

QG Breakfast series

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The Future of Work in Queensland to 2030 – Evolution or revolution?

Brett Hall, Acting Executive Director, Jobs Queensland

MC: It's my pleasure now to introduce Brett Hall from Jobs Queensland. Brett spent close to a decade working on issues related to skills and workforce development, workplace productivity and vocational education and training. This has been a range of policy development research and program delivery roles across several State and Federal Government agencies. Brett's currently in the role of Executive Director of Jobs Queensland. This is an independent entity established to provide advice to government on skills demand, future workforce planning and development and apprenticeships and traineeships. Brett's going to talk to us this morning about this wonder document that Barb just mentioned: The Future of Work 2030 – Evolution or Revolution, and the effect of technology on our workforce. Please join me in welcoming Brett.

BRETT: Well good morning and thanks very much to Queensland Health and the Women's Network for the invitation to come along and talk today about a topic that we spend a fair bit of time thinking about and talking about it at Jobs Queensland. Which is around the future of work, and what does it all mean for jobs and skills in a Queensland context. So over the next little while I'm going to spend a little bit of time talking about some of the work that Jobs Queensland has done in this space, as well as talk about some of the insights that have been developed around what some of these broader changes happening in the economy and the labour market mean for employment and skills in Queensland.

Now I don't need to spend too much time talking about who Jobs Queensland is and what we do. So people have done that already for me which is fantastic. But I will just point out that our work covers three key areas. So apprenticeships and traineeships, anticipated future skills needs, and workforce development and planning. So Jobs Queensland has been around for about three years now, a bit more than three years. And there's a fairly significant body of work and research that's been published that's available on the Jobs Queensland website. So I really encourage you to jump on there and have a look if you haven't come across the work that Jobs Queensland has done before.

But I am here today to talk about the future of work. And look not a day goes by it seems where we don't have a new piece of research, a new piece of literature, a new piece of commentary or another media article talking about the future of work and what it means for jobs. And certainly I'm sure you have seen that there's two ends of the spectrum here. On the one end the robots are coming and all the jobs are going to disappear, through to the other end of the spectrum which is where you know it's going to be bliss, it's going to be utopia, we're all going to be working three hours a week and spending less time kicking our feet up on the



beach in all our almost unlimited leisure time. And the commentary and the reporting falls everywhere in between those two extremes on the spectrum. Unsurprisingly it can create a bit of confusion and a little bit of uncertainty and a little bit of anxiety around well what does all of this mean. So there's one quote in particular that I think is often used to talk about issues around the impact of technology on work. And as changes to industry have been and continue to be profound and far reaching new machines and new processes in industry are radically changing whole areas of employment, wiping out old jobs and creating many new ones. So some of you may be looking at this thinking this seems to be a fairly accurate representation of issues around future of work in Queensland, in Australia and more broadly across the world as well. But I want to touch on a point that Barbara made in her discussion a little while ago which is discussions around the impact of technology on work are not new. Now this quote is from November 1937 in a publication called the Vocational Guidance of Youth by a fellow named J H Bentley. Now if you are interested in issues around skill to work transitions you may enjoy tracking this article down and having a look because I reckon you could cross out 1937 and put 2018 or 19 on there and much of what's in there would be just as relevant today as it was back then around some of the issues preparing young people for the new reality of the labour market.

But there's another point I want to make in relation to this quote which is those last four words which is creating many new ones. And this is the point that often gets left out of some of the reporting of the impact of technology on jobs. So yes, technology is certainly impacting on jobs across the labour market and across the economy. But technology is also a driver of jobs growth and jobs creation. And I'll talk a little bit later on around some of the work that Jobs Queensland's done around modelling the impact of technology on jobs and modelling employment demand across the economy more broadly. But what we often see is that there's a hell of a lot of reporting on the jobs that will be impacted by technology, but often a little bit less so on that point that many new jobs will also be created. So there's a couple of publications that have, one of which has already been talked about.

So there's a discussion paper that Jobs Queensland put out earlier this year and has underpinned quite an extensive consultation process around the State as well as some social research. That discussion was underpinned by literature review. Now we know that there's an enormous amount of literature on this topic. And what we sought to do there was to look at the literature that's been put out from 2015 to 2018 at that time. So several hundred pieces of research and literature. And what we sought to do was to delve into those and think about points of consensus and points of difference. So where are the areas where the literature is in broad agreement around some of these issues, and where are the areas where there is a lack of agreement, and what can we do to delve into some insights into those areas where there is a lack of agreement. Both of these documents are available on the Jobs Queensland website. So certainly encourage you to jump on and have a look at those. So we certainly looked at our technology as a key driver of the future of work. But one of the points that I wanted to make this morning is that it's not just about technology. Technology is absolutely having a significant impact on issues around future work and the future structure of the labour market. But just as important as technology are some of the demographic and social factors that are underpinning the labour market. Things like the ageing population. Things like people spending longer in the workforce generally before retiring. Increased levels of participation by women in the labour market. All of these demographic and social factors as well as things like technology are having a significant impact on what work looks like.

There are also some important legal institutional and policy factors at play here. So you can have the greatest technology in the world and the most disruptive technology in the world but unless you have the legal, institutional and policy environment for that technology to be applied in a widespread manner across the economy the impact of employment is often likely to be diminished if those legal, institutional and policy factors aren't enabling that technology to be applied across the structure of the labour market.

