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Advancing Vocational Education Collaboration between India and Australia Australia-India Skills Roundtable

Summary Paper

Foreword

Professor Alec Cameron

Vice-Chancellor and President,
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We are living through very transformative times, and at the heart of this evolution lies the critical need for accessible, industry-aligned vocational education. As Australia's largest dual-sector university with a proud reputation for integrating vocational and higher education pathways, RMIT University is committed to preparing the future workforce by partnering with innovative institutions and governments who share our vision.

This Australia-India Skills Roundtable reflected the friendship between our two nations. It brought together the expertise and ambition necessary to build a workforce that is agile, globally competitive, and inclusive. India's skills development agenda aligns closely with Australia's experience in creating high-quality, scalable vocational training frameworks. Together, we have an unprecedented opportunity to leverage our collective strengths for the benefit of current and future generations.

This summary paper captures key insights and actions that emerged from the roundtable and lays the groundwork for collaboration to drive sustainable economic growth and mobility across both countries. I am confident that through these partnerships, we can create new pathways for learners to succeed in the rapidly evolving skills landscape.

Foreword

Mish Eastman

Deputy Vice-Chancellor Vocational Education,
RMIT University

The Australia-India Skills Roundtable represented a shared commitment to reshaping vocational education into an engine for opportunity, mobility, and inclusion. As industries across the globe demand a workforce with agile and job-ready skills, vocational education must continue to evolve, integrating cutting-edge technology and industry co-designed learning models.

At RMIT, we have seen firsthand how the 'Earn and Learn' model – where students complete their studies as part of their full-time, paid employment at a partner employer – and work-integrated learning initiatives create opportunities for students to gain valuable experience while acquiring nationally

recognised qualifications. This report highlights the potential for these models to be scaled and adapted to the Indian context – addressing skills shortages, enhancing employability, and contributing to social and economic development.

The collaborative spirit fostered during the roundtable demonstrated a mutual understanding that vocational education can no longer be seen as a second choice. It is a powerful, aspirational pathway to rewarding careers and lifelong learning. I look forward to the next steps in our partnership, as we bring together Australian and Indian expertise to co-design solutions that are both scalable and impactful.

Foreword

Sougata Roy Choudhury

Executive Director, Skill Development,
Affirmative Action and Industrial Relations, CII

India is on the cusp of an extraordinary demographic dividend, but unlocking this potential requires a concerted focus on equipping our young workforce with the right skills for the future. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), through its long-standing commitment to skill development in India, recognises the critical role that collaboration with international partners like Australia plays in achieving this vision.

The Australia-India Skills Roundtable provides an important platform for dialogue on building a more inclusive, accessible, and industry-driven vocational education ecosystem. This summary report reflects the shared aspiration to create scalable models for skills development – ones that are rooted in global best practices but tailored to India's unique context. By embracing dual-sector models, technology-enabled learning, and stronger qualification frameworks, we can significantly enhance the employability and mobility of our workforce.

CII looks forward to leveraging Australia's successful vocational education ecosystem to develop industry-relevant skills among youth, creating a talent pool that meets the needs of both India and global markets.

CII remains dedicated to fostering public-private partnerships that bring government, industry, and academia together. We are confident that the initiatives discussed will pave the way for impactful collaborations and drive India's skills agenda forward.



The Australia-India Skills Roundtable, facilitated by RMIT University in collaboration with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), brought together key stakeholders from government, academia, and industry to explore the future of skilling and vocational education. The discussion focused on leveraging vocational education to address India's evolving skills agenda, activate youth talent, and create seamless pathways for lifelong learning. With a shared vision of equipping the workforce with industry-relevant skills, the roundtable examined key challenges, innovative training models, and collaborative approaches to strengthening vocational education ties between India and Australia.

A critical aspect of this transformation is the ability to create seamless pathways between vocational education and higher education, a space where dual-sector universities like RMIT play a pivotal role. By integrating vocational training with degree pathways, dual-sector institutions help reposition vocational education as an aspirational choice, bridging the gap between skills-based learning and academic progression.

