above, an updated National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults should recognise the impact that digital transformation is having on the workforce, especially on lower skilled workers performing tasks in jobs, occupations and industries impacted by digital disruption. Workplaces need support under a refreshed national language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills strategy that includes tangible and realistic KPIs, to ensure state and federal government accountability against universal standards. In support of this there needs to be a greater capacity for data collection on LLND to provide more real-time information on the scale of the issue, which the foundational skills study can play a key role in. Data can also be used to inform plans to increase access and affordability, which is particularly relevant to digital literacy.

¹<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/english/literacy/Pages/introduction-to-literacy-in-digital-technologies.aspx#:~:text=Literacy%20in%20Digital%20Technologies%20relates,about%20digital%20tools%20and%20systems.>

²<https://www.dewr.gov.au/foundation-skills-your-future-program/resources/digital-literacy-skills-framework>

³https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/media/7024/qc_digital_literacy_ict_capability_consultation_curriculum.pdf



As is evident, having accurate and timely data in relation to foundational skills is immensely useful, and ACCI supports initiatives to ensure the design and implementation of the foundational skills study collects meaningful data that can inform the foundational skills evidence base.

