Forestry Workforce Training Program

Scoping Study November 2023

Commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)

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GLOSSARY

Access and equity	Policies and approaches aimed at ensuring that VET is responsive to the individual needs of clients whose age, gender, cultural or ethnic background, disability, sexuality, language skills, literacy or numeracy level, unemployment, imprisonment or remote location may present a barrier to access, participation and the achievement of suitable outcomes
Accreditation	Accreditation of a course is confirmation that the course: * Meets national quality assurance requirements meets an established industry, enterprise, educational, legislative or community need * Provides appropriate competency outcomes and a basis for assessment An accredited course is nationally recognised. A course can be accredited as: * a short course with a Statement of Attainment 'Course in' outcome, or * a qualification recognised within the Australian Qualifications Framework, for example, a Certificate II or a Diploma
Accredited Course	Accreditation is formal confirmation that the course: * It is nationally recognised and meets quality assurance and training package requirements * meets an established industry, enterprise, educational, legislative or community need * Provides appropriate competency outcomes and a satisfactory basis for assessment
Accredited short course	A course accredited by the VET Regulator in accordance with the Standards for VET Accredited Courses that leads to an AQF statement of attainment
AQF certification documentation.	The set of official documents that confirms that an AQF qualification or statement of attainment has been issued to an individual
AQF qualification	An AQF qualification type endorsed in a training package or accredited in a VET accredited course
Assessment	The process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether competency has been achieved, to confirm that an individual can perform to the standard required in the workplace, as specified in a training package or VET accredited course
Assessment system	A coordinated set of documented policies and procedures (including assessment materials and tools) that ensure assessments are consistent and are based on the Principles of Assessment contained in Table 1.8-1 and the Rules of Evidence contained in Table 1.8-2.

Assessors	are persons who assess a learner's competence in accordance with Clauses 1.13 to1.16 of the RTO Standards 2015
ASQA	Australian Skills Quality Authority
Audit	An audit or compliance audit undertaken by the VET Regulator
Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)	The framework for regulated qualifications in the Australian education and training system, as agreed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory ministerial council with responsibility for higher education
Authenticated VET transcript	Has the meaning given in the Student Identifiers Act 2014
Client	A learner, enterprise or organisation that uses or purchases the services provided by an RTO
Code	The unique identifier for units of competency, skill sets, VET accredited courses, modules, AQF qualifications or training packages as required by the Standards for Training Packages and Standards for VET Accredited Courses
Competency	The consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
Current industry skills	The knowledge, skills and experience required by VET trainers and assessors and those who provide training and assessment under supervision to ensure that their training and assessment is based on current industry practices and meets the needs of industry
Data Provision Requirements	The requirements for data provision as agreed by the Industry and Skills Council and implemented by the VET Regulator as required by its governing legislation
Element	* Each element describes a major skill required to carry out the work. Reading the elements of competency helps you to understand which specific work skills will be the focus of training and assessment * Elements define the essential outcomes of a unit of competency.
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students
Evidence	The information which, when matched against a unit of competency or module, provides proof of competency

Industry	The bodies that have a stake in the services provided by RTOs. These can include, but are not limited to: a) enterprise/industry clients, e.g., employers b) group training organisations c) industry organisations d) industry regulators e) industry skills councils or similar bodies f) industry training advisory bodies g) unions
Industry currency	The maintenance of a trainer's vocational technical skills and knowledge, enabling the trainer to deliver and assess vocational training relevant to current industry practices
Industry engagement,	For the purposes of the RTO Standards 2015 may include, but is not limited to, strategies such as: a) partnering with local employers, regional/national businesses, relevant industry bodies and/or enterprise RTOs b) involving employer nominees in industry advisory committees and/or reference groups c) embedding staff within enterprises d) networking in an ongoing way with industry networks, peak bodies and/or employers e) developing networks of relevant employers and industry representatives to participate in assessment validation f) exchanging knowledge, staff, and/or resources with employers, networks and industry bodies
Industry regulator	A body or organisation responsible for the regulation and/or licensing arrangements within a specific industry or occupation
Learner	A person being trained and/or assessed by the RTO for the purpose of issuing AQF certification documentation
Licensed or regulated outcome	Compliance with an eligibility requirement for an occupational licence or a legislative requirement to hold a particular training product in order to carry out an activity
Micro Credentials	* A micro-credential formally recognizes and verifies achievement of a limited set of specific competencies or skill sets, as confirmed by assessment, and may or may NOT include a training component. * Micro-credentials are also distinguished by their adaptability, as they can be used for a variety of purposes (e.g., professional development, reskilling, etc.) * Microcredentials are designed to be short, stackable, industry relevant, and digitally credentialed learning experiences
Mode of delivery	The method adopted to deliver training and assessment, including online, distance, or blended methods

Module	A group of learning outcomes in a VET accredited course where it can be established that it is not possible to develop an appropriate unit of competency
National Register	The register maintained by the Commonwealth Department responsible for VET and referred to in section 216 of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011
Operations of an RTO	Includes training, assessment and administration and support services related to its registration, including those delivered across jurisdictions and offshore
Performance Criteria	Performance criteria are statements within each element. The Performance Criteria specify the level of performance required to demonstrate achievement of the Element
Professional development	Activities that develop and/or maintain an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a trainer or assessor. This includes both formal and informal activities that encompass vocational competencies, currency of industry skills and knowledge and practice of vocational training, learning and assessment, including competency based training and assessment. Examples of professional development activities include: a) participation in courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, or formal learning programs b) participation in mentoring, professional associations or other learning networks c) personal development through individual research or reading of publications or other relevant information d) participation in moderation or validation activities e) participation in industry release schemes
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	An assessment process that assesses the competency/s of an individual that may have been acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning to determine the extent to which that individual meets the requirements specified in the training package or VET accredited courses: a) formal learning refers to learning that takes place through a structured program of instruction and is linked to the attainment of an AQF qualification or statement of attainment (for example, a certificate, diploma or university degree) b) non-formal learning refers to learning that takes place through a structured program of instruction, but does not lead to the attainment of an AQF qualification or statement of attainment (for example, in-house professional development programs conducted by a business) c) informal learning refers to learning that results through experience of work-related, social, family, hobby or leisure activities (for example the acquisition of interpersonal skills developed through several years as a sales representative)
Registration	Registration as an RTO by the VET Regulator, where that registration is then entered on the National Register

RTO	Registered Training Organisation
RTO code	The registration identifier given to the RTO on the National Register
Scope of registration	The training products for which an RTO is registered to issue AQF certification documentation. It allows the RTO to: a) both provide training delivery and assessment resulting in the issuance of AQF certification documentation by the RTO b) provide assessment resulting in the issuance of AQF certification documentation by the RTO
Services	Training, assessment, related educational and support services and/or any activities related to the recruitment of prospective learners. It does not include services such as student counselling, mediation or ICT support
Skill set	A single unit of competency or a combination of units of competency from a training package which link to a licensing or regulatory requirement, or a defined industry need
Standards for VET Accredited Courses	Are the standards made under subsection 188(1) of the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 or the equivalent requirements adopted by a non-referring State
Statement of attainment	A statement issued to a person confirming that the person has satisfied the requirements of the unit/s of competency or accredited short course specified in the statement
Stackable Micro-credentials	A micro-credential is "stackable" when it belongs to a series of related micro-credentials, which, when completed, constitute a path to a higher-level certification
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency
Third party	Any party that provides services on behalf of the RTO but does not include a contract of employment between an RTO and its employee
Trainers	Are persons who provide training in accordance with the Standards for Registered Training organisation 2015 Clause 1.13, 1.14 and 1.16.
Training	Is the process used by an RTO or a third party delivering services on its behalf, to facilitate learning and the acquisition of competencies in relation to the training product on the RTO's scope of registration
Training and assessment credential	Are those qualifications, skill sets and units of competency, or relevant combination of those qualifications, skill sets and units of competency, specified in the table at Schedule 1
Training and assessment strategies and practices	Are the approach of, and method adopted by, an RTO with respect to training and assessment designed to enable learners to meet the requirements of the training package or accredited course.

Training Package	* The components of a training package endorsed by the Industry and Skills Council or its delegate in accordance with the Standards for Training Packages * The endorsed components of a Training Package are: units of competency; assessment requirements (associated with each unit of competency); qualifications; and credit arrangements * The endorsed components form part of the requirements that an RTO must meet under these Standards * A training package also consists of a non-endorsed, quality assured companion volume/s which contains industry advice to RTOs on different aspects of implementation
Training Product	AQF qualification, skill set, unit of competency, accredited short course and module
Unit of competency	* A Unit of Competency is the smallest component of a Training Package that can be assessed and recognised. It gives a description of the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively to a specific standard in a particular workplace role or function * The specification of the standards of performance required in the workplace as defined in a training package
Validation	is the quality review of the assessment process. Validation involves checking that the assessment tool/s produce/s valid, reliable, sufficient, current and authentic evidence to enable reasonable judgements to be made as to whether the requirements of the training package or VET accredited courses are met. It includes reviewing a statistically valid sample of the assessments and making recommendations for future improvements to the assessment tool, process and/or outcomes and acting upon such recommendations
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VET accredited course	A course accredited by the VET regulator in accordance with the Standards for VET Accredited Courses
VET Provider	There are a range of VET providers, these include: * technical and further education (TAFE) or similar public institutes * private providers * enterprise RTOs that deliver training to their staff * some schools and universities * professional or industry associations * not for profit community based adult education providers
VET Quality Framework	a) the Standards for Registered Training Organisations b) the Australian Qualifications Framework c) the Fit and Proper Person Requirements d) the Financial Viability Risk Assessment Requirements e) the Data Provision Requirements
VET Regulator	means: a) the National VET Regulator b) a body of a non-referring State that is responsible for the kinds of matters dealt with under the VET legislation for that State

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Forestry Workforce Training Program (FWTP) represents a unique, exciting opportunity to advance and transform the development of the forestry and wood products industry's workforce, especially its training, skills development and assessment processes and systems.

There is an ongoing issue for the forestry and wood products industry, i.e. the lack of an adequate skills and training delivery system to meet the needs of the industry and its stakeholders, making it all the more difficult for industry to access and maintain an appropriately qualified workforce.

This Scoping Study and research report, commissioned by the department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), provides key findings and key insights of experiences and barriers faced by the industry in accessing and implementing training and skills development.

Stakeholder feedback and the research for this Scoping Study all demonstrate that for several broad reasons, the interface between the forestry and wood products industry and the Australian vocational education and training system fails to meet industry's current needs.

The aim of the FWTP Scoping Study is to produce a fit for purpose training and skills development framework that is structured to meet the current and future industry context and needs, and that future-proofs workforce outcomes.

ForestWorks, in its extensive research, identified elements of the industry's employment and career paths that are the specific responsibility of employers. The critical understandings outlined in this report identify the challenges to attract, retain and deploy people and develop the critical skills and knowledge required for jobs in the immediate and sustainable future.

This Scoping Study stencils a roadmap for addressing the existing education and training environment, identifying the barriers faced by the industry, across the diversity of industry stakeholders and proposing strategic interventions, aimed at providing immediate solutions. The aim is for the FWTP to act as an investment, bridging industry to a future that includes greater lifelong learning, closer relationships with the Vocational Education and Training sector and durable processes for all aspects of workforce development.

The Scoping Study identifies a critical need for Industry's hands on involvement, engagement and influence as being central to the proposed architecture of the FWTP.

In this report ForestWorks identifies six integrated themes, scaffolding eighteen recommendations identified for action under the FWTP, to be led by industry. These are:

A.   Developing the Industry's Capability Through Workplace Skills and Training

B.   Enhancing RTOs and Training and Assessment Capability and Service in the Industry

C.   Supporting Career Long Learning and Skills Development

D.   Developing Critical Training Materials and Infrastructure

E.   Coordinating Management of the FWTP

F.   Highlighting Opportunities for Regulatory Change and Improvement

The eighteen recommendations are mapped to these themes and more importantly, those related to the FWTP are supported by projected costs, outlined for each year of the operation of the Program.

Whilst industry input for our Scoping Study demonstrates a need for program support valued at significantly greater than the FWTP's $9.5M, the recommendations and the projected costs are directly allocated around the identified priorities and funding envelope.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from this Scoping Study, is a recommended comprehensive program of coordinated investments, including for the operation of the Forestry Workforce Training Program. As per the Notably, we identify applications for First Nations Australians and Gender specifically Women, where appropriate. Table 1, illustrates the themes and recommendations as follows:

Table 1.

E. CO-ORDINATION & IMPLEMENTATION		F.
THEMES	**RECOMMENDATIONS**	
A. Workplace Focussed	▪ Link workplace procedures to competency standards [A1] ▪ Trial the application of micro-credentials and skill sets [A2] ▪ Develop workplace-based training and assessment capability and capacity [A3] ▪ Recognise skills and knowledge, regardless of how skills have been acquired [A4]	Policy & Regulatory Improvement
B. RTO Supported Capability Development	▪ Support trainers, assessors and RTOs with an industry specific network [B1] ▪ Develop an efficient 'virtual RTO' and travelling assessor capabilities for critical industry work functions [B2] ▪ Coordinate and aggregate training demand to improve viability for RTOs [B3] ▪ Support industry to engage with the VET system, including RTOs [B4]	
C. Career Long Learning	▪ Develop purpose-designed traineeships, including for school-to-work transition [C1] ▪ Create school to training to work relationships and linkages for First Nations Peoples [C2] ▪ Develop the skills of mid-career workplace leaders [C3] ▪ Support an industry-led project to improve tertiary education in the industry [C4] ▪ Develop and trial program to embed gender diversity in training systems, processes and materials and support women's participation in the industry, through 'ready for work' training [C5]	
D. Developing Critical Training Materials and Infrastructure	▪ Develop required training and assessment and competency verification resources [D1] ▪ Support initiatives to place relevant courses and qualifications online [D2] ▪ Establish an online catalogue and library of relevant training resources and relevant Australian Standards [D3] ▪ Develop First Nations cultural awareness and engagement training programs [D4]	

Industry is central to these recommendations. It is the responsibility of enterprises, unions, associations and others to act in a coordinated and collaborative manner to implement and evaluate the FWTP, its projects and pilots.

A. **Developing the Industry's Capability Through Workplace Skills and Training**
Placing industry at the centre of workplace training, skills development and assessment into the future, in an integrated pilot project focussed on Australia's sawmilling, wood processing and frame and truss manufacturing sectors that will:

- Link workplace procedures to competency standards [A1]
- Trial the application of micro-credentials and skill sets [A2]
- Develop workplace-based training and assessment capability and capacity [A3]
- Recognise skills and knowledge, regardless of how skills have been acquired [A4]

B. **Enhancing RTOs and Training and Assessment Capability in the Industry**
Maintaining the capability of RTOs in the industry and ensuring they can meet the needs of industry and its workplaces requires sustainable forms of support and new working models, to be trialled through a **series of pilot projects** over three years that will:

- Support trainers, assessors and RTOs with an industry specific network [B1]
- Develop an efficient 'virtual RTO' and travelling assessor capabilities for critical industry work functions [B2]
- Coordinate and aggregate training demand to improve viability for RTOs [B3]
- Support industry to engage with the VET system, including RTOs [B4]

C. **Supporting Career Long Learning and Skills Development**
Ensuring that from commencement of work to retirement, learning and skills development is continuous, a **series of pilot and trial activities** over the program's life will:

- Develop purpose-designed traineeships, including for school-to-work transition [C1]
- Create school to training to work relationships and linkages for First Nations Peoples [C2]
- Develop the skills of mid-career workplace leaders [C3]
- Support an industry-led project to improve tertiary education in the industry [C4]
- Develop and trial program to embed gender diversity in training systems, processes and materials and support women's participation in the industry, through 'ready for work' training [C5]

D. **Developing Critical Training Materials and Infrastructure**
Supplying industry, its trainers and assessors, RTOs and other training providers with the assistance they require can be more efficient by coordinated development of priority materials to support training. A **project of** the FWTP will:

- Develop required training and assessment and competency verification resources [D1]
- Support initiatives to place relevant courses and qualifications online [D2]
- Establish an online catalogue and library of relevant training resources and relevant Australian Standards [D3]
- Develop First Nations cultural awareness and engagement training programs [D4]

E. **Coordinated Management of the FWTP**
Implementing the FWTP and its integrated projects and pilots requires expert and industry-led capabilities. It is recommended an established and capable body coordinate the FWTP for and with industry. [E1]

F. **Regulatory Change and Improvement**
To facilitate the effective implementation of the FWTP and support industry to improve its workforce development, training and assessment outcomes, a number of regulatory flexibilities and changes are recommended. [F1]

The Scoping Study indicates that a successful future can best be delivered by the FWTP investing in the piloting with industry, of identified and potential solutions to significant challenges, through a coordinated approach that required leveraging some modest flexibilities within the national VET framework and potential improvements to it.

Pilot programs to road test potential solutions

At the centre of the FWTP are a series of outcome-oriented pilots that guide an improved future for training and skills development in the industry and its sectors.

Recommendations related to these pilots have been considered from several perspectives:

1. What are the pilot activities and what challenge, or problem are they seeking to resolve?
2. What sectors of the industry and to what employment cohorts are they most applicable (and therefore how might pilots be targeted)?
3. Which region or regions are most suited to operating the pilots, recognising some are related to national sectors and are not regionally bound?
4. What is the required estimated funding and how can this best be managed in the context of the FWTP's funding commitments

* It is noted recommendations under Theme F carry no specific, projected costs.

Meeting a broad range of industry needs

The following matrix, sets out the substantive recommendations and cross-references them to specific sectors, cohorts and areas of need:

Table 3

Challenges/Cohort/Sector	Developing the Industry's Capability Through Workplace Skills and Training				Enhancing RTOs and Training and Assessment Capability in the Industry				Supporting Career Long Learning and Skills Development					Developing Critical Training Materials & Infrastructure			
	A1	A2	A3	A4	B1	B2	B3	B4	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	D1	D2	D3	D4
Challenges & Needs																	
Access to RTOs and training options			X			X	X				X	X				X	
Regional, rural and remote			X			X	X	X			X	X					
Geographic dispersal of learners			X			X	X	X			X	X					
Low student-to-trainer ratios			X			X	X	X			X	X					
Costly equipment and expertise			X			X											
RTOs with limited industry expertise	X					X	X		X					X		X	
Limited functional linkages to other sectors				X					X			X		X			
Unfair funding models for RTOs				X					X								
Lack of support for private RTOs	X						X	X	X					X			
No support network for trainers & assessors				X								X				X	
Growing demand for micro-credentials		X	X							X				X			
Increasing demand for non-accredited training		X															
Job requirements being main drivers for training		X	X		X												
Lack of incentives and accessible training options for workers			X						X								
Cohorts																	
Trainees and apprentices	X			X					X			X		X			
RTOs			X	X	X				X					X	X	X	
Workplace trainers and assessors	X	X	X		X							X		X	X	X	
Women		X		X	X					X		X					
First Nations people		X		X	X					X	X			X			X
Workplace leaders											X	X	X	X			
Sectors																	
Forest growing and management	X		X		X	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X
Harvesting and haulage	X		X	X	X		X	X	X				X		X	X	X
Sawmilling and processing	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X				X		X	X	X
Wood panels manufacturing	X	X			X		X	X	X				X		X	X	X
Engineered wood product manufacturing	X	X			X		X	X	X				X		X	X	X
Timber building product manufacturing	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
Wholesaling and merchandising	X				X				X				X		X	X	X
Pulp and paper manufacturing	X				X								X		X	X	X

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the Scoping Study sets out the recommendations for piloting action and for coordinated implementation of the FWTP, along with suggested improvements to the regulatory framework for VET, to facilitate these initiatives.

These recommendations are integrated and a nested program of activities, proposed for piloting primarily in the Sawmilling and processing and Frame and truss manufacturing sectors. The exception is these recommendations also have application for activities involving First Nations Australians [see Rec. C2].

A. Developing the Industry's Capability Through Workplace Skills and Training

A1   Link workplace procedures to competency standards

Workplaces use Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) while VET uses competency standards. There are similarities between the two standards and the FWTP should develop and pilot a model for comparing (mapping) the skills and competencies of workers trained in the workplace against SOPs compared to accredited qualifications (full, skill sets and/or micro) delivered, RPL or assessment only purposes. The outcome should provide:

- A framework or model for application at the workplace level, including by workplace-based trainers and assessors (see Rec. A3);
- Opportunities for formal recognition of the skills of existing workers (see Rec. A4), including using appropriate micro-credentials and skills sets (see Rec. A2);
- Reduced training duplication that arises because of an absence of formal certainty of skills, and
- Provide guidance on skills-based career pathways for current and future workers and workplaces, regardless of the training and assessment pathways workers have followed.

A2   Trial the application of micro-credentials and skill sets

Piloting should be undertaken through the FWTP, of the potential application of stackable micro credentials in several sectors, including where there is relatively high labour turnover and many standard or common skills, some of which are transferable across and into other sectors of the forestry and wood products industry. This should include the agricultural sector and other regional and rural manufacturing industries.

This activity should be undertaken in consultation with the relevant Jobs and Skills Council - Skills Insight - to enhance portability of skills avoiding duplication across sectors and industries.

To support First Nations Australians and other new entrants to the forest and wood products industries, an emphasis needs to be placed on:

- 'Ready to Work' capabilities
- Literacy, Numeracy and Digital (LLND) requirements
- Completing employment paperwork
- Accessing identification documents; and
- Any other requirements

That forms a single micro-credential trial, operated as an integrated addition to existing First Nations activities being conducted in the Northern Territory. [see Rec. C2]

ForestWorks recognises that there is a low engagement from women and others in some work activities and sectors. This could be a result of poor access to formal training, impacting portable skills development and/or other personal commitments (such as family requirements) that leads to work absenteeism.

As such, we recommend a trial to provide stackable micro-credentials in flexible blended delivery modes conducive to maximising engagement. A qualitative survey should be conducted to determine the best way to achieve this outcome.

A3   **Develop workplace-based training and assessment capability and capacity**

Training and assessment is a continuous activity within all sectors of our industry's workplace. There needs to be a focus on developing the skills, confidence and capability of industry workplace-based trainers as a priority.

A pilot project of the FWTP should be conducted to provide resources and financial support to upskill:

- existing and potential workplace based trainers and assessors; and

- Formally accredited TAE Trainer's and Assessors in Registered Training Organisations RTOs)

We recommend that a focus is placed on:

- Those nearing retirement as they possess significant experience, skills and knowledge;

- Providing support to industry based trainers to undertake and complete the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment;

- Delivering a subset (skill set or micro-credential) of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment qualification, in the form of introductory 'train-the-trainer' training that increases and improves access to trainers and assessors.
  This initiative will provide support for increased engagement of women in these vital tasks and be of benefit to workplaces where First Nations Australians are engaged and efforts are being made to increase that engagement.

A4   **Recognise skills and knowledge, regardless how skills have been acquired**

Confirming skills by assessment reduces expensive training needs, enhances skills portability and retains an emphasis on operating efficiencies. Having a focus on sectors where there is regular labour mobility/turnover, the FWTP can include a priority project to develop and trial flexible and cost-effective models for training and assessment. This should include:

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) or Recognition of Current Competence (RCC)

- 'Assessment only' pathways, and

- Hybrid training and assessment pathways.

B. Enhancing RTOs and Training and Assessment Capability in the Industry

B1   **Support trainers, assessors and RTOs with an industry specific network**

To support trainers, assessors and RTOs wherever they are employed, the FWTP should establish and maintain a national, virtual network and online presence focussed on sharing information through a "Community of Practice" which delivers:

- New or changed technology, processes, machinery and equipment;
- Best practices in relationships between workplaces and RTOs;
- Training and support for workplace-based trainers and assessors [see Rec. A3]
- Professional development of existing trainers and assessors;
- Guidance and input to industry standards, Training Package and materials development priorities and processes;
- Develop quality, context specific, online training and assessment resources mapped to upcoming training package updates and pipeline VET reforms;
- Continuous Professional Development for TAE Assessors to maintain compliance and industry currency;
- Support for Trainers and Assessors to build and develop teaching and learning and assessment methods and tools; and
- Assists RTOs with training design, delivery, and evaluation

Integral to the network's early success in adapting to changing new priorities is the involvement of leaders and staff of pilot projects conducted under the FWTP. Establishing a specific network or 'channel' of female trainers and assessors should be considered within the total network structure.

B2   **Develop and trial efficient 'virtual RTO' and travelling assessor capabilities for critical industry work functions**

Dispersed operations and training demand mean for some critical work functions and key sectors, there is no opportunity to release employees for training at a centralised training facility. Equally significant, no RTO operates modern equipment, or has access to the latest technologies, like that found in workplaces, requiring training to be conducted by RTOs, in industry workplaces.

It is recommended the FWTP include:

- A **priority pilot project** to support the embedding of RTO trainers and assessors into major Sawmilling and processing facilities. This includes developing and assessing operating models for this approach to be sustainable and self-sufficient within the VET system, with particular emphasis on Saw technician and Wood machinist work functions and supporting workplace-based trainers and assessors [see Rec. A3].
- A pilot project in Forest Operations (*Forest growing and management* and *Harvest and haulage sectors*) to coordinate RTO assessors being deployed to industry for assessments during specific periods (e.g. Weekends) to minimise production downtime and other disruptions.

B3   **Coordinate and aggregate training demand to improve viability for RTOs**

The FWTP should include a pilot project to develop a 'demand aggregation' model and tool to inform RTOs in regions and sectors of the totality of industry training demand for specific work functions and activities. The pilot should be conducted in several sectors, including the *Forest Operations*, *Engineered wood products* and *Wood panels sectors*. [see Rec. E1]

B4   **Support industry to engage with the VET system, including RTOs**

An ongoing impediment for all sectors of the industry is translating demand into training and skills development activities with the VET system and RTOs. To support industry to achieve increased engagement, the FWTP should include a **priority pilot project** to provide two National Workforce Development Managers, for three years, shared across the sectors as follows:

- Forest Operations (*Forest growing and management* and *Harvest and haulage sectors*)
- Wood Processing and Timber Building Products (*Engineered wood products*, *Wood panels and Frame and truss manufacturing sectors)*

The National Workforce Development Managers would be located with the Coordinating Entity [see Rec. E1] and would undertake the range of tasks and activities aimed at linking industry with the VET system, including demand aggregation [see Rec. B3], support and lead the industry assessor and trainer network [see Rec. B1], and other activities designed to improve linkages and efficiencies to increase the uptake of training in the industry.

C.   Supporting Career Long Learning and Skills Development

C1   **Develop and support purpose-designed qualifications and traineeships, including school-to-work transition**

The FWTP should include a project to develop, support and promote modern technologically literate Traineeships in the industry, that are able to be commenced at school, include micro-credentials and possibly skills sets as sub-sets and operate in at least (but not limited to) the following sectors:

- Forest Operations (the *Forest growing and management* sector and the *Harvesting and haulage* sector);
- Timber and Wood Products Manufacturing (the *Sawmilling and processing, Engineered wood product manufacturing, Wood panel manufacturing)*
- Timber and Wood Products Manufacturing *(Frame and truss manufacturing, with emphasis on timber systems design and estimating*)
- Merchandising, wholesale and retail sector.

To enhance portability across sectors and industries, pilot implementation should identify and incorporate core, broadly applicable and/or foundation skills that could form micro-credentials and trial a specific pathway for women [see Rec. A2].

Consistent with this approach, the proposed Coordinating Entity should ensure close engagement with the Jobs & Skills Council, Skills Insight, including on the inclusion of forestry and wood products functions in any agricultural trade pathway, and to explore the potential role of Group Training Organisations in delivery of traineeships across industries.

C2   **Create school to training to work relationships and linkages for First Nations Peoples**

Creating clear and reliable linkages between school, training and work can be difficult for First Nations peoples. Discussions with Charles Darwin University (CDU) has identified that in the Northern Territory, work with industry and Traditional Owner organisations engaged in forestry activities, there are no easy or short-term solutions.

Recognising the established partnerships and work being undertaken in the Northern Territory, the FWTP should include a trial involving placement of a First Nations Training and Transition Development Specialist into the CDU program, to:

- Support First Nations people to navigate the transitions from school-to-training and from school-to-work and training-to-work;

- Assist in the development of stackable micro-credentials, including for workplace training in the 'train-the-trainer' format [see Rec. A3], to provide the VET system pathways for the transitions and to consider and advise whether these micro-credentials should be:

    o Registered separately as First Nations pathways;

    o Registered more generally within the qualifications structures, including Traineeships; [see Rec. C1]

    o Shared more broadly than the forestry and wood products industries, recognising potential similarities with other land-use industries, including agriculture, horticulture and grazing.

- Support First Nations mentors to be trained and engaged as workplace-based trainers to lead First Nations people's skills development and as workplace leaders; [see Rec. C3]

This FWTP project should work closely with Skills Insight, the Jobs and Skills Council for the agribusiness, fibre and furnishing industries, which has identified engagements with First Nations learning pathways and resources as a priority.

The First Nations Training and Transition Development Specialist should be a key participant in the National Trainer and Assessor Network.

C3   Develop the skills of mid-career workplace leaders

The FWTP should develop, support and promote a mid-career, workplace leaders' training program, linked to national qualifications, able to be delivered flexibly and including RPL and assessment only options, as well as organisational mentoring options, focussed on enhancing workplace and industry leadership knowledge and skills.

Development of the training program, which may be a specific qualification or a group of stackable skill sets, should focus on flexible delivery, including online learning options, where appropriate. [see Rec. D2]

Pilot delivery of the training program should include:

- A minimum of 40% women, with inclusion of a dedicated mentoring program and the operation of a women's mid-level leaders network;

- A specific program for First Nations Australians, with the target including those who may be engaged in the project operating in the Northern Territory [see Rec. C2];

- An emphasis on mentoring (including reverse-mentoring) where appropriate, in particular for mentoring by people from the same or similar backgrounds or cohorts.

C4   Support industry-led action to improve tertiary education in the industry

Industry's efforts to re-establish and reinvigorate tertiary education pathways have recently been significant, including major commitments from growers, working with Universities, to ensure more tertiary qualified foresters with local knowledge join and remain in the Australian workforce, thereby reducing dependence on importing talent from outside the industry, or overseas.

To support coordination of this and other tertiary level activities, the FWTP should include a specific Tertiary Workforce Development Manager on a full-time basis in 2024 and a part time (50%) basis in 2025, based at the University of Tasmania.

The Tertiary Workforce Development Manager should be a key participant in the National Trainer and Assessor Network.

[See Rec. B4 and Rec. E1]

C5   **Develop a specific program to embed gender diversity in training systems, processes and materials and support women's participation in the industry through 'ready for work' training**

Recognising that advancing social equality and ensuring the industry's capability and capacity harnesses the commitment, skills and qualifications of the entire population, the FWTP should include a **priority program** to comprehensively support women's participation in the industry through 'ready for work' training and to embed gender diversity across the industry.

Specifically, the FWTP should:

- Drawing on existing materials wherever possible, develop guidance material for developers of training packages and course materials and for trainers and assessors on specific training requirements for women and to support gender diversity;

- Develop and implement a 'work readiness' **priority pilot program** to provide women in regions with a density of employment opportunities (e.g. Greater Green Triangle), with the skills required to commence work in the forestry and wood products industry, structured as a Skill Set or series of stackable micro-credentials, addressing topics including but not limited to:

    o Workplace health and safety

    o Understanding the timber industry

    o Operating a forklift truck.

- Drawing on established programs, including those in other industries, develop a women's mentoring pilot program for women working in the industry, aiming to provide women with support, encouragement and role models to complete their training and remain in the industry;

- Conduct at least annually a women's specific training program within the forestry and wood products industry to train and upskill trainers, assessors, training coordinators and managers [see Rec. A3];

- Engage directly with industry and enterprise level leadership – regardless of gender – on workforce gender diversity and related training and skills development activities.

D.   Developing Critical Training Materials & Infrastructure

D1   Develop required training and assessment resources

Recognising the cost of developing appropriate and up to date course content, training and assessment materials and other training infrastructure can represent an impediment to the conduct of training, especially where there are small numbers of learners or they are geographically dispersed.

A targeted pilot needs to be conducted to develop and share [see Rec. D3] necessary materials for the following work functions and activities, as well as those required for the micro-credentials and Traineeships as set out in this Scoping Study. This would encompass:

- Cultural awareness and engagement with First Nations' Australians
- Implementing gender diversity and inclusion strategies in enterprises
- Establishing training and mentoring approaches that are specific to the learning needs of women and First Nations Australians
- Firefighting in Australia's afforested regions for wide application, including in other, non-forestry sectors
- Safe operating procedures in the *Frame and truss fabrication* sector
- Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital capability building teaching and learning resources and platform;
- Train the Trainer resources as a subset of the TAE qualifications;
- Establishing a suite of Micro-credentials based on standard operating procedures – e.g., Saw technician, load restraints, haulage, manual handling; [See Rec. A2]
- Getting Ready for Work (transitioning) training resources for First Nations people. [see Rec. C2]

Ensuring industry training materials are up to date with latest technologies, across all sectors, is an important element of ongoing upgrades and updates to content and learning approaches. Training materials development must be supported by ongoing research and engagement with industry to ensure training and skills development keeps pace with technological change.

D2   **Support initiatives to place relevant qualifications online**

Supporting sectors where online learning may be particularly appropriate for some qualifications or parts of qualifications may support increased enrolments. Focussed on that objective and noting this could assist participation from groups like those living with a disability, a pilot activity to work with industry and RTOs to place the relevant sections of at least the following qualifications on scope, and develop online learning systems and approaches for them:

- Forest Operations Diploma;
- Pulp & Paper Certificate IV;
- Pulp & Paper Diploma;
- FWP30920 Certificate III in Timber Frame and Truss Manufacture;
- FWP30622 Certificate III in Timber Building Products Supply
- Short Course in Timber Systems Design;
- FWP31220 Certificate III and FWP40420 Certificate IV in Timber Systems Design;
- Post Graduate course – Introduction to Australian Forestry (AFPA/COFFE initiative. Refer to AFPA report located in Gov Teams SharePoint FWTP folder)

D3   **Establish an online catalogue and library of relevant training resources**

Course content, training and assessment materials and other training infrastructure (including those developed as part of the FWTP [see Rec. D1 and Rec. D2]) should be assembled into a unified virtual library and linked catalogue of resources related to relevant work functions, competency standards and qualifications and be available to industry, RTOs, Government and other stakeholders (including Forest Learning and research organisations), to support 'open access' training and skills development.

D4   **Develop First Nations cultural awareness and engagement training programs**

Responding to the industry's concern it needs support to understand and more effectively engage with First Nations Australians, a **priority project** should develop and pilot a nested/stackable micro-credential or skill set addressing awareness of First Nations cultural considerations and value, engagement with First Nations peoples, including as Traditional Owners and Custodians and supporting First Nations peoples in employment in the forestry and wood products industry.

Pilot implementation should occur in at least the Forest Operations sectors of the industry, with an emphasis on enterprises actively engaged or engaging with First Nations Australians.

To maximise engagement, broaden outcomes and avoid duplications, this pilot project should be conducted in conjunction with the Jobs & Skills Council, Skills Insight and be integrated with other pilots and activities of the FWTP. [see Rec. C2]

E.   Co-ordinated Management of the FWTP

E1   **Engage an established and capable body to coordinate the FWTP for and with industry and to lead implementation**

To coordinate and lead the FWTP, an experienced, established and industry operated body be commissioned to:

- Manage the implementation of the Program and its Pilot Projects set out in the Scoping Study;

- Liaise with the Australian Government, Jobs & Skills Councils (in particular Skills Insight) and State and Territory Governments as required, including in support of the recommendations set out in the Scoping Study and to integrate actions on the recommendations into the work of the JSC, Skills Insight;

- Undertake formal pilot project evaluations and information sharing and minor research and other activities necessary for the successful implementation of the FWTP, with the aim being to embed successful practices after the FWTP has concluded. Further research is required on at least the following:

    o Development of stackable micro-credentials set out in Rec. A2

    o Feasibility of and options for a 'training levy' for the *Harvest & haulage sector* and possibly for other sectors

    o Feasibility of harvesting simulators being supplied on a 'mobile booking' basis

    o Explore opportunities for enhanced and more formalised Continuing Professional Development (CPD) systems with Forestry Australia and others

- Establish and operate the open access online catalogue and library of training resources; [see Rec. D3]

- Establish, operate and support the industry trainer and assessor network; [see Rec. B1]

- Support industry to engage with First Nations Australians and peoples, including directly engaging with First Nations peoples to support their involvement in the FWTP and its pilot projects and activities;

- Coordinate and aggregate specific industry demand for training and operate the process for sharing training demand, needs and calendars with RTOs and across industry; [see Rec. B3]

- Provide integrated reporting and accessible communication of the FWTP, its activities and outcomes to the Australian Government, to industry and others as required, including at industry leadership forums, Union and Association meetings.

F. Regulatory change and improvement

F1 Pursue regulatory changes to complement the FWTP and meet industry needs

Noting the significant VET reforms underway in Australia (see Section 7 p.98), there remain opportunities for improvements that would complement the practical, industry focused recommendations of this Scoping Study and support meeting industry needs.

In particular, the following reform opportunities would be welcome:

- **Recognition and acceptance of the role of workplace-based trainers and assessors**, allowing them to be integral as subject matter and process experts, for training and assessment directed through RTOs;

- **Funding support for training programs based on the cost of delivery**, not only standardised funding models which have limited relevance in markets and situations where demand is widely dispersed or the cost of conducting the training is significantly greater than the standardised funding;

- **Improved credit transfer for micro-credentials, skill sets and other assessments of competence in 'partial qualifications'**, including that achieved through RPL processes, aiming to streamline the use of scarce training and assessment resources without duplication of effort.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1　The Australian Forest, Wood, and Paper Product Manufacturing Industry: A Vision for the Future

Australia's forest, wood, paper, and timber product manufacturing industry is more than just a

sector, it is a vital part of our nation's economy.

The industry supply and value chain, supplies more than 80% of the framing for Australia's housing, in addition to the vast range of wood and timber products used inside and around the nation's dwellings[1].

The economic value generated by this industry is substantial and flows through to other sectors of the Australian economy, including significant export income. It fuels our construction sector by supplying sustainable wood products for housing and infrastructure development, ensuring affordable shelter, and shaping our built environment.

Whether timber pallets or corrugated boxes, industry moves the nation, delivering everything, everywhere, including to our export markets.