The roundtable underscored three central themes: understanding the barriers and opportunities in skills development, identifying innovative models for vocational training, and strengthening partnerships between industry, government, and educational institutions. 22w knowledge sharing and strategic dialogue, the participants highlighted the need for industry-driven education, the role of technology in scalable skilling solutions, and the potential for internationally recognized qualifications to support global job mobility.

The Landscape of Vocational Education in India

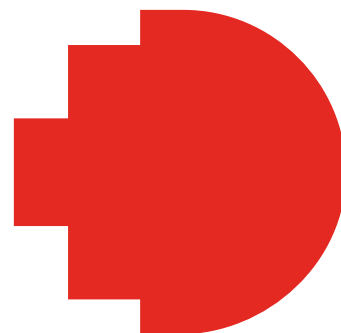
India's vocational education ecosystem is undergoing significant transformation, driven by both government policy and industry collaboration. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has played a pioneering role in skill development since 1987, with initiatives such as the establishment of Model Career Centres (MCCs) to bridge the gap between workforce supply and demand. Hospitality training programs, for example, have successfully placed interns with major hotel chains, demonstrating the effectiveness of industry-integrated education.

At the policy level, several regulatory bodies are shaping the future of skills development:

- **AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education)** oversees 14,000+ technical colleges and is shifting from a regulatory to a facilitative role, emphasizing curriculum alignment with industry needs. The introduction of faculty upskilling programs and industry-aligned curriculum updates aims to strengthen education-to-employment pathways.
- **NSDC (National Skill Development Corporation)** is focused on blue-collar skilling through sector skill councils, advocating for international mobility programs, and promoting the 'train-the-trainer' approach to enhance quality.
- **NCVET (National Council for Vocational Education and Training)** is actively recognizing multinational companies as skill training partners, developing global equivalency frameworks, and launching micro-credentialing initiatives to enable continuous learning.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly around the cultural perception of vocational careers, the cost and scalability of high-quality training, and the need for greater industry participation to ensure a seamless transition from education to employment.

Addressing these challenges requires a fundamental shift in how vocational education is perceived. Dual-sector universities can play a transformative role by embedding vocational learning within broader academic pathways, allowing students to transition from skill-based training into higher qualifications. This model not only elevates the status of vocational education but also enhances employability by offering multiple entry and exit points for learners.



Australia's Perspective on Skills Development

The Australian government recognizes the challenges of cost and scale when delivering vocational training in India. Rather than competing on cost, Australia's strength lies in its globally recognized certifications and innovative training delivery models. To enhance its impact in India, Australia is advocating for technology-driven vocational education, such as AI-powered learning platforms and virtual training labs. These approaches not only ensure cost-effective skilling but also expand accessibility across diverse learner populations.

Furthermore, Australian stakeholders see an opportunity to integrate vocational education initiatives with large-scale bilateral projects. Attaching skills training programs to emerging sectors such as renewable energy, technology, and infrastructure could create sustainable employment pathways while fostering deeper Australia-India collaboration.



Innovations in Vocational Training

Technological advancements are reshaping how vocational training is delivered, making it more scalable and accessible. With a strong industry-driven approach, WIL enables students to gain paid internships, stackable micro-qualifications, and hands-on industry experience. This model not only enhances employability but also provides a structured pathway for lifelong learning and career growth.

The integration of **artificial intelligence and remote learning tools** is another key innovation. AI-driven skill assessments, virtual labs, and mobile-accessible training programs are emerging as cost-effective solutions to train large numbers of learners without compromising quality. As India looks to scale its vocational education initiatives, these technology-enabled models could serve as a blueprint for sustainable growth.

