



# Skills-First Approaches for Skills Shortages

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# Background

- A recent report on skills-first policy and practice
- The barriers to implementation
- The roles of stakeholders
- Implications for the education and training providers

# Defining the Skills-First Approach

Model	Defining Feature
<b>Qualification-Centric</b>	Formal qualifications dominate employability criteria.
<b>Skills-Based Hybrid</b>	Qualifications remain central, but skills and competencies are integrated (e.g., modular pathways, RPL, micro-credentials).
<b>Skills-First</b>	Recognisable skills and demonstrable proficiency are prioritised. Qualifications support rather than gatekeep. Requires coordination and culture shift.

## The Benefits of Skills-first

- It may unlock a untapped pool of skilled people whose remain invisible to employers because they may not have the generally expected credentials (e.g., a degree).
- Proponents of skills-first argue that skills-first is essentially agile in nature, and therefore useful for enhancing mobility and employability needs.
- Skills-first responds directly to labour market needs
- Skills-first may advance diversity and equity in employment

# Importance of Skills-First in Education & Training

- To improve alignment between education and training with labour market needs
- To improve the agility and lifelong learning outcomes
- To enhance the sector's role in addressing skills shortages
- To empower individuals through clearer, transferable recognition

## Barrier 1: Signalling Failures

- Relative few reliable, portable tools to communicate skills
- There appears a lack strong incentives for education and training institutions to signal skills clearly
- Result: poor communication between education and employment systems and employers regularly falling back to using formal education credentials.

## Barrier 2: Coordination Deficits

- Fragmented communication/coordination between education, employers, and policymakers
- Lack of common skills language and taxonomies
- Disconnected efforts across sectors and regions
- Result: System inefficiency and wasted effort

## Barrier 3: Cultural Resistance

- Formal qualifications hold deep cultural and social value
- Skills seen as secondary, informal, or low-status
- Education institutions shaped by credential-based models
- Result: Slow mindset shift despite noticeable progress



## Key Takeaways for Educators & Policymakers

- Develop collaborative ecosystems
- Embrace dual roles of skills and qualifications
- Continue to make reforms in learning and credentialing systems

## Concluding Messages

- Skills-first is not a rejection of qualifications – it's more about prioritising the visibility, the portability and the currency of skills
- A substantial paradigm shift will be required
- Educators and lifelong learning leaders are pivotal to supporting and participating in this transition



# Q&A

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