Additionally, the manufacturing of wood and paper products contributes significantly to national economic growth, supporting secondary markets beyond housing and packaging, like furniture, and printing.

A robust, viable and constantly evolving forest, wood, paper and timber industry is a cornerstone of the national economy, whose ubiquitous role and products are indivisible from the national economy, living standards and well-being.

The Forest and Wood products industry and its sectors are a fundamental element of much of Australia's regional identity. It brings economic strength and stable employment to regional communities, playing a key role in Australia's housing supply chain, and importantly, serving as a critical pillar in our commitment to combating climate change and our carbon footprint.

No other building product is a net store of carbon, extracted organically from the atmosphere. Increased use of efficiently produced wood products is part of Australia's circular, low-carbon economy.

As Australia looks towards the future, striving for economic and environmental resilience, this essential industry can only realise its full potential through long-term investments that strengthen labour productivity and income protection, paving the way for the development and formal recognition of a skilled and agile workforce.

The industry's regional profile demonstrates the economic and social interconnectedness, connecting rural and urban environments and illustrating its significant impact on driving regional economies. By offering jobs across the platform of tree planting, wood processing, and paper manufacturing, the industry has provided income and stability for millions of people, while effectively contributing to regional employment.

Ahead of all other manufacturing industries, the forest, wood, paper and timber products industry serve the nation as a powerful solution in our fight against climate change. Trees have the remarkable ability to absorb CO2 and other greenhouse gases, as primary contributors to global warming.

Through processing and throughout the lifetime of wood products, carbon is effectively locked away, long into the future. This unparalleled carbon sequestration service positions the industry as a vital player in our journey towards a greener economy.

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[1] Inquiry into the timber supply chain constraints in the Australian plantation sector Submission 9, 2020. AFPA Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture and Water Resources Timber Supply Chain Constraints in the Australian Plantation Sector. Australian Forest Products Association.

It is our shared mission to build upon these strengths and ensure the future readiness of the forest, wood, and paper product manufacturing industry.

To achieve this and deliver on the nation's potential, a well-planned, long-term investment strategy that prioritises labour productivity, income protection, and skill development is critical for Australia's future.

1.2 The industry and its sectors

Australia's forestry and wood products industry is a complex and sophisticated series of inter-related sectors, whose end-products and contributions to Australian society and economy are far reaching and ubiquitous.

House frames and roof trusses, timber floors, outdoor settings, furniture, fencing, corrugated boxes, packaging and writing products and toilet paper are all products delivered by the integrated supply chain that commences with tree growing and finishes in the hands of Australians and our international customers.

The value chain of the forest, wood and paper industry encompasses a variety of stakeholders - from forest owners and managers to processors, manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers - all collaborating to deliver products and services to the consumer.

The forestry and wood products industry is diverse, with primary production, initial processing, secondary processing and end to end product manufacturing and service, all incorporated in its value chain. It is therefore inevitable that there is a wide and diverse range of experiences, views and needs that must be addressed (see diagram 2 below).

The main functions in the forest and wood industry range from cultivating and managing forests for timber production, timber harvesting and transport, sawmilling and processing, production of timber and paper products, including packaging, to timber and paper supply, building materials fabrication and manufacturing and a variety of service requirements.

The output from these operations is a wide range of materials and products, such as timber and its components for building construction, structural timber systems including pre-manufactured frames and trusses, engineered wood products, wood chips, pulp, paper and paperboard, packaging products, and biofuels and bio-energy.

This industry is supported by an extensive network of suppliers, buyers, and service providers, all cooperating with forest, wood and paper businesses across all stages of the value chain. This network includes:

- operations like forest nurseries (responsible for growing nursery stock and seedlings)
- economic and technical consulting services
- forest science research services
- ground preparation and forest planting services
- silviculture contracting and reforestation services
- timber plantation and track maintenance
- tree pruning and thinning services
- weed and pest control services
- machine tool and parts manufacturing; and
- timber construction companies

All these sectors and businesses are mutually dependent with the forest, wood and paper product operations, indicating that developments, challenges, and opportunities in one sector, such as those related to skill development, are likely to influence the others.

As diagram 2 below demonstrates, the inter-relationships of the supply chain are significant, both in respect of product movements and business-level relationships. The sectors of the industry can be broadly defined as:

Forest Operations

- Forest growing and management
- Harvesting and haulage

Wood Processing and Timber Product Manufacturing

- Sawmilling and processing (e.g., Sawn wood production)
- Wood panels and engineered wood products manufacturing (e.g., Particleboard production)
- Timber building product manufacturing (e.g., Frame and truss fabrication)

Wholesaling and Merchandising

- Wholesaling and merchandising

Pulp and Paper Manufacturing

- Pulp and paper manufacturing

From an education and training perspective, the supply and value chain linkages are important because much of the fundamental knowledge base is similar from one sector to the next and many foundation skills are consistent.

Importantly, this Scoping Study identifies that for the Forest Operations group, there are also synergies with requirements in the agricultural and horticultural sectors, for Wood Processing and Timber Product Manufacturing (and for the Pulp & Paper Manufacturing sector) and, inter-relationships and synergies with general manufacturing and Wholesaling and Merchandising activities with the wholesale and retail sectors.

Diagram 1

Resource	Processing	Remanufacture	Distribution	Value Adding	End Product
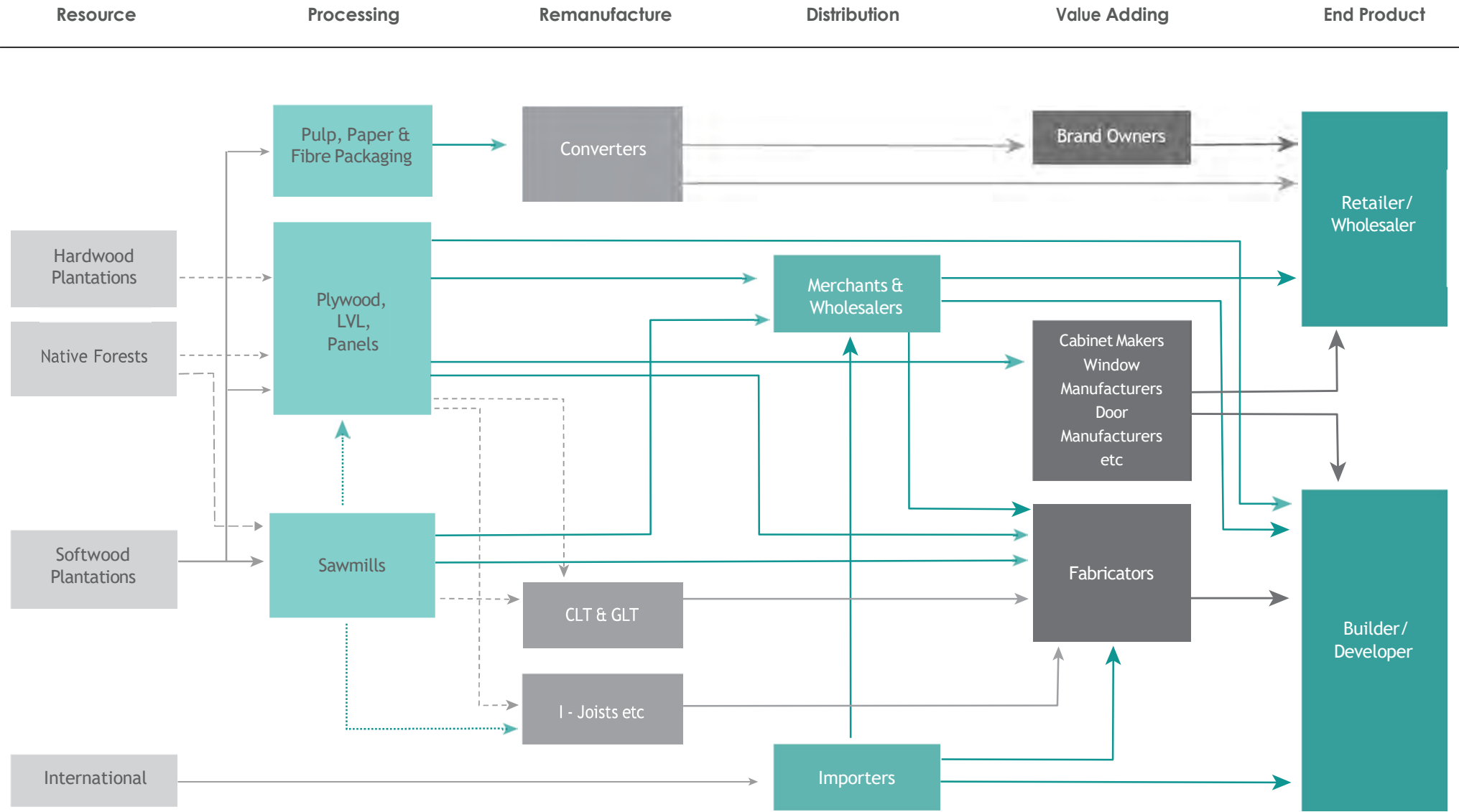
1.3   Forestry Workforce Training Program

An ongoing issue for forestry industries is the lack of a skills and training delivery system which meets the needs of the industry and its stakeholders and allows the industry to access and maintain an appropriately qualified workforce. This is partially caused by barriers hindering delivery of training and/or credentials including for key skills.

At the October 2022 budget, the Australian Government announced $10 million to support the delivery of qualifications, competencies, or credentials to meet the specific training and accreditation needs of the forest and wood products industries. The Forestry Workforce Training Program will apportion $10 million over four years (2023 – 2027) to support delivery of skills and training to meet the requirements of Australia's forest and wood products sectors.

1.4   This scoping study

To inform delivery of the program, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) engaged ForestWorks to undertake a scoping study that will research and analyse the existing education and training environment. The study will include the ongoing reforms occurring in the vocational education and training sector, detail existing and predicted skills and training needs noting where and why, identifying barriers and where underutilisation exists.

The study incorporates both desktop research and direct stakeholder engagement, to provide a complete picture of the research and training needs environment. Targeted stakeholders for consultation include relevant forestry and wood products industry bodies, relevant workers unions, forest and wood products certification bodies, education and skills providers, and relevant commonwealth, state and territory departments.

In the context of this scope, the study details essential information and recommendations on how to increase the participation of First Nations Australians in forestry industries and enhance the gender balance within the forestry workforce.

1.5   The ForestWorks' holistic model

The diagram below illustrates the industry's "journey" of employment and career pathway. While training and assessment are central to this model, industry has been explicit about the importance of other elements, such as the attractiveness of working and wanting a career in the industry and its sectors.

Significantly, the industry recognises several of these elements or domains are within arm's length, being its specific responsibility, whether it be at the industry, sectoral or enterprise level.

Diagram 2. Future proofing industry skills and training
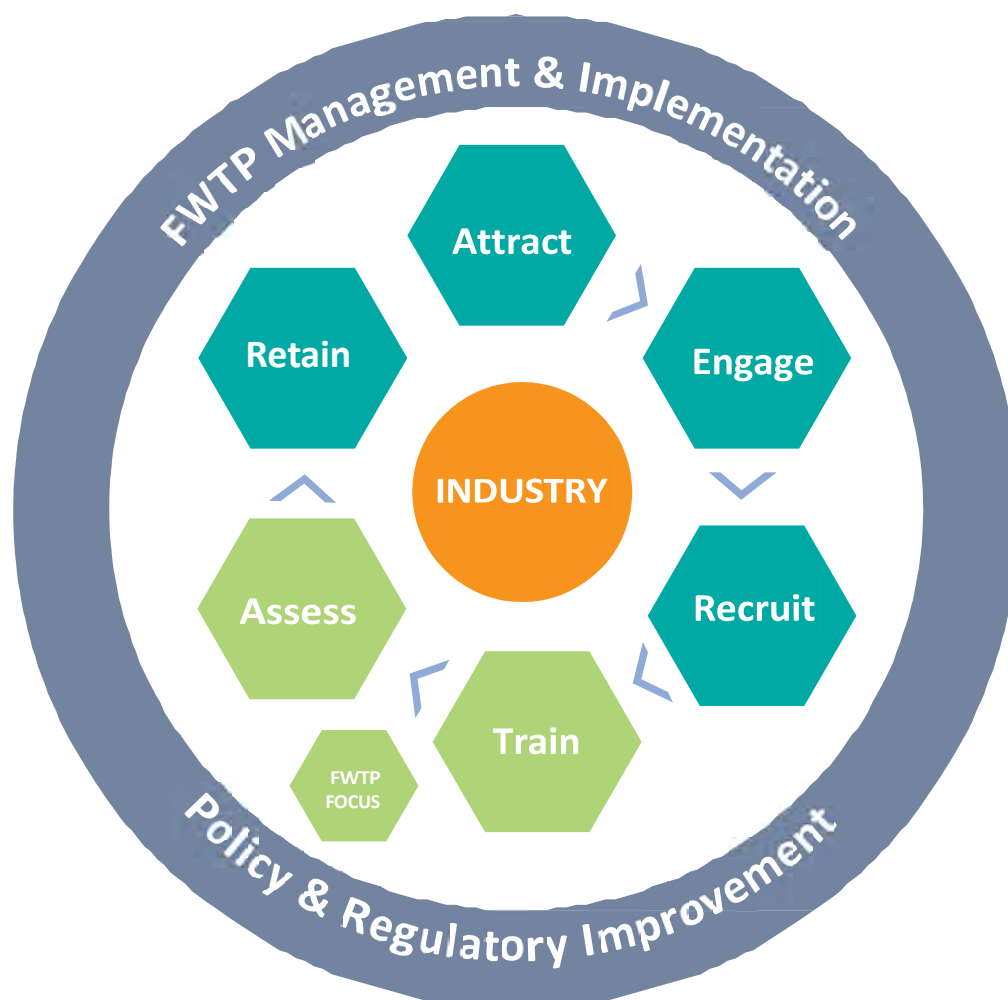
A report compiled as part of a G20 training strategy in 2010[2] on a skilled workforce for strong, sustainable and balanced growth, identified that the cornerstones of a policy framework for developing a suitably skilled workforce as being:

> …the broad availability of good-quality education as a foundation for future training; a close matching of skills supply to the needs of enterprises and labour markets; enabling workers and enterprises to adjust to changes in technology and markets; and anticipating and preparing for the skills needs of the future...

The G20 training strategy stated that when applied successfully, the above approach nurtures a virtuous circle in which more and better education and training, fuels innovation, investment, economic diversification and competitiveness, as well as social and occupational mobility – and therefore the creation of more productive and rewarding jobs.

The key recommendation was that good-quality primary and secondary education, complemented by contextually relevant vocational training and skills development opportunities, will prepare future generations for their productive lives, endowing them with the core knowledge and skills that triggers long life learning.

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[2] A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth: A G20 Training Strategy International Labour Office – Geneva, 2010 ISBN 978-92-2-124277-2 (print) ISBN 978-92-2-124278-9 (Web pdf) training policy / vocational training / vocational education / skill requirements / training employment relationship / economic recovery / economic growth 06.02

The scoping study forums identified that the forests and wood products industry strongly support this G20 strategy and tenet, we discovered that industry is applying considerable effort in attempting meet this strategy, but for a variety of reasons, has not been sufficiently successful.

Qualitative insight from the stakeholder focus group forums, radiated strong consensus that industry must act on how it is perceived, to attract, engage and recruit the workforce of the future whilst retaining skills, talent and experience within the industry in the face of a labour market that is likely to be tight long into the future, especially in regional Australia (refer to the Appendix - Forums section).

However, stakeholder feedback was clear that for this to materialise, successful implementation of the FWTP $9.5M funding program, needed to be strategically co-ordinated.

1.6   A challenging training environment

Analysis and industry feedback and input for this Scoping Study identified a number of systemic challenges that need to be addressed:

- **Geographic barriers to training,** often described as 'thin markets'[3], resulting in significant unmet training demand in some sectors and regions. This matter is addressed in greater detail at Section 3.3
- **Structural barriers to training and skills development,** making training more expensive than in many other sectors;
- **Funding barriers**, including declining support for private RTOs which in some instances are the only RTOs prepared to service specific industry needs;
- **Evolving training drivers, preferences and demand**, emphasising job requirements over qualifications and seeking access to micro-credentials and 'bite-sized' training like short courses.

To effectively address these challenges, this Scoping Study finds the industry's training and skills development must be:

- A circuit breaker to override the characteristics of thin markets,needs to be focussed on enterprises and workplaces
- Led by industry,
- Focussed on enterprises and workplaces, and
- Supported by a VET framework and system that adapts, where required and feasible, to meet the needs of industry and its participants

The FWTP can deliver the support required to make meaningful step changes towards this objective. Moreover, and in this context, the FWTP needs to be an investment vehicle to address, trial and pilot proposed solutions to some of the most significant and enduring challenges.

The aim of the recommendations is to guide the implementation of the FWTP to operate in a manner that will result in durable change where required, to how training, skills development and assessment are conducted in and for the industry. It may in doing this identify opportunities to promote appropriate flexibilities within the VET system to support that more durable future.

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[3] In VET, 'thin markets' are those areas of the training market where there are few learners and/or VET providers. Thin markets can occur in geographic areas (particularly in remote or regional areas) and in some industries or occupations. Geographic, industry and occupational thin markets can overlap (see glossary). See chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED505750.pdf

1.7   ForestWorks: Industry Focussed, Expert and Independent

ForestWorks is an independent, industry-owned not-for-profit organisation offering skills development advice, services and support for the forest, wood, paper, timber and furnishing industries and long been integral to industry efforts to develop and maintain a highly skilled workforce for its sectors and industries, as they play their part in Australia's economy and society.

ForestWorks undertakes extensive and ongoing skills and training needs analysis for the Australian forest and wood products industry and its sectors. Significant portions of this work are undertaken for the Australian Government, through contractual arrangements managed by Skills Service Organisations, specifically Skills Insight, (previously Skills Impact).

ForestWorks also supports State and Territory government bodies and agencies engaged in assessing skills and training needs, including by devising programs to meet identified needs and providing implementation pathways to those tasks.

In addition, ForestWorks in partnership with Skills Impact has on behalf of industry, undertaken extensive skills research, compiling a skills report (Forest and Wood Products Industry Skills report) which brings to surface the issue of 'thin training markets', and factors affecting low enrolments[4].

Australia relies on the skills and capabilities of the forest, wood, paper, timber and furnishing industries to manufacture products used across the country to construct homes and other buildings, provide flooring and furniture, and produce essential items such as packaging and health products.

Industry continually adopts new technology, equipment and processes to improve safety, sustainability, and efficiency. In particular, the industry focusses on providing sustainable building products to support a growing Australian population with timber-based housing and maximising the use of its resource to supply the packaging that keeps Australia moving.

ForestWorks has combined its experience and ongoing industry engagement with the specific engagements conducted as part of developing this Interim Draft Scoping Study. We provide services to support learning and careers, so that the industry and its workforce is equipped with the skills required to keep building and moving the nation.

Major activity areas for ForestWorks have always been:

- Understanding current and future workforce requirements for each sector
- Supporting and promoting the industry and its sectors, to recruit the workforce of the future
- Providing strategic guidance and thought leadership on workforce, skills development and related matters
- Developing and trialling strategies to meet the evolving and changing needs of industry and develop and recognise the skills of new and existing workers
- Supporting industry workers on their career journey, from recruitment to retirement

ForestWorks has a long history in the evolving forest, wood, paper and timber industries, including in establishing partnerships with industry companies and associations, unions, community-based organisations, training providers, Government agencies and others engaged in the industry and its sectors. It is an organisation which is governed by an industry-based Board of Directors, operates from multiple states and engages with industry and its constituent sectors on an ongoing basis, both formally and informally, including through numerous ad hoc committees established to guide every project it leads.

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[4]   https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/forest-management-and-harvesting/skills-forecast/

2. METHODOLOGY

ForestWorks has, undertaken three major activities associated with the scoping study as follows.

Activity 1: Project Communication

ForestWorks established a project webpage to ensure effective communication and informed stakeholder consultations. The webpage served as a centralise repository, hosting a project information page, details about online consultation forums and how to participate in these forums and a comprehensive collection of industry reports, providing stakeholders with convenient access to materials that inform the consultation process.

Activity 2: Desktop Research and Analysis

Desktop research was conducted having two objectives as follows:

1) To develop a background and discussion paper for the stakeholder consultation forums. The paper is available as a separate document and can be accessed directly by clicking on project webpage.

   The purpose of the background and discussion paper was to provide the forum participants with an overview of the known challenges and barriers related to skills development, training, diversity, and inclusion within the industry. The intent was that the paper would prepare stakeholders through thought-provoking questions across five key focus areas and stimulate discussions to produce robust and trustworthy insight.

   The paper was structured into three sections:

   Section One: Workforce for the Future
   Section Two: Advancing Gender Diversity, Inclusion, and Training Opportunities
   Section Three: Advancing First Nations Inclusion, and Training Opportunities.

   Each section consisted of two parts:

   Part 1: Discussion Points - Key issues, and questions
   Part 2: Background - Additional context and information on the section topic.

   A list of publications that informed the paper was included at the end of each section.

2) Analyse existing industry reports, research papers and relevant studies on education and training needs and environment, including an assessment of the ongoing reforms taking place in the vocational education and training sector. This was established on the project webpage.

3) This desktop analysis, along with regulatory framework discussion resulting from stakeholder consultations forums, is presented in Section 8.

Activity 3: Stakeholder Consultations

Online forum consultations – a series of stakeholder online consultation forums (eight online forums, and one in person forum, being nine in total) were conducted to obtain a complete picture of the research and training needs environment and formulate recommendations. The forums had the objective to gather expert insight from industry stakeholders on key challenges and barriers to workforce education and training, including identifying key thematic data to support the delivery of the skills and training needed by the industry.

To ensure that the Forestry Workforce Training Program supports the delivery of qualifications, competencies, and credentials to meet the specific training and accreditation needs of the forestand wood products industries, individual consultation sessions were organised for the following sectors and interest groups and themes:

Industry Sector	Forum Type
First Nations	Online
Gender Diversity	Online
Pulp and Paper	Online
Forest Growers, Harvesting and Haulage	Online
Timber Processing & Timber Building Solutions	Online
Associations and Hubs	Online
Government Departments and Agencies	Online
Skills and Training Agencies	Online
Australian Forests Products Association (AFPA) Peak Body	In Person

A total of two hundred and seventy stakeholders (n=270) were targeted to directly participate in the forum themes. The selection of these stakeholder groups represented the sectors of the Forest and wood products industry, to provide expertise, representation within their sector or category, and the projects they had undertaken in their field.

The online method for the forums was selected in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, as it offered several advantages over traditional face-to-face consultations:

- **Focus:** The online consultations allowed for a targeted approach, enabling in-depth discussions and the removal of barriers to contribution specific to different sectors within the industry.

- **Group dynamics:** By organising the consultations as forums for sectoral groups, it encouraged greater participation and engagement from stakeholders within those specific sectors.

- **Overcoming travel barriers:** Conducting consultations online eliminated travel and distance barriers, maximising communication and ensuring broad participation.

- **Cost effectiveness:** The online forums proved to be a cost-effective approach compared to other methods of stakeholder consultations.

Online Consultation Forum Schedule:

Forum Number	Date	Time
1. First Nations	6 June 2023	Time: 1100 hours
2. Gender Diversity	6 June 2023	Time: 1300 hours
3. Pulp and Paper	8 June 2023	Time: 1100 hours
4. Forest Growers, Harvesting and Haulage	8 June 2023	Time: 1300 hours
5. Timber Processing and Timber Building Solutions	9 June 2023	Time: 1100 hours
6. Associations and Hubs	9 June 2023	Time: 1300 hours
7. Government Department and Agencies	13 June 2023	Time: 1100 hours
8. Skills and Training Agencies	13 June 2023	Time: 1300 hours

1) **Face-to-face forum consultations** – A face-to-face forum was organised specifically for the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA) on 7 June 2023. This forum provided an opportunity for AFPA, being the largest Peak Body, consisting of the major industry representatives, to share their vision and contribute their perspectives for the scoping study. AFPA as the peak national industry body represents the resources, processing, and pulp, paper and bioproduct industries covering the forest products value chain. AFPA represents all elementsof the value chain from the sustainable harvesting of plantations and multiple use natural forest resource including forest establishment and management, harvesting and haulage, processing oftimber resources and manufacture of pulp, paper and bioproducts.

AFPA's membership falls under four chambers (Growers, Hardwood Processing, Softwood Manufacturing, and Pulp, Paper and Bioproducts) representing the core business of organisations at different points in the value chain.

AFPA provided their own written submission to ForestWorks titled: Australian Forest Products Association Submission to ForestWorks for the Federal Government's Forestry Workforce Training Program June 2023, which was loaded onto the DAFF GovTeams Sharepoint portal - FWTP folder.

2) **Post-forum consultations**

a) First Nations

The First Nations forum unfortunately did not attract any indigenous representation, and in response to this it was necessary to undertake further interviews with First nations organisations.

ForestWorks consulted the Forestry Industry Association Northern Territory (FIANT), the Tiwi Plantations corporation, Charles Darwin University with Northern Institute, Midway and the Gumatj Corporation. This cohort of stakeholders was identified as a go to authority because Aboriginal forestry development is a priority initiative for FIANT. They have a targeted objective to develop First Nations led forestry enterprises. A further area of focus is to attract, develop and retain an increasing proportion of First Nations people in the Northern Australian forestry sector.

ForestWorks consulted with FIANT in August who compiled a formal submission (Uploaded on to the Gov teams SharePoint FWTP folder) responding to the discussion paper used for all stakeholder forums. The submission titled "Increasing First Nations Participation in Northern Australia's Forestry Sector" [5] outlined the best way to develop the capability of First Nations people so they could participate in a sustainable forestry industry in Northern Australia.

The membership of FIANT have worked together to define three platforms off which the objective of increasing the participation of First Nations people in forestry can be reinvigorated. FIANT recognises factors such as local context, local trainers and mentors, greater awareness and engagement among First nations, training framework, Language, literacy and Digital skills and dedicated training and development management.

b   Gender Diversity

The Gender Stakeholder Forum did not provide the necessary in depth insight on the Focus Area 2 in the Forums discussion paper, i.e. promoting education, partnerships and networks. ForestWorks consulted the Tasmanian Forests and Forest Products Network (TFFPN) on work they are performing in the Gender training arena. The portfolio includes the release of:

- A Workforce development Plan
- A Diversity Action Plan
- Collaborating with TasTAFE on a Leadership and Safety Pilot Skill Set comprised of three Certificate IV in Forest Operations Units
- mapping our forest industry careers is soon to commence, guided by the Workforce Development and Diversity Reference Group and in partnership with the Tasmania Forestry Hub
- Supporting forest industry women in their leadership journey project
- Forming a partnership with Trades Women Australia

See section 6.Promoting and advancing gender diversity, inclusion and training opportunities.

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[5] Increasing First Nations Participation in Northern Australia's Forestry Sector, FIANT, 2023.

3) **Written report submissions** – in response to stakeholder requests, ForestWorks introduced the option to submit written reports in addition to the forum consultations. This was done to acknowledge that certain stakeholders may face difficulties participating in online forums, whether due to time limitations or other reasons.

The introduction of written reports allowed stakeholders to offer detailed information, feedback, or proposals in a structured manner. This approach provided stakeholders with the opportunity to express their viewpoints, concerns, and recommendations comprehensively. Furthermore, it ensured that even those who found it challenging to engage in the established consultation forum could still contribute their valuable input. Written reports submissions were provided by AFPA and the South and Central Queensland Forestry Hub[6] and have been uploaded to the GovTeams FWTP portal.

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[6] REPORT: Forestry Training And Education Future Skills Assessment March 2023

3. THE FORESTRY AND WOOD PRODUCTS INDUSTRY'S EXPERIENCE

In this section of the Scoping Study, the Australian forestry and wood products industry's experience of training and assessment, its interfaces with VET and tertiary education sectors, infrastructure and agencies is outlined. Barriers to participation and engagement are explored, along with the industry's specific needs.

3.1   How industry meets its skills and training needs

This section sets out how the forestry and wood products industry, its sectors and enterprises engage in training processes and skills development.

a.   **Workplace training and assessment**

Central to the training and skills development activities of all industries is training that occurs in the workplace. From the moment a new employee is engaged, a continuous system of training and instruction and informal assessment takes place. Just as the extent of this workplace-based training and assessment varies for individuals and jobs and by workplaces and sectors, it also varies by industry.

Some industries, like the forestry and wood products industries, are more likely to be structurally dependent on workplace-based training and assessment than other industries.

It is a central finding of this Scoping Study that the primacy of a workplace-based approach to training and assessment operates in nearly all sectors of the forestry and wood products industry.

However, the evolution and development of this approach has arisen by necessity and is not consistent, either as to inputs and processes, or as to outcomes across businesses, sectors or regions.

For instance, in some businesses and sectors, there are specific workplace trainers engaged to perform workplace training functions. In other situations, training is solely a supervisory function and for others, it is even more ad hoc. Only some sectors and businesses have access to or engage with RTOs and aspects of the VET system.

Case study: Online induction program development, a collaboration between Visy and the union

This initiative highlights the collaboration between Visy and the union to develop an online induction program that aimed to address the need for facilitating workforce entry into the pulp and paper manufacturing sector.

The program comprises two modules: one providing an industry overview and the other focusing on work health and safety. This ensures that new entrants gain essential knowledge specific to the industry before stating a job.

The initiative was made possible through funding from the NSW government, specifically for a project related to bushfire recovery and local economic development.

The collective intention is to make this induction program available industry-wide, serving as a valuable introductory resource for new entrants across.

Case study: Adapting to changing industry needs

This case study demonstrates how Appita, a long-standing professional association for the pulp and paper manufacturing sector, has adapted and evolved its training and professional development offerings to meet the changing needs of the industry.

Over the past 20 years, Appita has witnessed significant shifts in training delivery and requirements, necessitating a shift towards online training, coaching, mentoring, and contextualising training to job roles and career pathways. However, Appita faces challenges in aligning programs with competency frameworks, securing funding, and gaining recognition for the training they provide.

Adapting to Changing Landscape

Appita has observed a notable change in the delivery of training sessions. Previously, face-to-face sessions with up to 80 attendees were common, however over time participation numbers have diminished, reflecting the challenge of sustaining a financially viable RTO in this sector.

Appita recognised this shift and responded by embracing online training, providing greater accessibility and flexibility for participants. To meet the industry's evolving needs, Appita shifted its training methodology to focus on contextualising training to specific job roles and sector career pathways. By mapping training content to specific job roles within the sector, Appita ensured the relevance and applicability of the skills acquired, would increase engagement and activity in training and professional development within the paper and pulp mills.

Appita has been working closely with the mills to develop a framework for learning that encompasses coaching, mentoring, and succession planning within their training programs. The aim was to make these programs easily accessible and flexible, accommodating the diverse roster and schedule demands of mill employees.

Irrespective of the rotas, shifts and timetables Appita's outcomes provide training in smaller and digestible deliveries, ensuring that employees engage in learning activities without placing any impost on rosters and scheduling.

Challenges and opportunities

One of the challenges faced by Appita is the alignment of their training and professional development programs with competency frameworks. As they do not have an RTO, Appita cannot deliver national recognised accredited training and formal competency outcomes. This unfortunately also affects their ability to access funding and training incentives at federal and state levels.

Appita's previous arrangements with RTOs have changed or been removed, making it difficult to auspice funding opportunities available through Australia's publicly funded training systems. However, there is an opportunity for collaboration between training institutions, professional bodies, and Appita to support the industry's unique needs. Establishing partnerships and structures that enable recognition of training and skills development is crucial to overcome funding challenges and ensure the sustainability of Appita's training initiatives.

Leveraging Technical Training Resources

Appita possesses a vast array of technical training resources, with access to over 1000 online training units for the pulp and paper manufacturing industry. The association has also established an effective platform for delivering this training. Leveraging these resources, Appita aims to enhance the accessibility and quality of training within the industry.

Future directions

Appita recognises the need to establish mechanisms that link their training efforts with competency standards and allow for potential national recognition. By addressing this gap, Appita aims to ensure that individuals who undergo their training receive proper recognition for their efforts, enhancing their employability and career prospects.

To overcome funding challenges and facilitate greater integration of training efforts, Appita seeks to establish partnership approaches that connect their training activities with existing training systems and frameworks. By collaborating with RTOs, training institutions, and professional bodies, Appita can create a cohesive ecosystem that maximises the impact of training and professional development initiatives.

There are far reaching consequences of Appita's case study, including uncertainty of workforce skills and capabilities that undermines portability and transferability of skills, a lack of confidence about their skills and future career opportunities for workers. There is an inaccurate perception in some communities and potentially the populous at large that working in some sectors of the forestry and wood products industries is lower skilled, with limited career path options.

b. **Industry's involvement with the Australian Vocational Education and Training system**

Australia's forest and wood products industry engages with the national vocational education and training system, where it has access to their services. It does however face constraints, especially in regional areas and in sectors where demand is difficult to aggregate in a region, or where it is more difficult to deliver training online or via other modes.

Where training is required to be delivered 'in situ' or in a physical or operating context, smaller regions and/or sectors within regions require access to an RTO, otherwise engagement with national accredited training and formal credentialing is non-existent.

This is a largely supplier-driven model, in which supply (RTOs) searches for demand (enterprises and individuals) to be sustainable. It is not a model that implies there is no demand, rather, it is a model that fails to provide supply to meet underlying demand.

Inevitably, this model is flawed, with gaps where demand simply goes unmet and industry is left to its own in-house systems, for the credentialing of skills, training and assessment. An additional consequence is that disaggregated and unmet demand increases the challenges of the operating environment for RTOs and training providers.

Instead of responding to aggregated demand, RTOs consume limited resources pursuing industry training needs, and in some cases ranging across the nation to recruit sufficient demand to conduct training and operate viable, albeit marginal, businesses.

These conditions combine to create what is broadly described as a 'thin market' for vocational education and training, a phenomenon which the forestry and wood products industries are very familiar, as are other industries in Australia. This is a pivotal topic for this Scoping Study and is further explored in section 3.3.

The forest and wood products industry in Australia relies heavily on a skilled workforce. RTOs play an integral role in supplying training and assessment to meet this demand for critical skilled labour.

Currently, there are fourteen RTOs having a scope of registration tailored to the forest and wood products industry. This includes eleven boutique private training providers and three TAFEs. TAFE has industry based campuses located in key forestry regional hubs that include Gippsland Victoria, Tumut region in New South Wales, and Tasmania.

As shown in table 4 below, the bulk of the training provision is centered on forestry operations, at Certificates II and III. Most of these RTOs fulfil industry demand by employing their own trainers or engaging external trainers through third-party arrangements.

One Victorian private RTO (Timber Training Creswick) provides training to meet a comprehensive suite of FWP qualifications, significantly contributing to the diversity of training offerings within the industry. The RTO has made a significant investment to meet demand across all states (including Northern Territory and Queensland) offering a scope of registration that maps to the spectrum of the industry's sectors, as best as its resources and capabilities allow.

Timber Training Creswick's commitment to servicing to the industry's needs nationally, is considered as a desirable model for extension into other sectors.

There is another RTO that addresses the training needs associated with frame and truss manufacture and design and timber building products supply, responding to niche and specialised training requirements within the industry.

The role of these RTOs is crucial in ensuring a continuous supply of skilled workers for the forest and wood products industry. Their relationship with the industry is symbiotic: the industry relies on the support of RTOs to meet its demand for skilled labour, while RTOs rely on the industry for shaping their curriculum based on the changing needs of the industry.

Pivotal to the operation of these RTOs is the method they use to provide service to the industry. Their sustainability requires face to face delivery of training and assessment at industry sites and facilities, which include sawmills, wood panelling plants and frame and truss fabrication facilities. It is favoured as the preferred delivery model because the stakeholder forums communicated that work based training vastly improves:

- employee performance
- produces a stronger workforce
- aligns better with organisational goals
- expands knowledge sharing
- boosts engagement

Thus, an enhanced and modernised collaboration between RTOs and the industry is paramount to the industry's ongoing success and sustainability.

RTO Name	Forest Operations				Timber and Wood Products Operations				Timber Frame or Truss Manufacture & Design				Timber Building Products Supply
	Certificate II in Forest Operations	Certificate III in Forest Operations	Certificate IV in Forest Operations	Diploma of Forest Operations	Certificate II in Timber and Wood Products Operations	Certificate III in Timber and Wood Products Operations	Certificate III in Saw Technology	Certificate III in Wood Machining	Certificate IV in Timber and Wood Products Operations	Certificate III in Timber Frame or Truss Manufacture	Certificate III in Timber Systems Design	Certificate IV in Timber Systems Design	Certificate III in Timber Building Products Supply
	FWP20122	FWP30122	FWP40121	FWP50121	FWP20322	FWP30322	FWP31021	FWP31121	FWP40222	FWP30920	FWP31220	FWP40420	FWP30622
NTHA Training	X	X								X	X	X	X
TAFE Gippsland		X											
Fusion Training Solutions	X												
Intrain National Training Academy	X	X											
LITA Training	X	X											
Prosaw Australia		X											
RTV Training		X											
Southern Training Organisation Pty Ltd	X	X											
TasTAFE		X											
TAFE NSW		X						X					
FITS Training Service		X											
Timber Training Creswick Ltd	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
THS Training	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Western Australian College of Agriculture Denmark	X												
None				X									

Source: training.gov.au

The pulp and paper manufacturing sector is characterised by its technical complexity and high skill requirements. Operating complicated paper-making machinery demands specialised training, which often can only be acquired over 8 to 12 months of on-the-job learning. This presents difficulty of securing formal training through Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

In the past, in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector, formal training was offered by Box Hill Institute through partnerships with major pulp and paper employer organisations. However, in recent years, no RTOs have offered support for industry-specific qualifications.

Given these challenges, employers have stepped in, providing all funding and facilitating training within their workplaces, where industry experts impart crucial skills and knowledge, with little or no engagement with RTOs. Sporadic efforts have been made to provide training in general manufacturing, using general training packages. For the most part, these have proved to be too generic and the efforts have been short-lived.

Currently, only one RTO delivers the Certificate II PMP20121 and Certificate III PMP30121 Pulp and Paper Operations qualifications and that is due to the unique difficulties presented by Opal's Maryvale mill in 2023.

