

DRAFT

**WESTERN DOWNS
REGIONAL WORKFORCE PLAN
2025-2028**





Mayor's Welcome

In the Western Downs, we are proud of who we are and excited about where we're going. Our region is an innovation and opportunity powerhouse, driven by our economic pillar industries of energy, agriculture, intensive agriculture, and manufacturing.

With more than \$7.5 billion of projects in our regional development pipeline, the Western Downs is open for business. From agriculture to energy, manufacturing and beyond, our region offers boundless possibility, enviable liveability, and growing global significance. We're not just preparing for Australia's future - we're building it.

None of this can happen without people. A skilled, adaptable and resilient workforce is critical to powering our industries, supporting our communities, and making the most of the opportunities ahead. That's why Western Downs Regional Council is proud to present the **Regional Workforce Plan 2025-2028**.

This is more than just a document; it's our shared commitment to building a future-ready workforce. Behind every thriving sector is a network of skilled professionals. Building this network will require collaboration and partnership between Council, industry, training providers, and all levels of government. Together we can secure the workforce we need today, while laying the foundations for tomorrow.

With the **Regional Workforce Plan 2025-2028**, we're preparing for a future where families, workers and businesses can continue to grow and thrive in the Western Downs, now and for generations to come.

Councillor Andrew Smith

Mayor, Western Downs Regional Council



Acknowledgement of Country

Western Downs Regional Council acknowledges the traditional owners, the Barunggam, Iman (Yiman), Bigambul, Wakka Wakka, and the Jarowair people, as the custodians of this land. We pay respect to all Aboriginal community Elders, past and present, who have resided in the area and have been an integral part of the history of the region.



What is Workforce Planning?

Workforce Planning is the development of a strategy to create a resilient and dynamic workforce equipped to fulfill today's jobs and embrace future opportunities. Western Downs Regional Council is committed to enabling a dynamic and vibrant economy by ensuring businesses in the region have access to a talent pool which fulfills employment needs both now and in the future.

This long-term plan will guide collaboration with businesses, community, neighbouring Councils, State and Federal government, and other stakeholders to grow the economy and meet the needs of our growing population.

Source: [Queensland Government, Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032](#)

Why is Workforce Planning Important?

Just 2.5 hours west of Brisbane is the Western Downs. The Western Downs covers 37,937 square kilometers, an area slightly smaller than Switzerland. Despite a small population of just over 35,000 people our region produces a significant share of critical goods and services for domestic and international markets.

The region has experienced significant economic growth over the past decade, demonstrated by a strong increase in Gross Regional Product to \$5.28 billion in 2024.

Strong economic growth has resulted in an increased number of local jobs, however the local workforce hasn't increased at the same rate. Deloitte estimated the gap between the local jobs and the region's workforce to increase from 20% to 28% between 2020 and 2030. This skills gap compromises local businesses' opportunity to access talent needed to operate and limits residents' ability to access essential and quality services.

Housing availability, retention of young and emerging talent, access to local training opportunities and attraction and retention of workers have been identified as key constraints to meeting our growing workforce demand in the region.

This **Regional Workforce Plan (2025-2028)** addresses critical issues and clearly articulates a strategic pathway for the Western Downs to diversify and grow its workforce, building the region's competitive advantage and further attracting skilled workers to strengthen and grow local businesses.

Western Downs Regional Council is committed to partnering with key stakeholders to address the actions in this **Regional Workforce Plan**, working together to ensure our workforce is optimised to support our thriving industries, now and into the future.



Strategic Context

The **Regional Workforce Plan** has been developed in consideration with:

- *Western Downs Regional Council Corporate Plan*
- *Western Downs Regional Council Economic Development Strategy 2023 - 2028*
- *Western Downs Futures 10-year roadmap*
- *Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022 - 2032*
- *Queensland Clean Energy Workforce Roadmap 2023 - 2035*
- *Jobs and Skills Australia 2024 - 2025 Work Plan*



Our Work

Deloitte Access Economics (DAE) delivered in August 2021 a Skills Gap Report, noting the skills gap on the Western Downs at the time to be approximately 4,610 and this was forecast to increase to 7,790 by 2030. Key reasons for this were:

- a. Reduced access to affordable housing
- b. Travel or relocation required to acquire highly demanded skills
- c. Limited access to key support services
- d. Perceptions of regional lifestyle

Specific occupation gaps listed were:

- Machinery Operators and Drivers
- Technicians and Trades Workers
- Aged and Disabled Carers
- Registered Nurses
- Retail Managers and
- Child Carers

Since then, there has been a significant number of initiatives aimed to positively contribute to the attraction and skilling of staff.

