



AFAM ITAB

Agriculture, Food
& Animal Management

May 2025

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AFAM ITAB would like to thank stakeholders who have provided valuable feedback during consultations on NSW apprenticeships and traineeships reform.

Thanks to the industry stakeholders who registered for the Mid North Coast Schools and Industry Forums. Unfortunately, the forums needed to be cancelled due to extreme weather. AFAM acknowledges the difficulties for these communities and industries as they undertake recovery from the impacts of recent flooding. The [flood recovery information webpage](#) provides information updated daily about recovery assistance and wellbeing support for impacted areas.

Best wishes,
Ben
Executive Officer

Engagement activities

AFAM was pleased to be able to provide feedback to the AgriFutures [Discussion Paper for the National Schools Food and Fibre Education Strategy](#) based on discussions from previous Industry Training Advisory Committee (ITAC) meetings. Industry feedback from the ITAC meetings indicates strong connections between industry and schools are important to improve training pathways leading to the attraction of young future workers.

AFAM continues to work on an initial response to the NSW Apprenticeship and Traineeship Act review, providing some background for the department to build a consultation strategy with industry as the review progresses. AFAM has collected a lot of industry views over the last three years, and Michael Williams has been

supplementing that following recent consultations with peak bodies, unions and other industry participants. Thank you for your contributions so far. There will be more focused opportunities to contribute to the review once the design and planning phase is completed by the department.

Ben from AFAM attended the recent [Food Ladder Summit](#) in Sydney where he gained insights into school programs addressing industry training priorities for digital capabilities across the production horticulture sector. The Food Ladder program, involving protected cropping systems using automated and AI programs is being incorporated into school food and fibre programs. This has resulted in remarkable outcomes for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds who have re-engaged with school and future careers with flow on benefits to regional communities. Foundational AI literacy is a recognised future skills need across many AFAM-supported industries. Practical activities conducted within school programs such as Food Ladder greenhouses can increase student engagement and aid recognition of the diversity of careers and skills required for the agricultural workforce.

Ben also visited [Summerland Farm](#) in Far Northern NSW who provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the production and amenity horticulture sector. The farm provides work readiness assessment and adjust work processes and use strategies to enable access to work for priority cohorts, specifically disabilities. The farm then seeks appropriate vocational skills training for individuals based on their strengths, capabilities and needs to perform their roles at work resulting in gainful employment which benefits both the farm and the employees.

If you're interested in employing someone living with disability in agriculture, you can also take a look at [Ability Agriculture](#).



L - R Summerland Farm Production Horticulture Manager Chris Smith, AFAM contractor Michael Williams, AFAM Executive Officer Ben Holmes

Smart and Skilled update

The NSW Department of Education will be sending Smart and Skilled Review Notices to eligible providers for the 2025-2026 Activity Period shortly. The Review Notice offer, and acceptance process will be open for 2 weeks.

NSW Public Sector Apprentices and Trainees Program

The NSW Government has launched the third round of its Public Sector Apprentices and Trainees Program, aiming to recruit 1,000 new apprentices and trainees across more than 30 government agencies by June 2026. For employers and jobseekers alike, the program represents a practical pathway to developing future skills and addressing urgent workforce needs.

Employer applications for the 2025/26 financial year are now open. Critical skills shortage areas across AFAM-supported industries including agriculture, food, beverage and pharmaceutical manufacturing, and parks and gardens within eligible NSW government agencies, state owned corporations and public non-financial corporations can be supported by this program.

Learn more about how to participate in the program and to increase equity and education pathways into public sector employment by visiting the [resources webpage](#). To access funding and specialised assistance with recruitment and support services as part of this program please download the [information package](#).

Pathways for the Future Program

The Pathways for the Future Program aims to create a comprehensive evidence base for the department to improve the education and training system to better prepare students as lifelong learners and equip them with the knowledge, skills and attributes for meaningful work and life.

In order to understand lifelong learning journeys, the Pathways Program includes data on students and learners aged between 0 and 67 within NSW from 1996 onwards. The program provides unique insights into NSW student's education, training and employment outcomes and actual end-to-end pathways from education to work. The dataset provides a comprehensive evidence base for the NSW Department of Education to provide NSW students and learners with valuable information about the outcomes of different education to employment pathways and the study choices that may impact these outcomes. This will help them make better-informed choices about their education and careers.

Learn more about the [Pathways to the Future Program](#).