With the introduction of the Victorian Forestry Plan[7] , native timber businesses will close. ForestWorks estimates 600 jobs will be lost and over 1000 families members impacted. Under this Forestry Plan, sawmill workers, harvest, haulage and community forest workers and pulp and paper manufacturing workers employed by Opal Australian Paper who lose their jobs, will receive Victorian government support[8] to access education and training for new employment opportunities.

However, there is an urgency to have RTOs ready with the scopes of registration to deliver accredited training for new job opportunities. This is time consuming as it is riddled with the impost of complex compliance requirements, resource development, staffing and infrastructure requirements.

In that context, it is recommended the FWTP support industry to synergise its training, assist RTOs to expand their scope of registration with the crucial qualifications and fund the establishment of delivery models that blend RTOs and industry enterprises on the one hand and online training with workplace-based training on the other.

[See Rec. D2]

c. **RTOs supporting industry in the workplace**

In some sectors of the forestry and wood products industry, access to equipment and resources is only available in enterprises. There are no 'RTO simulated training mills'. This necessitates training being conducted in the workplace.

Those RTOs with strong industry relationships more commonly support the roles of workplace trainers, enhancing and formalising industry-led training activities. There are varying levels of formality to these RTO roles, but rather than being a strategic and planned system, it is ad hoc and more prone to boom and bust. The personnel of the small number of 'scope ready' RTOs in the forestry and wood products industry cannot be experts at everything that is required to deliver and assess formal accredited training.

There is therefore a reliance on workplace-based subject matter experts, in a relationship that at its best is operationally symbiotic.

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7 https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/forestry/forestry-transition-program
8 https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/bolstering-victorian-forestry-plan

CASE STUDY: Integrating RTOs and Workplace Training for Critical Work Functions

Engagements between RTOs and workplaces can be successful, where they focus on established or clearly identified demand and are underpinned by the role of workplace trainers and assessors. whether formally engaged or in the capacity of 'subject matter experts'.

There are a small number of unique work functions (e.g., Wood technicians like saw doctors) requiring on-the-job, in workplace training that necessitates the involvement of internal experts, in part because sawmills require a small number of highly-skilled technicians, all of whom are employed. They are experts and they and their trainees are difficult to release from their continuous manufacturing roles.

In this case, the model is provided by Timber Training Creswick, where the RTO's trainers provide the program and ongoing support to the workplace trainers, confirming skill and competence via assessment and the issuance of formal qualifications in accordance with the requirements of those qualifications.

Discussions with industry have included the option of coordinated and aggregated demand being met by one workplace acting as a 'host' facility, allowing workers from multiple workplaces and businesses to be trained together, as efficiently as possible, while improving the viability of delivery for the RTO.

Extending this model, formalising it and making it more systematic is a priority for the FWTP, with potential operational outcomes – including increased training of employees in critical work functions – and the opportunity to embed and advance one of the few viable models for training in the forestry and wood products industries.

[see Rec. B2]

Engagement and partnership approaches are a potential solution and an evolving model for industry training and assessment and its engagement with the VET system. This is a critical matter identified in this Scoping Study and is a priority for action under the FWTP, both to pilot solutions and for modest regulatory improvements.

[Rec. A1, A2, A3, B2, B4]

d. Role of tertiary institutions in forestry

Historically, the forestry and wood products industry relied heavily on a professional workforce of graduates from courses like the Bachelor of Forest Science, offered by Go8 Universities such as the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University.

In addition, Government operated forest management organisations, had established their own Higher Education training, offering qualifications up to the Associate Degree level, in conjunction with tertiary education providers. This model ensured a consistent supply of highly educated and skilled professionals, capable of driving the industry forward.

However, in recent years, there has been a significant decline in student numbers, resulting in the discontinuation of undergraduate offerings by both the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University. That leaves Southern Cross University as the sole remaining tertiary institution offering a Bachelor degree (undergraduate) in Forestry Systems[9]. This course is also experiencing low student numbers, threatening its commercial viability. This situation poses a significant risk to the future development of the industry and requires urgent attention.

Revitalising forestry education is crucial to meeting the industry's evolving demands and to continue to drive Australia's forestry sector forward and is a priority for the FWTP.

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[9] https://www.scu.edu.au/study/courses/bachelor-of-science-3007004/2024/

CASE STUDY: Revitalising tertiary level forestry education

A group representing commercial forest growers, universities, forestry professionals (Forestry Australia) and education organisations (ForestWorks and FWPA's Forest Learning) has met online since October 2022 to discuss forest industry needs for tertiary education and university collaboration to meet this need. The group met in person Melbourne on Friday 5 May 2023 to discuss and design future arrangements. It was agreed that the group be called the Committee for the Future of Forestry Education (COFFE).

The aim is to re-establish domestic tertiary education ensuring more tertiary qualified foresters with local knowledge join and remain in the Australian workforce, thereby reducing dependence on importing talent from outside the industry, or overseas.

The commitment is to establish a nested post-graduate forestry program offering a Graduate Certificate in Forestry and Graduate Diploma in Forestry program (totalling 12 units), with the following features:

- Entrance requirements that recognise professional experience and lower-level qualifications in the absence of an AQF level 8 qualification
- Central coordination and qualification offered by one academic institution, proposed to be the University of Tasmania
- Units offered by partner academic institutions around Australia on the basis of capacity and location offering suitable opportunities for in-field learning
- Appropriate compensation to providers of each unit by the coordinating institution
- Intensive delivery for all units (mix of online readings, recorded lectures and assessment

The industry commitment to the new program is significant. This cohort of Australia's forest growers have committed to fund a minimum of twenty student positions per year for the next five years, covering all student costs.

Industry and Universities are covering the establishment costs, but consistent with the VET experience, the identified gap in capability and resources is coordination in the program's infancy to assist with the significant number of tasks and activities required to ensure the post-graduate courses are established and that student recruitment, engagement and retention is maximised.

Specialist tertiary education in the forestry and wood products industry is a relatively narrow field, drawing on several disciplines. The FWTP can provide transitional support to pilot industry-led initiatives and through the proposed Coordinating Entity, support examination of options to enhance systems for Continuing Professional Development (CPD), as identified by Forestry Australia and others during the consultations and industry forums.

[See Rec. C4, E1]

e. **Declining role of specific tertiary education in the pulp and paper sector**

The pulp and paper manufacturing sector currently lacks a dedicated MBA program and the former Masters of Chemical Engineering provided by Monash University has ceased to operate because of low enrolments. Instead, engineers, chemists, and technicians engage in short courses or specific programs to satisfy job prerequisites. While a Master's program existed in the past, decreased uptake led to a transition to an online format, that was also short-lived.

Online platforms, such as Appita's Knowledge Academy[10] have, to an extent, bridged the gap by offering a comprehensive framework for developing skills across various operational areas. These platforms allow industry professionals to gain practical knowledge and experience, helping them meet the industry's changing demands.

[See Rec. D2]

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[10] https://appita.com/training-development/e-learning

3.2 Barriers to forest and wood products industry participation and engagement in the Australian vocational education and training system

The forest, wood and paper products industry is confronted with various challenges regarding the implementation of formal workforce training. A study by the Gippsland Forestry Hub[11], which involved ForestWorks to undertake the assessment and development of the report, identified several recurring challenges affecting the industry and its sectors.

The identified challenges include:

- Shortage of trainers, either in RTOs or in industry, and consequently, a limited number of RTOs;

- Limited opportunities for potential trainers to receive training and become qualified as trainers;

- Inadequacy of the trainer and assessor qualifications to accommodate a specific skill-set for those engaged in training at the workplace level, supported by RTO trainers;

- Wide geographic spread of learners;

- Low student-to-trainer ratios;

- High costs associated with equipment and expertise that drives RTOs to workplaces where the equipment and facilities already exist;

- Insufficient government funding for industry-specific training;

- Inadequate funding mechanisms for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) operating in niche markets.

It is noted that Skills Insight[12], the JSC for the agribusiness, fibre and furnishing industries proposes its 2023-24 workplan will include undertaking and promoting a Low Enrolment Monitoring Report identifying enrolment issues from multiple perspectives. This Scoping Study and the prior work on this topic by ForestWorks and Regional Forestry Hubs described above will be important inputs and the outcomes will be informative for the conduct of the FWTP.

The following topic sections describe the challenges and paint a picture of industry's current approaches to training and assessment and its engagement with RTOs:

a) Geographic barriers to training

Employers in regional areas have significant challenges due to limited access to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and training options. They report a shortage of training programs, trainers, and assessors and little or no contact with RTOs. This shortage and lack of access hinders workforce development and limits opportunities for individuals and businesses to enhance their skills. This lack of accessibility results in a shortage of training programs, trainers, and assessors, thus hindering workforce development and constraining opportunities for skill enhancement for both individuals and businesses.

The forest, wood, and paper products industry exacerbates this scenario by being geographically located in regional, rural, and remote areas. RTOs, in their attempt to service this industry, encounter financial strains as available training funding through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system does not adequately compensate for these high delivery costs.

Additionally, the wide geographic dispersal of learners in these expansive areas presents the barrier of thin markets[13]. With learners spread out in various remote locations, RTOs find it challenging to offer consolidated, nationally accredited training to meet the collective needs of the industry.

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[11] https://gippslandforestryhub.com.au/key-activities/

[12] https://skillsinsight.com.au/

[13] https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/vetinsights/thin-markets-and-rto-delivery-challenges/

According to the Job Skills Council Skills Impact these above factors contribute to high costs per learner, often 2 to 5 times higher than for training in situations that are not subject to the same factors[14].

This is an important issue as some of the skills most critical to Australia's future are highly technical and high cost to deliver, so RTOs struggle to fund development leading to their delivery. Without delivery being offered, enterprises, over time, develop their own alternative solutions and no longer seek formal training for their staff.

The FWTP can support the industry and RTOs to trial and pilot models focused on more effectively managing disparate demand, to increase engagement and enrolments within the formal VET sector, allowing the industry to access the training and skills development support it requires.

[See Rec. B2, B3, B4]

b) Structural barriers to training and skills development

In the forest, wood, and paper products industry, the low student-to-trainer ratios present significant challenges for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). With fewer students per trainer (class group), it becomes economically and logistically problematic for RTOs to conduct on-site training and assessment, especially for smaller groups. This issue is heightened in sectors where the workforce is stable, already well-trained, and in areas where structural efficiencies have led to a reduced workforce.

There is also very little online training and assessment content available to the industry currently. It is notable this situation is exacerbated in sectors where the workforce is stable and already trained, and in sectors and workplaces where investment and other structural efficiencies have reduced the size of the total workforce.

Industry demands access to high-cost machinery and specialist trainers, adding significant financial challenges for RTOs. Balancing the high costs associated with costly specialised equipment and securing subject matter experts, RTOs grapple with financing the preliminary developmental stages leading up to training delivery.

Another pressing concern is the lack of accredited trainers and assessors possessing both pedagogical know-how and specific industry expertise within RTOs and workplace partnerships. An important industry study delved into the training barriers confronting individual learners in the industry in 2022, spotlighting primary drivers for training while highlighting the existing gaps.

The absence of incentives for individuals to undertake training roles and the limited accessible training opportunities for skills development emerged as principal concerns for these industry participants.

There is a lack of functional linkages to other regional, rural and land-based sectors. It is noted elsewhere in this section of the Scoping Study that the forestry and wood products industry's enrolments in the VET sector and in qualifications is extensive in 'non-forestry' qualifications, including those related to some agricultural and horticultural qualifications. To date, stakeholders and RTOs report this has been ad hoc and opportunistic, rather than necessarily structured and strategic.

In this context, the 2023-24 Workplan proposed by the Skills Insight Jobs and Skills Council with responsibility for the Agribusiness, Fibre and Furnishing Industries, Skills Insight is notable, where it intends to:

> Undertake workforce function analysis and industry engagement on creating an agricultural trade pathway to complement existing qualifications, with the support of the Agricultural Workforce Working Group as requested by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.[15]

To provide industry and RTOs with improved opportunities and linkages, the forestry and wood products industry should engage directly with Skills Insight in this work, aiming to ensure any agricultural trade pathway is as broad and diverse as possible.

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14   Ibid

15   https://skillsinsight.com.au/workforce-plan/

Aggregating demand, supporting direct RTO linkages with industry and assisting industry and RTOs to gain access to training and assessment resources on a consistent and low-cost basis through the FWTP can alleviate some of the structural challenges, including creating the conditions in which recruitment of additional trainers and assessors by RTOs can be both viable and rewarding.

[See Rec. B1, B2, B3, B4, D1, D2, D3]

c) **Funding barriers**

Training providers within the forest, wood, and paper products industry are grappling with a myriad of challenges primarily rooted in the prevailing funding models and a palpable lack of governmental support. These models have been notably unfavourable, especially disadvantaging private Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) that cater to specialised sectors in marginalised regional and remote areas.

The government's inclination to channel a significant portion of its funding towards TAFEs exacerbates the issue, leaving a void of financial resources for private RTOs. Further compounding their problems are policies that introduce free TAFE courses, which, while only accessible through TAFEs, inadvertently divert potential clientele from private RTOs, rendering some of their courses unviable.

Another point of contention is the financial instability faced by trainers under private RTOs. Their earnings, being directly tied to training frequency and enrolment count, oscillate unpredictably. Additionally, the current funding mechanisms do little to incentivise private RTOs to extend their services to small, regional, and remote industries.

It is telling that a significant portion of training expenses are shouldered by employers, with many of them choosing fee-for-service arrangements to circumvent the convoluted government-subsidised options. This funding shortfall becomes particularly pronounced in niche markets. Often, the amalgamation of government and employer contributions falls short of the actual training costs, leaving RTOs in a quandary, especially when they need to train individuals in critical roles such as Saw technicians and Wood machinists.

Compounding these challenges is the conspicuous absence of a dedicated support network or community for trainers and assessors. This vacuum significantly hinders their capacity to continually hone their skills, ensure the delivery of high-quality training, and share invaluable resources.

The industry's clear need for skilled personnel starkly contrasts with the current financial and support structures, making it increasingly challenging for private RTOs to meet these demands effectively.

The RTO stakeholder forums provided the following insight:

i. Unfair funding models: Training providers report that the current funding models in the vocational education and training marketplace have created an imbalance, adversely affecting private RTOs that cater to small, regional, and remote industries. The challenges stemming from unfair funding models are detailed below.

ii. Lack of government support for private RTOs: Government funding is primarily directed toward TAFEs, with Free VET leaving private RTOs, especially those serving small, regional, and remote industries, having to tender for capped and restricted User Choice agreements.

iii. Impact of free TAFE training courses: Government policies that provide free TAFE training courses, exclusively accessible through TAFEs, negatively affect private RTOs by drawing away potential clients. When this occurs in the most marginal situations and locations where there is limited demand, a potentially viable training course for a private RTO can tip over into being unviable.

iv. Inconsistent income for private RTO trainers: Trainers employed by private RTOs earn money only when they provide training, with their income contingent on the number of enrolled students. This financial instability presents a challenge to private RTOs and individual trainers who may 'freelance' and be engaged from time-to-time to conduct training.

v. No incentives for serving small, regional, and remote industries: Current funding models do not offer incentives for private RTOs to provide training services to small, regional, and remote industries, making it difficult for them to maintain high-quality training courses and to conduct viable training.

vi. Insufficient government funding for industry-desired training: The training required by industry is costly for many employers and requires more flexible delivery arrangements that harmonise with an employees work roster. Even when training is accredited and eligible for funding, employers often opt for fee-for-service instead of government-subsidised training due to the complexity of navigating the system.

vii. Inadequate funding structures for RTOs in niche markets: Government funding and employer contributions often do not cover the full cost of training, making it unviable for RTOs to deliver in some sectors where the only training option is on site at a workplace, including with 'contracted in' expert trainers. This is particularly challenging where there is only a small number of people to be trained, but the work functions are critical to the industry's operations (for example, Saw technicians and Wood machinists).

No support network for trainers and assessors: There is no community-of-practice or network for trainers and assessors, hindering the capacity of workplace and RTO-employed trainers and assessors to effectively develop and maintain their skills and provide high-quality, industry-specific training and share common resources.

Through the FWTP, a series of strategic projects and activities can pilot options to reduce the financial burdens and impediments to training and skills development, as well as assist in establishing more viable and durable business models for RTOs, freelance trainers and other supporting the industry's training and skills development needs.

[See Rec. A2, A3, B2, B3, B4, D1, D2, D3]

d) **Evolving training drivers, preferences and demand**

The VET landscape has been undergoing significant shifts in recent times, with evident patterns emerging in how industry and workers approach skill development. One key trend is the rising preference for short courses, skill sets, and stackable micro-credentials. These succinct training modules, despite being less prioritised in government funding, are seen as potential avenues to bridge the gap between formal training and the industry's needs. However, the transition towards these modular training models has been gradual.

There is also a burgeoning demand for non-accredited training, partly propelled by the exorbitant compliance costs accompanying accredited training. This trend not only renders the search for trainers willing to navigate the rigorous accreditation process more challenging but also burdens trainers with compliance tasks, diverting them from their core teaching roles.

When assessing the motives behind seeking training, job requirements clearly emerge as primary drivers. Workers pursue training to enhance their skills, meet specific job-related requirements, and, often, in anticipation of higher wages. Interestingly, these job needs don't always resonate with extensive qualifications, leading to a surge in demand for condensed, 'bite-sized' training modules tailored to specific job tasks.

Yet, barriers abound in the training ecosystem. Many workers find themselves caught in a web of deterrents that stymie their skills development. Some of these challenges emanate from workplace cultures, while others have roots in the overarching VET system. A notable deterrent is the perceived lack of support from employers, making workers hesitant to embark on training ventures. The inflexibility of work schedules, especially impactful for women and those with familial obligations, further complicates training pursuits.

Moreover, the paucity of accessible training avenues for workers, especially those in the forestry and wood products sectors, exacerbates the issue. With scant opportunities to engage with the VET system outside their workplaces, the lack of pay increments upon training completion, and the unavailability of flexible online training options, many are dissuaded from pursuing further education.

Lastly, the VET system's focus on comprehensive qualifications hinders workers from investing in training, especially when partial qualifications or workplace training might not be recognised or valued by future employers. This presents a conundrum, as workers seek skills that are both immediately applicable and future-proof.

The key insight from the stakeholder forums indicated:

i.   Growing preference for short courses and micro-credentials: Until recently, short courses, skill sets and micro-credentials were not commonly included in government-funded or supported programs. Establishing models that include developing nested or stackable skill sets may present a solution to industry's access to formal training and relationship with the VET system, but progress toward them has been slow, to date.

ii. Increasing demand for non-accredited training: The increasing preference for non-accredited training is partially driven by high compliance costs associated with accredited training. This situation has the added impact of finding trainers and assessors prepared to endure the accreditation processes more difficult. Trainers and assessors want to work with people but spend much of their time doing compliance-based paperwork.

iii. Job requirements are the main drivers for training: Training is primarily driven by job necessities, skill improvement, and for workers, the prospect of receiving increased remuneration. Job requirements often do not align directly with a full qualification, increasing demand for 'bite sized' training and courses to facilitate job needs.

iv. Lack of incentives and accessible training options for workers: a variety of circumstances impedes engagement in training and development of skills for some workers. Some of these matters need to be addressed at the industry and workplace level, while others are relevant for the VET system to consider:

  - Employer encouragement: A lack of support and encouragement from employers hinders training engagement for workers in some sectors.

  - Flexible work arrangements: The absence of flexible working arrangements creates obstacles for individuals to participate in training programs, especially for women and others likely to have family responsibilities.

  - Access to training: Limited access to training opportunities further complicates the training process for learners and potential learners. There is almost no opportunity for workers in the forestry and wood products industry and its sectors to engage with the VET system independently of their workplace.

  - Pay incentives: The absence of pay incentives for completing training or acquiring qualifications discourages individuals from engaging in further learning, skills development and professional development.

  - Accessible training options: A lack of training options that are online, available outside of work hours, or that can demonstrably improve career opportunities serves as a disincentive for many individuals to participate in training programs.

  - Limited portability: The VET system's emphasis on 'whole qualifications' acts as a disincentive to participate in training programs where partial qualifications, workplace training and other activities have no formal outcome that could be attractive to an alternative employer in the future

In some respects, progress on these matters is in the hands of industry, especially at the enterprise level. There are however opportunities for the FWTP to support these industry initiatives, by reducing barriers to training and addressing the underlying causes of those barriers. This can include placing training programs and materials online, piloting training and assessment conduct outside working hours and especially piloting assessment options that assist in delivering portability of skills. [See Rec. A4, B2, D2]

3.3   Thin training markets explored

Examination of the status of training and skills development in Australia's forestry and wood products industries from multiple perspectives generally ends with some element of the challenges faced being cloaked in the language of 'thin markets'. There is often either insufficient supply of training options when considered from an industry or demand-side perspective, or inadequate demand for certain training to be viable from a supply-side perspective.

This situation is not unique to the forestry and wood products industries. Many other industries, whether from a discreet skills, geographic location or sheer scale perspective, face the same predicament. This is broadly known as the dilemma of 'Thin Markets'.

In this Scoping Study, the definition as described by Ferrier et al (2008)[16] has been adopted: that thin markets in Vocational Training and Education (VET) are those in which the actual and potential number of learners may be too small to engage registered training organisations and providers. In other words, there are parts of the training market where there are either or both few learners and VET providers.

Each specific type of thin market has its own unique set of characteristics, including those related to the training product or service, drivers and incentives for that training, the specific barriers and the experience of stakeholders.

Thin market perspectives

Insight from the consultations undertaken for this Scoping Study indicated that different types of VET thin markets exist. Considered from the context of demand, these are noted as follows:

- **Occupational VET thin markets** – where few people are seeking training for a particular occupation, qualification or even skill set;
- **Industry VET thin markets** – where few people are seeking training for employment in a particular industry;
- **Geographic VET thin markets** – where few people are seeking training in a particular geographic region e.g. regional, rural and remote Australia and its jurisdictions.

Stakeholder feedback from the focus groups conducted for this Scoping Study presented a range of reasons as to why thin markets are inherently difficult for RTOs to service, resource and conduct assessment.

Some of the major reasons included:

- Low and volatile student numbers,
- Higher costs for the long travel distances for training to regional and remote areas, and
- Insufficient training funding to cover the real cost of providing the training.

The net result is that training is often not viable for RTOs and training providers.

Desktop research and literature review identified a diverse range of factors that influence or drive the "thinning" within each of the sectors, either individually or combined. These are outlined as follows:

- The specialisation and proliferation of job roles within business and industry,
- Constant changes in Training Products (i.e. training package qualifications, Units of competency, Accredited courses),
- Onerous Training Package compliance requirements,
- Insufficient flexibility and responsiveness of RTOs,
- Level of Industry Enterprise and Industry Workforce Planning and Training Culture

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[16] Ferrier, F, Dumbrell, T & Burke, G 2008, Vocational education and training providers in competitive training markets, NCVER, Adelaide.

- Distribution of demand for training and supply of capability to deliver that training,
- Government policy
- Market understanding of the national Training Package system,
- Lack of engagement by TAFE and absence of RTOs with the scope of registration required by industry.

Furthermore, it was identified that thin markets persist with people living in rural and remote areas like most of Australia's afforested regions and regions inhabited by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (for example, the Northern Territory). This phenomenon leads to increased costs per learner, presenting a structural impediment to engagement with RTOs, training providers and the national VET framework.

In 2021, ForestWorks conducted an Improving enrolments project, part of a skills report with the then Job Skills Council, Skills Impact[17] . This identified that low enrolment numbers in training that triggered thin markets, was a direct result of:

- A lack of encouragement and support from employers,
- The impost of accredited training to industry operations,
- Learners not been provided with flexible working arrangements,
- A lack of access to training, modes of delivery and career pathways,
- No pay incentives deepening or widening of skills,
- A lack of accredited trainers and assessors to support learning,
- RTOs unable to establish simulated training facilities, due to the significant capital outlay needed

Registered Training Organisations

Insight from the Scoping Study's qualitative forums indicated that the significant challenges for RTOs and training providers included:

1. **Costs and restrictions on their scope of training activity.** RTOs, training providers and others argue for higher nominal hourly funding to be paid for training in thin markets, and for all jurisdictions to apply loadings for the higher cost of delivery in regional and remote areas.

2. **Jurisdictions/states have very different funding models, processes and requirements.** RTOs seeking to establish improved market density by operating across jurisdictions are faced by multiple and varied requirements and funding contracts for the same national qualifications, skill sets and/or unit of competency, adding cost and complexity to already marginal business considerations**.**

3. **Speculative nature of funding issued by various tenders, with no direct connection to the underlying demand.** RTOs having to sifting through often onerous and diverse State and jurisdiction application processes, systems, tender processes, timing and rules when applying for State funding, with no certainty of acquisition of actual training opportunities.

4. **TAFE receive State preference to an automatic re-occurring funding system, whereas private RTOs must tender annually for limited capped funding contracts.** State governments inadvertently exacerbate thin markets, denuding RTOs and training providers of many opportunities, leaving them with the option of taking on solely the less desirable (lower volume, low margin etc) options specifically required by industry.

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[17]   https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/forest-management-and-harvesting/skills-forecast/

5. **Training funding contracts from State Governments being insufficient to cover the cost of training,** especially when delivery occurs across borders or includes the challenges of remote and regional delivery.

Skills Impact, the Job and Skills Council (JSC) [18] reported that RTO delivery challenges were a direct result of training delivery consolidating in areas where delivery was viable, creating thin markets in other areas.

The Scoping Study forums resonated this, noting that RTOs focus on delivery in areas that they are best able to meet demand under the compliance, regulatory and funding settings. TAFE and private RTOs are increasingly reluctant to take on new qualifications and training. This is because the demanding level of regulation in the VET sector, including the cost of meeting that regulation and the related impost on industry operations, is often not sustainable nor viable.

The biggest harm for industry is that thin markets for training routinely proliferate where there is the greatest industry need for training. It is an uncomfortable irony they are routinely created or exacerbated by the conditions that see RTOs focus away from meeting core industry demand.

Trainers and Assessors

One of the strongest insights that emerged from the Scoping Study is that there is a shortage or lack of fully accredited and qualified trainers and assessors required to deliver and conduct assessment, in the range of qualifications, needed across all the diverse sectors of the forests and wood products industry. This consideration was explored in some detail with stakeholders, who report that neither RTOs or industry enterprises, have sufficient qualified trainers and assessors to meet current or emerging needs.

There were many reasons provided to explain why it has proven difficult to boost the critical mass of trainers and assessors.

One of the key reasons that emerged from the Scoping Study focus group forums was that Certificate IV in Training and Assessment (TAE training package) qualification contains onerous exigencies for anyone wishing to be accredited as a trainer and/or assessor. It followed that these exigencies were far less likely to be tolerated in RTOs or industry enterprises where training and assessing is just one function of many performed by some people, or in situations where the demand for training and assessment is occasional or very specific.

In the latter case – occasional or highly specific need for training – demand limitations make engaging in the Certificate IV commercially non-viable in many cases, both for RTOs and especially for industry enterprises and individuals.

The Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015 [19], outline in Standard 1 (clauses 1.13 – 1.24) the compliance requirements required by RTOs. We provide the following excerpt of the significant compliance required of RTOs:

Standard 1 - Trainers and assessors

1.13.   In addition to the requirements specified in Clause 1.14 and Clause1.15, the RTO's training and assessment is delivered only by persons who have:

a)   vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered and assessed;

b)   current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided; and

c)   current knowledge and skills in vocational training and learning that informs their training and assessment.

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18   https://www.skillsimpact.com.au/vetinsights/thin-markets-and-rto-delivery-challenges/

19   https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2019C00503

Industry experts may also be involved in the assessment judgement, working alongside the trainer and/or assessor to conduct the assessment.

1.14.   The RTO's training and assessment is delivered only by persons who have the training and assessment credential specified in Item 2 or Item 3 of Schedule 1.

1.15.   Where a person conducts assessments only, the RTO ensures that the person has the training and assessment credential specified in Item 2, or Item 3, or Item 5 of Schedule 1.

1.16.   The RTO ensures that all trainers and assessors undertake professional development in the fields of the knowledge and practice of vocational training, learning and assessment including competency based training and assessment

AND…

Individuals working under the supervision of a trainer

1.17.   Where the RTO, in delivering training and assessment, engages an individual who is not a trainer or assessor, the individual works under the supervision of a trainer and does not determine assessment outcomes.

1.18.   The RTO ensures that any individual working under the supervision of a trainer under Clause 1.17:

   a)   holds the training and assessment credential specified in Item 6 of Schedule 1.
   b)   has vocational competencies at least to the level being delivered and assessed; and
   c)   has current industry skills directly relevant to the training and assessment being provided.

1.19.   Where the RTO engages an individual under Clause 1.17, it ensures that the training and assessment complies with Standard 1.

1.20.   Without limiting Clauses 1.17 - 1.19, the RTO:

   a)   determines and puts in place:
   i.   the level of the supervision required; and
   ii.   any requirements, conditions or restrictions considered necessary on the individual's involvement in the provision of training and collection of assessment evidence; and
   b)   ensures that trainers providing supervision monitor and are accountable for all training provision and collection of assessment evidence by the individual under their supervision.

In addition to meeting the above compliance impost, trainers and assessors must also dedicate a significant length of time to complete the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment, due to the large volume of learning, and many high-level assessments. It simply is not a five-day course.

At the workplace level

Insight provided by stakeholders indicated that whilst some enjoyed the role of on-the-job training and assessment at the workplace, in industry enterprises, they did not want a professional career as a full time VET Teacher. Most considered that to be the main focus of the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. The Scoping Study research found that many industry-based on-the-job trainers regarded coaching on the job as being quite different to being a credentialled teacher, which is not within their career aspirations.

One key reason for this was that for many there was the need to have a higher level of language, literacy and numeracy skills, as required by the Australian Core Skills Framework [20] - pegged at Level four (ACSF 4). Learners studying at a nationally accredited Certificate IV level TAE qualification, need to be able to interpret and critically analyse complex texts, as well as communicate complex ideas and information in writing, displaying a broad vocabulary and accurate spelling and punctuation.

For many who sit at the Australian Core Skills Framework ACSF level two[21] , this upskilling to the required ACSF level 4 was uninviting, triggering low interest, and subsequently leading to the thinning of the supply-side of the training and assessment 'market'.

A thematic that emerged from feedback received by industry-based trainers were:

> …Why would I go through all the requirements to become an accredited trainer and assessor with all the hoops to go through, when I already am a trainer for my employer, and get paid for it, without the sacrifice…

Further research in this area was conducted by ForestWorks in a low enrolment project in collaboration with the Gippsland Forestry Hub Skills, who compiled an Employment and Education report [22].

Breaking the cycle of thin markets

This Employment and Education report indicated that there is a training need within the forestry sector and that training is occurring, however it is often being done outside of the VET system (non-accredited). This experience is largely due to thin markets, and a need for training to be able to be adapted to individual organisations to meet their requirements whilst still meeting nationally accredited training requirements.

The impact of thin markets according to the Gippsland Forestry Hub report [23] was affecting attracting young people to taking on an apprenticeship and/or a traineeship.

Table 5 below shows data commencement in the Forestry and Wood Products Training Package (FWP) steadily falling Victoria [24]. The trend is downward from 2016 to 2020 with a significant drop off in commencements in 2020.

[20] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-information-training-providers/australian-core-skills-framework

[21] Ibid

[22] Gippsland Forestry Hub. Skills, Employment and Education Report. 2023. Unpublished (Uploaded to GovTeams Sharepoint Portal FWTP folder).

[23] Ibid

[24] The huge fall in 2020 is likely to be due to strict Victorian covid lock down. However, there is a fall and enrolment numbers over the longitudinal survey are low.

Table 5: Apprentices and Trainees enrolments 2016-2019, Latrobe - Gippsland
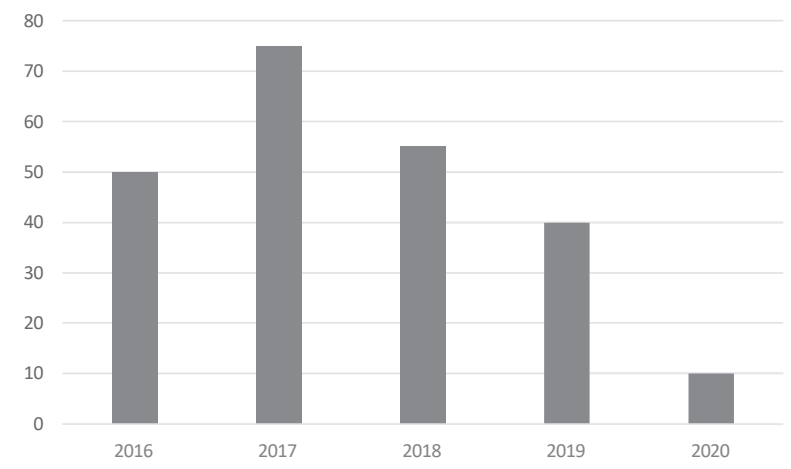
Source: VOCSTATS: Apprentices and trainees

The table 6 (p.63) sourced from the Gippsland Forestry Hub 2021 survey [25] shows the different areas of training ranked by their net difficulty to access. The data provides the following insight on areas where it was somewhat or very difficult to obtain relevant training:

- Heavy machinery operation was 57%
- Road transport drivers for haulage was 43%
- Chainsaw and other hand held machinery was 40%
- IT/software training specialised to the industry was 36%

This data indicates the degree of difficulty to access training for industry-specific skills, whereas more generic cross-sector training is easier to access.

In the low enrolments project conducted by ForestWorks, the qualitative research indicated that employees in the forestry and wood products industries tend to stay in the industry, resulting in a low attrition rate. However, once they have been trained in the early stage of their employment, there is often little nationally accredited training that takes place thereafter. This further exacerbated the thin market issue and RTOs having to train small numbers of learners. Thin markets are self-perpetuating, requiring solutions that break the cycle.

It is this confluence of circumstances and structural impediments that drives much of the thinking of this Scoping Study.

Breaking the thin markets cycle requires an emphasis on industry and workplace-level training and skills development and on a wholistic approach that supports the Australian Government's efforts to recognise existing skills. Solutions need to appreciate that industry is constantly engaged in training and leverage that with a focus on implementing potential solutions, mainly in the form of trials and pilots of potential solutions that can be conducted and evaluated to inform an improved future.

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[25] https://gippslandforestryhub.com.au/key-activities/

Table 6 : In the last three years how easy or difficult has it been to access the following education skills and training required in your area of work?
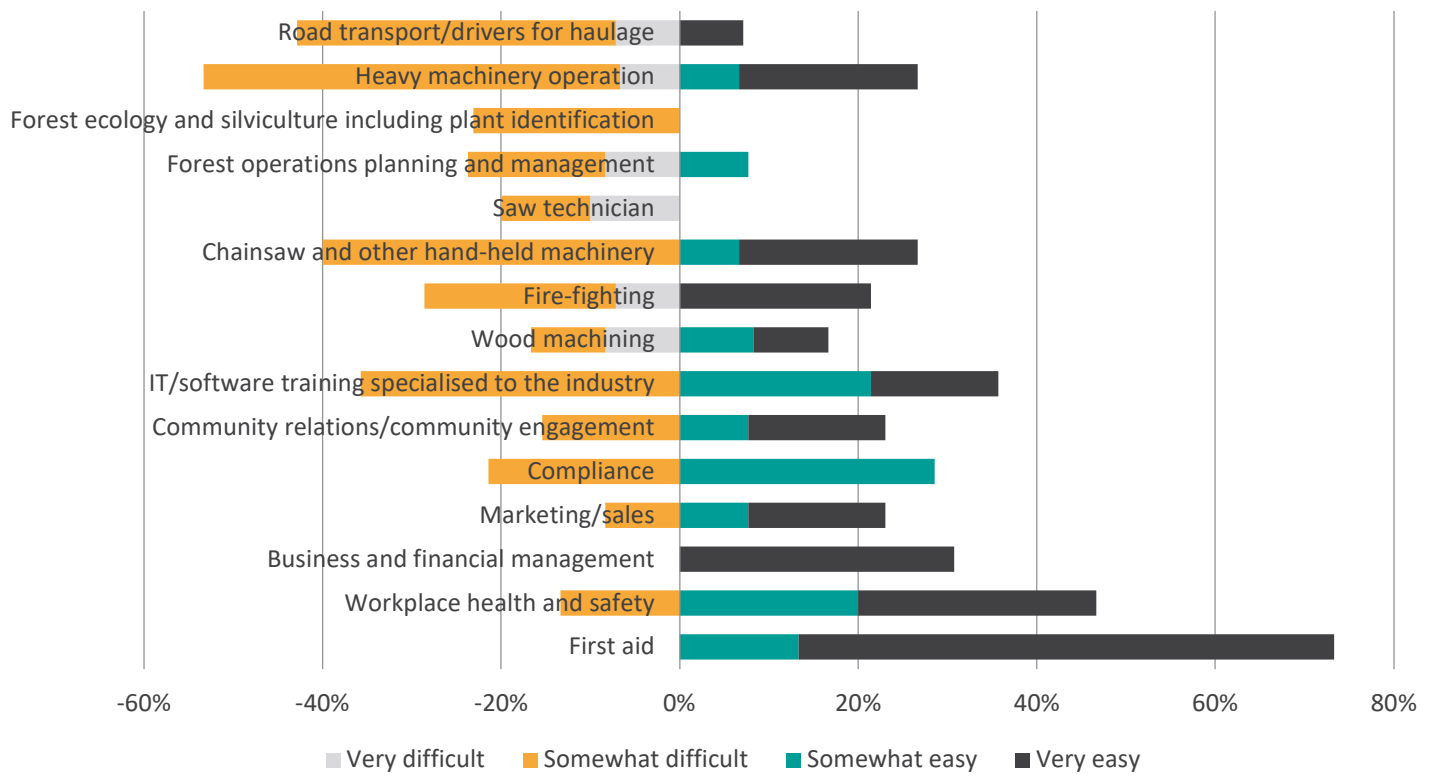
Source: GFHub survey, 2021 .

3.4   Understanding perceived underutilization of formal skills and training arrangements

The forestry and wood products industry generally places a strong emphasis on the continuous development of employees, utilising various strategies to support their growth. Internal subject matter experts and resources are commonly leveraged to provide on-the-job training across a wide range of skill areas. This is the nucleus of the industry's training and skills development system.

However, for specialised trades like wood machinists, saw technicians, mechanics and for operating machinery such as forklifts that require work permits, businesses often collaborate with training providers to facilitate traineeships and apprenticeships.