The impacts are quite important. So each of those three drivers come together into a range of impacts. And those impacts are not uniform across industries, occupations and regions. And certainly as we went out across the State talking to employers, to individuals, to industry groups, to regional bodies earlier this year some of the impacts, and the differences in impacts across particular regions in Queensland were quite stark. And this brings us to a range of implications for skills and employment policy in Queensland. And that's a significant area of focus for Jobs Queensland in our advice to government on these issues.

So I mentioned that the literature of use focuses on points of consensus and points of difference. Now there's three in particular. So three points of consensus and three points of difference that I'll focus on in particular this morning. Now this is a very brief snapshot of the broader analysis that's available there. But the first point of consensus is around transitions between the workforce and education. So education and training are absolutely essential in navigating this future of world of work. There's some research that the World Economic Forum put out last year that talks about the half-life of a skill. And the work that they've done suggests that in the last couple of decades the half-life of a skill has reduced from around 30 years to around 6 years. And this notion of ongoing transitions in and out of education and work throughout a person's working life is becoming and will continue to become far more prevalent. So the notion of lifelong learning as it is often referred to. The concept of going through school doing a post-school qualification of some form and then having a career for life so to speak is becoming less and less common.

The second point is around the role of different types of education and training. Now we often talk about the moves towards a higher skilled economy. And on the surface what that is often interpreted as is an increasingly important role for universities as a provider of high level skills in the economy. Universities absolutely play an important role, and will continue to, but the vocational education and training system is key here. And there's some research suggesting that depending the way you cut the numbers eight or nine out of 10 of the fastest growing occupations are underpinned by vocational education and training.

The third one is around collaboration. Now these are big and complex issues. And no single actor can put in place the responses in isolation. Government, industry, unions, employers, employees all have a role to play here. There are some points of difference as well. Nobody has a crystal ball. So you know there's a range of research and insights that can provide an indication of the impact of technology and other factors on jobs, but when, how and to what extent jobs will change is difficult to define with absolute certainty. There's some difference in viewpoints on the definitions and extent of new forms of work. So things like the GIG economy. Certainly with Uber and some of these other commonly utilised platforms it is affecting new sectors in new ways. But the GIG economy and task-based work has always happened in some industries in the economy. And there's a range of views around whether that is increasing in prevalence or just occurring in different ways to what we've seen before.

Also some points of difference around how the skills, knowledge and attributes needed for the future can be identified, taught and assessed. So this is often called different things. Soft

skills, 21st Century skill, enterprise skills, encompasses those things like adaptability, teamwork, communication. Everyone agrees that they're important, but how do you teach them and how do you assess them and how do you measure them is a topic of significant debate.

I want to talk a little bit about technology given that's the area of focus today. Now some of you may have heard a number thrown around that's used quite a lot which is 47% of all jobs are highly susceptible to automation. Now that's a figure that's been cited thousands and thousands of times over the last few years. And it stems from a single piece of research that was undertaken in 2013 by Frey and Osborne in the States. Now what's interesting about that research is that firstly it's been picked up an enormous number of times and has really transformed the debate around the future of work. But one of those same researchers came out a couple of years later and substantially revised down that particular estimate. So the revised estimate was substantially lower than 47%. And there is an emerging level of consensus across the literature that the impact on jobs is perhaps going to be far less than was originally thought just a few years ago. Now of course when that estimate was revised down that didn't get nearly as much reporting and air time as that original, far more significant and sensationalist figure may have received. But there is an emerging level of consensus that the impact is far more likely to result in evolution of jobs and the tasks within jobs changing rather than the jobs themselves disappearing.

Now this segways quite nicely to another piece of work that Jobs Queensland has done, which is an economic modelling piece looking at future employment demand in Queensland. Now we modelled a number of different scenarios that may plausibly effect the economy in Queensland over the coming years. And I won't talk about what the scenarios are, but there was a range of scenarios in there as well as a baseline. Now what we found over each of those scenarios was that regardless of the scenario that we looked at, employment in Queensland is projected to grow. There is some variance across the scenarios, but the overarching trend remains the same. Now that first scenario, scenario one, actually modelled the impact of an upswing in technology uptake and a corresponding increase in productivity across the labour market. And again, a projected increase in employment across the economy.

If we look at where those jobs are projected to increase we can see that more than two-thirds of all new jobs projected to be created over the next five years are projected to be in just five industries. And that's those five industries listed there. The remaining one-third are split across 14 other industries. So we are seeing a significant move to a services-based economy, particularly in areas like health care and social assistance. And that's linked to some of those broader demographic factors across the economy and the labour market.

Now there's an important point that I want to make about this data is that all of this data is publicly available. And what I've shown here is a tiny snapshot of what's available. So Jobs Queensland has made available employment projections for Queensland across 300 odd occupations, 200 odd industry sub-sectors, 15 regions. And the point that I make about this in the context of a room full of people from government is that this is data that can underpin policy development, program management, decision making, across a whole range of different contexts. So with that in mind there's a range of data tools available on the Jobs Queensland website that may have of interest as well. But you can slice and dice this data that is of interest to you. And we are in the process of updating this with the most currently available data inputs as well.

So look that's a very brief snapshot of some of work that Jobs Queensland has done in this space. It is going to be a continuing area of focus for us. And we will be publishing more material on this topic, both in terms of employment projections and issues around the future of work more broadly over the coming months as well. So really encourage you to stay connected, either through subscribing to our e-News, following us on LinkedIn or finding us on Twitter as well. And we'd really love to stay involved with the work that you're doing. And feel free to get in touch with us if there's anything we can do to assist in sharing the research and insights that we've undertaken in this space to assist you in your day to day work as well. So thank you very much.