In addition, the roundtable highlighted the importance of **rebranding vocational careers** to overcome cultural stigma. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is by reinforcing vocational education as a gateway rather than a limitation. Dual-sector universities provide structured pathways that allow students to progress from vocational certifications to higher degrees, reshaping the perception of vocational education as an alternative to traditional academic routes rather than a lesser option. Shifting terminology—such as referring to carpenters as ‘engineering - wood specialists’—and promoting success stories can change perceptions and elevate the status of vocational education in society.





RMIT Pilots New Earn-and-Learn model: Industry Based Learning



RMIT is shaping a new tertiary education system to better address Australia's critical skills shortages and provide education opportunities for those who need to work alongside their studies. Together with industry partners, RMIT has developed the **'Earn and Learn' model** - a nationally recognised work-based-learning qualification that combines vocational and higher education, co-designed and delivered with industry.

It combines Vocational and Higher Education to create learning opportunities to address skills shortages, improve workforce participation, as well as the need to upskill and reskill large parts of the workforce.

The model is the first of its kind for a Victorian university at degree level. It will see students complete their studies as part of their full-time, paid employment at a partner employer. This allows them to acquire valuable workplace skills while attaining a tertiary qualification and apply skills for their employing organisation.



Key Trends Driving the Need for Innovation

- AI-facilitated automation is projected to help India's electronics manufacturing industry reach \$300 billion by 2026.
- The logistics sector is expected to add 5 million jobs by 2030, requiring a focus on supply chain training and digital skills.
- India's e-commerce exports are projected to grow from \$1 billion to \$400 billion annually by 2030, necessitating new digital and logistics skills.
- Female participation in manufacturing is expected to rise from 25% to 40% by 2025-26, emphasizing the importance of gender-focused vocational education.
- The Indian manufacturing sector contributes 17% of India's GDP and is projected to grow to 25% by 2030.
- India aims to export \$1 trillion in goods by 2030, with the manufacturing sector playing a critical role.
- 80% of manufacturing jobs are currently in the unorganized sector, highlighting the need for formal vocational training.
- India's healthcare sector employs 4.2 million professionals, accounting for 4.5% of the workforce. Vocational training in healthcare is crucial to meeting future demand.
- The renewable energy sector could generate 4 million jobs globally by 2030, with India well-positioned to benefit.

Strengthening Collaboration for Skills Development

Collaboration between governments, industries, and academia is essential for the success of vocational education programs. The roundtable discussions emphasized several strategic areas for deeper Australia-India engagement:

- **Leveraging Indian Government Schemes:**
Engaging with Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and the Prime Minister Internship Program to standardize skills and create structured work experiences.
- **Enhancing Global Job Mobility:**
Strengthening qualification recognition frameworks and partnering with multinational corporations to establish direct overseas employment pathways.
- **Building Industry Partnerships:**
Encouraging industry co-funding models to ensure sustainable skilling initiatives and integrating vocational training into major bilateral projects.
- **Expanding Train-the-Trainer Models:**
Upskilling faculty through government-funded international fellowships and aligning sector skill councils with best practices from Australian vocational training.

These collaborative initiatives aim to create a seamless education-to-employment ecosystem that meets the evolving needs of both the Indian and Australian economies.

The Next Steps

To translate these discussions into action, the roundtable identified several priority initiatives:

- **Pilot a scalable Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) vocational education model**, with RMIT, CII, and industry partners leading a proof-of-concept initiative. As part of this, dual-sector institutes are positioned to reposition vocational education as an aspirational choice.
- **Expand qualification recognition frameworks** to facilitate international job mobility through collaborations between NCVET and Australian education bodies.
- **Develop a ‘Train-the-Trainer’ initiative**, aligning Indian sector skill councils with Australian training methodologies to enhance instructor quality.

- **Secure industry buy-in for future skills training**, engaging multinational corporations, small and medium enterprises, and state governments to co-develop funding models.
- **Draft a comprehensive position paper** summarizing key insights and submitting it to Indian and Australian policymakers to drive future collaboration.

By focusing on these strategic areas, the partnership between India and Australia can foster a more dynamic and inclusive vocational education landscape, equipping the workforce with future-ready skills.



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