Additionally, businesses recognise the importance of formal training and qualifications for the skills of their employees. These formal programs serve multiple purposes, including upskilling, skills widening and deepening, assessing skills for potential promotions, and creating opportunities for career advancement within the company.

By embracing this approach, employees can continuously improve, progress or transition to different roles within the business, fostering their professional growth and development.

Use of accredited and non-accredited training

Training in the business context takes place across various settings, including accredited and non-accredited training and courses. The essential difference between accredited training and non-accredited training is that the completion of an accredited course means learners are issued with a nationally recognised qualification.

An accredited, nationality recognised qualification is a course recognised and taught to the same standard all over Australia. Nationally recognised courses are VET Accredited by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). This provides employers with the guarantee that the qualification listed on your resume is quality assured and meets the training package requirements as listed on training register www.training.gov.au. An accredited qualification will be valuable (and recognised) nationally anywhere within Australia.

In short, accreditation is formal confirmation that the course:

- Is nationally recognised and meets quality assurance and training package requirements
- Meets an established industry, enterprise, educational, legislative or community need
- Provides appropriate competency outcomes and a satisfactory basis for assessment
- Is aligned appropriately to the Australian Quality Framework (AQF) where it leads to a VET qualification.

In contrast, a non-accredited course does not count towards a recognised qualification. Instead, non-accredited courses are specially designed to teach you relevant skills that will enable you to perform your job more effectively, typically in a shorter period of time.

These non-accredited courses offer a range of benefits in helping you to achieve your personal and career goals, including:

- Build more in-depth skills and knowledge on top of what you may have already acquired through an accredited course.
- Stay on top of industry advancements and adopt the latest skills to meet the growing demands of your field.
- Build greater earning potential by adding new skills and certifications to your resume.
- Create networking opportunities and connect with other professionals in your field.
- Get greater career advancement prospects by building the skills needed to move into new positions that may be more fulfilling or give you more responsibilities.
- Learn on your own terms, studying whenever is most convenient for you.

Perhaps most significantly, training and instruction occurs organically in every workplace, continually in the form of:

- Inductions and safe work instructions
- Meetings discussing company values, health and safety regulations, and compliance requirements
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) being regularly maintained and applied
- On-the-job training, coaching and mentoring
- Other forms of exposure to learning opportunities within the workplace on an ongoing basis

The FWTP can support opportunities to bridge the relationship between industry and RTOs, to provide for increased engagement with and support from the VET sector by: undertaking pilot projects to link or map standard operating procedures to competency standards, providing training and other support mechanisms to workplace trainers and developing and making available critical training materials for use in workplace settings, along with delivering RTO-based trainers and assessors into operating workplaces.

Additionally, the establishment of formal skills recognition pathways will support workers who have developed skills to achieve qualifications.

[See Rec. A1, A3, A4, B1, B2, B4, D1, D3]

Formal training uptake in the industry: analysis of FWP enrolments

This analysis delves into the nuances of formal training adoption within the industry, centering primarily on Forest and Wood Products (FWP) qualifications, with data sourced from NCVER VOCSTATS [26] to elucidate enrolment trends and their spread across different qualification levels. Remarkably, there has been a steady demand for formal training, with around 1,700 enrolments recorded in FWP qualifications in both 2020 and 2021.

However, it is crucial to note that enrolments don't necessarily equate to the completion of qualifications, serving sometimes merely as gateways to training in specific units of competence and associated funding. Stakeholders identified funding as a key driver in full qualification enrolments, underscoring the potential for increased enrolments in micro-credentials and skill sets.

A noticeable uptick in enrolments in FWP units of competence has been observed, escalating from over 37,000 in 2020 to over 45,000 in 2021. However, a sweeping majority, about 83%, of these enrolments covered universally applicable units, largely focusing on chainsaw and four-wheel-drive vehicle operations, crucial for various roles within and beyond the forestry industry.

Industry-specific training attracted approximately 17% of the total enrolments in FWP units, converging predominantly on workplace health and safety (WHS) and environmental protection skills, fundamental for navigating the industry and its operating landscape effectively. These essential skills collectively amounted to 14% or 1,000 enrolments, emphasising their importance in maintaining quality, adherence to compliance, and effective communication within the industry.

In the specific arena of fire prevention, over 300 enrolments were recorded yearly, indicating the industry's focus on proactive safety measures and its responsibility for critical aspects of landscape management.

The remaining enrolments were mainly concentrated on acquiring discrete skills vital for harvesting and forestry operations, including operating diverse harvesting equipment.

Consultations supported the widely expressed experience that the lack of availability of consistent assessment and training tools for the Forest and Wood products (FWP) and the Pulp and Paper

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[26] Australian vocational education and training statistics Total VET students and courses 2021. National Centre for Vocational Education Research

Manufacturing industry (PPM) training packages is an impediment to enrolments that impacts both enterprises and RTOs, as Skills Insight, the Jobs & Skills Council has identified.[27]

Surprisingly, there was also a palpable inclination towards non-industry-specific qualifications and training packages. For instance, units in Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation, and Land Management, with the Public Safety units most significant, highlight the industry's versatile approach to skills acquisition.

Consultations with stakeholders identified there are opportunities to develop traineeships and potentially a trades pathway, that are sufficiently broad to accommodate the needs of the forestry and wood products industry, as well as the Agriculture, Horticulture and other rural, land-based industries, as the workplan of Skills Insight, the relevant Jobs and Skills Council identifies [28].

The co-benefits of this approach could include supplying increased and semi-coordinated demand for Traineeships, across industries within a region and providing cross-industry portability of fundamental skills for employees. The role of Group Training Organisations should be explored in the design of Traineeships and other qualifications in this respect, potentially as a means to ensure continuity for trainees and the retention of a skilled workforce.

Of relevance is that stakeholders in the industry report having insufficient knowledge to take their specific demand and training need to RTOs. Instead, they wait for the RTOs to make contact, often offering places in 'broadly suitable' training programs, rather than meeting specifically articulated industry needs.

The industry's multifaceted approach to training and skills development reflects not only a balanced preference for both universal and industry-specific skills but also underscores the unflagging demand for formal and versatile training across various sectors of the industry. This intricate tapestry of enrolments and training pursuits mirrors the industry's dynamic needs and its relentless pursuit of excellence and adaptability in a rapidly evolving landscape.

The key thematic are:

a) **Enrolments in FWP Qualifications:** Based on NCVER VOCSTATS [29], there were approximately 1,700 enrolments in FWP qualifications in both 2021 and 2020. However, it is important to note that these enrolments do not necessarily result in completion of qualifications; they may be used for accessing specific units and funding associated with qualification enrolment.

b) **Breakdown of FWP Enrolments by Qualification Level:** Out of these enrolments, the breakdown by qualification level is as follows:

   • Level 2: An average of 44% or 753 enrolments per year

   • Level 3: An average of 51% or 871 enrolments per year

   • Level 4: Only 3% or 60 enrolments per year

c) **Enrolments in FWP Units of Competency:** VOCSTATS [30] estimates that enrolments in FWP units of competency were over 45,000 in 2021, compared to over 37,000 in 2020. However, a significant majority (about 83%) of these enrolments were for units used across various occupations within and outside the forestry industry. These units mainly covered tasks related to chainsaw operations and four-wheel drive vehicle operations, most commonly deployed in the Forest Operations sectors of the industry. Occupations utilising these units included arborists, garden labourers, stock and station agents, earthmoving plant operators, and forestry workers.

d) **Enrolments in Industry-Specific Training:** Industry-specific training accounted for approximately 17% of the total enrolments in FWP units, equivalent to about 7,700 enrolments in 2021 and 6,800 enrolments in 2020.

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27 https://skillsinsight.com.au/workforce-plan/

28 Ibid

29 Australian vocational education and training statistics Total VET students and courses 2021. National Centre for Vocational Education Research

30 Ibid

e) **Focus on Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) and Environmental Protection:** The most sought-after industry-specific training focused on acquiring skills in workplace health and safety (WHS) and environmental protection, comprising an average of 33% or 2,400 enrolments per year.

f) **Additional Fundamental Skills Training:** Another category of industry-specific training pertained to additional fundamental skills required to work in the industry effectively. This included effective communication, working effectively, quality and product care, compliance with soil and water protection, and cultural heritage requirements. On average, these skills accounted for 14% or 1,000 enrolments.

g) **Training for Fire Prevention:** A specific focus on fire prevention training accounted for 4% of total enrolments in industry-specific training, with over 300 enrolments each year.

h) **Enrolments for Discrete Skills in Harvesting and Forestry Operations:** The remaining enrolments targeted discrete skills relevant to tasks primarily associated with harvesting and forestry operations. This included operating various harvesting equipment, with yearly enrolments ranging from 50 to 200 for each unit. Units of competency related to timber processing and manufacturing were used. The enrolment numbers for each of these units were below 25 per year.

The FWTP can support increased enrolment in formal qualifications by developing and trialling broad, multi-sector traineeship options, accessible through and able to be completed by micro-credentials and skill sets.

[See Rec. A2, B3, B4, C1]

Use of other qualifications and training packages

The industry also engages in the use of non-industry specific qualifications and training packages. To illustrate this, in the years 2020 and 2021, there were notable enrolments recorded in different units of competency beyond forest and wood products.

For instance, the Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management (AHC) units drew over 620 enrolments. Similarly, 640 enrolments were in the Business Services (BSB) units, and the Public Safety (PUA) units saw a significantly higher count at 1,770 enrolments.

These units attracted enrolments from a wide range of industry occupations, such as forestry workers, harvesting equipment operators, and operators in sawmilling.

3.5   Industry skills and training

The forest, wood, and paper products industry holds a critical position in the national economy, supplying building products for almost every dwelling in Australia, with timber frames and trusses alone assessed in 2022 to be used in 85% of houses and townhouses [31], supporting environmental sustainability and helping deliver the long-term management of carbon dioxide emissions on the national journey towards net zero emissions.

Despite its significance, the industry currently faces a pressing challenge in the form of a significant shortage of skilled labour across all states and regions and most of its sectors. This shortage poses a direct threat to the industry's long-term growth and stability and its ability to contribute to significant national needs.

In part, the skills' shortage is a straight labour shortage. That is, like many industries, there is simply insufficient labour to meet all needs. While attracting the workforce of the future may be the specific responsibility of industry, its sectors and enterprises, the interface with training and skills development is vital. First, because an industry demonstrating it supports and trains its workforce is a more attractive proposition for prospective employees. Second, because developing skills and workforce capabilities is a

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[31] WOODS, T. & HOUGHTON, J. 'Future market dynamics – potential impacts on Australian timber imports', available at SAE179-2021_Future_market_dynamics_potential_impacts_on_Australian_timber_imports.pdf (fwpa.com.au)

critical element in achieving improvements in safety, efficiency and productivity that can marginally reduce the demand for additional labour.

In anticipation of the future, industry enterprises are therefore focusing on equipping their employees with crucial knowledge and skills required for safe, compliant, productive and efficient operations.

The skills required in the industry span a broad spectrum of competencies, including in areas like management, leadership, digital technology, safety, and social and personal skills, in addition to unique industry and sector specific skills.

This section presents an overview of the industry's workforce shortages and skills needs for the future

The breadth and scope of Workforce Skills Shortages

As the forestry, timber and paper products industries adapt to market demands, businesses across the entire forestry and wood products industry and its sectors are confronted with a critical shortage of skilled labour, as revealed by studies conducted by ForestWorks and Regional Forestry Hubs. This shortage affects a wide range of essential roles such as foresters, harvesting operators, saw technicians, wood machinists, mechanical fitters, truck drivers, frame and truss estimators and detailers, among others.

Arising from long-term structural challenges attracting a workforce to undertake estimating and detailing based on plans, the frame and truss fabrication sector on a combined basis has more overseas employees in these work functions than it does in Australia. The Frame & Truss Manufacturer's Association (FTMA) [32] has communicated to ForestWorks this as sub-optimal for many businesses, and as a function of necessity, more than of desire. It considers online learning options, supported by workplace training, to be a potential solution for this vital work function. It has launched efforts to focus recruitment on non-traditional participants including those living with physical disabilities and older tradespeople.

Ultimately, the shortages are consistent across the industry, sectors and regions, with some variations of the specific roles that are most in-demand.

Enterprises anticipate the need to hire even more personnel in various job roles over the next five years to meet market demands.

For example, millions of pine seedlings are set to be planted in the Tumut and Tumbarumba areas of the Murray Region to replenish softwood plantations affected by recent bushfires. This future-proofing endeavour will create job opportunities in roles such as nursery work, tree planting, silviculture/maintenance, and for foresters and planners.

Factors contributing to workforce shortages

This workforce shortage can be attributed to a combination of factors, including market and legislative forces, competition for skilled labour from other industries, the COVID pandemic, public infrastructure in forestry regions, public awareness and perception of the industry and its jobs and wages, and the lack of school-based forestry traineeships or related topics in school curricula.

An ageing workforce presents an additional challenge, as retirements are expected to create significant gaps in the industry workforce. For instance, in South and Central Queensland, retirements are estimated to account for a 5% workforce gap, while the Murray Region will face an estimated 14% workforce gap as 300 workers aged 60 or above are likely to retire in the next five years [33].

Combined, these shortages create a need to train the existing workforce and to ensure training progressions exist, with an ideal outcome including the industry retaining its skilled workforce through long, meaningful and progressive careers.

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[32] https://ftmanews.com/about-us/

[33] https://murrayregionforestryhub.com.au/category/reports/

The scope of skills and training needs

Research and consultations undertaken for this Scoping Study identified the following skills businesses are focusing on to provide employees with the necessary knowledge, skills and training to achieve safe, efficient and effective operations, regardless of the sector or region in which the enterprise operates:

a. **Management and leadership:** Businesses reported that equipping frontline managers with the leadership, project management, business management, operational risk assessment, and lean manufacturing skills is essential to ensure effective decision-making and productivity in the industry.

b. **Technology and digital competency:** As the industry continues to evolve, it is crucial to develop advanced technology skills (e.g., drone, imagery, GIS, LiDAR), basic digital proficiency (e.g., word processing, computer operations, software applications), and digital data management, analysis, and application abilities.

c. **Process and equipment operation:** Ensuring that workers have the required knowledge and expertise to operate machinery and manage processes is fundamental for maintaining efficiency and safety in the workplace.

d. **Safety and handling:** Training in chemical handling, firefighting, first aid, chainsaw operations, and forklift operation is vital to ensure the safety and wellbeing of industry personnel. Regular reviews and updates of these skills and related certifications are necessary to maintain compliance with industry standards.

   o There is cross-sectoral complexity in some critical work functions, as Skills Insight's workplan identifies, with the urgent need to review the qualifications [34]; "AHC50520 Diploma of Arboriculture" and the "AHC60520 Advanced Diploma of Arboriculture" to accommodate the specialist arborist unit; "AHCARB613 Conduct complex tree hazard and health assessment post-fire".

   o Directly related to that is Skills Insight's anticipated leadership of the review of relevant units of competence in the Forestry and Wood Products (FWP) Training Package, related to tree-felling, which have been the subject of urgent safety concerns. [35]

e. **Wood and forestry knowledge:** Businesses reported that a foundational understanding of wood properties, trees, and forest management is essential for all professionals working in the forest, wood and paper products industry.

f. **Quality and processing techniques:** Implementing training programs that cover drying techniques and quality control help timber industry workers to maintain the high standards expected from consumers.

g. **Personal and social skills:** Businesses identified that training programs that emphasise First Nations engagement, emotional intelligence, work ethics and mental health and wellbeing are also needed. These skills help foster a supportive and inclusive work environment that acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and experiences of industry professionals.

h. Additionally, the industry forums conducted as part of this scoping study identified three key skills areas at the forefront of industry development, innovation and inclusiveness as follows:

i. **Innovation and future-proofing skills:** One area of identified skills needs in the industry revolves around innovation and the concept of future-proofing the industry, at all levels.

j. To address this, there is a need to enhance the industry's collective understanding of 'future-

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[34] https://skillsinsight.com.au/workforce-plan/

[35] Ibid

proofing' by providing a clear definition and explaining its implications for training. As the term is used here, it should be taken to encompass concepts such as sustainability, circularity, and design thinking, to push the boundaries of innovation.

k. It also includes cultural engagement and diversity to foster respectful workplaces, as well as acknowledging the importance of varied skill sets and experiences in stimulating innovation and future-proofing the industry.

l. **Digital and technological skills:** Another significant skills area identified is digital and technological proficiency. To address this need, training programs must be established that focus on equipping workers with the necessary digital skills to adapt to technological advancements and digital transformations within the industry, as and when they arise. This includes developing an advanced understanding of technology, currently including tasks such as calibrating lasers and operating automated machinery.

   a. As stakeholders indicated during consultations, adaptable digital and technology skills need to be developed and embedded prior to the next phase of changes, for their benefits to be fully harnessed and the risks associated with them to be safely, efficiently and effectively mitigated.

m. **First Nations cultural awareness training:** The importance of cultural awareness and understanding of First Nations' cultures and practices within the industry is also recognised as an essential aspect of industry inclusiveness and development. To address this, there is a need to integrate cultural awareness modules into industry training programs. These modules should aim to improve understanding and respect for First Nations cultures and actively involve Traditional Owners in the development and implementation of cultural awareness training initiatives to ensure authenticity and relevance. By incorporating cultural awareness training, the industry can foster a more inclusive and culturally sensitive work environment.

n. **Women, gender diversity and workforce culture:** Gender stereotypes have a profound impact on the wellbeing of women in male-dominated industries according to Buchy (2001). Gender stereotypes are often used to glorify one gender while mocking the other, creating a feeling of inferiority in the oppressed group. Women entering male-dominated fields face unrecognised psychological pressures because they must be proactive in selling themselves and their skills in order to be successful. This can lead to a feeling of isolation, both socially and physically, in the workplace. To cope with this, women must develop strategies to fit in, such as depersonalisation and other tactics. This is particularly true in rural areas, where professional women are often seen unfavourably and socially isolated from their male colleagues. It is therefore important to create an environment where all genders are respected and given equal opportunity, to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes on women in male-dominated industries.

The FWTP can support the industry to meet its specific, future-proof and forward-looking workforce and skills needs by supporting activities to update and create critical training materials for key work functions and sharing them on an online, open access basis with industry and RTOs, establishing and piloting mid-career workplace leadership training programs and opportunities and developing and piloting First Nations cultural awareness training and training programs and pilots focused on gender and diversity.

[See Rec. C3, D1, D2, D3, D4]

4. THEMES AND FINDINGS

This section of the Scoping Study specifies the interim findings of the scoping study, placing details into the context provided by major themes arising from research and stakeholder engagement and consultation.

A number of over-arching topics were explored at the industry stakeholder forums in June 2023, along with a series of themes or focus areas, finishing with the key points identified in research and/or discussed at the stakeholder forums.

It is noted that specific sections of this Scoping Study address the experiences, themes, findings and recommendations as they relate to First Nations Australians and Women and Gender Diversity

4.1   Placing industry and the workforce at the centre of the FWTP

Throughout the research and stakeholder consultations undertaken to inform this Scoping Study, one of the recurring themes has been the extent to which industry and sector specific needs have been largely unmet, regularly disregarded and even occasionally, gone unheard.

There are potent reasons why a national, urbanised, volume driven system of vocational education and training can fail to understand, adopt and adapt to meet the needs of an industry and sector that is often out of sight, out of mind, but whose contributions to the nation's future are growing and becoming more urgent.

The establishment of the Forestry Workforce Training Program (FWTP) recognises this overarching challenge, providing the opportunity to devise and implement durable solutions to what is now a decades long series of impediments.

a)   **A program defining and strategic approach**

As a unique opportunity, the FWTP provides capacity for the Australian forestry and wood products industry to articulate its specific needs, to devise, pilot and evaluate solutions to meeting those needs that are applicable to its circumstances and experiences.

Stakeholder consultations demonstrate that the industry and its sectors largely concur this opportunity needs to be deployed at a strategic level, treating the FWTP funding as an investment in devising a sustainable future, not a 'one-off' expenditure fund.

b)   **Defining and recognising industry needs**

It is a central finding of this Scoping Study that the forestry and wood products industry and its constituent sectors need to be at the core of the FWTP. The needs of the industry and its sectors, the enterprises and individuals that make it up, are pivotal and will form the likely basis upon which the success of the FWTP will be measured.

To that end, meeting the specific workforce, training and skills development needs of the industry, its sectors, enterprises and individuals are pivotal to the FWTP.

4.2   Workforce for the future

Australia's forestry and wood products industry is vital to Australia's low carbon future and economic prosperity. In the concentrated regional centres and the smaller rural communities in which it operates, the industry and its sectors are especially important, with some communities considered to be 'timber towns' and entire regions defined in large part by the role the forestry and wood products industries continue to play in them.

As was always the case, the industry's future workforce, its attraction, retention, commitment, skills and capabilities are critical to enhancing the industry's role in Australia for next and subsequent generations.

Industry stakeholders have clearly identified that workforce development challenges are at the forefront of their consideration. Moreover, there is open recognition that attracting and retaining that workforce is a necessary precursor to the conduct of training and skills development activities.

An integrated, consistent, wholistic, stable and adequately supported career-based approach is required to develop the workforce of the future. Industry has been equally clear that issues related to the industry's perception in the wider community, and its ability to attract and retain the workforce of the future, are primarily its responsibility. Equally, there is recognition that a reinvigorated and fit-for-purpose approach to skills development, training and assessment can contribute to improved perceptions of the industry and its sectors.

4.3   Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

Industry has identified one of its challenges, in regions and in urban areas, is attracting and retaining the workforce it requires for the future. Although some of the challenges confronted by the forestry and wood products industry are consistent with those experienced by other industries, some of the difficulties relate to misconceptions about the breadth, depth and sustainability of the industry, its sectors and the jobs within them.

Stakeholders report that while the forestry and wood products industry may be viewed as a job opportunity, it is less likely to be considered a careers option. In some sectors, there is relatively high labour turnover, a factor that underpins a possibly 'short-term' view of employment in the sector.

While this perception of the industry applies most to operating positions, the attitude is also evident in professional occupations in some sectors.

Industry reports it is common for high school students to be advised there are few or no careers opportunities in the forestry and wood products industry, with the industry described as a resources industry, not in the context of its role as an advanced manufacturing, high value-added, home building, climate change solution.

There are suggestions this attitude is also evident in some publicly funded training providers, especially because they do not offer services for the industry, in most cases.

There is no single solution to this situation, which would result in a change in perception and emphasis, that would alter the balance toward recruitment into the industry, supported to become longer-term careers underpinned by training and skills development activities.

A suite of inter-related activities, led by industry, is required to address this challenge, some undertaken by industry (enterprises and associations), some by individuals and supporting industry, some actions to be taken by RTOs and other training providers.

Industry Perception and Promotion

To develop the workforce of the future, the industry aims to bridge perception gaps, in part by enhancing the forestry and wood products industry's appeal to skilled individuals from diverse backgrounds, including women and First Nations Australians.

Industry's leadership, supported by the FWTP, is capable of elevating the narrative of the industry beyond monetary compensation, emphasising its intrinsic sustainability, purpose, and role in housing the nation to make it a more appealing and fulfilling career choice.

Important themes and potential actions identified for the FWTP include:

a. Advocating for and establishing professional accreditation and potentially continuing professional development (CPD) for essential occupations, such as timber systems design and fabrication estimators and specifiers to elevate the occupation's standing in public perception and to promote its importance. The system for Foresters, managed by Forestry Australia, provides an example of industry-based accreditation and CPD.

b. Mapping existing training courses to industry occupations and career paths, especially at the enterprise level using Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), providing clear pathways for training and skills development, while promoting these opportunities to attract individuals interested in pursuing careers in these fields.

[See Rec. A1]

Broadening Recruitment Strategies

Tomorrow's workforce will be different to the current workforce. Driven by technological change, global competition and the need to attract and retain a workforce capable of sustaining a developing career, the forestry and wood products industry is intent on leading a recruitment revolution in regional Australia.

The industry, including established careers promotion activities and entities, seeks strategic support to achieve its objectives, including from the FWTP. Important themes, including actions supported by the FWTP include:

a. Exploring alternative avenues for career messaging in schools through widely utilised platforms such as "myfuture" [36] which provides resources to explore career pathways and tools to develop self-knowledge to help with career decision-making to reach a wider audience.

b. Building deeper strategic connections with local communities to promote the variety of career pathways available within the industry, to increase visibility and interest (e.g., coordinating industry representatives to connect with regional schools and promote job and career opportunities within the industry).

Expanding the recruitment focus

This needs to be beyond traditional demographics, such as young people, by also targeting women, new migrants, semi-retired persons, transitional individuals, and other cohorts.

The FWTP can support these initiatives by assisting the development of suitable micro-credentials, skill sets and traineeships, including those with a school-to-work focus, assisted by flexible training and assessment processes.

[See Rec. A2, A3, A4, C1, C2]

Career Development and Job Retention

There are varied pathways to a career in any industry, including the forestry and wood products industry and its sectors. Access to information has expanded significantly, providing individuals with more opportunities and a wider array of choices, both as to their preferred career and the pathways to develop their career.

To attract and retain the workforce of the future, industry is working on initiatives including:

a. **Nurturing individual control and flexibility over career growth**, to support long-term retention (i.e., providing employees with opportunities to shape their own career paths so that they develop a sense of ownership and commitment).

b. **Fostering a coordinated and collaborative network of experts and educational resources** for student development in the forestry and wood products industry that may support trainers and learners alike, as a means of enhancing learning experiences and better preparing students for their future careers and career advancement.

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[36] https://myfuture.edu.au/home

c.   **Using stackable or nested micro-learning and micro-credentials** for training and skills development and to encourage retention in the industry, by making skill acquisition more efficient and adaptable.

d.   **Addressing workforce succession and retention**, considering both turnover and retirements in the context of developing a competitive and collaborative workforce landscape (i.e., implementing strategies for knowledge transfer and ensuring new employees feel welcomed and valued).

e.   **Adapting attraction and retention strategies** to ensure they are in line with the changing demands of the workforce (i.e., implementing innovative and personalised incentives to boost employee loyalty).

f.   **Creating a supportive working environment** and conducive physical workspace to address retention issues (i.e., environments that promote teamwork, respect, and employee well-being and contribute to employee satisfaction).

Support for Job Transitions and Upskilling/Reskilling

Regional forestry and wood products industries have a long history of being forced by decisions of State and Commonwealth governments to cease operating or reduce their operations significantly. These forced restructures invariably result in employees being required to transition from their current work to something different – often in other industries.

Approaches to employment transition support, including ensuring employees receive formal, transferable recognition of their existing skills and providing training and assessment opportunities to develop new skills, is at best ad hoc. The impact of which includes delays, stress and failures in some cases, to achieve a just transition for workers in the industry.

The FWTP can support improved practice in these situations by:

a.   Establishing an 'open' access platform for enterprises, associations, unions, workers and others to share resources and materials to support transition situations.

b.   Addressing the specific training challenges faced by individuals impacted by industry restructurings (e.g., the closure of Opal's Maryvale Mill's white paper machine). Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) play a pivotal role providing assistance to individuals affected by industry restructuring.

The RTOs provide training and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programs, which are paramount for assisting redundant workers in finding new employment. These initiatives have recently been key in supporting workers in Victoria, particularly those affected by the execution of the Victorian Forestry Plan as well as the shutdown of the Maryvale white paper manufacturing machine at Opal Australian Paper. RTOs participate actively in company-level RPL events, offering individual and company-wide skills recognition.

[See Rec. D3, A4]

4.4   Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

Just as the job of tomorrow will be different, so too will the skills and training required. A consistent insight from enterprises and workers alike is that training and skills development is not keeping pace with the changes being shaped by society and the economy, leave alone addressing the rapid and ongoing changes in technology.

A modern forestry and wood products industry, playing its necessary and significant role in the nation's economic activity, must be fit for purpose not only in the present but for the future. This goes way beyond the normal considerations of technological change, addressing the fundamental building blocks that support adaptation, flexibility and whatever variations are thrown up by a rapidly changing world.

The FWTP can support industry and provide guidance to RTOs, by addressing the following major themes An enduring challenge for Australia's forestry and wood products industry has been the availability, capacity and capability of the training provision network operating across the nation, and in particular in the regions.

As set out earlier in this Scoping Study, there are myriad reasons regional training capacity is inadequate and no longer fit for purpose.

Some solutions appear obvious, at first blush, but prove to be more complex or less effective when implementation is considered. If that was not the case, the rationale for this work and industry's engagement with it, would not be as significant or compelling.

One of the most significant issues identified by industry revolves around the importance of establishing a stable funding base for training and assessment, especially in the regions. Self-sufficiency has been identified by stakeholders as a key objective, but one that is difficult to achieve if the regions are each treated and operate separately.

The strategic imperative around regional training capacity is to ensure it is viable, regardless of how it is delivered. Consultations centered around harnessing the best of the local capabilities – including those in enterprises – and ensuring they are efficiently connected to the leading RTOs and as much online training and infrastructure like resource libraries, as can be managed.

The FWTP provides an opportunity to trial several of these approaches, in an integrated manner, seeking to trial and ultimately embed a durable and self-sufficient model for operation of training across the regions and sectors of Australia's forestry and wood products industry.

Stakeholders noted most sectors of the forestry and wood products industry have experience with resource-linked levy systems and other forms of collaborative, pre-competitive funding. Some suggested that a broad commitment to establishing a durable and self-sustaining platform for the development of skills and knowledge and the conduct of training and assessment may need to include some form of levy system as an element of sustainable funding models.

Levies or other funding models are a topic requiring further consideration and examination as part of the evaluation of the pilot projects and activities of the FWTP that are intended to place regional training capacity on a revitalised and more sustainable footing.

Therefore, a specific and major role for the FWTP is to take meaningful action to develop and implement strategies that revitalise regional training capacity in an enduring manner. Specific actions under the FWTP should focus on:

Aligning Training and VET Systems

The forestry and wood products industry and its sectors conduct on the job training continually due to standard operation procedures (SOP), technological changes, occupational health and safety, on the job requirements, policy changes and job role changes. Much of this training is in house training that is non accredited via the national training VET system. Individuals do not get access to recognition for their skills, reducing their mobility and community and self-regard. Enterprises, entire sectors and the industry as a whole are treated as being uninterested in training and thus, as an 'unskilled' industry, because their training is not visible. Enterprises also miss out on receiving funding support for their training effort, placing them at a financial disadvantage relative to other industries.

This is a priority activity for the FWTP, specifically finding solutions to bridge the gap between existing non-accredited training delivery (including training conducted in workplaces) and the accredited VET system, especially in the sectors with limited access to publicly funded training and other opportunities for skill development.

Workplace-based Trainers and Assessors

To deliver training and assure the quality of skills, enterprises provide ongoing training and assessment, often using experienced operators and technical staff as workplace trainers and ultimately, assessors. The qualification structure for the role of workplace trainers and assessors can be used flexibly, where the training delivery model includes partnerships with RTOs and appropriate quality assurance.

Workplace-based trainers and assessors, particularly in regional locations, could significantly contribute to the training, evaluation, and learning processes in the industry. They have the potential to fill the gap left by the lack of accredited trainers and assessors within RTOs. Many industry professionals already engage in training activities, and their expertise could be recognised and used to deliver formal training and skills recognition. The harnessing of this expertise is crucial to meet the demands of industry training.

The VET system through the available skill sets and TEA qualifications aims to involve industry professionals and retain their participation in the formal training sector, potentially in a part-time capacity, while they continue in their current jobs. However, this implementation has been limited within the industry. This is primarily due to challenges in providing incentives to undertake the necessary training, and for employers to recognise these roles. Creating suitable conditions and arrangements with RTOs to allow interested professionals to take on these roles has also been an obstacle.

The FWTP presents a landmark opportunity to support the industry and RTOs by:

- **Encouraging and supporting the development of workplace trainers and assessors** in the industry, by promoting their importance in meeting industry training demands and encouraging the uptake of required skill sets or formal Trainer and Assessor qualifications; creating a framework for developing and sustaining partnerships between RTOs and employers including workplace trainers to deliver training, including guidelines, templates for agreements, role responsibilities, expectations and benefits; establishing a network of workplace and RTO-based trainers and assessors to share knowledge, best practices, and ideas for enhancing the quality of the activities undertaken by enterprise trainers and assessors.

- **Devising and trialling new training and assessment partnership models**, integrating competent and quality assured workplace training and assessment, with RTOs and other training providers, including for assessment only and RPL purposes.

- **Engaging VET regulators** to address compliance risks and constraints in third-party arrangements, supporting the functionality of partnerships of workplace-based trainers and assessors and RTOs.

[See Rec. A3, A4, B1, B2, F1]

Education, Training and Collaboration

In demonstrably thin and geographically diverse training markets, establishing actual levels of demand and engaging in collaborative aggregation, can be a means of encouraging increased training supply, and of linking supply with established demand, resulting in increased enrolments. It is notable this issue has been identified by our industry's Jobs and Skills Council, Skills Insight, in its 2023-24 workplan [37]. As the recommendations for this Scoping Study identifies, supporting improved linkages is a key need and activity proposed for the FWTP.

An effective role for the FWTP would include:

- **Enhancing training provision through coordinated approaches**, such as shared industry training calendars and other demand aggregation activities, leading to more efficient and viable training schedules for support from RTOs.

- **Fostering collaborative approaches** in training resources development and workplace-based training, enabling more efficient use of resources.

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[37] https://skillsinsight.com.au/workforce-plan/

- Enhancing industry and RTO knowledge sharing through a **training and assessment knowledge stocktake, warehouse and library** approach, led by industry, including contributions from associations, hubs, and other organisations, promoting a unified and efficient approach to learning and development.

[See Rec. D1, D3]

Leveraging Online Learning and Technology

Significant portions of knowledge and skills transfer can and does occur online. Where effective, online learning can be efficient and helps to address the challenges of small and dispersed training cohorts. The forestry and wood products industry recognises it underutilises online learning and there is limited engagement with technological delivery by some RTOs.

The FWTP can be structured to provide leadership and support in the following areas:

- **Unlocking the potential of online learning** in the industry, including blended learning options and the deployment of modern technologies and the latest online learning practices.

- **Fostering collaboration and resource optimisation** for the successful implementation of online learning within the industry, including by engaging with the knowledge stocktake, warehouse and library approach set out above.

- **Leveraging virtual reality and other technological innovations** to enhance training experiences, delivering innovative and immersive learning opportunities.

[See Rec. D2]

Funding and Operational Support for RTOs

Across Australia, RTOs are funded as though they are alike and operate under the same conditions. The variations between funding support available for RTOs and the cost of delivering training can be very wide, with some of the most complex and critical work functions receiving proportionally miniscule training funding support, while more rudimentary and widely available work functions receive proportionally much higher support.

This situation makes small and dispersed training markets even more difficult for RTOs, reducing the appetite to participate and undermining the provision of training and assessment services by RTOs to industry.

Working with RTOs, training providers and industry, the FWTP should include a focus on:

- Advocating for **sufficient funding and operational support** to address the challenges faced by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) resulting from the mismatch between funding models and limited demand for formal qualifications in the industry, which is dispersed thinly across various regional geographical areas.

Additionally, through the proposed coordinating entity, evaluation of the success of pilot projects in achieving a self-sufficient industry training system and framework should lead to examination and articulation of appropriate long-term funding models.

[See Rec. E1, F1]

4.5   Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

Just as the job of tomorrow will be different, so too will the skills and training required. A consistent insight from enterprises and workers alike is that training and skills development is not keeping pace with the changes being shaped by society and the economy, leave alone addressing the rapid and ongoing changes in technology.

A modern forestry and wood products industry, playing its necessary and significant role in the nation's economic activity, must be fit for purpose not only in the present but for the future. This goes way beyond the normal considerations of technological change, addressing the fundamental building blocks that support adaptation, flexibility and whatever variations are thrown up by a rapidly changing world.

The FWTP can support industry and provide guidance to RTOs, by addressing the following major themes:

Innovation and Future-Proof Skills

At the core of modern industry are era defining technological changes and processes of change that are ever more rapid. The workforce capability requirements of these changes mean work today is different to yesterday, at fundamental levels.

A future-proof industry and workforce needs to be abreast of and capable of addressing change as it arises, and it is consequently vital that RTOs and training providers be similarly informed and ultimately, capable.

The FWTP can support industry in this regard by:

a. Improving the shared understanding of "future-proofing" within the industry context by providing a clear definition and explaining its implications for training (i.e., this may encompass a range of concepts such as sustainability, circularity, and design thinking, pushing the boundaries of innovation; cultural engagement and diversity, aiming to foster respectful workplaces; or broader perspectives, acknowledging the role of varied skill sets and experiences in future-proofing the industry and stimulating innovation).

b. Identifying the skills crucial for future-proofing the industry, explore the demand for these future-proof skills across various job roles and sectors, and determine the emerging themes, and new projects shaping the future of the forestry and wood products industry.

c. Keeping abreast of and sharing the latest digital and technological developments.

[See Rec. B2, C1, D1, D3]

Digital and Technological Skills

A sound base in technological comprehension is now a pre-requisite for work in modern industry. Existing workforces are often left behind by the new entrants in this regard, and there are strong suggestions RTOs and training providers can reside in technological and digital cul-de-sac without support to understand the technologies currently and prospectively being deployed in the industry.

To bridge this gap, the FWTP can support the industry by:

a. Establishing and including in all relevant programs a focus on digitally-focused training, preparing workers to adapt to technological advancements and digital transformations in the industry.

b. Supporting training programs that develop an advanced understanding and skills in technology, such as calibrating lasers and operating automated machinery, to navigate the evolving landscape of the industry.

c. Incorporating micro-credentials in industry training to provide recognition for digital skills and other specific, in-demand skill sets.

[See Rec. A2, B2, C1, D1]

Leadership and Coordination in Training

The forestry and wood products industry's workforce of the future will be different to today's in a number of important respects. Some are well understood, including that there will be a smaller number of people, required to work more flexibly, capable of adapting to new technologies at an ever-faster pace.

The implications for training and assessment, for RTOs and other training providers and for industry enterprises and individuals are significant. Planning, coordination and preparation are required to support the industry, with the role of the FWTP including:

a. Strategising training planning and aggregating plans and demand to assist training for future readiness, moving beyond reactive skill development to proactive skill cultivation.

b. Addressing the lack of coordinated focus for developing industry-specific leadership training programs.

c. Preparing for workforce succession by assessing training requirements and bridging skills gaps for future leaders.