New strategy to align university pathways with the workforce

The NSW Government will collaborate with the Commonwealth, Jobs and Skills Australia, and education providers to deliver reforms and create a higher education sector that provides the skilled workforce needed today and into the future. [Public Partnerships for Public Benefit: The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29](#) sets out a strategic framework to enable stronger collaboration between government and universities that targets workforce needs, student pathways, equity and effective public policy.

Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, Steve Whan said:

'We know NSW faces major workforce challenges, and this strategy ensures our tertiary sector is agile and responsive to those needs.

"Importantly, this is about ensuring people—particularly in regional areas— can access the training and education required to fill critical skill gaps.'

The government will work with universities to streamline credit recognition and transfer systems between vocational and higher education, making it easier for students to move between different types of study and to tailor their learning to suit their career goals. By 2036, nine out of 10 jobs will require a post-secondary qualification, with 44% requiring a vocational education and training pathway. The input from AFAM industry stakeholders through existing data collection is used to advise government on current and future workforce demands.

Learn more about the government's [strategic engagement with the higher education sector](#).



Get Back in the Game initiative

Support for youth to transition into training and a pathway to the workplace can have a significant effect on individuals and communities across NSW. The [Get Back in the Game](#) initiative provides specialist support for two cohorts of young people. Back in the Game, supports young people at school in need of support to remain engaged at school or transition to employment or training. Get in the Game, supports young people disengaged from all employment, education and training.

A range of service providers from urban, regional and rural areas are currently offering young people access to career mentoring, planning and brokerage of pathways to training and employment (including apprenticeships and traineeships) through the Get Back in the Game program.

More information about the program and local service providers can be found on the [NSW Government website](#).

Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) project updates

Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance (MISA) JSC is developing their 2025 Workforce Plan following input from over 150 stakeholders.

Approved project in initial stages:

- To review the impact of training delivery of baking qualifications on the industry

Skills Insight JSC currently have training package and research projects underway in various stages. To learn more and provide input please follow the links below.

Initial Stages:

- [Veterinary Nursing Skills and Qualification Review](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Attraction and Retention Guidance](#)
- [Concept for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)

Development Stage:

- [Rural Operations](#) (this project has been paused while qualification reform work takes place)
- [VET Workforce Project](#)
- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)

Broad Consultation:

- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)

Finalisation:

- [Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Workforce Insights](#) (report published)
- [Essential Meat Processing Skills](#)

Other projects underway:

- [Qualification reform](#)
- [Workforce Plan](#)



NSW grants, opportunities & scholarships

The following grants, opportunities and scholarships are available to employers and vocational learners. Follow the links for more information.

Aboriginal Business Advisory Initiative: support for existing Aboriginal owned and operated businesses to grow and diversify their business.

Barranggirra: to provide end to end support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners through culturally appropriate mentoring to ensure successful retention and completion of training and improved post-training employment outcomes.

Boarding scholarships for isolated students: assists eligible students from rural areas who are required to board to attend NSW public specialist high schools – including agricultural boarding schools.

Continuing Apprentices and Trainees Placement Service (CAPS): CAPS helps apprentices and trainees find jobs or continue with their qualification when their training contract ends before completion.

Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant: the grant adopts a number of strategies to develop and support First Nations people through the creation of training and employment opportunities.

Employers funding and support: learn about government incentives and supports to employ and train apprentices and trainees.

Fee-Free training for agriculture, forestry and fishing: giving broad access to government-subsidised training and high-level courses in targeted priority areas.

Free Workshops: Supervising your apprentice or trainee: free workshops for employers and supervisors of apprentices or trainees in the workplace held across NSW.

Living Away From Home Allowance for Apprentices: an allowance is available to eligible full and part-time apprentices and school-based apprentices during the first 3 years of training who need to move away from home in order to start or remain in an apprenticeship.

OCHRE Opportunity Hubs: aim to provide First Nations young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between school and further education and/or employment through partnerships with schools, coordination of local opportunities, mentoring, support and more.

Resources to Assist in Supervising Your Apprentice or Trainee: a series of videos and resources are available.

Women in trades: Resources available to attract women into trades for industry and educators

Other Grants and opportunities:

Free Support to Help Create Mentally Healthy Workplaces: SafeWork NSW has a range of programs, tools, and resources available to help on the journey to create mentally healthy workplaces.

Food Rescue Rebates - The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is working to reduce good quality food suitable for human consumption from being disposed to landfill. The rebates are part of a suite of organics programs available to support NSW to halve organics waste to landfill by 2030.
Amount: Up to \$2,000 per rebate with a total funding pool of up to \$800,000

Status: Open, ongoing until 30 June 2027, until funding is expended, or at the EPA's discretion.

Find information about these and all available grants and funding opportunities on the [NSW Government website](#).

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