[See Rec. B3, C1, C3]

4.6 Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Like many industries, but in its own way, the forestry and wood products industry and each of its sectors, is undergoing significant change. The markets the industry supports, the end-products it produces, and the drivers of its future activities are all developing and evolving rapidly.

It follows that the requirements on the workforce, work undertaken, and the skills and knowledge required to undertake that work, are also changing. One aspect of this change is that labour 'mobility' is growing. This means that within an enterprise, the likelihood of change in job roles and skill requirements are greater than ever as the prospect of business change is significant and employees required to find new jobs in the same or different industries is also rapidly growing.

Mobility in all these contexts is enhanced and supported where skills are treated as being portable and are recognised in a manner that facilitates mobility, however that necessity arises.

An important activity for the FWTP is to focus on this growing requirement.

Recognising and Defining Portable Skills

Some skills are unique to an industry, a sector or a specific job. But in reality, there are threads of skills in every job that are transferable to new applications. Gaining an understanding of the breadth and depth of these is a potentially complex matter, but one that must be achieved to maximise the efficient mobility of labour where and how it is needed.

The FWTP can facilitate this understanding by:

a. Establishing a shared definition for the portability of skills and explain what this entails for industry mobility.

b. Championing the use of "skills passports" and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to validate the skills acquired through workplace training and facilitate the transfer of these skills across different roles and sectors, thereby enhancing worker mobility.

c. Assisting industry in exploring options and utilising recognition platforms to document training, assess skill gaps, and verify workers' skill currency. These options may enhance or combine with the existing online system, led by the industry, for skills verification.

[See Rec. A4]

Optimising Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Training Processes

Efficient consideration of skills, form every perspective, but including to support skills portability and mobility, means recognising existing skills and knowledge in the most efficient possible manner. The absurdity that routinely observes an established workforce being trained in activities for which they are already demonstrably competent (e.g., In which they are employed), absorbs scarce resources and reduces confidence in enterprises and individuals that they have the skills required to meet modern challenges.

An effective system to optimise RPL is required and the FWTP can support that by:

a. Advocating for solutions to funding and credit transfer issues in the RPL and training processes to simplify the recognition of individual skills across different jurisdictions

b. Strategising ways to enhance the efficiency of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, ensuring that skills and knowledge attained through previous experiences or training are properly recognised

c. Investigating current RPL processes, ensuring they are fit for purpose and recommending improvements

d. Considering the resources and materials needs of RTOs and industry for RPL to be undertaken efficiently, with the avoidance of duplications of effort and the intention to maximise the use of RPL and other recognition processes

[See Rec. A4, F1]

Micro-Credentials and Industry-Specific Training Packages

Not all work activities require full qualifications and not all skills are defined neatly inside the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The limitations of funding structured around 'whole qualifications' is the assumption that work can and should be redefined in that narrow context.

A better approach recognises that work requirements have primacy and supports the development of qualifications over time, by the use of "stackable" micro-credentials.

As part of an integrated whole, this is an important activity for industry and for the FWTP which can lead this process by:

a. Sustaining and continuously refining industry training packages and qualifications, including Traineeships, to meet the unique objectives and requirements of the industry, thus ensuring the relevance and applicability of training programs

b. Supporting the use of stackable or nested micro-credentials, which can provide flexible qualification pathways within the industry

c. Promoting the importance of formal qualifications, given the challenges in recognising their value, which could impact the mobility of workers

[See Rec. A2, C1]

5. FIRST NATIONS INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION, TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES AND ENGAGEMENT

Background

The forum dedicated to advancing Forest Nations inclusion and training opportunities in the forest, wood and paper products industry took place on June 6, 2023. The agenda was structured around two thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The two thematic focus areas were:

- Focus Area 1: Improve Job and Training Opportunities for the First Nations Australians in the Industry
- Focus Area 2: Strengthen First Nations Inclusion and Engagement in the Industry

The forum attracted fifteen participants, who did not identify as being First Nations people and as such were not able to obtain rich robust insights in addressing the two thematic areas. ForestWorks concerned with this outcome, undertook further robust qualitative research, by consulting directly with various stakeholder organisations to address this concern.

These stakeholders included:

- Forestry Industry Association Northern Territory (FIANT)[38]
- Tiwi Plantations Corporation[39]
- Gumatj Corporation Ltd[40]
- Charles Darwin University (CDU) Northern Institute[41]
- Plantation Management Partners / Midway Limited[42]
- The Northern Territory Government's Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade[43]
- ForestWorks met with FIANT, who represented the above stakeholders, providing rich and robust insights and recommendations. As a collaborative they compiled an authoritative report, which has been uploaded to the GovTeams portal).

FIANT has as a priority initiative, Aboriginal forestry development and a targeted objective to develop First Nations led forestry enterprises. The key area of focus for FIANT is to attract, develop and retain an increasing proportion of First Nations people in the Northern Australian forestry sector. They represent an authoritative collaboration of members insight that is formed from a genesis of lived experiences of people, and practical wisdom from those who have worked in Northen Australian forestry sector for many years. The insight and recommendations are the voice of the First Nations people.

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[38] https://fiant.org.au/team/
[39] https://www.tiwiplantations.com/
[40] https://gumatj.com.au/
[41] https://www.cdu.edu.au/northern-institute
[42] https://www.midwaylimited.com.au/
[43] https://industry.nt.gov.au/

Findings

According to FIANT, despite having strong linkages to Country as a key 'pull factor' for First Nations people and their potential engagement in and with the forestry and wood products industries, the lack of well-developed and supported training and development pathways, significantly limits participation levels.[44]

This rich insight indicates strongly that First Nations Australians face numerous barriers when it comes to accessing education, training, and employment opportunities within the forest, wood and paper products industry. These barriers include the following:

- Limited or no support for the development of local, indigenous mentors and trainers, whether working independently or linked into and with RTOs

- Limited access to specific and structured training programs, especially those that can be conducted 'on country', in first language and are focused on 'ready-to-work' skills

- Lack of emphasis on Language, Literacy, Numeracy and Digital (LLND) skills development

- Limited awareness among First Nations people including Traditional Owners, of opportunities that exist for employment and business development opportunities associated with forestry and wood products industries, including eco-systems services and consequently, limited understanding of the requirements for employment and/or business opportunities

- Limited recognition of skills that reduces the ability for workers to transition from forestry to other sectors (e.g., Mining, agriculture, horticulture), reducing the desirability of undertaking training and skills development in the forestry and wood products industries

- Financial barriers at an individual and collective level

Additionally, many First Nations people face limited career progression opportunities and negative attitudes and biases, due to a lack of cultural awareness and understanding within the industry and broader community. The forestry and wood products industry has identified this as a challenge.

However, the opportunity that exists is to introduce well managed initiatives and training programs, as this offers the best prospect for success.

Cultural awareness and engagement with First Nations culture and peoples is a priority for the industry. The FWTP with potential learnings available from other land-use sectors and opportunities to collaborate across industries to enhance potential benefits of improved understand of and engagement with First Nations Australians.

There is recognition that many First Nations communities own or are custodians of forests or land where forestry activities, including eco-system services, are potentially viable. Translating that underlying potential into culturally appropriate income generating, business and employment opportunities is a journey, and one that will be different for different communities and regions.

There is a sound base of practice from which to commence, some of which is prominent in Northern Australia. The following summary case study provides (as part of a submission to the Scoping Study by the Forest Industries Association of the Northern Territory (FIANT) refer to the GovTeams FWTP portal for the full document).[45]

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[44] FIANT, 'Increasing First Nations Participation in Northern Australia's Forestry Sector, 2023 Report (uploaded to GovTeams portal)

[45] It is noted permission was granted for the use of this case study only for the Scoping Study and no further use is authorised as it contains references to as-yet unpublished material.

CASE STUDY

Growing an Indigenous-led forestry industry in East Arnhem Land

The Gumatj clan of the Yolŋu nation in Northeast Arnhem Land (NEAL) are poised to regain land control, previously leased to Rio Tinto for bauxite mining. As Rio Tinto's tenure ends, it brings both opportunities and challenges. While mining royalties would cease, the Gumatj have a vision for self-sustainability and prosperity. One of their primary initiatives is Indigenous-led forestry, which aims at enhancing job opportunities and increasing revenue for the clan.

Gumatj's Forestry Approach: Capitalising on the demand for hardwood products, the Gumatj clan is focused on scaling existing operations that have been managed by the Gumatj Corporation and their subsidiary, Delta Reef Gumatj. They seek to increase productivity, transitioning from reliance on resources salvaged from Rio Tinto's clearing activities to more sustainable forestry methods. This includes developing plantations of Darwin stringybark and accessing additional timber resources.

Workforce Development: Central to this venture is the development of a predominantly local Yolŋu workforce. To ensure success, training is being approached in a culturally sensitive manner. Traditional Yolŋu pedagogy emphasises context-based learning. Therefore, local First Nations trainers, paired with resident VET trainers, are vital for delivering both non-accredited on-the-job training and accredited VET packages.

However, there is a need to integrate English Language, Literacy, Numeracy, and Digital (LLND) capability building alongside forestry skills. Since many Yolŋu learners might lack the basic English proficiency required for vocational training, specialised LLND training, integrated with employment and forestry training, becomes crucial.

Pathways to Employment: The East Arnhem region showcases potential interest in forestry careers, and Gumatj aims to establish clear pathways for entry into the forestry workforce. Collaborations with local educational institutions, like Dhupuma Barker Primary School, Garma Institute, and Nhulunbuy High School, can streamline this. Engaging students through career days and curricular activities could stimulate interest in forestry careers.

Beyond traditional recruitment methods, Gumatj emphasises the importance of preparing workers for the industry. This involves training in 'work-ready' competencies and understanding cultural differences in workplace expectations. The ALPA's 'Ready for djama' program exemplifies this approach, helping First Nations jobseekers adapt to work environments.

Support Systems: To ensure long-term retention, transitional employment arrangements are deemed essential. Considering the potential inexperience of many Yolŋu workers due to limited opportunities, flexibility in employment models is crucial. Examples like the Manapan Academy provide a roadmap for successful integration of workers, balancing technical and general workplace skills with mentoring.

Empowerment of local First Nations mentors is pivotal. These mentors not only aid in workforce transition but also act as community ambassadors. Given their cultural authority or prior forestry experience, they can bridge gaps between employers and workers, aiding in training contextualisation and community engagement.

Funding Needs for a Successful Pilot: For a successful pilot forestry workforce project in NEAL, several funding avenues need exploration:

- Training funds for a resident-led model comprising both non-accredited and VET training.
- Resources for integrated LLND training.
- Subsidies for 'transitional' work arrangements.
- Financial support for employing First Nations mentors.

Conclusion: The Gumatj clan's vision for an Indigenous-led forestry industry in East Arnhem Land not only represents an economic transition but also underscores the importance of cultural preservation and self-determination. Through strategic partnerships, workforce development, and necessary funding, this vision can pave the way for a sustainable future for the Gumatj clan and the broader Yolŋu nation.

It is noted this section of the Scoping Study sets out specific considerations as they relate to First Nations Australians and that in addition to specific recommendations related to training and skills development for First Nations Australians, there are elements of other recommendations with specific streams and an explicit focus on First Nations Australians.

The following themes and findings have been identified throughout the research and consultations for this Scoping Study, related to engagement with and participation of First Nations peoples in the industry:

5.1   Improving awareness and engagement with First Nations Australians

Australia's forestry and wood products industry is at a pivotal juncture, where its evolution and sustainability are intrinsically tied to its relationship with First Nations communities. Historically, the sector's awareness of these communities and their rich traditions has been fragmented across the nation. Certain segments, driven by operational needs, have gained some insights, but this knowledge remains localised and uncoordinated.

As we stand at this crossroads, the opportunity lies in broadening this awareness, transforming it from isolated instances into an industry-wide culture. This isn't merely about acknowledging First Nations cultures but integrating their profound insights into the industry's very core. To achieve this, it's imperative that cultural awareness and engagement programs, anchored in authenticity, be piloted across the nation.

These programs, under the FWTP initiative, would draw from real experiences and First Nations knowledge, skills and narratives, ensuring genuine representation and participation.

Engagement strategies, however, cannot be a one-size-fits-all model, as the rich tapestry of First Nations communities, comes with individual unique cultural nuances and histories, demanding a heterogenous approach. By aligning regional and key business-level strategies with the specific traditions and needs of local communities, the industry can cultivate deeper, more meaningful partnerships that secure engagement and participation. Developing these relationships extends beyond cultural integration. Equipping First Nations communities with appropriately structured forest business skills will assist in bridging traditional knowledge with contemporary practices. This initiative underscores the importance of local engagement and facilitates the confluence of genuine collaborations and meaningful relationships, where both the industry and the communities co-evolve.

In summary, the Forest and Wood products industry can advance its engagement with First Nations Australians by:

- Prioritising the fostering of authentic partnerships with First Nations communities as a step towards more inclusive industry practices
- Developing effective strategies to navigate the complexities inherent in establishing and maintaining partnerships with First Nations peoples
- Actively cultivating cultural awareness within the industry and focusing on building strong, respectful relationships with First Nations communities
- Integrating cultural awareness modules into industry training that improves understanding and respect for First Nations cultures and practices
- Actively involving-Traditional Owners in the development and implementation of cultural awareness training initiatives to ensure authenticity and relevance
- Tailoring engagement strategies at a regional level to reflect and respect the unique dynamics of local First Nations community
- Nurturing localised cultural engagement and fostering strong community relations to enhance the relationship between the industry and First Nations communities
- Supporting appropriate business skills training for First Nations Australians, especially Traditional Owners

[see Rec. D1, D4]

5.2   Integrating First Nations' Expertise into the Forest and Wood Products Sector

The relevance of the First Nations' indigenous knowledge base, especially in terms of land and forest management, is empirically evident. Integrating this comprehensive understanding into the forest and wood products industry can significantly recognise and diversify conventional methodologies, resulting in sustainable and efficient practices.

To realise the potential of integration, it will be pivotal to establish systematic support, infrastructure and recognised mentorship frameworks. These should be tailored to bolster First Nations' involvement in the sector, ensuring both the preservation of indigenous knowledge and its effective application within modern contexts.

Additionally, diversification within the industry's range of occupations is paramount. Creating a range of job opportunities, spanning from field operations to strategic management roles, will assist in supporting and facilitating a comprehensive representation of First Nations communities. The economic implications of such diversification are multifaceted. By ensuring access and promoting active participation of First Nations youth, the industry can foster economic self-determination, supporting both community-centric and industry-wide growth trajectories.

The pursuit of long-term sustainability requires an unwavering focus on community resilience and self-sufficiency. Targeted engagement, rooted in data-driven strategies, combined with capacity-building activities and programs should be recognised to foster a harmonious integration of First Nations communities into the industry's operations on a durable and sustainable basis.

Moreover, the development and implementation of suitable training protocols requires a nuanced approach. Ensuring cultural congruence in training and education is vital for ensuring the effectiveness of learning processes for First Nations participants. Design must account for the distinct pedagogical requirements and aspirations of First Nations communities, necessitating the establishment of adaptive and responsive training frameworks.

In essence, the future trajectory of the forest and wood products sector is contingent on a genuine integration of First Nations' indigenous knowledge and contemporary industry practices. Through a strategic amalgamation of opportunities, targeted community engagements, and culturally attuned training mechanisms, the sector can achieve enhanced operational efficiency and sustainability, grounded in centuries of indigenous wisdom.

Industry must take the bull by the horns with individual enterprises and prioritise reconciliation for this to be successful. The journey of the industry and individual enterprises towards reconciliation needs to be a priority to realise this potential.

5.3   Enhancing job and training opportunities for First Nations people

The forest and wood products sector stands at a critical juncture, where its trajectory can be significantly enhanced by harnessing the potential of First Nations communities. One of the key avenues for achieving this is by optimising job and training opportunities, rooted in the indigenous knowledge and expertise of First Nations people.

Firstly, and importantly , the industry needs a recalibrated focus on creating a diverse array of job roles specifically designed for, and in collaboration with First Nations communities. By diversifying these occupational roles—ranging from field operations to strategic management—we not only tap into the unique skill sets and insights that these communities bring, but also ensure a holistic representation at all operational levels. This isn't just about inclusion; it's about enhancing the sector's operational efficacy through diverse perspectives.

Secondly, economic empowerment through job opportunities plays a pivotal role in ensuring the self-determination of First Nations communities. Especially pivotal is the active promotion and facilitation of roles for First Nations youth, ensuring the industry's growth trajectory is intrinsically linked with their professional and economic development.

However, merely creating job opportunities is not sufficient. To truly optimise the involvement of First Nations in the sector, a rigorous focus on specialised training is paramount. Tailored training programs, designed with a deep understanding of First Nations' pedagogical requirements, should be at the forefront. Ensuring that these training paradigms are culturally congruent and adaptive can significantly enhance the learning experience and outcomes for First Nations participants. Such training will not only equip them with the requisite skills for the industry but will also ensure that their unique knowledge and perspectives are seamlessly integrated into the sector's methodologies.

Thirdly, the establishment of mentorship frameworks can bridge the gap between traditional industry practices and the rich indigenous knowledge of First Nations communities. These mentorships can be instrumental in ensuring a two-way knowledge transfer, thereby mutually enriching both the industry and the community.

The future potential of the forest and wood products sector is intrinsically linked to the optimisation of job and training opportunities for First Nations people. By strategically integrating their unique insights, facilitating economic growth, and providing culturally attuned training, the industry can pave the way for a sustainable, efficient and inclusive future.

In summary, the emphasis needs to:

- Acknowledge and incorporate the unique land and forest management knowledge and practices of First Nations into the industry to enrich and diversify its practices
- Build robust support networks and mentorship programs specifically designed to empower First Nations groups in the industry
- Foster a wide range of job opportunities within the forest and wood products industry to ensure diverse career paths for First Nations communities
- Recognise the importance of economic self-determination for First Nations, and actively promoting opportunities for their youth in the industry
- Place a strong emphasis on long-term community sustainability and self-sufficiency, through targeted engagement and capacity building efforts with First Nations communities
- Provide culturally appropriate training and ensuring meaningful engagement with First Nations learners to improve their educational experiences and outcomes
- Offer continuous support for tailored training programs specifically designed to meet the learning needs and aspirations of First Nations communities

[see Rec. A2, A3, C3]

6. PROMOTING AND ADVANCING GENDER DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

The forum dedicated to advancing Gender Diversity and inclusion and training opportunities in the forest, wood and paper products industry took place on June 6, 2023. The agenda was structured around two thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The two thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Developing and Implementing Gender Diversity Strategies and Guidelines
- **Focus Area 2**: Promoting Education, Partnerships and Networks

Twenty-seven participants from various organisations, including employers, union, industry associations, regional forestry industry hubs and education providers, actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the Gender Diversity challenges associated with the industry and potential solutions.

Prior to the Gender forum, ForestWorks conducted the following desktop research and analysis:

6.1. Desktop Research

Buchy (2001)[46] conducted research that explored the views and experiences of women who work in the forest industry in Australia. This paper indicated that women in the industry face several issues due to gendered attitudes, such as a lack of support and recognition, discrimination, and harassment. A number of organisational issues identified by women in the research study are most probably shared by men too. That is the lack of communication, the sense of dis-empowerment, insecure jobs, working long hours, lack of flexibility.

As per the Australian Bureau of statistics (ABS) financial period 2021-2022[47], of the 3.3 million people who did not have a job in March quarter 2023, 1.4 million people wanted a paid job (42%) and 1.9 million people did not want a job (58%).

The ABS[48] reports that the most common reason women were unavailable to start a job or work more hours was 'Caring for children' (48%), while for men it was 'Long-term sickness or disability'(47%). For women aged 40-54 years, the main reason was 'No need to work' (21%), followed closely by 'Caring for ill, disabled or elderly' (19%) and 'Long-term sickness or disability' (18%)[49].

For women aged 25-39 years, the most important incentives were 'Working a set number of hours on set days' (50%), 'Ability to work part-time hours' (47%), and 'Ability to work school hours' (47%). For women aged 40-54 years, the most important incentive was the 'Ability to work part-time hours' (53%)[50].

According to the ABS, for women aged 25-39 years, the most important incentives were 'Working a set number of hours on set days' (50%), 'Ability to work part-time hours' (47%), and 'Ability to work school hours' (47%). For women aged 40-54 years, the most important incentive was the 'Ability to work part-time hours' (53%)[51].

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[46] Buchy, M. (2001). Listening to Women's Voices in the Australian Forestry Workforce: you learn to cope and get on with things. ANU Forestry Occasional Paper 1:2001/ ISSN: 1441-0028.

[47] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/2020-21

[48] Ibid

[49] https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/latest-release

[50] Ibid

[51] Ibid

6.2.   Post Forum Consultations - Gippsland Forestry Hub

The above information provides some clarity as to what influences women in their participation in the workforce above industry contexts. ForestWorks being firmly embedded in the Gippsland region, is a major regional forestry area with the Gippsland forestry hub (one of the eleven Australian hubs. ForestWorks, having strong collaboration with the Gippsland Forestry Hub, undertook discussions with the hub to seek context with the ABS data.

The Gippsland Forestry Hub (GFH) compiled a Skills, Employment and Education report (unpublished)[52] that ForestWorks engaged (February 2021) in a Skills and Employment Assessment Project to inform the hub's future work.

Their industry engagement included an online survey (March 2021) that was drawn from as critical insight in their report[53]. The survey of industry respondents were largely made up of Forestry and Logging, Forestry Support services, Log Sawmilling and Timber processing and Wood product manufacturing.

The GFH survey found that a significantly higher percentage of the employees of respondent companies were male (83 per cent), which was consistent with the ABS data from 2016[54]. This percentage is largely unchanged from 2006, regardless that overall Victorian industries have seen an increase in the proportion of women in the labour force (from 46 per cent to 48 per cent).

The following table indicates that the highest percentage of female workers (21 per cent) and Pulp and Paper Manufacturing have the least (6 per cent)[55]

Table 7: Gippsland workforce by gender composition and industry sector

Industry Sector	% Male	% Female
Forestry & Logging	86	14
Forestry Services	79	21
Pulp & Paper Manufacturing	94	6
Wood Product Manufacturing	89	11
GFHub survey (average)	83	19

Data Source: Census of Population and Housing, 2016, TableBuilder and GFHub survey, 2021

The report indicated reasons for the lack of participation included:

- The industry has fewer part-time workers than other industries in Gippsland, which the report indicated may be a contributing factor to the small number of women working in the industry
- lack of access to part-time work (compared to all industries in Gippsland) may make the industry less attractive to women or other people seeking flexible work options

Themes from the FWTP Stakeholder forums provides the following insight:

Supporting platforms that facilitate women's connection, idea-sharing, and mutual support are essential and might include:

- Establishing and conducting network events, especially in regional areas, including for fundraising to support women's participation and engagement

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[52]   https://gippslandforestryhub.com.au/key-activities/ report

[53]   Ibid

[54]   https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/Lookup/2901.0Chapter38602016. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour Force Status (LFSP),* (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, October 23, 2016)

[55]   Gippsland Forestry Hub. Skills, Employment and Education Report. 2023. Unpublished.

- Conducting field trips, workshops and engaging guest speakers to support and advance women's participation in the industry, including by ensuring equal access to knowledge and information

- Mentoring through formal programs including reverse mentoring

- Developing an internal database that captures skills and areas for growth and can assist pairing mentors and mentees

- Collecting and sharing female role model case studies and stories

- Developing newsletters, information formats and social media tools to promote workforce diversity and inclusion

- Developing a 'male champions for change' program to ensure industry-wide engagement around diversity

The consensus from the twenty seven forum stakeholder participants communicated the following:

- A gender-equal and inclusive workplace promotes positive attitudes, behaviours and values that promote respect, empathy, and cooperation among workers and all employees will feel valued and respected, regardless of their gender or background. This leads to a better workplace culture more likely to foster innovation, productivity, and creativity

- a shift in organisational attitudes and policies that promote equal opportunities and inclusion was long overdue, as it is about workplace culture change, as it is a male dominated Industry

- Enhancing the industry's capacity to address gender equality and inclusion issues, required creating gender-responsive tools, guidelines, and best practices specifically tailored to meet the unique needs and challenges of gender diversity in the forestry sector is critical

- Communication between "head office" and regional offices is not well developed, and women perceived these "regional" offices as having a poor record of employing and respectfully treating women

- wage disparities, inflexible hours to meet family responsibilities, and receiving little recognition and feedback in any form, forum stakeholders agreed that this was harmful

- diversity and inclusion is everyone's responsibility, but requires males to lead the charge

- without strong leadership in managing change, diversity and inclusion would be significantly hindered

As we can see, the research shows that mainstreaming gender diversity at all levels of industry can have positive effects on industries, enterprises and communities. Diversity generally includes incorporating a wider range of experiences, views, approaches, skills and knowledge, which harnessed inclusively is capable of contributing to improved decision-making and implementation.

In Australia's forest, wood, and paper products industry, a glaring gender imbalance exists. This disparity is not merely a statistic; it underscores a deeper issue of the industry's diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Left unresolved, a less diverse workforce limits the pool of talent available to an industry, reducing its access to different capabilities and approaches.

Reducing the gender gap in the forest and wood products industry helps to achieve broader social and economic goals. Equality between men, women and all genders contributes to meeting societal, industry and enterprise objectives, as well as supporting individuals to meet their objectives for meaningful and rewarding work and careers.

A predominantly male-centric workforce inadvertently neglects the manifold benefits of a balanced and diverse team, notably in fostering and harnessing creativity, innovation, and productivity. This is increasingly well understood in the forestry and wood products industry, however action toward improved and genuinely inclusive diversity has been slow and patchy.

The forest, wood, and paper products industry stands at a pivotal juncture. Its contribution to society and economy is at a crossroads. It can, in part by harnessing the potential of the entire community, regardless of gender, provide the innovation required to achieve a low emissions and more sustainable future.

The significance of gender diversity and inclusion in today's industries cannot be downplayed nor

undervalued. Both concepts not only foster a culture of equity and fairness, but also harness the diverse talents, perspectives, and experiences that women bring to the table. The industry's future vibrancy and adaptability hinge on its commitment to embracing diversity in all its manifestations.

Importantly, the path towards achieving gender equality is more intricate than merely increasing female representation (the proportion of women in the workplace). Achieving an effective outcome requires industries, sectors and enterprises to institute structural changes that facilitate an inclusive work culture and make the industry appealing across the gender spectrum.

This entails redefining work culture to make it more accommodating and appealing to women, and concurrently implementing policies that support their needs. Only through concerted efforts can the industry evolve into a beacon of gender equality, harnessing the strengths and perspectives of the entire workforce, to drive growth and innovation.

[See Rec. D1]

6.3   Supporting women's education, partnerships and networks

In a rapidly evolving industry, with an increasingly complex external environment, the empowerment of women remains a pivotal concern from an equality and an industry capability perspective.

Taking concrete steps to support women's education, including through partnerships and women's networks is a key to progressing gender diversity within the industry. A dedicated focus on platforms for women's empowerment is essential. Stakeholders identified a need for industry leadership, by women, to facilitate networking events across diverse locations, with an emphasis on regional areas where such opportunities may be scarce, and where the events are conducted to include women working across the spectrum of the industry and its work functions.

By doing so, industry can not only foster stronger professional ties among women but also underscore the industry's commitment to gender inclusivity.

Organising industry specific field trips and workshops will provide women equitable access to pivotal knowledge. Supporting women's networks by engaging guest speakers who resonate with and inspire female participants can elevate these sessions from mere knowledge sharing to potentially transformative experiences.

Mentorship is a beacon of growth and support. By initiating structured mentoring programs tailored to women's needs, industry and enterprise can bridge experiential gaps and foster a culture of continuous learning. The concept of reverse mentoring, where younger professionals guide their seasoned counterparts, may add another dimension of cross-generational knowledge sharing.

Complementing this is the establishment of an internal skills database that will streamline the mentor-mentee pairing process, ensuring rich collaborations. Capturing and publicising the journeys of successful women celebrates achievement and inspires other women to follow suit.

The FWTP can support development of initiatives, such as a specific women's stream of the assessor and trainer network, and participation in pilot training programs that are mapped to maximising women to participate in mid-career leadership training programs (refer to case study 1 below).

The Industry action of networking is about a communication piece of sharing via social media campaigns, network events, communiques, and a community of practice. This action serves multiple purposes, in particular sharing information through as community of practice that raises awareness of gender diversity and inclusiveness and showcasing the industry's commitment to these values, to attract potential female employees.

[See Rec. B1, C3]

6.4 Increasing opportunities and improving industry's talent pool

A shift towards gender balance is not solely about inclusivity—it is also about strategic outcomes that increase our industry's talent pool.

The Scoping Study forum identified that for many women, a career in the forestry and wood products industry could be constrained by a lack of specifically designed opportunities for training and skills development. In particular, there is a collective concern that younger women may enter the industry with limited opportunities to undertake training programs that lead to a qualification outcome.

As observed by the ABS data provided at the start of this section, women do not enter or leave the industry to focus on family requirements and needs. Furthermore, related and potentially separate in some instances, when women consider returning to the industry from a sabbatical, they consistently find they return to where they left off.

Moreover, as the Construction Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMMEU), the industry trade union, identified at the stakeholder forum, this would usually result in women earning less than men across their entire career, representing a disincentive to continued participation in the industry. It is disappointing that in contemporary times, we are still battling with wage disparities solely based on gender.

What should be concerning to our industry is that ignoring gender diversity and inclusiveness will divert our talent pool of women to other industries that can offer equal workplace conditions and support platforms.

The call to action on career path structures and strategies for industry and enterprises, as a potent driver for change, must include trialling stackable micro-credentials of skills.

The topic of micro-credentials was a strongly supported theme in the Gender forum for all stakeholders. The findings indicated that micro-credentials eliminate skills gaps, especially for women as this mode of training places the least impost on family requirements and reversing the trends observed in the ABS statistics for women in the industry. s.

Micro-credentials are mini-qualifications that demonstrate skills, knowledge, and/or experience in a given subject area or capability. Also known as "nano-qualifications", micro-credentials tend to be narrower in range than traditional qualifications like diplomas or degrees. They can also be broad in focus rather than specific. For example, you can have a micro-credential for something as broad as data-driven marketing and offer another micro-credential focusing specifically on how to empower others in the workplace.

The growing interest in micro-credentialing was observed in the Gender forum. It could be in part explained by the need for the industry to remain competitive by ensuring employees continue to develop new capabilities. Micro-credentialing gives industry a way to map these career paths and quantify any types of skill and knowledge.

From its perspective, ForestWorks recognises that micro-credentials:

- Can minimise employers' costs to keep the current workforce updated while keeping track of their development
- Can be awarded for all skills and are portable
- Gives a way to map these career paths and quantify any types of skills
- Are an easy-to-manage method of allocating training to staff and evaluating their online learning programs. Because micro-credentials are delivered on a unit-by-unit basis, industry will find it easier to manage and track staff training programs in the workplace
- Offers industry and the workforce a structured approach to training and learning on the job. Often the skills developed on the job aren't recognised and recorded, and not reflected on the employee's record or resume. The flexibility and incremental nature of micro-credentials allows a tool to give employees greater structure and measurement in the skill set and knowledge they accumulate in their role

[See Rec. A2]

Extending opportunities for women to advance in their careers may equally be challenged by work breaks and lack of general opportunities. To that end, women need to have priority access to mid-career leadership and learning and development opportunities, including with women being mentored and supported by other women, as well as by men.

6.5.   Current Industry initiatives

The Tasmanian Forests and Forest Products Network (TFFPN) found, a key element of strategies to increase gender diversity is empowering women in the workplace, including through access to advocacy skills and training and training in increasing diversity and embedding inclusion into everyday working activities.

This would extend to normalising a focus on gender diversity and inclusion in recruitment practices and in training, including providing opportunities for training. We provide the following case studies to demonstrate an initiative that could be incorporated into an integrated FWTP program.

Case Study 1 : A Best Practice and Success Story

Tasmanian Forests & Forest Products Network (TFFPN) [56]

Supporting forest industry women in their leadership journey

The Tasmanian Government supported TFFPN to provide scholarships for 11 women working in the Tasmanian forest industry to increase their governance and leadership skills. Two opportunities for leadership and governance upskilling were identified for this project –

1. AICD Foundations of Directorship Online – 3 scholarships and

2. Tasmanian Leaders I-LEAD Program – 8 scholarships.

Both programs are highly regarded and provide significant opportunities for participants to not only develop skills but to build their networks.

Designed just for women, the I-LEAD Women in Industry Program aimed to help tackle the under-representation of women in leadership positions and explore opportunities for career success across large and small enterprises. The participants were complimentary in their feedback of this program with one participant highlighting that the most valuable aspect of I-LEAD was "Connecting with industry leaders, adaptive management techniques and learning more about my personal work and leadership style." Another noted the "networking connections and peer reflection" were highlights.

The AICD Foundations of Directorship Online Course, is a structured 11-week program that combines virtual classroom sessions, online learning activities and individual study with support from a team of experienced faculty members and a dedicated Learning Support Executive. The women who participated in this program agreed they were more prepared to participate in a governance role. "It was a great introductory course that was able to be managed in an around other work commitments whilst at the same time delivering great value," said one participant.

Case Study 2 : Connecting and Creating Pathways

Tasmanian Forests & Forest Products Network (TFFPN) [57]

A group of industry stakeholders, facilitated by Tracey Taylor, have been collaborating with TasTAFE on a Leadership and Safety Pilot Skill Set comprised of three Certificate IV in Forest Operations Units.

One of the drivers of this initiative, Jillian Aylett Brown, CEO of MechLog, is passionate about creating pathways for our industry employees.

"This Pilot Skill Set is an opportunity for our industry to create real pathways and careers in the forest industry. We want to offer training to support our employees to grow their skills and knowledge and become our future leaders," Jillian said.

The stakeholders have identified three key units for the Pilot Skill Set that will provide a well-rounded introduction for upcoming leaders and supervisors:

- Monitor Safety, Health and Environment
- Monitor and Improve Forestry Operations
- Lead Effective Workplace Relations

"We want to keep people in our industry, and these units are a natural fit to build on existing training and skills of our employees," explained Jillian. For this pilot initiative to be successful, it will require employer support via enrolments over the next three years. Without sustainable enrolment numbers year on year, developing and delivering such an important initiative for our industry will be difficult

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[56] https://www.tffpn.com.au/supporting-forest-industry-women-in-their-leadership-journey/

[57] https://www.tffpn.com.au/connecting-and-creating-pathways/

Case Study 3 : Diversity & Inclusion: Its everyone's responsibility...

Tasmanian Forests & Forest Products Network (TFFPN)[58]

Our Workforce Development and Diversity Reference Group is pleased to release the Connecting & Belonging: Tasmanian Forest Industry Diversity Action Plan (DAP)

This plan articulates and reflects the perceived and real constraints and barriers to supporting a diverse and inclusive workforce for our forest industry.

Key its success, is the engagement from stakeholders across the sector, government, training and the community. The people who have developed this plan have embodied it's title of Connecting & Belonging. They have connected with each other and built an inclusive project where everyone can feel they belong. These individuals have freely given their time and expertise to not only develop this plan but, more importantly, to lead and guide the implementation of key actions within this plan.

The GREAT theme of this plan requires strong leadership in managing change. This is a change management plan, and with a focus on providing tools to help the industry to become more inclusive and to attract and retain a diverse workforce. With this change, the forest and wood products industry can realise a vision of being an 'industry of choice' with a skilled workforce that supports industry development and is representative of the community in which it operates.

[See Rec. C3]

In Queensland, the Women in Forests & Timber Network Queensland (WFTN QLD) is dedicated to promoting gender equality and inclusion in the forest industry. We provide this current initiative that the FWTP could fund:

Case Study 4 : A Best Practice and Success story

The Women in Forest & Timber Network Queensland (WFTN QLD)[59]

The WFTN has a mission to support, advocate for, and empower women, WFTN QLD has taken several steps to encourage a diverse and inclusive industry. These initiatives include mentoring programs, growth funds, professional development opportunities, advocacy, networking, field trips, workshops, and guest speakers.

In addition, WFTN QLD has planned to set up regional WFTN events in areas such as Gympie, develop newsletters and social media accounts to ensure better communication within the industry, create a database to capture skills and areas for growth and assist with pairing mentors and mentees, as well as implement a "Champions for Change" program to recognise and reward male allies in the industry who demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and inclusion.

Through WFTN QLD, women have a platform to have their voices heard and their presence felt in the industry. It is a space that celebrates and promotes women in the industry through social media, newsletters, events, and connections with mentors. WFTN QLD provides a safe space for women to connect, learn, grow, and develop their skills and knowledge. WFTN QLD has become a champion for change in the industry and an example of what can be achieved when we work together.

[See Rec. A4, C1, C3]

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[58]   https://www.tffpn.com.au/diversity-action-plan/

[59]   The Women in Forest & Timber Network Queensland, (n.d.). Future Directions Worksop. Presentation provided by the Women in Forest & Timber Network Queensland.

Logistical measures to support increased gender diversity

Stakeholders identified a number of standard and often-considered actions that may be of assistance at the enterprise level, in improving gender diversity. It is noted these measures can be as applicable for men as for women but are routinely considered as promoting gender diversity because they are still more likely to be applicable for women than men.

Integrating policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible work arrangements, can make the industry more appealing to women. Additionally, providing on-site childcare and actively supporting parental leave could be of assistance.

Measures such as these would signal the industry's commitment to supporting working mothers, acknowledging their dual roles, reducing some of the barriers that could see them forced to choose between their career and family responsibilities. On a final note, when engaging with stakeholders on the scoping study and participation in the discussion forum, we asked the following question: "What do you expect as an outcome from this scoping study?". The majority of female stakeholders responded that they didn't expect very much, or at least, much in the way of major change. They saw that their contribution to the Scoping Study, was more of an opportunity to meet other women and stakeholders, to share their experiences and develop new networks.

ForestWorks regards this networking as a critical strategy to be driven by the industry men for the success of women in all sectors of our industry workforce. It will break down the sense of isolation by women, inspire younger women in their career aspirations and personal development and reinforce self-esteem. If the Forest and Wood products industry organisations are to keep women in their workforce, important organisational and attitudinal changes have to occur.

Policies are in place, but they are not enough as implementation mechanisms to drive a comfortable and safe workplace. Gender diversity and inclusion can be enabled through various means, such as providing growth funding, resources, and access to comprehensive education and training programs.

[See Rec. D1]

7.   VET REGULATORY SYSTEMS AND REFORMS

A Desktop Review

Introduction

Strengthening the role of industry and empowering it to drive reforms to the VET sector and its delivery to meet the needs of the nation is key to ensuring employers and individuals access the training and skills development they require. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)[60] is conducting major VET reforms[61] for the VET sector at a time of global economic uncertainty. The reforms aim to support individuals to re-train and re-skill to find and to stay in work, through courses that link with and build on their existing experience and training.

Investing in VET will assist Australians to learn new skills, innovate and create new knowledge that will improve productivity, increase future economic growth and meet the skills needs of today and tomorrow.

Stronger industry leadership and engagement is critical to delivering a VET sector that can respond rapidly to changes in Australia's economy, build a resilient workforce and provide confidence to employers that VET graduates have the right skills for the jobs they have on offer.

All governments are in partnership to improve the VET system. One aspect of this collaboration results in the Australian Government strengthening the VET sector through a new 5-year National Skills Agreement (NSA)[62], commencing in January 2024. This agreement outcome is focused on delivering high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity, skill the workforce and support people to obtain the skills critical to industry and their own futures.

This commitment to the guiding principles for the NSA, (between the Commonwealth of Australia (Commonwealth) and New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory will provide States and Territories with access to additional Commonwealth investment of $4.1 billion over 5 years from 2024. This is made up of Commonwealth investment of $3.7 billion, in addition to $400 million to support another 300,000 TAFE and vocational education and training (VET) fee-free places.

This agreement[63] is focused on:

- Delivering high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity
- Supporting Australians to obtain the skills they need to participate in rewarding work
- Ensuring Australia has the skilled workforce needed for critical industries and the delivery of high-quality services

Major reform areas identified in the NSA[64] are as follows:

- Completion rates and support for students who face barriers. The aim is to lift completion rates and improve outcomes for students and apprentices. The focus will be on students who face barriers and are underrepresented in the workforce, such as those with disability.
- Boosting enrolments in the following sectors: care and support (aged, disability, veterans and early childhood and education), clean economy, manufacturing and sovereign capability (including defence industries), construction, agriculture, hospitality, tourism, cybersecurity and technology.

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[60]   The Employment and Workplace Relations portfolio comprises the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) and ten entities including the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). Under the Administrative Arrangements Order of 23 June 2022, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations was established from 1 July 2022.

[61]   https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform

[62]   https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/heads-agreement-skills-reform

[63]   https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/national-skills-agreement

[64]   https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform

- Women's participation and gender equality. Emphasis is on a coordinated effort to support enrolments and completions. A focus will be on accessing skills in better paid occupations, including trades, traditionally dominated by men. Men will also be encouraged to participate and gain skills in fields where women have been historically over-represented, such as care.

- Working closely with First Nations people, their communities and training providers to support skill development that their career opportunities.

- Promoting and pursuing foundation skills to ensure that Australian adults lacking language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills can gain essential skills for work, career progression and successful completion of a vocational education training course or an apprenticeship.

- Workforce capability and the development of a VET Workforce Blueprint to strengthen and support a high-quality teacher workforce, to delivery up to date training and an industry relevant curriculum.

National Skills Agreement Vision and Principles[65]

The guiding principles for longer-term VET reform under the National Skills Agreement, agreed by Skills Ministers (endorsed by the National Cabinet on 31 August 2022), are committed to by all governments, working in partnership.

The principles focus on supporting training providers to deliver quality education and training, with a modern and responsive TAFE at the heart of the VET sector. This includes upgrading TAFE facilities, prioritising wrap-around supports for priority groups, supporting a quality teaching workforce and strengthening collaboration with industry and unions.

The agreement has a focus to ensure that all Australians have access to the education, training and support needed to obtain well-paid and secure jobs, particularly:

- Women;

- First Nations Australians;

- Young people;

- Mature age Australians;

- Long-term unemployment;

- People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities;

- People with disability; and

- Regional and remote learners;

The vision is to ensure that no Australians are left behind as the Australian economy transitions and adapts to structural change, including by providing opportunities for life-long learning and foundation skills development.

Priorities for the new reforms[66]

The following priorities have been identified for the reforms:

1. adopt a new funding model to improve national consistency for students, integrating subsidies and loans and is linked with efficient pricing and the skills needed by employers.

2. develop and fund nationally accredited micro-credentials and individual skill sets, in addition to full qualifications, and supporting lifelong learning through an integrated tertiary education system.

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[65] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/skills-reform-priorities/national-skills-agreement-vision-and-principles
[66] https://www.pmc.gov.au/publications/heads-agreement-skills-reform

3. Provide stronger support for foundation skills and ensuring access for all Australians with low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.

4. Promote apprenticeships and other employment-based training, including pre-apprenticeships, and undertaking reforms to boost geographic mobility and labour supply.

5. Strengthen VET pathways for secondary school students and improving the quality and vocational relevance of VET in schools.

6. Work with the National Careers Institute (NCI), to reduce the proliferation of careers information available, and supporting the NCI to provide access to career information that best enables people to make decisions about their learning, training and employment pathways.

7. Enhance transparency and accountability, through clear roles and responsibilities for governments and industry, and increasing data collection and analysis that is shared publicly to support regular assessment of governments' policies and performance.

8. Support a viable and robust system of public, private and not for profit providers, with contestability in VET markets, to ensure high quality training and student choice.

9. Increase real investment in VET, while undertaking agreed reforms needed to ensure this investment will improve outcomes for Australians and the economy.

Reform Context

Governance

Governance of Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector is through a network of Commonwealth and state and territory governments[67]. A new governance structure was put in place post COVID-19, which saw the cessation of the COAG Skills Council and the formation of the Skills National Cabinet Reform Committee[68].

Commonwealth, state and territory departments and training authorities

The architecture of Australia's VET system operates broadly as follows:

- The Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) oversees a national role in the governance, financing, and overarching policy development for the Australian VET system, working cooperatively with state and territory skills departments.

- State and territory training authorities are responsible for the operation of the VET system within their state or territory. Each training authority participates in the formulation of national policy, planning and objectives, and promotes and implements agreed policies and priorities within the state or territory, supported by statutory advisory and regulatory bodies.

The VET System

The Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system is a national system that provides industry-relevant and practical skills and knowledge to individuals. There are 5 key elements of the Australian VET system:

1. Underpinned by the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) – clients receive qualifications that are regulated, quality assured and nationally recognised
2. It is nationally regulated – clients receive nationally consistent, high quality training and assessment, regardless of their location
3. Industry-led – employers shape the qualifications needed by their industry, which in turn enhances their productivity and global competitiveness

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[67] https://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank-governance
[68] Ibid

4. Client centred – flexible pathways and tailored learning allow students to gain the skills they need, when they need them
5. It is competency based – outcomes-focused training and assessment enables students to build practical capability through work-integrated learning.

VET Regulatory System[69]

The VET system's regulatory regime is largely based on a nationally consistent and managed framework, as set out here:

Australian Skills Quality Authority

The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) is the national regulator for Australia's VET sector. It was established under the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 (NVETR Act) and is responsible for registering RTOs and monitoring their compliance with the national VET standards in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. It is also responsible for managing the registration of some RTOs in Victoria and Western Australia that offer courses to overseas students or to students in states that come under ASQA's jurisdiction. ASQA also has related responsibilities, including the regulation of VET accredited courses and functions as a designated authority under the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000.

Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

The Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is the statutory authority responsible for ensuring that employers of apprentices and trainees in Victoria and providers of education and training (including course and qualification owners) meet quality standards, and that information is readily available to support informed choice in education and training. It was established under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and operates within a legal framework comprising legislation, ministerial directions and delegations and the Australian Quality Training Framework.

Training Accreditation Council (Western Australia)

The Training Accreditation Council (TAC) is the independent statutory body for quality assurance and recognition (VET) services for domestic students in Western Australia. It was established under the Vocational Education and Training Act 1996 and operates within the National Skills Framework as the Western Australian VET regulator.

Funding

Government funding is not the same as the school and higher education sectors, as a significant proportion of VET activity is undertaken by non-government providers on a fee-for-service basis (no government funding). The cost for this activity is borne by end user, being the student and/or their employer. According to the NCVER statistical report for Total VET students and courses 2021[70], in 2021, 2.1 million students (49.9%) were enrolled in nationally recognised programs, consisting of:

- training package qualifications (1.9 million students)
- accredited qualifications (160 300 students)
- training package skill sets (86 800 students)
- accredited courses (96 300 students).
- 4.3 million students were enrolled in nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET), up 9.0% from 2020

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[69] https://www.voced.edu.au/vet-knowledge-bank-getting-know-vet-overviews-vet-regulators

[70] NCVER 2022, Total VET students and courses 2021, NCVER, Adelaide. Statistical report 18 August 2022, ISSN 2206-5156, TD/TNC 149.03. Commonwealth of Australia, 2022.

- 3529 registered training organisations (RTOs) delivered nationally recognised VET
- an estimated 24.0% of the Australian resident population aged 15 to 64 years participated in nationally recognised VET in Australia

Of the above only 1.2 million were enrolled in courses outside the school system that were directly government funded (that is, were 'government-funded students'). Federal and state/territory government funding is provided through multiple channels[71] including:

- Commonwealth funding to the states and territories targeted to particular outcomes, such as through the NASWD and National Partnerships, often spent on training subsidies
- general funding of government-supported providers such as TAFE institutes, schools and universities, including capital funding
- fee-for-service arrangements for the provision of designated programs (such as the Adult Migrant English Program)
- VET Student Loans, which are paid by the Australian Government to providers on behalf of students in designated courses.

Total government funding provided through VET appropriations and VET intergovernmental funding agreements in 2019 was $6.4 billion, of which the Australian Government contributed $2.6 billion (41.6%). In addition, the Australian Government provided $275.9 million for VET Student Loans (including grandfathered VET FEE-HELP loans)[72]. In 2021, 58.5% of students enrolled in training package qualifications were government-funded and 95.4% of students enrolled in subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program were domestic fee-for-service funded[73]

Table 8 :Students enrolled in nationally recognised training by funding source and type of training, 2021

Type of training	Government funding	Domestic - fee - for - service funding	International fee - for - service funding
Training package qualifications	1 107 600	692 500	199 200
Accredited qualifications	113 900	41 000	7 800
Training package skill sets	38 300	48 100	1 000
Accredited courses	38 200	58 000	200
Subjects not delivered as part of a nationally recognised program	158 800	2 604 900	9 400

Note: The sum of students (n = 5.1 million in 2021) will not add to the 2021 total (4.3 million) as a student may have multiple sources of funding and types of training in a calender year.

VET Skills Reforms

Industry Engagement Reforms

DEWR states[74] that stronger industry leadership and engagement is critical to delivering a VET sector that can respond rapidly to changes in Australia's economy. This will foster a resilient workforce and provide confidence to employers that graduates can hit the road running.

Industry needs a strong, strategic voice in VET to drive collaboration across sectors, address strategic workforce challenges and to ensure qualifications are developed and updated faster to meet the evolving needs of industry.

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71 Ibid
72 Ibid
73 Ibid
74 https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/industry-engagement-reforms

Jobs and Skills Councils (JSCs) are being established (10 JSCs in total) to provide industry with a stronger strategic voice in ensuring Australia's VET sector delivers stronger outcomes for learners and employers. JSCs have replaced the previous industry engagement arrangements which included 67 Industry Reference committees. The JSCs will:

- identify skills and workforce needs for their sectors
- map career pathways across education sectors
- develop contemporary VET training products
- support collaboration between industry and training providers to improve training and assessment practice
- act as a source of intelligence on issues affecting their industries.

They will work closely with Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) including drawing on JSA's workforce analysis and projections, to undertake planning for their industry sectors creating a consistent understanding of the skills landscape and how skill gaps can be addressed.

Qualifications Reform

Qualifications Reform will build upon the strengths of the existing VET system and ensure the VET system is fit-for-purpose, being efficient, effective and easy to navigate. The focus is on transferable and relevant skills that enables learners to get jobs, and support upskilling and reskilling throughout their career.

The current VET system is cluttered and difficult to navigate over the years, with over 1,100 qualifications, 1,600 skill sets, and 15,000 Units of Competency [75]. The content has become prescriptive and stifles innovation and flexibility in training delivery. There are issues of transferable skills and learner mobility and as such, a learner who is upskilling or reskilling will likely undertake some training that delivers similar skills to those they already have.

Qualifications Reform will explore potential changes to the current VET qualifications model to ensure the national training packages has ongoing relevance to labour market needs.

Quality Reforms

While the quality of training is affected by many variables, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) have a critical role in ensuring training delivery on the ground is high-quality and meets the diverse range of learner and employer needs.

Reforms include revising the Standards for RTOs 2015 (the Standards) to ensure they are clear and outcome-focused and developing a Blueprint for the VET Workforce to support, grow and retain a quality VET workforce. These reforms will be supported by work to help build RTO capability and capacity, including developing tools and resources and supporting continuous improvement.

The Standards are currently being revised with the aim of providing greater clarity for RTOs and regulators, strengthening the focus on quality outcomes for learners and employers, and allowing for more flexibility and innovation in training delivery.

A copy of the draft standards for RTOs are available for review on the following link: https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/resources/draft-standards-rtos

Foundation Skills reforms

There is a need to strengthen and improve access to foundation skills for many Australians. According to the OECD[76] around three million Australians aged 16 to 65 have low literacy and numeracy.

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[75] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/qualifications-reforms
[76]   https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/9789264281110-4-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/9789264281110-4-

Foundation skills for adults are the basic skills needed to participate in the workplace, the community and in education and training. Nearly all jobs require minimum foundation skills. They are a combination of English language, literacy and numeracy (LLN), which is important because this includes:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing
- Digital literacy
- Use of mathematical ideas
- Employability skills, such as collaboration, problem solving, self-management, learning and information
- Communication technology (ICT) being skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

Workers with low levels of foundation skills have insecure employment with limited opportunities for development and tend to have recurring periods of unemployment. Improving foundation skills improves participation in work, social outcomes and provides more opportunities to contribute to the broader community.

Improving VET delivered to secondary students

Recent reviews, including the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into work, further education and training recognised the importance of VET in providing alternative vocational pathways to secondary students.

The reviews raised concerns with VET delivered to secondary students which disclosed[77] the following:

- inconsistent quality of delivery of courses and outcomes for students
- industry concerns with the value of VET qualifications delivered to secondary students
- limitations of current data collections. These make it difficult to measure investment, quality and outcomes and to develop evidence-based policy to achieve the best outcomes

In February 2021, Skills Ministers considered initial options to support improvements to VET delivered to secondary students. They requested officials undertake work to further scope the options.

As per the DEWR website, a working group of education and skills government officials will further explore reform options. These include considering the development of a National VET in Schools Strategy in line with Recommendation 10 of the Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into work, further education and training[78].

Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are short and targeted training products and for VET and Industry this offers more flexible ways of learning. The paradigm scaffolds deliver in-time training to meet emerging and urgent Industry skills needs. Micro-credentials support people to move between jobs and industries and can be used as building blocks towards full qualifications.

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en#:~:text=In%20Australia%2C%20an%20estimated%20three,or%20numeracy%20skills%2C%20or%20both.&text=More%20than%201%20million%20adults,average%20to%20good%20literacy%20skills.

[77]   https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/improving-vet-delivered-secondary-students

[78]   Ibid

Micro-credentials were identified in two prominent reviews as an area for reform[79] :

a) The review, *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's VET system*, led by the Hon Steven Joyce, noted their potential for providing more flexible training options for industry. The review recommended consideration for further encouraging their use.

b) The Review of the *Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF Review)* later picked up on this recommendation and explored the importance of micro-credentials. The AQF Review recommended that policy guidelines be developed to allow the recognition of micro-credentials for credit.

These reviews highlight how micro-credentials support opportunities for flexible learning and training and help modernise the training landscape, as part of broader reform work in the VET system.

The importance of micro-credentials was also recognised under the JobTrainer Fund as part of the economic response to COVID-19. The Australian Government partnered with state and territory governments to establish the JobTrainer Fund. JobTrainer provides free or low-fee training places – including short courses – in areas of skills needs.

VET Data streamlining

The way we collect and manage student activity data at the national level is multi-layered, complex and inconsistent. Consequently, the information needs of students, training providers and decision makers in much of the VET sector are not currently being met.

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) Data Streamlining program aims to streamline the way VET student activity data is collected, managed, and used[80]. It will provide better data, faster and is a partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory training authorities, the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) and VET sector regulators.

Reforms will encapsulate the following key changes:

- a new VET Information Standard to replace AVETMISS 8.0, changing what information will need to be collected by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and how it is reported
- a new Student and Training Activity Reporting System (STARS) changing how RTOs will validate and submit data, which can be integrated with student management systems
- a sector-wide, consistent reporting timeframe, moving from periodic for some providers to progressive reporting for everyone.

The VET Data Streamlining program benefits include:

- a more efficient data validation and submission practices
- reduced duplication through a national dataset (including state and territory data elements) in a consistent, consolidated, and flexible VET Information Standard
- up-to-date student training records so students can demonstrate competencies, using the USI transcripts sooner
- supporting training providers to manage their data as they go, rather than periodically
- improved evidence-based decision making, resulting in better outcomes for the sector.

Fee-Free TAFE

According to DEWR[81], the Australian Government partnered with state and territory governments to establish a $1 billion 12-month Skills Agreement to deliver 180,000 Fee-Free TAFE and vocational

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79 https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/supporting-microcredentials-training-system
80 https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/vet-data-streamlining-program
81 https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/fee-free-tafe

educational places from January 2023. The Australian Government contribution of $493 million, will be matched by states and territories to support the delivery of training places.

The Australian Government also announced an additional $414.1 million, will be committed for a further 300,000 TAFE and vocational educational courses to be made fee-free from Jan 2024 (this is currently being negotiated with States and Territories through the 5-year National Skills Agreement).

The Agreement sets out training places across the following areas of national priority:

- agriculture
- care (aged care, childcare, health care and disability care)
- construction
- hospitality and tourism
- sovereign capability
- technology and digital

Fee-Free TAFE will be prioritised for a number of priority groups[82], noting that specific details on priority groups as follows:

- Certain categories of visa holders
- First Nations Australians
- Unemployed or receiving income support payments
- People with disability
- Unpaid carers
- Women facing economic insecurity and those undertaking study in non-traditional fields
- Young people aged between 17-24

TAFE Technology Fund

under the TAFE Technology Fund rest with the Australian Government Minister for Skills and Training. The Australian Government will place TAFE at the centre of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. A commitment of $50 million to improving TAFE campuses around Australia [83]. This Technology Fund will support TAFEs across the country to upgrade and expand their facilities, such as laboratories, workshops, and IT services to ensure TAFE is delivering training to standards expected by students and industry.

There are 14 tranche-1 projects initially committed across 5 states and territories that will be funded under the TAFE Technology Fund. These commitments are valued at $28.2 million and are being progressed with state and territory governments [84]. The balance of the fund ($21.8 million) will be allocated amongst projects proposed by state and territory governments for their TAFEs through a competitive merit process in 2023. Approval of projects for funding

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

The AQF defines the essential characteristics, including the required learning outcomes, of the 14 different types of qualifications[85] issued across the senior secondary education, vocational education and training

[82] Ibid

[83] https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-reform/tafe-technology-fund

[84] Ibid

[85] Within the 14 qualification types, both the Masters Degree and the Doctoral Degree specify more than one qualification type. The Masters Degree specifies the Masters Degree (Research), the Masters Degree (Coursework) and the Masters Degree (Extended). The Doctoral Degree specifies the Doctoral Degree (Research), the Doctoral Degree (Professional) and the Higher Doctorate.

(VET) and higher education systems in Australia[86]. According to the "review of the Australian Qualifications Framework report[87] the traditional role of formal qualifications is challenged by the ready availability of information through the Internet, declining trust in institutions and traditional sources of authority. It has been recognised that many people gain skills and experience in a variety of settings outside the formal education and training system.

The review recognised that many current job roles will become redundant, particularly in areas of standardised and routine production and service delivery. However, new roles are also emerging, that place a premium on human aptitudes and capabilities, including the ability to understand, shape, interpret and reshape the use of technology. The review notes that workplaces are transforming dramatically, with employers having a strong and growing expectation that graduates will be work ready and productive. Individuals need to be able to manage multiple career transitions, and to build their own career paths and business opportunities, through continuous learning and development.

As such in order for qualifications to retain their relevance and effectiveness, they will need to respond to the above current and emerging workforce and social needs, be delivered in ways that meet learners' needs and circumstances, and be trusted by learners, employers and the community generally.

According to the Department of education (Australian Government) website[88], the reforms to the AQF[89] needs to operate in and help shape a future in which:

- Central economic and social policy goals widen participation in education and training, and improve educational attainment levels, particularly among those with low levels of participation and attainment.

- Young people can successfully transition into post-secondary education and training through a broad range of options and pathways, and complete at least an initial tertiary qualification.

- Lifelong learning must become a practical reality for people; it cannot stand as an abstract goal.

- Post-secondary education and training is conceived and redesigned as a diverse set of offerings, available through better linkages and pathways between the VET and higher education sectors. These linkages and pathways will no longer be linear and hierarchical; they will need to recognise that throughout adulthood, people need to develop new skills in different areas and at different levels. Central to this objective is reinvigorating the VET system and raising its standing.

- As they transition into post-school education and training, young people must have a well-informed appreciation of the purpose of different qualifications and the relationship between qualifications. That appreciation must be accessible to adults seeking to deepen existing skills or gain new skills. Qualification outcomes will be relevant, understood, and trusted.

- Firms and people will have ready, flexible access to a broad suite of options and opportunities for developing new skills. They will look to short, purpose-built, flexibly delivered qualifications – within and outside the formal qualification system – to gain new skills and knowledge. Systems and processes for credit recognition and recognition of prior learning will be easier to access, more transparent, and rigorous in applying the credit recognition process to ensure quality is maintained and qualification outcome requirements are met.

- The competitiveness of Australian education and training as a major export industry will be influenced by perceptions of the standing, quality, and relevance of its system of qualifications.

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[86] https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A84730

[87] https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2008523494/view

[88] https://www.education.gov.au/

[89] https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/resources/review-australian-qualifications-framework-final-report-2019

AQF Proposed reforms

The Review panel has proposed a comprehensive set of reforms and an implementation plan that would see a future AQF evolve[90] as:

- a less complex AQF structure with a primary focus on the qualification types in the AQF (Degrees, Certificates etc.).

- a single and clearer taxonomy comprising eight bands of knowledge and six bands of skills more flexibly applied. Application is not rigidly locked to other bands (or levels).

- Knowledge, Skills and Application are defined in terms of action, i.e., the information to inform action, the capabilities to act and the context for action.

- Refocusing the design of qualifications to be linked to learning outcomes for individual qualifications.

- Including additional information to help define qualification types, particularly for qualifications leading to Nationally Recognised Training delivered through the VET sector, for apprenticeships and for research-oriented qualifications.

- Identifying general capabilities (such as digital literacy and ethical decision making) for use in individual qualifications.

- Revising the AQF Pathways Policy to broaden guidelines for credit recognition across AQF qualifications and define and provide for recognition of shorter form credentials, including micro-credentials, towards AQF qualifications.

- Developing a prototype of national credit points system for voluntary adoption by institutions and sectors.

- Realigning qualification types against the revised taxonomy (based on options outlined in the Report) including the addition of a higher diploma qualification. i.e., VET certificates should be more meaningfully titled to reflect their purpose.

- Clearly defining the Senior Secondary Certificate of Education to be represented in the AQF, in terms of its role in preparing young people for a range of pathways into VET and higher education (including with credit).

- Expressing the Volume of learning in terms of hours, not years, and applied as a benchmark for compliance and quality assurance.

- Establishing an ongoing governance body for the AQF, to give effect to decisions of the Review of the AQF and to provide advice on revisions to the AQF where required in the future.

- Ensuring that AQF policies are updated or assigned to the relevant agency, with redundant policies removed. The AQF is more consistently referenced and applied in VET and higher education sector standards and guidelines.

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9. APPENDIX

The Forums

Forum 1: First Nations

Forum Overview

The forum discussing First Nations inclusion and training opportunities in the forest, wood and paper products industry took place on June 6, 2023, marking the first event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around two focus areas:

- **Focus Area 1**: Improve Job and training opportunities for the First Nations Australians in the industry.
- **Focus Area 2**: Strengthen First Nations inclusion and engagement in the industry.

The discussions were guided by a series of questions provided in a background paper that was distributed before the forum.

Forum Participants

Fifteen participants from various organisations, including employers, union, industry associations, regional forestry industry hubs and education providers, actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the First Nations' challenges associated with the industry and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: AKD Softwoods, Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), One Forty One, PF Olsen, Reliance Forest Fibre, Ling Futures, AKS Forest Solutions, Charles Darwin University | Northern Institute | Collage of Indigenous Futures, Education and Arts (CIFEA), Forest and Wood Products Australia (FWPA), Forestry Australia, Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub, CFMMEU Manufacturing Division, Midway Limited, National Workplace Services Group (NWSG), Northern Territory Ord Valley Forestry Hub / Forestry Industry Association Northern Territory, Skills Insight, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, National Timber and Hardware Association (NTHA), Southern Cross University, NSW Department of Education, Gippsland Forestry Hub, and Tasmanian Forest and Forest Products Network (TFFPN).

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges related to First Nations and forestry industry engagement, to guide the development of potential solutions.

Focus Area 1: Improve Job and Training Opportunities for the First Nations Australians in the industry

1. **Recognising and integrating Fist Nations' land and forest management knowledge and practices in the industry**

During the forum, participants expressed concerns regarding the insufficient recognition and support for Traditional Owners management in the forestry sector. They stressed the need to explicitly acknowledge the extensive history of active forest management by Traditional Owners, spanning over 60,000 years. The participants emphasised the need to integrate this valuable knowledge and expertise into forestry practices to ensure sustainable and culturally sensitive approaches.

A notable example was shared during the forum regarding the involvement of First Nations elders in instructing non-First Nations land managers on specific burning techniques. This case demonstrated the extension of traditional land management practices within the context of plantation forestry. It showcased the adaptive learning process and the incorporation of traditional knowledge into organisational practices.

Although engaging elders in land management activities has been practiced for approximately 20 years, participants recognised the need for wider adoption and continued growth of these practices.

2. **Empowering First Nations groups through support networks and mentorship programs**

Participants recognised the need to move beyond mere acknowledgement of Traditional Owner involvement in forest management and emphasised the significance of sharing best practices and creating a supportive network focused on training. They stressed the need to establish support networks and mentoring opportunities specifically designed for traditional groups. These networks should prioritise training, share examples of best practices, provide learning opportunities, and facilitate potential mentoring relationships within a tailored framework for First Nations communities. The goal is to empower First Nations communities to make informed decisions and plans for their land while enhancing their participation in the forestry sector.

Mentoring emerged as a recurring theme throughout the discussions, with participants highlighting its critical role in supporting First Nations individuals as they navigate their roles and overcome obstacles in the forestry industry.

The participants shared various mentoring models and highlighted their potential for enhancing training programs. They recognised that the diverse experiences and approaches of different mentoring programs can provide valuable insights for designing and implementing similar initiatives within the industry. The examples shared during the forum emphasised the importance of cultural sensitivity and understanding in effectively managing people, situations, and negotiations.

3. **Fostering diverse job opportunities for First Nations communities**

Participants acknowledged that job opportunities for First Nations individuals in the forestry sector can encompass a wide range of activities, including cultural burning, carbon projects, and managed land initiatives. Creating employment opportunities that accommodate the cultural practices and flexibility required by First Nations Australians was seen as essential. This flexibility ensures that employment opportunities align with cultural practices and enable individuals to balance their work and community responsibilities.

4. Recognising economic self-determination and promoting youth opportunities

Recognising and supporting self-determination processes specific to each land and across lands of Australia's First Peoples was acknowledged as essential in shaping the career paths of these communities within the industry. Examples such as the Wombat State Forest[83] in Victoria and First Nations engagements in the South Coast of New South Wales demonstrate the positive outcomes of self-determination processes, which contribute to the creation of long-term job opportunities for First Nations Australians.

The plantation on Tiwi Islands was recognised as a significant catalyst in supporting economic self-determination and creating opportunities for young people. Collaboration with organisations like Charles Darwin University and the Tiwi Island Training Education Board has been crucial in developing programs and infrastructure that support individuals in gaining skills and becoming job ready.

Prioritising long-term sustainability and self-sufficiency for First Nations communities through engagement efforts

While initial engagement is crucial, participants emphasised the importance of creating self-sufficiency and sustainability within First Nations communities beyond the initial stages. Long-term impact and outcomes should be prioritised, ensuring that the engagement efforts extend beyond short-term objectives and contribute to self-sustaining growth and success.

5. Culturally appropriate training and meaningful engagement with First Nations learners

The participants recognised that cultural relevance plays a significant role in providing training and support programs. These should align with First Nations values and aspirations. It is crucial to interact with First Nations learners with utmost cultural respect, ensuring all behaviours are free from cultural inappropriateness or exclusion. It is also essential to customise training programs to align with the specific needs of First Nations learners. Thess approaches ensure meaningful engagement and successful outcomes.

6. Supporting tailored training programs and providing continuous support for First Nations learners

To address the needs of First Nations communities and the industry, it is essential to create training programs that are locally designed and delivered. These programs may need to encompass not only high-level skills like management and timber supply characteristics but also vocational skills and basic skills such as car driving. Given the limited access to computers and internet connectivity, there may be a preference for on-site and contextual learning approaches.

7. Supporting individual career aspirations within First Nations communities

Acknowledging the diverse aspirations within the First Nations communities, the forum participants emphasised the need for ongoing training and support that cater to individual career goals. Reducing assumptions and providing tailored guidance and assistance help individuals pursue their desired career paths and contribute to their long-term success.

Focus Area 2: Strengthen First Nations inclusion and engagement in the industry.

Fostering authentic partnerships

Forum participants stressed the need for authentic partnerships based on respect and effective relationships to enhance inclusivity and diversity for First Nations communities in the forest industry.

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[83] Located 50 kilometres west of Melbourne, consisting of approximately seventy thousand hectares, is the only initiative in Australia to introduce community forestry, within the internationally understood context. It is managed by the department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

While they recognised the value of job opportunities and training, they highlighted that genuine engagement and inclusion of First Nations communities were of utmost significance.

The forum highlighted the Wombat State Forest in Victoria as an exemplary case of authentic partnership between the local First Nations community and the state forest organisation. This collaboration has produced mutual benefits, with the First Nations community actively participating in activities such as removing dead trees and engaging in forest gardening. This cooperative effort has addressed environmental challenges, generated economic opportunities and deepened the community's connection with the land.

8. Navigating partnership complexities

Participants acknowledged the complexities of effectively engaging with First Nations communities across various regions. They stressed the need to recognise the distinctiveness of each First Nation and cautioned against adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to engagement.

They emphasised that effective engagement is a long-term commitment, transcending short project timelines. Success hinges on sustained efforts, close collaboration with local communities, and a tailored approach catering to each community's unique needs. Initiating partnerships with communities that are prepared for such engagements emerged as a key strategy.

Starting with formal prior informed consent and initial conversations was identified as a crucial step since not every community may be prepared or willing to participate in specific initiatives. The focus of forestry and educational efforts sparked debates: should they first inform or educate First Nations Australians or address situations created by non-First Nations Australians?

A close collaboration with local communities, genuinely understanding their challenges, and approaching conversations from their viewpoint were highlighted as vital components for developing successful partnerships in the forestry industry. Engagement processes can differ based on circumstances. It is imperative prioritising active listening and understanding local needs over imposing preconceived solutions.

9. Cultivating cultural awareness and building strong relationship

Participants highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and understanding in building successful relationships with various First Nations communities. They emphasised the need to be culturally aware, respectful of traditional practices, and engage in effective communication to facilitate the integration of First Nations people into the forestry sector. Developing a deep understanding of the historical context, respecting cultural practices, and acknowledging land ownership were identified as essential elements in fostering positive engagement.

10. Integrating cultural awareness in industry training

To bridge the knowledge gap and foster cultural awareness, participants suggested the integration of cultural awareness into industry training programs. By incorporating cultural awareness training, the forestry sector can become more inclusive and culturally sensitive. It can create a safe space for culturally responsive conversations within the workplace and provides opportunities for First Nations individuals within the industry.

Participants suggested drawing upon successful practices from other industries, such as mining. The approach discussed leverages proven strategies and frameworks for facilitating effective cross-cultural interactions and promoting a more inclusive working environment. They recognised the mining sector's comprehensive approach to cultural training, which includes both general awareness and specialised training tailored to specific roles or contexts. The collaboration between elders and professional trainers was highlighted as an effective method of delivering training within a specific work environment. Learning

from individuals with firsthand knowledge and experience was highlighted. The importance of genuine conversations, including discussions about social boundaries, respect, and what is considered off-limits, was emphasised. Participants also stressed the need to acknowledge that cultural learning is a continuous process.

Additionally, participants acknowledged the potential for collaboration with universities and institutions offering forestry and wood processing degrees or training. By leveraging existing partnerships, such as those established through the Committee for the Future of Forestry Education (COFFE), opportunities arise to integrate cultural awareness training and related programs into the curriculum. This collaborative effort ensures that future professionals in the industry are equipped with the necessary knowledge and understanding to engage respectfully with First Nations communities.

11. Engaging Traditional Owners in cultural awareness initiatives

Participants emphasised multiple co-benefits from engaging Traditional Owners in cultural awareness initiatives. In addition to promoting understanding and appreciation of First Nations cultures, such initiatives can serve as a steppingstone for further involvement of First Nations communities in forestry activities and potential employment opportunities.

12. Tailoring engagement to local community dynamics

The forum discussions underscored the need to consider the size and dynamics of local First Nations communities. Engagement efforts should be appropriately tailored to each community, striking a balance between active involvement and fostering self-sufficiency. This approach empowers the community to take ownership and drive their own sustainable outcomes within the industry. It was acknowledged that the level of forest management involvement from First Nations may vary depending on the active engagement and prevalence of Traditional Owners within a particular community.

13. Nurturing localised cultural engagement and community relations

Fostering cultural awareness at the organisational level was a recurring theme in the forum discussions. The participants emphasised the need to transition from a broad or macro approach to cultural awareness towards localised, micro levels of engagement. It was acknowledged that a broad understanding of First Nations culture is essential, yet adaptive strategies that are tailored to the distinct cultural and social contexts must be utilised. A balanced approach to merging the general understanding of cultural diversity and intentional active local engagement was acknowledged. This enables cultural understanding to be attained at a general level and translated into effective and meaningful actions at the local level.

Forum participants highlighted the efforts of various regions in enhancing cultural engagement and community relations, providing the examples below.

The Forestry Corporation of New South Wales employs First Nations liaison officers to promote effective communication, understanding, and collaboration with local communities.

Similarly, HQP Plantations employs a part-time First Nations cultural advisor. They have developed a First Nations engagement framework to serve as the basis for engaging with First Nations communities and strengthening relationships. The cultural advisor spends one day a week visiting various plantation sites across Queensland, creating real connections, and encouraging community involvement.

The involvement of local cultural advisors has proven to be instrumental in helping organisations better understand and engage with local communities. By tailoring strategies and approaches to the unique needs and circumstances of each community, organisations can foster comprehensive and effective outcomes.

Forum 2: Gender Diversity

Forum Overview

The forum discussing gender diversity and inclusion and training opportunities in the forest, wood and paper products industry took place on June 6, 2023, marking the second event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around two thematic focus areas:

The two thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Developing and Implementing Gender Diversity Strategies and Guidelines
- **Focus Area 2**: Promoting Education, Partnerships and Networks

The discussions were guided by a series of questions provided in a background paper that was distributed before the forum.

Forum Participants

Twenty-seven participants from various organisations, including employers, union, industry associations, regional forestry industry hubs and education providers, actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the gender diversity challenges associated with the industry and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: Linking Futures, Southern Cross University, Sustainable Timber Tasmania, Reliance Forest Fibre, AKD, Forest and Wood Products Australia, One Forty One, NSW Department of Education, Arbre Forest Industries Training & Careers Hub, National Timber and Hardware Association (NTHA), C3 Australia, Britton Timbers, Australian Forest Products Association Limited, Northern Territory Ord Valley Forestry Hub / Forestry Industry Association Northern Territory, Master Builders ACT, CFMEU Manufacturing Division, Forestry Australia, Timberlands Pacific, Timberlink, Green Triangle Forest industries Hub, Trades Women Australia and PF Olsen.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges related to gender diversity and forestry industry engagement, to guide the development of potential solutions.

Focus Area 1: Developing and Implementing Gender Diversity Strategies and Guidelines

The issues raised by the forum focussed on the areas of:

- Current state of women participation in the industry
- Challenges reported by women working in the industry
- Impact of gender stereotypes on women in male-dominated industries
- Benefits of integrating gender equality and inclusion in the industry
- Best practices and success stories.

14. Workplace Culture

Forum participants raised several issues related to the culture of workplaces towards gender and flexibility of work arrangements. They also emphasised that women should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all approach, noting that that there are many cohorts within the female gender.

Buchy (2001)[84] was acknowledged at the forum for research on the experiences of women who work in the forest industry in Australia. The study indicated that women in the industry face several issues due to gendered attitudes, such as a lack of support and recognition, discrimination, and harassment. The research also suggested that these challenges stem from structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from having equal representation and a voice. Participants' insight was clear that in 2023 not much has changed within the industry.

Participants agreed that to achieve lasting equality and inclusion in forestry, there needs to be a shift in organisational attitudes and policies that promote equal opportunities and inclusion. To address gender equality and inclusion effectively, the industry should develop gender-responsive tools, guidelines, and best practices specifically tailored to meet the unique needs and challenges of gender diversity in the forestry sector.

Discussions focused on women in field-based jobs, such as sawmills, where they often feel unsupported and undervalued. Participants indicated that many women lack adequate training and resources they need to perform their roles, because as women, they are not in control of their own training. Other issues mentioned included wage disparities, inflexible hours to meet family responsibilities, and receiving little recognition and feedback in any form.

The overarching sentiment was clear: unless industry leaders prioritise inclusivity and diversity, the industry's broader culture will remain unchanged. Communication between head office and regional offices is not well developed, with women perceiving the latter as less accommodating and respectful towards them. Regional Managers are seen as powerful industry figures, leaving women feeling unable to speak up and be fairly heard. Examples mentioned included experiences like being overlooked for promotions or being assigned less challenging tasks than male counterparts. Many women describe their careers and jobs as having low intellectual challenges, low responsibility and limited career paths or promotion prospects, leading to low morale. An example shared was the lack of accessible female-friendly facilities, such as toilets in forests. In many officed workplaces, female restrooms are an afterthought rather than a standard infrastructure requirement as it is with male restrooms.

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[84] Buchy, M. (2001). Listening to Women's Voices in the Australian Forestry Workforce: you learn to cope and get on with things. ANU Forestry Occasional Paper 1:2001/ ISSN: 1441-0028. Viewed http://www.anu.edu.au/forestry/staff/buchy/womens-voice.pdf

15. Stereotypes

Women are often pushed into desk-bound office jobs rather than operational forestry, which limits their career prospects since only those with field experience are considered for higher jobs. The example used was the capability of woman being able to operate a chainsaw due to its weight and power. Despite this, women in forestry find learning new things in the field inspiring.

Another barrier raised was the fear of competing with men for newly created positions, especially given the uncertainty around future job availability due to structural changes and the potential for job losses. Fire management was mentioned as particularly discriminatory to women, offering very few opportunities. There was also a sentiment that male fire officers may resent to work alongside female colleagues.

16. Inclusiveness responsibility

A common theme in the forum was that everyone has a role to play in promoting diversity and inclusion. Participants highlighted that without strong leadership in managing change, the progress of diversity and inclusion would be significantly hindered.

Proposed initiatives included the introduction of "Champions of Diversity", establishing mentorship programs to educate the industry about gender language, provisions for work arrangements (hours and days and location of work), training options, and arrangements for basic facilities such as toilets.

Focus Area 2: Promoting Education, Partnerships and Networks

17. Women in Leadership

Leadership training for women, in addition to industry education on gender diversity, may be also critical to retaining women in the industry, which has been historically a male dominated industry.

Forum participants discussed several initiatives already being implemented by specific organisations and stakeholders. Forestry Australia, in particular, used the forum to increase awareness of their "Women in Leadership" program, which is specifically geared towards fostering female leadership and enhancing gender equality.

Women entering male dominated fields often face unrecognised psychological pressures and may need to work significantly harder to be successful. This imbalance can result in feelings of social and physical isolation in the workplace. As such, the female workforce develop strategies such as depersonalisation to fit in, particularly in rural areas where professional women are often seen unfavourably and socially isolated from their male colleagues.

18. Gender balance

Participants agreed that an inclusive work environment, regardless of gender, is essential for the Australian forest Industry and wood product Industry. The focus should be on achieving a gender balance by incorporating people with diverse skills, perspectives and experiences. This approach is expected to significantly enhance the industry's image and reputation. There was a general agreement amongst the forum participants for the need for further funding to continue the Tasmanian Forest and Forest Products Network (TFFPN)'s programs beyond 2023, and to work collaboratively as a unified force rather than as separate organisations with individual agendas.

19. Industry Initiatives

Australian Forest Industries Diversity and Inclusion Charter 1

The Charter provides a voluntary framework for organisations within the Australian Forest Industries to develop supportive and inclusive workplaces for people from diverse backgrounds. The organisations adopting the Charter commit to:

- Creating a positive image of industry to better develop a diverse and skilled workforce
- reflective of our communities.
- Actively seeking to attract, employ and retain people from diverse backgrounds.
- Building and maintaining a genuine culture of inclusiveness for diversity in the workplace.
- Maintaining a workplace that promotes dignity and respect for all.
- Ensuring equal pay for equal work.
- Understanding and responding to the challenges hindering diversity and inclusion in the workplace.
- Promoting flexible working arrangements in the workplace.
- Reporting on diversity at an industry level.

Tasmanian Workforce initiatives

Tasmanian Forests and Forest Products Network (TFFPN) have seen it as important to create an environment where women are respected and given equal opportunity, to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes on women in male-dominated industries. Accordingly, the Tasmanian organisation has focussed on a suite of Programs[85] that include:

- Workforce Development Plan
- Diversity Action Plan
- Connecting and creating pathways
- Mapping our forest industry career
- Supporting forest industry women in their leadership
- Workforce, diversity and inclusion – "what a year it has been"

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[85] https://www.tffpn.com.au/workforce-development-plan/ (viewed 14 June 2023)

Forum 3: Pulp and Paper Manufacturing

Forum Overview

The forum for the pulp and paper manufacturing sector took place on June 8, 2023, marking the third event in a series of main stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

The discussions were guided by a series of questions provided in a background paper that was distributed before the forum.

Forum Participants

Eleven participants from various organisations, including employers, unions and industry associations, actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the industry's challenges and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: Australian Bluegum Plantations (ABP), Manufacturing Division for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, CFMEU Manufacturing Division, Midway Limited, Opal ANZ, the Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), the Australasian Pulp and Paper Technical Association (Appita) and Visy.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the sector's challenges and potential solutions.

Opening remarks made by forum participants

20. Concerns over the sufficiency of federal funding allocation in addressing challenges faced by the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Forum participants acknowledged the federal government's allocation of $10 million to the forest, wood, and paper products industry sector. However, they highlighted the size and complexity of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector, voicing concerns that only attempting to address the many challenges in this sector would deplete the allocated funding quickly.

21. Driving targeted investment initiatives for sustainable transformation of skills development in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Forum participants stressed the need for a focused and comprehensive discussion on investment initiatives that can meaningfully address the underlying problems faced by the pulp and paper manufacturing sector. It was recognised that the sector's challenges are multifaceted and cannot be resolved solely through financial injections. Therefore, investment initiatives should be designed to address the sector's specific needs, foster innovation, enhance competitiveness, and promote sustainability.

22. Training nature in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector: flexibility, on-the-job learning, and continuous skill development

Forum participants acknowledged that all training within the pulp and paper sector is currently funded by employers and primarily takes place within the workplace. They recognised the importance of online training as a flexible method used by employers to provide training and skill acquisition opportunities within the sector. This highlights the sector's commitment to adapting to modern training practices while ensuring the necessary flexibility for employees.

Participants emphasised the distinction between workplace training conducted in pulp and paper manufacturing and off-site training programs. Unlike off-site programs that require employees to attend external training sessions for a set period to obtain a certificate, workplace training conducted in the sector prioritises hands-on learning within the actual work environment. This approach allows employees to develop practical skills and knowledge relevant to their specific roles. An example was that learning on the job the intricacies of operating complex paper making machinery can take a minimum of 8 to 12 months, underscoring the complexity and skill requirements associated with these machines.

Forum participants also highlighted that training occurs on an ongoing basis in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector. Training is not a one-time event, but an integral part of business operations. This recognition underscores the sector's commitment to staying updated with technological advancements, improving efficiency, and ensuring the development of a skilled workforce.

23. Limited access to publicly funded training

Concerns were raised regarding the limited access to publicly funded training in the sector. Participants identified a missing link between workplace training and the VET sector, as well as the lack of flexibility within the VET system to cater to the unique needs and scale of pulp and paper manufacturing. The participants stressed the importance of industry-specific skill recognition and integration within the broader VET framework, which is required to bridge this gap. They called for a collaborative effort to ensure that training programs adequately address the sector's requirements and provide opportunities for employees to acquire recognised qualifications.

24. Bridging the gap: integrating existing training delivery with the VET system

Participants agreed that the conversation should revolve around identifying training needs within the industry and the importance of linking the existing training available to the sector with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. The participants highlighted the significance of facilitating recognition of informal training delivery and prior skills as a means of addressing the challenges faced by the sector. The sector can effectively address the skills gap and create pathways for career progression by integrating the existing training opportunities and aligning them with the VET system

Focus Area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

25. Overcoming public perceptions and promoting the importance of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Forum participants expressed concern about the general public's lack of familiarity with the pulp and paper manufacturing sector and the specific skills involved in operating the machines. They noted that people may be unaware of the importance of this sector in the contemporary sustainability context unless they are specifically informed about the products being made by the sector. In addition, they might also overlook the opportunity to working for it, by joining its workforce. This lack of awareness was seen as a contributing factor to the challenges faced in attracting a new workforce to work in paper mills.

26. Nurturing individual control and flexibility over career growth for long-term retention

The advantages of unionisation in the sector, such as good pay and favourable working conditions, were noted by some participants. They recognised that these factors make workplaces in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector more desirable compared to other fibre-based sectors, highlighting that the challenge lies in retaining individuals and not necessarily attracting them to the pulp and paper jobs.

This raised questions regarding the extent to which individuals have control over skills, recognition, and career pathways within the job and internal career progression system. This was especially so considering that a career path in the sector may take a decade or more to reach a senior position, and whether these factors also pose challenges for young workers entering the workforce.

Participants suggested that allowing greater individual control and flexibility in training and career development might be necessary to meet the preferences and needs of the younger generation to stay in the sector.

27. Addressing workforce succession and retention: turnover and retirements vs a competitive workforce landscape

Participants discussed the upcoming turnover in the workforce within the sector, specifically due to retirements, particularly among highly skilled personnel in top positions.

The retiring workforce poses a potential loss of valuable experience, multi-skills, and extensive knowledge spanning different areas of the mill. Participants emphasised the importance of finding strategies to overcome this challenge and preserve the sector's expertise.

The competitive workforce environment was also discussed, noting that some industries will have the potential to leverage technological advancements to reduce dependence on labour, while others will face intense competition for skilled workers. Given the significant capital investment required for technological innovations in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector, attracting, and retaining skilled workers is essential for sustained growth and success.

28. Adapting attraction and retention strategies

The sector has witnessed a shift in attracting expertise, influenced by factors such as the impact of COVID-19. Attracting individuals to the sector is no longer straightforward. The sector may experience again an influx of individuals from other countries in leadership and technical positions. Whilst this brings valuable diversity, it also raises questions about the number of Australian professionals transitioning to global positions.

Promoting the sector as forward-thinking and solutions driven may serve as an initial attractor. Training programs, creative job opportunities, and the nature of work also play crucial roles in appealing individuals to join the sector.

Additionally, the challenge of recruiting employees without affecting other mills within the sector was acknowledged. Participants emphasised the need to explore alternative strategies to attract and retain the workforce in regional and rural locations where pulp and paper mills are situated.

29. Ensuring candidate suitability and enhancing workforce preparedness in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

The forum discussion outlined the pre-employment measures and school engagement practices within the sector. Participants acknowledged the significant effort employers put into ensuring the entry of suitable candidates. The efforts included assessing attitudes, conducting conflict checks, and employing rigorous screening processes. The need for evolving school engagement practices to align with the sector's high-risk nature was recognised. The resource-intensive nature of programs for work experience and inductions was also acknowledged.

Participants noted that new workers directly entering the sector from school are uncommon, and employers typically value those with trade skills, diverse experience, and a certain level of maturity. Entry-level positions involve operating forklifts or other mobile equipment, requiring specific qualifications and shift work rotation. Workers typically obtain basic leadership skills as they progress to more advanced roles – such as machine operation, converting lines, distribution centres and warehousing. Participants observed that new employees tend to quickly learn the technical aspects of the job but often struggle to adapt to the solitary nature of these positions, with limited opportunities for social connections and collaboration with colleagues.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

30. Frustration with the VET system: seeking alignment with the specific needs of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Forum participants expressed frustration with the current state of the VET system, which they believe is failing to meet the needs of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector. This lack of alignment hampers employers' efforts to provide continuous training and upskill their employees while also retaining them in the sector.

Although the sector has access to sufficient training resources through Appita's comprehensive framework and effective platform[86], there remains a crucial need for a supportive infrastructure that recognises the skills acquired during this training.

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[86] Appita is the leading not-for-profit industry association that supports the advancement of the pulp, paper packaging and bioproducts industries. They have a broad-based membership with over 120 corporate members and over 1300 professional members and student members in Australia, New Zealand and other countries. Appita membership is diverse and currently includes CEOs, mill managers, mill technical personnel, operators, process engineers, consultants, researchers and suppliers. < https://appita.com/><cited June 2023>>

For the past five years, the sector has consistently called for a system reform that addresses its specific requirements. The practicality of relocating mills or changing the sector's nature to fit the existing system is unrealistic. Instead, it is crucial for the VET system to adapt and align itself with the sector's needs. Recognising the value of workplace training, which is delivered by subject matter experts, workplace trainers, and assessors, is essential in meeting the sector's demands.

Given that workplace training is the primary method of skill development in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector, it is necessary to overcome the limitations of the VET system. This can be achieved through the establishment of partnerships that assure quality without being restricted to physical presence within the TAFE system. Collaboration among stakeholders is key to building strong linkages between training activities, funding access, and desired skill outcomes, ensuring that the sector's objectives are effectively met. It is crucial to note that the industry's reliance on workplace training should not exclude it from accessing publicly funded training.

31. Addressing misconceptions and advocating for recognition: educating government agencies and communities about on the vital role of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

There is a disconnect between the political class, the general community, and their understanding of the sector's activities. Misconceptions, such as associating forestry with harming koalas, hinder progress. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for gaining support and ensuring long-term success. Only investing financially without addressing these underlying issues may generate limited results.

During the forum, participants brought attention to the specific challenges faced by the pulp and paper manufacturing sector in getting its training package included on the funding list in Victoria. They noted the misconceptions formed, with the government mistakenly perceiving the sector as shutting down due to the closure of a single paper machine at Maryvale. To address this issue, the participants emphasised the need to educate both federal and state-level government agencies about the sector's true nature and the significant contributions to the economy.

Contrary to misconceptions, the pulp and paper manufacturing sector in Victoria encompasses a diverse range of essential products beyond copy paper. It manufactures essential items such as tissues, toilet paper, hygiene products, napkins, food packaging, Tetra packs, and egg cartons.

Participants said that it is essential to educate government agencies about this diverse output and its underlying value to gain support for funding training initiatives and achieving flexibility within the VET system. As the sector operates daily to produce these essential products, the need for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to align with their unique requirements and circumstances becomes even more evident.

Clear communication and recognition of the industry's value are essential in fostering understanding and support from government agencies. It is vital to convey that the sector is not only viable but also increasingly important at both national and global levels. With the growing focus on reducing harmful plastics, the pulp and paper sector has gained even more significance. Consumers widely appreciate the sector's sustainable alternatives to plastic. In Victoria, there is a growing drive to move away from single-use plastics. At the federal level, discussions are taking place regarding the devastating impact of plastics on our oceans, with projections indicating a potential tripling of plastics in our oceans within the next 20-30 years.

Given the sector's advancements in technology and innovative solutions, it will play a vital role in combatting the problem of plastic pollution and finding sustainable alternatives. The importance of this sector cannot be overstated – it is integral to addressing the global concern of plastic pollution and paving the way for a more sustainable future.

32. Navigating training challenges: balancing operational demands and limited resources

Participants noted that the common challenge faced by employers in the sector is operating with limited resources. This directly impacts their approach to training. With lean structures and constrained resources, companies have increasingly adopted buddy-oriented training, where experienced employees assist in training others. This approach has become prevalent due to the need to balance training priorities with operational demands.

Operating with lean structures and limited resources presents a dilemma for employers. Releasing individuals for training can create workforce gaps, while neglecting training priorities can lead to equipment malfunctions or shutdowns due to a lack of skilled personnel. Achieving a delicate balance between training needs and operational demands is a constant challenge.

Moreover, with operations running at full capacity, there is limited time available for training. In some cases, employees must undergo training off-shift hours, being compensated for the additional time invested. This further highlights the challenging task that employers face in managing operational demands while simultaneously investing in the development of its workforce. Attracting and retaining skilled employees also becomes crucial in this context, as businesses strive to maintain productivity and adapt to changing industry demands.

33. Supporting job transitions and upskilling: training challenges faced by individuals impacted by the closure of Opal's Maryvale Mill's white paper machine

The specific challenges faced by Opal's Maryvale mill in upskilling and acknowledging the skills of individuals impacted by the closure of the white paper machine/production were acknowledged. The closure has created a pressing need for immediate action to support these individuals in their transition out of the sector.

Participants emphasised the crucial role of incorporating the pulp and paper manufacturing training package into the scope of an RTO to equip affected individuals with the necessary credentials to navigate their transition effectively.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

34. Embracing innovation and future-proof skills: nurturing sustainability, circularity, and design thinking

Sustainability, circularity, design thinking, and fostering creativity in the workplace were identified as crucial factors for achieving success in the pulp and paper sector. Participants highlighted the importance of cultivating problem-solving skills through workplace experiences to encourage innovative solutions. Embracing these principles would help navigate the evo

lving landscape and secure a prosperous future for the industry. Designing training programs that deliver future-proof skills is vital for maintaining competitiveness.

35. Lack of coordinated focus: addressing the need for industry-specific leadership training programs

Addressing the management and leadership training within the sector is essential to tackle future challenges and bring fresh perspectives. Although there is not a specific focus on industry-specific leadership programs, businesses run their own training programs aligned with general leadership curriculums offered by external organisations.

Appita convenes groups of managers, engineers, technicians, and emerging leaders, primarily focusing on and addressing emerging skills needs from a technological perspective.

36. Addressing the gap: tertiary education technical training programs in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

While there is not a dedicated Master of Business Administration program for pulp and paper manufacturing within the industry, individuals in roles such as engineers, chemists, and technicians pursue short courses or specific programs to meet job requirements. They gain practical experience through on-the-job training and enhance their knowledge through additional courses, online training, and learning opportunities to overseas mills. Although a master's program existed in the past, it transitioned to an online format and experienced decreased uptake over the years.

Industry professionals can now access online platforms like Appita's Knowledge Academy, which provides a comprehensive framework for developing knowledge and skills across various operational areas.

37. Preparing for workforce succession: assessing training requirements and bridging the skills gap

Participants acknowledged the aging workforce in the sector, noting that a significant portion of the current workforce is expected to retire within the next 5 to 10 years. This prompted discussions about the timing and nature of the training required to bridge the skills gap. Participants questioned whether the sector has a clear understanding of the future training landscape and whether it can forecast its training needs and communicate them to the market.

38. Strategic training planning for future readiness: moving beyond reactive skill development

Participants noted that the sector is rather reactive than proactive, addressing immediate training needs as they arise. They highlighted the need for proactive planning and a long-term outlook to avoid falling into a cycle of retrofitting. The lack of secure funding and enrolment issues have hindered the sector's ability to identify and address its emerging training needs effectively.

The importance of taking up the responsibility of conducting proper analysis to identify emerging training needs and align them with the sector's training framework was emphasised. Participants noted that until recently, the sector had skills forecasts regularly reviewed to identify emerging needs.

To address this, participants stressed the need for collaboration, funding support, and information consolidation to make skills forecasts meaningful for the sector. They emphasised the importance of accurately assessing the current and future capacity of the workforce, especially considering the upcoming retirement of ageing workers.

During the discussions, participants raised critical questions about the timing, nature, and forecasting of training requirements for the next 5-15 years. They recognised the need for a clear understanding of training needs and an effective communication with training providers to ensure proactive planning and address emerging needs effectively.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

39. Defining portability of skills

Participants emphasised that, in this sector, skills portability is understood as the transferability of skills within the workplace, not the movement between mills. Due to the geographical locations of mills, people rarely move from mill to mill. The ability to apply acquired skills in different areas within the workplace was considered important. Defining what portability means within the sector is essential to establish a clear understanding and facilitate career development for individuals.

40. Enhancing skills recognition and skills passports

The concept of skills recognition, particularly within the workplace, was discussed. Participants emphasised the need to enhance the recognition of critical skills and find effective ways to introduce relevant processes. Instances of job losses without proper recognition of employees' skills, particularly during crises such as the closure of a paper machine, were highlighted. Addressing these issues promptly and retroactively to ensure fairness and support for affected individuals was seen as crucial.

41. Exploring the potential of stackable micro-credentials: facilitating qualification pathways in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Participants was engaged in discussions regarding the potential use of stackable micro-credentials within the sector to trigger qualifications. While an initial scepticism from the union was acknowledged, participants expressed openness to effectively exploring this concept. The primary concern focussed around ensuring that micro-credentials do not impede individuals from obtaining proper qualifications and recognition for their skills. Addressing this barrier was seen as crucial for further consideration of micro-credentials in the industry.

During the discussions on micro-credentialing and skill sets, participants stressed the importance of ensuring their stack-ability. This refers to the ability to combine micro-credentials in a way that eventually leads to a formal national qualification. To achieve this objective, it was highlighted that everyone involved needs to understand and support the concept of stackable micro-credentials.

42. Maintaining and improving industry-specific training package for the unique objectives and requirements in the pulp and paper manufacturing sector

Participants highlighted the unique objectives and requirements of the pulp and paper manufacturing sector compared to broader manufacturing standards. They highlighted the potential risks and limited influence associated with adopting a generic manufacturing package and attempting to customise it for the sector's specific needs. It was recognised that such an approach would undermine the sector's ability to shape the contents of the training package.

Retaining industry-specific training packages was seen as crucial to maintaining control over the sector. This allows the sector to determine how to micro-credential, trigger qualifications, establish pathways, and recognise skills so that they align with the specific needs of the sector, including for the roles of line managers and senior managers.

Additionally, it was emphasised that switching to a different training package would not address the underlying issue of insufficient funding to trigger qualifications for workers.

While recognising the potential need for updates and improvements, the union's position was to prioritise making the sector's existing training package fit for purpose instead of importing external elements that fail to address the fundamental issue of funding.

Participants stressed the importance of retaining the sector's influence over the training package and striving to attract funding through contextualising the tools already in place. While each manufacturing facility may have unique aspects, there is also a significant degree of commonality within the sector in terms of equipment and outputs. Participants believed that with adequate support and government funding, it is possible to establish a resource pipeline that offers benefits to all stakeholders. This pipeline could address various challenges including those related to RTOs, training package, and the allocation of funding lists across different states.

The discussion about skills portability and career pathways assumed reliance on the sector's own training package. Preservation, improvement, and adaptation of the existing package were seen as essential to address identified challenges effectively.

Forum 4: Forest Growers, Harvesting and Haulage

Forum Overview

The forum was dedicated to advancing education and training opportunities for the whole of the forest, wood and paper products industry, and took place on June 7, 2023, marking the only "in-person" event in a series of stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

Participants from various organisations, including employers, union, industry associations, and ForestWorks executive actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the Gender Diversity challenges associated with the industry and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: HQ Plantations, Forest and Wood Products Australia, Forico, AFCA, various Universities, TAFEs and RTOs, Midway, Various Hubs, Forestry Corp NSW, HVP Plantations, Pentarch, Forestry Australia, AKD, Timberlands Pacific, Master Builders ACT, ACT Parks and Conservation, Britton Timbers, Australian Bluegum Plantations, Visy, Mechlog, NSW Dept or Education, Arbre Forest Industries, C3 Australia, Unions.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum providing a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by a wide range of sectoral participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges related to First Nations and forestry industry engagement, to guide the development of potential solutions.

Focus Area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

43. Funding Necessary qualifications and skill sets

Stakeholders raised the issue and barrier with the lack of funding across all sectors/Industry for a variety of accredited qualifications. The dialogue consensus was that as accredited qualifications are essential for Industry workers to have then the various state government need to review their courses funded lists to be universal in funding. This should also be considered for skillsets as this seemed to be a major activity for industry. The question asked was what was viewed by industry as being more important, was it a full qualification or a skill set being a cluster of units.

Stakeholders felt that funding was a federal level initiative and to control the activity the States would adopt. The diversity between all the states and territories for administrating federal funding was onerous and cumbersome and was a huge barrier for Industry and RTOs to secure. The rules were different between the states, incurs much red tape and individual state agendas that does not align with a national outcome for forestry.

44. Younger Generations understanding of the industry

Stakeholders' comments highlighted that the understanding of the forestry and related Industries for younger generations, including their perceptions, was low and this a huge barrier for attracting new entrants.

Younger people had little understanding of the different roles and jobs not only as an industry as a whole, but in the different industry areas and sectors. The education of the younger generation into choosing forestry and wood products as a career is an activity which needs to be undertaken by everyone in the industry. One initiative suggested would be to conduct school projects and field trips to the forests, visiting key companies in all the sectors, to learn and understand the industry and what it represents and does. This could be a partnership arrangement between schools and the sector via the associations and hubs. The insight provided recommended that the school sector campaigns must start at year 9, prior to years 10 and 11, as this is the year students start to shape out the direction of their future.

45. Indigenous issues

Stakeholders (non-indigenous) identified a potential Gap with indigenous engagement in traditional knowledge, management leadership and general forestry. The gap as an industry needs to be addressed as an emerging need to respect first nations Australians and their engagement. The industry agrees that first Nations engagement or indigenous knowledge is a key priority and that engagement sensitivities are an important part of skill acquisition within the industry.

46. Workforce Attraction

Workforce attraction and recruitment in respect of individuals training is driven by jobs availabilities and roles. The major issue is 40% of the workforce will retire within the next 10 years and replacement of roles will be a massive challenge for the industry as a whole as the impact will be significant. The ageing population globally is the same all over and replacement will have its challenges.

Stakeholders agreed that the younger generation as individuals not knowing what careers were available or the pathways offered within the industry, would be a huge barrier to attraction. Forum members highlighted that all industry stakeholders needed to play a role in addressing this problematic issue. Activities included promotional campaigns to the younger people, creating opportunities for school-based apprenticeships, conducting industry tours and delivery of student-based projects.

Forum stakeholders broadened this perspective to include first nations people, gender diversity and women as part of the future solution. As mentioned in the above younger generations section, participants discussed forest growers and harvesters taking things to the next level, and actually start getting people into forests and seeing how it all works, so that understanding occurs through an evidence-based approach. Activities such as performing a "show and tell" of the sector's high-level technology and all of the elements of forestry, which are poorly understood.

Initiatives raised by Forestry Australia, was a careers webinar they conducted where 50% of participants from the school's sector, had not understood the industry and considered it as a career path. Through Geography teachers, Forestry Australia were able to reach out far more effectively with schools. Other webinars delivered by Forestry Australia, were at tertiary levels via university students studying broad science degrees, who could view the opportunities for them.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

47. Schools sector

The theme emerging once again was targeting the school sector. Major stakeholders proposed that funding should be directed to having a dedicated careers platform for the industry as a whole. This funding would focus on all sectors outlining careers, jobs and the regional landscape. This funding would have the outcome that student's exposure to understanding the industry which ultimately promote enrolments at both VET and HEd qualifications. The spin-off would include thickening of the thin market and improving dramatically its attraction. It was about providing students with options in the industry at trade, TAF and University levels.

Stakeholders mentioned that the challenge will be from the school's effectiveness as every state has its own educational curriculum which creates a challenge around forestry. Views communicated that it was imperative that training education needs to be federally delivered and state-level adopted.

48. Thin markets

This issue was seen as a huge barrier for regional training by the training providers. The lack of accredited TAE trainers, low enrolments, the wide spread of running face to face training deliveries over large geographical areas, and lack of resources, training materials, affected the financial viability for the training providers. It's just not profitable.

Stakeholders shared that a new generation of skilled Workplace Training and assessors was needed as a potential solution with regionally thin markets. It was noted that many employers run their own informal on the job training outside the accreditation system as the show must go on. Partnerships with training providers, including higher education providers as solution to develop training resources, delivery challenges, and capacity was noted.

Other issues from thin markets indicated lots of people needed training, however the coordination between who needed what and when it was conducted was a chicken and egg concept. If national competencies can't be delivered anymore then the training package has no value. If RTOs could not be profitable then the industry would be severely compromised. A national effort was the desired approach. Stakeholders once again highlighted the pattern of a national approach or co-ordination at regional and rural levels to solve the thin market issues. They raised initiatives such as using online deliveries, on-line platforms for workshops, incorporate Industry trainers and assessors, having and organisation likes ForestWorks develop training resources and work with RTOS.

49. National approach

Stakeholders again raised the initiative for having a national approach, to revitalise regional training capacity. Associations and hubs working in this space have localised agendas rather than a national approach. Associations and hubs were instrumental in determining needs and requirements for training in their neck of the woods, however as one spearhead revitalisation would be a coherent body of work that eliminates double handling, overlapping and duplication. The notion described was that associations and hubs act as one voice to the Australian Government.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

50. Schools sector

This school sector theme re-occurred several times throughout the forum. The focus being on younger cohorts as they would be the future. Because industry is currently invisible, how to promote the industry to young people was critical. Focus also was drawn on the differing schools' systems and curriculum between states and territories as being a challenge to overcome.

Industry needs to be willing to pull their resources and be coordinated or we will continually get the message completely lost. How do we encourage everyone to agree to a pathway forward and then stick to the plan or land the ship needs to be coordinated.

51. Visibility

Discussions opened up focussed on challenges associated with the industry being invisible and how to promote it. An example case study was with the primary industries education foundation Australia who undertake several projects in the area of influencing people about the visibility of an industry.

Members had various opinions for high school to kindergarten, to what the modern social media rage looked like. Discussion included live website, social media platforms, meet and greet tours, road shows and study expos.

Some members mentioned that the industry does have a collective platform which promotes visibility, however it lacks resources and funding. The dialogue also mentioned having more modern case studies and contemporary career information that could be duplicated on Wi-Fi platforms and to the education foundation. The issue raised was to have funding and resources.

Insight was provided from the sector of forestry agriculture regarding seasonality issues and impacts to training across machinery and equipment, staffing and operational issues and economic conditions. This impact affects new starters and the diversity of qualifications required for the supply chain and whether they seek formal qualifications.

Stakeholders mentioned many case studies being conducted by many industry sectors and organisations on attracting and retaining workforce programs, whether it be in schools or beyond. Future proofing education and skills should be a national perspective and effort rather than a scattergun approach by many. Members agreed that forestry includes local communities, industries to help connect the dots and that resourcing and funding must have a national approach.

52. Associations and Hubs having a national approach

Stakeholders once again raised the initiative for having a national approach, to developing programs for future proofing. As a federal funding initiative associations and hubs need to work as one spearhead when developing the required training programs. Having a one approach model means that there would be a coherent body of work that eliminates double handling, overlapping and duplication. The notion described was that associations and hubs act as one voice to the Australian Government.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

53. Portability of skills

Participants emphasised that within the industry, portability refers to the transferability of skills within the workplace. The ability to apply acquired skills in different areas within the workplace was considered important.

54. Skills recognition and skills passports

The concept of skills recognition, particularly within the workplace, was discussed. Participants emphasised the need to enhance the recognition of critical skills and find effective ways to introduce them. Instances of job losses without proper recognition of employees' skills, particularly during crises such as the closure of sectors of the Industry were highlighted. Addressing these issues promptly and retroactively to ensure fairness and support for affected individuals was seen as crucial.

55. Micro-credentials and qualifications

The potential use of stackable micro-credentials to trigger qualifications was discussed. While there may be initial scepticism from the union movement, participants expressed openness to exploring this concept effectively. The main concern raised was ensuring that micro-credentials do not hinder individuals from obtaining proper qualifications and recognition for their skills. Addressing this barrier collectively was seen as crucial for further consideration of micro-credentials in the industry.

56. Stackability of micro-credentials

When considering micro-credentialing or skill sets, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring their stackability. This means that micro-credentials can be combined to eventually lead to a formal national qualification. To achieve this objective, it was highlighted that everyone involved needs to understand and support the concept of stackable micro-credentials.

57. Industry Trainers and Assessors for ASQA Reforms

A discussion point theme across all forums was raised also raised by this forum. The pattern emerging for the lack of suitability accredited trainers and assessors. This was a huge issue across all industries and not just particular to forestry. However, for forestry this issue is a huge barrier for conducting formal training and accredited training delivery of formal qualifications across All the sectors of this industry.

Discussions raised the crucial role played by industry/workplace-based trainers who were assessing training, SOPs, learning processes and performance criteria at organisational levels. It was acknowledged that every workplace engages in these activities to some extent, with individuals assuming training roles or taking on partial training responsibilities, including assessing colleagues and allocating work.

Participants raised questions about the potential to recognise and utilise their expertise in delivering formal training and skills recognition, concluding that harnessing the expertise of workplace-based trainers and assessors is critical for meeting industry training demands and to be included in ASQA's regulatory reforms

Forum 5: Timber Processing and Timber Building Solutions

Forum Overview

The forum dedicated to the timber processing and timber building solutions sector took place on June 9, 2023, marking the fifth event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

Fourteen participants from various organisations, including employers, unions and industry associations, actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the industry's challenges and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: AKD, Australian Forest Products Association (AFPA), Manufacturing Division for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, CFMEU Union (Manufacturing), LITA Training, Multinail, National Timber & Hardware Association (NTHA Training), One Forty One Wood Products, PICMM Melbourne Polytechnic, and Pryda.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants.

This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges within the sector and identify potential solutions for improving retention, supporting workplace trainers and assessors within the timber industry, offering technology-focussed training, and promoting recognition of existing skills and qualifications to encourage further training.

Opening remarks made by forum participants

58. RTO challenges arising from misalignment between funding models and market demand for formal qualifications

The forum discussion started around the challenges faced by RTOs in relation to formal training and qualifications. Participants expressed concerns regarding the funding models associated with formal qualifications. It was noted that RTOs typically receive funding based on further qualifications and full qualification models. However, businesses in the industry are increasingly seeking training solutions that do not require a full qualification. This misalignment between funding criteria and market demand poses challenges for RTOs, as programs that do not lead to full qualifications may not be eligible for funding.

59. Financial challenges and compliance burdens for RTOs: the need for adequate funding and operational support

From an RTO business perspective, compliance was identified as burdensome and expensive. Participants emphasised that the funding allocated for travel and related expenses are insufficient to adequately support the operational needs of RTOs, which operate in thin and geographically dispersed markets. The calculation of hours involved in training programs, as done by the funding agencies, was considered unrealistic in the context of having only a few trainers operating nationwide.

Focus Area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

60. Addressing retention issues through positive work culture and conducive physical workspace

The forum participants learned about the approach of a group training business in engaging with schools and school career advisors. The organisation revealed that they have a dedicated team of seven individuals focused on this crucial task. Furthermore, they actively participate in various expos to promote their training opportunities. It was also highlighted that their recruitment team has been successful in bringing in approximately 120 new trainees and apprentices each year.

However, despite their accomplishments in attracting new recruits, the group training business acknowledged the significant challenge of retaining them, particularly among younger individuals. They emphasised that various factors contribute to the decision of trainees and apprentices to stay or leave the workplace. These factors include organisational culture, physical workspace, treatment of individuals, and the overall environment. While pay level was noted as important, it was clear that the overall work environment had a more profound impact on their retention.

The group training business recognised this as a crucial issue that demands attention. They echoed the importance of creating a positive work culture and providing a conducive physical workspace to enhance the overall experience for individuals within the organisation.

Moreover, the group training business emphasised the significance of collaboration among different groups involved in supporting trainees and apprentices. While they operate nationwide, the organisation recognised the limitations of their available resources. They expressed the need for improved collaboration to maximise collective efforts and provide better support to trainees and apprentices across the country.

61. Building alliances and relationships with education institutions and careers advisors for skills acquisition in the truss and frame sector

One of the significant challenges discussed in the forum pertained to the spread of operations across the country within the truss and frame sector. This geographical dispersion poses difficulties in establishing effective partnerships and connections with schools and organisations. However, participants recognised

that this challenge also presents an opportunity to forge strategic alliances with educational institutions located in close proximity to industry operations and building strong relationships with schools and careers advisors as a proactive approach to skills acquisition and pipeline development.

62. Exploring microlearning as a solution for training and retention in the truss and frames Industry

In the truss and frames industry, hiring under pressure was identified as another major issue. Due to the urgency to replace departing employees, there is often a lack of time for proper planning and preparation. This leads to productivity-driven hiring, where the focus is on immediate replacement rather than comprehensive training and onboarding. This cycle can result in employees feeling overwhelmed due to the lack of training, potentially leading to frustration and eventual attrition. Participants discussed the potential role of microlearning as a solution to address this challenge, enabling ongoing training without significantly impacting productivity.

63. Elevating the profession: the need for formal certification requirements for roof truss design roles

The discussion in the forum touched upon the broader scope of the truss industry, highlighting the significance of roles beyond estimating, specifically focusing on truss design, manufacturing, and installation.

Participants emphasised that these roles encompass the entire process and play a crucial role in construction projects. However, conveying the importance of these roles to potential employees and their parents was noted as a challenge. Explaining the career prospects and potential growth opportunities in truss design to young individuals, for example, might be a tough sell compared to more recognised career paths like carpentry, which offers a clear framework and understanding.

The absence of formal certification requirements for certain roles, such as designers for roof trusses, was highlighted as an industry issue. Currently, individuals in these roles are only required to undergo training on specific software, without the necessity of obtaining a formal certificate. This lack of certification requirements discourages many individuals from pursuing a two-year traineeship or seeking professional accreditation.

To address this challenge, participants suggested that attaching a formal certificate to the role of truss design, along with the requirement for individuals to undergo necessary training, would enhance the perception and value of this profession. It was emphasised that designing trusses is a complex and deserving field that should receive recognition equal to, if not greater than, the installation process. Participants expressed that implementing certification requirements could positively impact the industry by providing a constant flow of individuals seeking training and fostering a sense of pride and recognition for the profession.

64. Taking the narrative beyond monetary compensation: emphasising the intrinsic value of the structural timber industry in building and housing the nation

The forum participants acknowledged the need to highlight the intrinsic value and significance of the industry beyond monetary compensation when engaging with others, particularly in group settings. To further illustrate this point, the discussion delved into the business aspect of the Australian structural timber supply. It was highlighted that 60% of the timber supply is directly allocated to the frame and truss sector, which plays a crucial role in constructing houses. This sector's significance extends beyond being a niche market, as it contributes to a universal experience that holds immense importance. Various stakeholders along the supply chain have their own interests, but the ultimate value is derived from the final product – a house that is either sold to or by someone. Regardless of individual positions within the chain, realising that everyone plays a part in building and housing the nation was deemed a compelling narrative to share.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

65. Unlocking the potential of online learning in the timber industry

The forum participants recognised the advantages of incorporating online training components in vocational education and training as part of a blended training approach while acknowledging that certain skills and qualifications in the industry require face-to-face interaction.

The value of online training, particularly in regional contexts, was emphasised by participants.

Online training was seen as a valuable tool, allowing individuals to acquire essential foundational knowledge before engaging in face-to-face training. This approach not only applies to specific skills and qualifications but also to a wide range of practical skills and courses.

It was emphasised that the aim of incorporating online components in training courses is not solely to save costs or avoid sending trainers to different locations. Rather, it is about utilising time with participants more efficiently. By establishing a strong foundation through online training, the subsequent face-to-face sessions can focus on providing value-added training, building upon the trainees' existing knowledge. This comprehensive approach optimises the learning experience and enables more efficient use of time during in-person training sessions.

The integration of online training has proven to be effective in reducing variation within training programs and increasing the number of completed tasks within a given timeframe (the case study provide further examples). By starting with an online component tailored to individual needs, RTOs can better pace face-to-face interactions and potentially improve outcomes.

The forum discussion highlighted the importance of recognising the limitations of online training in certain courses, such as chainsaw training. However, it was exemplified that, by incorporating virtual training methods, such as Zoom, trainees in regional areas were provided with both knowledge-based instruction and practical equipment usage guidance before face-to-face practical sessions. This resulted in a more efficient training process, allowing trainers to allocate additional time during on-site sessions for further instruction.

Participants emphasised that while online training is useful for providing foundational knowledge and safety training, certain practical skills and assessments can only be effectively conducted in a face-to-face environment. However, the consensus was that having learners' complete safety training online prior to their hands-on session was beneficial, as it allows for a more focused and efficient practical training process.

In general, the forum participants regarded the online training component as a valuable foundation, ensuring that learners are well-prepared and knowledgeable before engaging in training practical applications. This streamlined approach optimises the training process and enhances the value of subsequent hands-on training sessions.

The approach was seen beneficial particularly in thin market situations where trainees are geographically scattered and start their training at different times. By streamlining the process and having a qualification or training program that includes online components, followed by value-added face-to-face training, it becomes easier to scale efforts and some of the challenges faced by training providers in thin markets can be addressed.

Participants agreed that the implementation of online training alongside face-to-face sessions not only facilitates the aggregation of training demand but also offers cost-effectiveness compared to relying solely on in-person training. While there may be initial investment costs, the long-term benefits, including increased efficiency and effective resource utilisation, could outweigh them.

66. Fostering collaboration and resource optimisation for implementing online learning

A training provider participant also shared that they have made substantial investments, amounting to approximately $4 million, in e-learning over the past few years. They acknowledged that the cost of implementing online learning still poses a challenge, particularly in markets with limited demand. However, they recognised the potential advantages of enhanced collaboration within the industry, where resources can be pooled, and funding can be secured collectively to address these challenges.

Further, the forum discussion highlighted the potential of collaboration within the supply chain of vocational education and training as a means to revitalise training and skill development. This involves multiple stakeholders, such as RTOs, businesses, and suppliers like equipment suppliers or nail plate companies. Participants recognised that by working together in this supply chain, significant progress can be made in enhancing training and skills.

The ongoing engagement of the industry in a timber systems design course (see case study), involving significant online learning, was seen as an encouraging development. In addition, collaboration with larger merchants who already have induction programs was cited as an example of training provider-industry cooperation. By incorporating online components in these training programs, learners were able to gain a head start in a formal qualification, obtaining credit for completing certain units.

Participants highlighted the importance of discussions and forums like this in exploring potential assistance and solutions to support industry-wide training initiatives. They agreed that online and face-to-face training should not be viewed as an either-or situation, as each has its own merits and suitability for different activities. It was emphasised that relevant training, regardless of the delivery mode, is essential. The focus should be on mapping the blended training programs back to the required competencies to ensure its inclusion in the VET credentials, such as micro-credentials or other forms of recognition.

67. Leveraging Virtual Reality (VR) for enhanced training experiences

The forum discussion brought attention to the potential of virtual reality (VR) training in enhancing training experiences, particularly in industries involving hazardous tasks. VR technology allows individuals to engage in realistic simulations, handling virtual equipment such as chainsaws, knives, and other dangerous tools. With avatars representing humans, they can gain practical experience and learn important safety measures without the risk of physical harm.

68. Encouraging workplace trainers and assessors in the timber industry

The forum discussion emphasised the significance of knowledge transfer in workplaces and the crucial role played by workplace trainers and assessors in the VET (Vocational Education and Training) training models. The VET system aims to involve industry professionals and retain their participation in the training sector, even as they continue their current jobs, potentially in a part-time capacity, while transitioning into trainers. However, the participants acknowledged that they have observed limited implementation of this approach within the industry. To address these challenges, one suggested solution was for the industry to actively encourage experienced professionals to contribute to the field by becoming trainers.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

69. Providing digitally-focused training for adapting to technological advancements

The forum participants engaged in a thoughtful discussion about the transformative impact of technology in the workplace. The transition from manual labour to advanced machinery was highlighted, along with concerns and apprehensions expressed by some long-standing employees.

The need to streamline processes and provide digitally-focused training was recognised as essential to adapt to technological advancements. The suggestion to explore virtual reality (VR) training was mentioned as a potential option. By leveraging immersive experiences, VR training can enhance the learning process and help employees gain valuable skills in operating advanced technologies.

A significant portion of the workforce was identified as lacking digital literacy skills, despite their experience and progression within the company. Microlearning was discussed as a viable approach to bridge this gap. Through small, tailored learning modules, employees can acquire specific skills like using Excel, Word, and other office software. Combining these microlearning components can provide a comprehensive learning experience and enable employees to meet their specific needs.

70. Recognition of accumulated skills and expertise

Acknowledging the invaluable expertise and accumulated skills of long-standing employees was emphasised as crucial. Although some may not have formal qualifications, their experience holds significant value. It is essential for the companies to provide recognition and opportunities for these employees to showcase their capabilities.

71. Importance of developing advanced technological understanding and skills

The discussion touched upon the necessity of developing advanced technological skills, such as calibrating lasers and operating automated machinery. While these skills may currently be seen as specialised roles, participants expressed the belief that all employees will eventually need to learn and understand advanced technologies, as they are becoming increasingly critical in all roles. Existing employees with optimisation and efficiency-focused roles were mentioned, but it was noted that comprehensive knowledge should be extended to everyone. This understanding contributes to employee engagement and their connection to the overall process. There needs to be a balance and consideration for individuals who have a greater understanding and passion for technology.

72. Embracing cultural engagement, diversity and skills for respectful workplaces

The consensus was that adapting and embracing technology is crucial for staying relevant. However, participants emphasised the need to consider a wider range of skills beyond technology, such as cultural engagement with First Nations Australians. Future-proofing requires a holistic approach that encompasses various aspects of the evolving landscape.

The discussion underscored the significance of training programs that address diversity, inclusion, and respect in the workplace. The recent introduction of new harassment laws was mentioned, highlighting the shared responsibility to educate oneself and create a respectful workplace.

Additionally, participants called for more focus on developing soft skills and providing support for different generations. Finding a middle ground on skills related to work perspective, commitment, communication, and empathy was deemed crucial. Acknowledging the significance of soft skills and incorporating them into training programs was emphasised.

The participants emphasised the need to explore how stakeholders can collaborate to identify and define essential competencies that foster workforce adaptability and mobility.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

73. Challenges and strategies for promoting recognition of existing skills and encouraging further training

The forum participants engaged in a discussion centered around the challenges faced within the nationally recognised training system regarding the recognition of portable skills. One challenge identified was the difficulty in motivating individuals to pursue further education and enrol in courses. Some individuals dismiss the idea, believing that their existing knowledge is sufficient. To address this, a suggestion was made to introduce a dedicated role that would collaborate closely with businesses to facilitate qualifications. Streamlining the process would encourage participation, especially for those who already possess the required skills and knowledge.

Another issue raised during the discussion was the reluctance of businesses to invest in training for individuals who already possess the necessary skills. Participants noted that businesses often prefer to allocate funds toward acquiring new skills where needed. This presents a challenge for individuals seeking recognition for their existing expertise. To tackle this challenge, strategies could be explored to demonstrate the value of investing in further training for individuals with relevant skills.

74. Addressing efficiency in the RPL process and recognition

Concerns were raised about the heavy reliance on paperwork and the lack of standardised documentation within the training system for recognising existing skills. It seems that enrolling and studying are much easier and requires less time and effort. The task of retrieving training records from past employers or providing proof of past experience, even for individuals who practiced and excelled in their field for many years, was seen as daunting and inefficient. Participants discussed the possibility of simplifying the process and bypassing certain steps to proceed directly to assessment. Streamlining documentation requirements while ensuring the credibility and authenticity of prior learning was deemed essential. This highlights the importance of recognising both prior learning and current competence. Solutions for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process may involve working closely with RTOs to address the limitations of the current process, which involves significant administrative tasks to meet the criteria.

75. Addressing funding and credit transfer issues in the RPL and training processes

During the discussions, concerns were also raised about the limited funding allocated for the RPL process. Participants noted that funding allocation also has an impact on the transfer of credits between jurisdictions, qualifications, and training packages. The requirement for individuals to redo training they have already completed, or possess skills, due to the temptation for training providers to add units to training solely for full funding purposes, was viewed as an inefficient use of resources. The conversation highlighted the importance of addressing funding aspects to optimise the use of limited resources and facilitate seamless credit transfer.

76. The significance of formal qualifications and challenges in recognizing their value

The significance of formal qualifications in recruiting young individuals was emphasised, as parents often prioritise them for their children's careers. Additionally, participants acknowledged that while individuals may not always gain the expected extensive knowledge and skills from pursuing a qualification, they still value the formal recognition it brings for personal development. Formal qualifications were seen as a solution to address concerns related to retention, engagement, skill shortages, and the aging workforce.

One participant shared the perspective that organisations may not be fully committed to investing in formal qualifications yet, despite recognising their importance. The challenge lies in the lack of immediate or timely productivity gains associated with formal qualifications. Identifying and addressing this issue, as well as finding ways to bridge the gap between qualifications and tangible benefits, were identified as key areas to focus on.

Forum 6: Associations and Hubs

Forum Overview

The forum involving associations and hubs took place on June 9, 2023, marking the sixth event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

Twenty-four participants from various organisations, including associations and hubs, unions, employers and training organisations actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the industry's challenges and potential solutions.

The organisations represented in the forum were: AFCA, AKD, Australian Forest Products Association, C3 Australia, Central and South Queensland Forestry Hub, Manufacturing Division for the Construction, Forestry, CFMEU Union (Manufacturing), Engineered Wood Products Association (EWPA), Food Fibre & Timber Industries Training Council, Forestry Australia, Forestry Corporation NSW, FTMA Australia, Gippsland Forestry Hub, Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub, MGA TMA, Murray Region Forestry Hub & SWG, National Workplace Services Group (NWSG), North East NSW Forestry Hub, Northern Territory Ord Valley Forestry Hub / Forestry Industry Association NT, PICMM Melbourne Polytechnic, and Timber Queensland.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the forum. Its purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of these discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants.

This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges related to recruitment and retention, the capability of training and programs for future skills and the recognition of transferable skills, to guide the development of potential solutions.

The feedback and conversations during the forum highlighted the need for collaboration, unified focus, and streamlined efforts within the industry.

Focus Area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

77. Addressing skill shortages in industry occupations

At the forum, the participants spoke about the occupations facing skill shortages in forestry. Emphasis was placed on the lack of skilled tradespeople such as mechanics, electricians and boilermakers, who are critical to the servicing and maintenance of forestry equipment. Truck drivers were particularly mentioned as being in short supply; some have the license but not the required knowledge for transporting logs. There is an extreme lack of operators for harvesters, skidders and other related machinery. Additionally, there is a high demand for millworkers, maintenance personnel and production managers.

Participants noted that in response to the skill shortages, some businesses have taken an unconventional approach by upskilling their managers to obtain truck driver licenses. This allows managers to operate the machines during severe shortages, serving as a last-minute solution. However, participants recognised the potential impact on the future succession and development of businesses, as owners, managers, and leaders are diverted from their core responsibilities.

78. Building stronger connections with local communities and promoting career pathways in forestry industry

Participants emphasised the importance of appealing to local communities when it comes to attracting and retaining the future workforce in the forestry industry. They recognised the need to create and promote career pathways that reflect individual interest levels. It was strongly suggested that targeted efforts should be undertaken to engage children from an early age. Many industries and programs have already implemented this strategy to generate stronger interest and open a variety of different career paths for youth.

The importance of involving people with close ties to the timber industry as well as the local community was discussed. It was agreed that having meaningful conversations at the local level about the timber industry, its prospects, and its sustainability is essential in educating and informing young people about the industry's job and career opportunities. Participants acknowledged the value of localised connections to help provide a more accurate image of the industry and its potential.

79. Bridging perception gaps and enhancing market appeal to attract skilled individuals to the forestry industry

Forum participants highlighted the key concept of creating market appeal to attract individuals to the forestry industry. They emphasised the need to examine whether the industry is perceived as an attractive choice in a competitive labour market. Addressing any perception gaps and ensuring alignment between the industry's reality and public perception were deemed essential to bridge discrepancies and attract skilled individuals to the industry.

80. Promoting the industry as a fulfilling career choice: bridging the gap between jobs and careers through sustainability and purpose

The forum discussion addressed the distinction between a job and a career. Participants highlighted that perceiving a current position as merely a job, rather than part of long-term career aspirations, may lead individuals to be less likely to stay in that role. To attract and retain individuals in the wood processing business, it is crucial to promote the industry as a viable and fulfilling career option.

The participants acknowledged that the prevailing message from families, schools, and society at large tends to emphasise the importance of pursuing a university degree and finding a "proper" career. This perspective may hinder students from exploring alternative paths like forestry, as there is a general lack of

knowledge and understanding surrounding the industry. The influence of societal messages creates barriers for individuals to consider forestry as a viable and fulfilling career choice.

The importance of describing forestry and wood processing in a way that resonates with the interests and values of potential candidates was also recognised. By emphasising how the industry contributes to sustainable solutions, such as replacing plastic bags or providing carbon-friendly housing solutions, the industry can engage candidates who are passionate about environmental impact and social good. Demonstrating the industry's commitment to sustainability can attract individuals who align their values with such initiatives and foster a sense of purpose in their career choices.

81. Coordinating industry representatives to connect with regional schools and promote job opportunities

A participant who came from a multi-generation family business in the industry shared their perspective, expressing admiration at the depth and advanced research taking place in the forestry field. However, as high-school teacher, they observed a significant lack of understanding among students regarding these research advancements in forestry.

The participant stressed the importance of involving a diverse range of students in activities that showcase the industry's full potential, moving beyond solely targeting those who feel directionless.

They also highlighted a general lack of understanding among teachers as well. They shared an interesting anecdote about two teachers expressing interest in forestry careers after a recent school presentation. This experience emphasised the need for collaboration between industry experts and teachers within the curriculum to provide mentorship and expertise.

The participant emphasised that a localised and coordinated response is essential, suggesting the presence of a representative who can establish connections with schools and coordinate regional opportunities.

82. Mapping training and courses to industry job roles and careers

The discussion further explored the drivers that motivate individuals to seek training in the forestry industry. Two primary motivators were identified. The first is understanding the requirements necessary to secure a job, providing individuals with a clear path to employment. The second motivator is considering the training necessary for career advancement, progression, and potential increase in earnings.

Participants suggested that the industry can play a role by mapping training and courses to the exciting job roles available, enabling individuals to comprehend the diverse career paths within the industry beyond common perceptions. Clear career pathways would guide aspiring individuals toward suitable roles and ensure a more streamlined progression within the industry.

83. Expanding the recruitment focus beyond young people and traditional demographics by targeting women, transitional individuals, and other categories

Forum participants addressed the question of whether the industry should solely focus on young people, recognising the need to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds and demographics rather than exclusively targeting school students.

They highlighted the potential of targeting groups such as women, new migrants, and those transitioning from cities to regions. Participants also emphasised the importance of considering opportunities for other cohorts, including semi-retirees, and recognising their unique skills and experiences.

Participants shared examples of designing training programs to cater to individuals transitioning from being on the tools to becoming designers, targeting builders as a specific group. They also encouraged

recruiting individuals from backgrounds such as stay-at-home mothers or those seeking flexible work hours. By promoting flexibility and accommodating different lifestyles, the industry aims to expand its pool of potential workers and provide opportunities for a wider range of individuals.

Other participants acknowledged the valuable contributions of immigrants to the forestry industry. An interesting observation was shared by a participant, noting that around 90% of the best staff in some industry businesses are immigrants who undertake labour-intensive jobs.

Participants expressed the need to strengthen education and create awareness among individuals from various backgrounds about the vital role forestry plays in the environment.

84. Exploring alternative avenues for widening career messaging in schools through widely utilised platforms such as "myfuture"

The forum discussion challenged the typical approach of focusing solely on establishing partnerships with schools for disseminating career messages to students. Participants suggested considering alternative avenues, such as partnering with organisations like the National Career Institute. The need to leverage existing resources and platforms that are widely used by schools and trusted by career practitioners was also emphasised. The "myfuture[87]" website, supported by state governments, was cited as an example of such a platform commonly utilised by schools. Leveraging existing government-established mechanisms can prove highly beneficial in expanding the reach and impact of career messaging initiatives.

85. Fostering a coordinated collaborative network of experts and educational resources for student development in the forestry industry

Forum participants emphasised the significance of establishing a collaborative network that supports interested students in their forestry-related pursuits. They envisioned a partnership-oriented system that connects students with a wide range of resources, enabling their progression and development within the industry. The broader collaboration and support network would provide students with valuable opportunities to enhance their knowledge, gain practical experiences, and expand their professional connections.

86. The importance of collaboration

During the discussion, there was agreement on the importance of collaboration as a key aspect of unifying messaging and achieving a single voice approach. Participants recognised the inherent value of collaboration but acknowledged that it is not an easy task to accomplish. They stressed the need to explore ways to enhance collaboration efforts and ensure their effectiveness. The forum highlighted the significance of collaborative endeavours to maximise the industry's impact and address challenges collectively.

87. Implementing a contribution or levy-based model for national forestry skills and training

The discussions focused on the specific model implemented in Western Australia, exemplified through the Forestry Training Association. Participants acknowledged that this model operates on a contribution-based or levy-based approach, where businesses contribute to the association responsible for delivering skills and training. The forum participants highly valued this approach and expressed support for exploring its potential implementation at a national level. Case studies illustrating additional context and information shared at the forum are presented below.

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[87] https://myfuture.edu.au/ (cited June 2023) myfuture, provides resources to explore career pathways and tools to develop self-knowledge to help with career decision-making.

Forum 7: Government Agencies and Departments

Forum Overview

The forum dedicated to the focus group of Government agencies and departments took place on June 13, 2023, marking the seventh event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

A list of thirty participants from various government levels and departments, had registered for the forum, however only 50% of the registrations dialled into the forum, which made the discussion low engaging for contributions to insights and perspectives from government's perspectives.

The agencies represented in the forum were: NSW Department of Education, South Australian Skills Commission, CFMEU Union (Manufacturing), Tasmanian Forest Practice Authority, Vic Forests, Department of Primary Industries and Regions, South & Central Qld Regional Forestry Hub, PICMM Melbourne Polytechnic, Master Builders ACT, FFTITC, NTHA, One Forty One, National Workplace Services group, Timberlink Australian and NZ, and Forestry Corp NSW.

Insights from the Forum

This section purpose is to provide a comprehensive overview of discussions with the government agencies and departments, presenting key viewpoints, perspectives and insight expressed by the participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the sector's regulatory frameworks and the impact it has on the Forestry Industry.

Focus area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

88. Public awareness and attracting workforce

The Tasmania Forest Practice Authority as a statutory authority is running a training course for a Forest Practice Officer accreditation. It is a six month course that is not a national VET accredited qualification, however, addresses workforce issues and needs. The course to continue requires an injection of funding to develop the program which improves skills and training. Tasmania does have a comprehensive development workforce development plan in place, and a website dedicated to workforce roles and career paths. The insight brought to the surface was that each agency is working in silos as are the states and territories , there is no consolidated effort as one industry unifying its strategies, resources and training.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

89. Frustration with the VET system and need for alignment with the sector needs

Forum participants not associated within the government agencies expressed frustration with the current state of the VET system, which they believe is failing to meet the needs of the Forestry Industry. This lack of alignment hampers workforce efforts to provide continuous training and upskilling.

Although the sector has access to sufficient training resources, there remains a crucial need for a supportive regulatory infrastructure that recognises the difficulty of training and assessment in the sector. Insight identified that whilst accredited training is well recognised by Industry, it is onerous and difficult to deliver. There are issues of location and geography, thin markets, lack of accredited trainers, the complexity of the national training package system, problems with high RTO operating costs, issues with the regulatory requirements, and the burden of compliance.

In the area of non-accredited training, micro credentials or short courses are not regarded as a skills passport and only relevant to that particular employer. There is a concern that micro-credentials will draw people away from completing formal accredited qualifications.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

90. Nothing noted.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

91. Skills recognition and skills passports

The concept of skills recognition, outside the national accreditation system should be regarded as an avenue for the whole Industry, was discussed. Participants emphasised the need to enhance the recognition of critical skills and find effective ways to introduce them. The issues of thin markets hindered training efforts at a nationally accredited level, so stakeholders raised the topic of micro-credentials, having other types of skills passports were highlighted. Addressing these issues promptly as one Industry support was seen as crucial.

92. Micro-credentials and qualifications

The potential use of stackable micro-credentials to trigger qualifications was discussed. While there may be initial scepticism from participants who indicated that this would hinder enrolments into formal credentialling, participants expressed openness to exploring this concept effectively. The main concern raised was ensuring that micro-credentials formed part of a skills passport. Addressing this barrier collectively was seen as crucial for further consideration of micro-credentials in the industry.

93. Stackability of micro-credentials

When considering micro-credentialing or skill sets, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring their Stackability. This means that micro-credentials can be combined to eventually lead to a formal national qualification. To achieve this objective, it was highlighted that everyone involved needs to understand and support the concept of stackable micro-credentials.

94. Regulatory framework

Insight provided by stakeholders in this question brought to the surface that ASQA in its moderation processes with the Regulatory framework, should be engaging with the Forestry Industry to shape out the best way forward in the area of Education and Training.

Forum 8: Skills, Training and Education Agencies

Forum Overview

The forum dedicated to the Educational Providers sector took place on June 13, 2023, marking the final event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

Participants from University, TAFE and RTO organisations also included some employers, Hubs and industry associations, who actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives.

The thirty participating providers and organisations represented in the forum included: Universities, TAFE, various RTO's, Arbre Forest Industries Training and Careers Hub, CFMEU Union (manufacturing), Opal Paper, C3 Australia, Master Builders ACT, MTO consulting, Skills Insight (JSC), AKD, One Forty One, Timberlink Australia and New Zealand, Forestry Corp NSW, ACT Parks and Conservations Service, Forestry Australia, PF Olsen, Green Triangle Forest Industries Hub, Forest Reliance Fibre, Multinail, Emtrain Fire & Community Safety, NT Ord Valley Forestry Hub, and National Workplace Services Group.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions, having the purpose of providing a comprehensive overview of the issues and barriers in training and education deliveries for the industry.

Opening remarks made by forum participants

95. The nature of training in the sector

The forum participants acknowledged that TAFEs and RTOs delivering nationally accredited training package qualifications, the following issues are experienced by all:

- Training and Assessment is very costly because it is a Thin Market paradigm.

- It is very difficult to source TAE qualified Trainers and Assessors.

- The Regulatory Framework is rife with red tape and presents onerous compliance burdens

- Resource development is costly because it is time consuming and requires dedicated resources for development. There are specific skill sets needed that are scarce in the Industry.

- The Training Package system is not conducive to RTO operations and outcomes as it presents many red tape and compliance barriers at a regulatory level.

- Crucial state funding is onerous and difficult to access as each state runs very different tender processes, models and compliance for a single national fund. It bestows another layer of red tape, difficulty of access bureaucracy and compliance. In sone states the level of compliance has higher burdens than with eth National regulator. This is not the same for TAFE as they are favoured and undergo far less burdens.

Stakeholders recognised the importance of online training in a blended delivery method as a more effective way to conduct training and assessment as it overcomes geographical barriers.

Technology advancements were highlighted as overcoming barriers that the Industry faces with modern training practices while ensuring the necessary flexibility for learners/employees. The issues included:

- Lack of tertiary education technical training programs

- The technical space, and addressing emerging skills needs from a technological perspective.

- Assessing future training capacity

Apprenticeships were indicated as being a positive solution, however this requires significant campaigns and communication by Industry to attract people to undertake an apprenticeship.

The participants stressed the importance of industry-specific skill recognition and integration within the broader VET framework to bridge this gap. They called for a collaborative effort to ensure that training programs adequately address the sector's requirements and provide opportunities for employees to acquire recognised qualifications.

96. Bridging the gap: integrating existing training with the VET system

Concerns were raised regarding the limited access to publicly funded training in the sector. Participants identified a missing link between workplace training and the VET sector, as well as the lack of flexibility within the VET system to cater to the unique needs and scale of the industry.

Participants agreed that the conversation should not solely revolve around identifying training needs within the industry, as this is not the primary concern. Instead, they emphasised the importance of linking the existing training available to the sector with the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system.

The participants highlighted the significance of facilitating recognition of training delivery and skills as a means of addressing the challenges faced by the sector. By integrating the existing training opportunities and aligning them with the VET system, the industry can effectively address the skills gap and create pathways for career progression.

Focus area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

97. Public awareness and attracting workforce

Forum participants expressed concern about the general public's lack of familiarity with Industry and the specific skills involved in each of the sectors. They noted that unless individuals are specifically informed about the products being made by the sector, they may be unaware of the importance of this sector in the contemporary sustainability context and working for it, being part of its workforce. This lack of awareness was seen as a contributing factor to the challenges faced in attracting new workforce to the Forestry and Wood Products Industry.

98. Focus on the Secondary School landscape and attracting new entrants

Insight revealed that not enough was done in the secondary school landscape which promoted Forestry as a career path. As such, students do not choose forestry as a choice, as they lack visibility, awareness and knowledge of what a career aesthetic represents.

Promoting the sector as forward-thinking and solution-driven may serves as an initial attractor. Training programs, creative job opportunities, and the nature of work also play crucial roles in appealing individuals to join the sector.

99. Pre-employment measures and school engagement

Participants noted that new workers directly entering the sector from school are uncommon, and employers typically value trade skills, diverse experience, and a certain level of maturity. Entry-level positions involve operating forklifts or other mobile equipment, requiring specific qualifications and shift work rotation. This was not an attraction for secondary students.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

100. Frustration with the VET system and need for alignment with the sector needs

Forum participants expressed frustration with the current state of the VET system, which they believe is failing to meet the needs of the Forestry Industry. This lack of alignment hampers employers' efforts to provide continuous training and upskill their employees while also retaining them in the sector.

The practicality of changing the industry's nature to fit the existing training system is unrealistic. Instead, it is crucial for the VET system to adapt and align itself with the sector's needs. Recognising the value of workplace training delivered, which is delivered by subject matter experts, workplace trainers, and assessors, is essential in meeting the sector's demands. It is necessary to overcome the limitations of the VET system. This can be achieved through the establishment of partnerships that assure quality without being restricted to physical presence within the TAFE system.

Collaboration among stakeholders is key to building strong linkages between training activities, funding access, and desired outcomes, ensuring that the sector's objectives are effectively met. It is crucial to note that the industry's reliance on workplace training should not exclude it from accessing publicly funded training.

101. Promotion of the Forestry Hubs

A forestry Hub was highlighted as a positive way to connect Industry with training and education programs. The hubs would be able to connect with schools and network as they have the capability to reach out to both industry and schools.

102.   Upgrade Training.gov.au

One stakeholder communicated a frustration with the Training.gov website as being difficult to navigate and limited in what information can be sourced about training g providers.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

103.   Schools sector

This school sector theme re-occurred several times throughout the forum. The focus being on younger cohorts as they would be the future. Because industry is currently invisible, how to promote the industry to young people was critical. Focus also was drawn on the differing schools' systems and curriculum between states and territories as being a challenge to overcome.

Industry needs to be willing to pull their resources and be coordinated or we will continually get the message completely lost. How do we encourage everyone to agree to a pathway forward and then stick to the plan or land the ship needs to be coordinated.

104.   Ageing Workforce

Participants acknowledged the aging workforce in the industry and the imminent retirement of 40% of the current workforce within the next 5 to 10 years. This prompted discussions about the timing and nature of the training required to bridge the skills gap. Participants raised the question of whether the industry has a clear understanding of what the training landscape will look like in the coming years and whether it is possible to forecast the training requirements and communicate them to the market.

105.   Proactive planning and skills forecasting

Participants emphasised the importance of taking up the responsibility to conduct proper analysis to identify emerging training needs and align them with the sector's training framework. They noted that until recently, the industry had skills forecasts regularly reviewed to identify emerging needs.

To address this, participants stressed the need for collaboration, funding support, and information consolidation to make skills forecasts meaningful for the sector. They emphasised the importance of accurately assessing the current and future capacity of the workforce, especially considering the upcoming retirement of aging workers.

During the discussions, no solutions were provided. Rather participants raised critical questions about the timing, nature, and forecasting of training requirements for the future. Stakeholders recognised the need for a clear understanding of training needs and effective communication with training providers to ensure proactive planning and address emerging needs effectively.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

106.   Portability of skills

Participants emphasised that within the industry, portability refers to the transferability of skills within the workplace. The ability to apply acquired skills in different areas within the workplace was considered important.

107.   Skills recognition and skills passports

The concept of skills recognition, particularly within the workplace, was discussed. Participants emphasised the need to enhance the recognition of critical skills and find effective ways to introduce them. Instances of job losses without proper recognition of employees' skills, particularly during crises such as the closure of sectors of the industry were highlighted. Addressing these issues promptly and retroactively to ensure fairness and support for affected individuals was seen as crucial.

108.   Micro-credentials and qualifications

The potential use of stackable micro-credentials to trigger qualifications was discussed. While there may be initial scepticism from the union movement, participants expressed openness to exploring this concept effectively. The main concern raised was ensuring that micro-credentials do not hinder individuals from obtaining proper qualifications and recognition for their skills. Addressing this barrier collectively was seen as crucial for further consideration of micro-credentials in the industry.

109.   Stackability of micro-credentials

When considering micro-credentialing or skill sets, participants emphasised the importance of ensuring their stackability. This means that micro-credentials can be combined to eventually lead to a formal national qualification. To achieve this objective, it was highlighted that everyone involved needs to understand and support the concept of stackable micro-credentials.

110.   Retaining industry-specific training package

One insight provided indicated that the process of RPL should be performed at a group level rather than an individual one, as it is a very onerous process and time consuming. Retaining industry-specific training packages was seen as crucial to maintain control over the sector. This allows the industry to determine how to micro-credential, trigger qualifications, establish pathways, and recognise skills, aligning with the specific needs of the sector, including the training of Industry Trainers and Assessors.

Forum 9: Australian Forests Products Association (AFPA)

Forum Overview

The forum dedicated to advancing education and training opportunities for the whole of the forest, wood and paper products industry, and took place on June 7, 2023, marking the only "in-person" event in a series of nine stakeholder participation forums. The agenda was structured around four thematic focus areas, which were supported by a set of prompting questions outlined in the discussion and background paper shared prior to the forum.

The four thematic focus areas were:

- **Focus Area 1**: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce
- **Focus Area 2**: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity
- **Focus Area 3**: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills
- **Focus Area 4**: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

Forum Participants

Twenty participants from various organisations, including employers, union, industry associations, and ForestWorks executive actively engaged in the discussions, contributing valuable insights and perspectives on the Gender Diversity challenges associated with the industry and potential solutions.

ForestWorks Board Members, ForestWorks CEO, AKD, HQ Plantations, Pentarch, One-Forty-One, PF Olsen, AFPA Growers Chamber, Trade and Apprenticeship working group, and AFPA sub–HR Committee representatives.

Insights from the Forum

This section delves into the discussions held during the in-person forum providing a comprehensive overview of the discussions, presenting the key viewpoints, perspectives and concerns expressed by the participants. This information aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges related to industry engagement, and to guide the development of key insight.

Focus Area 1: Attracting and Retaining the Next-Generation Workforce

111.   New Entrants

Discussions focussed on the culture of working for industry employers, highlighting:

- General wages of employees that needed to reflect parity to national wage rates, rather than lower skill rates. A review of the total wages system would be desirable.

- The nature of shift work and rosters warranted a total review as it was not conducive to family friendly and current lifestyle choices.

- The younger generations were not attracted to industries who offered lower paid jobs, when looking from the perspective as a career.

Stakeholders identified that it is a "career" that attracts new entrants, as opposed to just doing a "job". If the industry is not appealing, then this is a barrier to choosing the Forests and Wood Products Industry as an option. It was up to the industry to change its operating model to determine ways to attract new entrants and retain existing workers. The consensus was that workplace roles and conditions should be competitive with other industries.

112.   Attraction and Retention

a. **New workers**

Discussion focussed on attracting employees was increasingly difficult as there was not a coordinated positive campaign and approach by the industry as a whole. Industry did not have a strategy as a collective effort, to target schools and school leavers in promoting forestry as a career. Many participants felt that school leavers did not consider Forestry and wood products as an attractive option as career choice. Recommendations indicated that funded research needed to be conducted to understand what was seen as a value proposition for existing and new workers.

b. **Industry perceptions**

The forest sector needed to be seen as part of the climate solution and not seen as a community evil. The industry is viewed negatively, rather than viewed as a vital industry for Australia. A 'positive' story campaign is needed to be communicated to the Australian public that sends key messages of the industry. This would bolster and encourage career choice and increase enrolments into accredited courses at both VET and HEd levels.

c. **Associations and Hubs**

It was discussed that there needed to be a national co-ordination of all regional forestry hubs, as this would provide a coherent and consistent spearhead effort, rather than a siloed regional focus, which sees duplication and overlapping. AFPA members highlighted that the work and research performed by hubs and industry associations was overlapping and scattergun in approach, creating barriers for training strategies. One initiative raised was to conduct feasibility studies of long hour childcare, including before and after hour care. Members flagged the concept of co-locating childcare facilities at one forest product business and establishing a regional facility with the participation of multiple forest products' businesses. It was also highlighted that the industry would expand the Annual FWPA Diversity Statistics to include the collection statistics from industry participants regarding indigenous employment and other diversity measures as the current focus is gender mix.

Focus Area 2: Revitalising Regional Training Capacity

113. Motivating the next generation

Members emphasised the need for increased collaboration between industry and training providers in course development and assessment material creation. By enhancing industry involvement in these processes, training packages can be tailored to meet industry requirements more effectively within the regional capacity and attract the next generation. This collaboration would ensure a better alignment between job expectations, learning materials, and the vocational education and training system.

114. Workplace conditions

Importance was placed on wages parity to other industries, with wages, benefits and incentives. Reference was made to the written AFPA submission, which identified that employers needed to implement further flexible working arrangements, whilst achieving production and commercial realities.

115. Industry based trainers

A discussion point during the forum was the crucial role played by regional based trainers and assessors in the training, assessment, and learning processes within organisations. It was acknowledged that the industry workplace within the regional areas engages in training activities, having staff assuming training roles or taking on partial training responsibilities, including assessing colleagues and allocating work. These work-based trainers were not TAE qualified yet performed the same role and types of assessment.

Forum Participants raised questions about the potential to recognise and utilise these workplace trainers as experts in delivering formal training and skills recognition. The consensus was that harnessing this expertise was critical for meeting industry training demands. Recommendations that the VET regulatory framework and regulator needed to capture this proposition.

116. Hubs

AFPA members raised the work performed by Hubs was at a regional level, which was their mandate, however it should also be performed at a national level and focus. The issue with this was overlapping research and work performed that was duplicated and siloed. A lot of research conducted should be coordinated better to avoid frustrations between Hubs overlapping within the regional levels.

Focus Area 3: Developing Training Programs for Future-Proofing Skills

117. Micro-Credentials

The participants engaged in discussions about the role of micro-credentials in shaping qualifications and training programs. They recognized the growing demand for specific skill sets among communities, enterprises, and learners. The concept of stacking skill sets or units of competency to create recognisable qualifications was discussed as a way to address skills recognition and validity.

Discussion highlighted that there was a fear that micro-credentialing would be a barrier to accredited training enrolments and as such needs to have a 'stackable' framework.

There was acknowledgement of critical identification of immediate skills needs within the sectors of the industry and understanding these needs was essential for designing effective training programs and meeting the evolving demands of the future workforce.

It was highlighted that the AFPA written submission included an initiative to attract the talent pool, by piloting a Forest Operations Traineeship and a timber and Wood Products Traineeship which would commence in the secondary school system.

118. Accredited Industry Trainers

This theme was repetitive across all forums and was raised also raised by AFPA members, i.e., the lack of suitability accredited trainers and assessors. This was a key theme across all industries and not just particular to the forestry industry. It is a huge barrier for conducting formal training and accredited training delivery and hinders critical mass.

Discussions raised the crucial role played by industry/workplace-based trainers who were assessing training, SOPs, learning processes and performance criteria at organisational levels. It was acknowledged that every workplace engages in these activities to some extent, with individuals assuming training roles or taking on partial training responsibilities, including assessing colleagues and allocating work.

AFPA participants raised questions about the potential to recognise and utilise Industry expertise in delivering formal training and skills recognition, concluding that harnessing the expertise of workplace-based trainers and assessors is critical for meeting industry training demands and to be included in VET regulatory reforms.

119. Research

Discussions highlighted that there is a lot of research that is performed in the sector that overlaps and is very similar, leaving gaps with another necessary research required that is missed. Research performed in some areas are out of date and non-current and recommendations was to have a national approach for then industry.

Focus Area 4: Recognising Portable Skills for Mobility

120. Industry Culture

AFPA members concurred that the general view in the industry was that employers were reluctant to train existing staff as once trained they would move on to other workplaces. This was a disincentive because employers did not want to invest in staff who would leave once trained. AFPA members highlighted that employers needed to have a broader outlook and a holistic approach to training staff as it was about the big picture. Participants concurred that mobility is about pathways and having a whole Industry career which would benefit everyone, rather than having a narrow job perspective with one employer.

121. Younger Generations

Recognition by AFPA had the consensus that younger cohorts are far more transient and technology savvy than older generations working in the industry. This means for the industry that mobility of portable skills is essential. It is important these days that workers have formal qualifications and credentials which are stackable and transferrable. Industry needed to recognise that to attract younger generations their operating models would need to be far more flexible and contemporary.

122. Accredited Qualifications

AFPA members raised the issue of ensuring that national qualifications in Forestry and wood products were listed on the government funded lists. National qualifications promoted mobility and was essential in a skills passport as it was about creating a career. Funding courses would address the "thin markets' concept and assist RTOs to operate financially, encouraging their willingness to deliver accredited training for the industry.