1. Establishment of Western Downs Futures – Employment Working Group
2. Establishment of Health Sustainability Futures Group
3. Western Downs Country University Centre opened in Chinchilla
4. LIVE Western Downs Marketing Campaign to further promote the regional lifestyle and opportunities
5. Local Housing Action Plan aimed to support increased housing stock and diversity of housing





Consultation

April 2025:



36 survey responses

May 2025:



15 participants in digital consultation sessions

June 2025:



Regional Workforce Plan for Public Notice

July 2025:



Regional Workforce Plan for Council Adoption

Consultation encompassed the following stakeholders:



Health care



Education & Child Care



Construction / Trades



Energy Sector



Professional services



Government

Community Objectives and Aspirations

The key objectives and aspirations from engagement have been summarised below:

- Minimise workforce participation barriers
- Abundant training, education and skill development opportunities
- Sufficient housing and accommodation
- Vibrant industries and communities
- Diverse industries and employment pathways
- Strong workforce attraction and retention
- Increased viability of care services (including childcare and aged care)

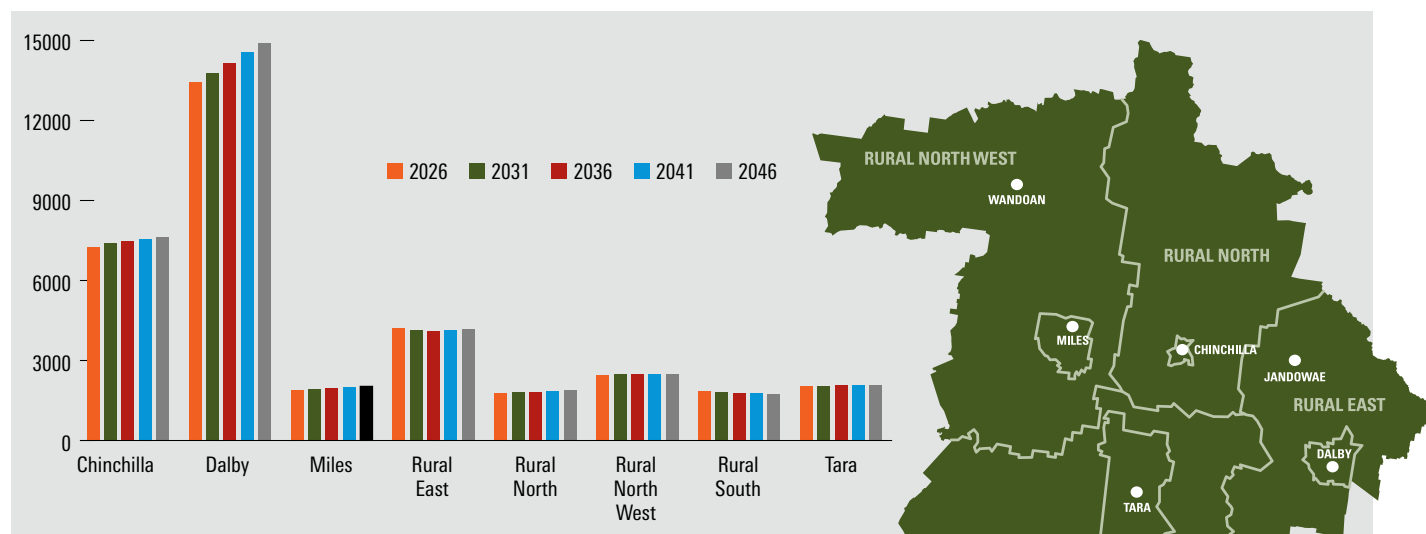
Hearing from our Community

Here are a few of the great ideas from our community on ways to maximise the opportunities for the Western Downs Region's workforce and jobs market.

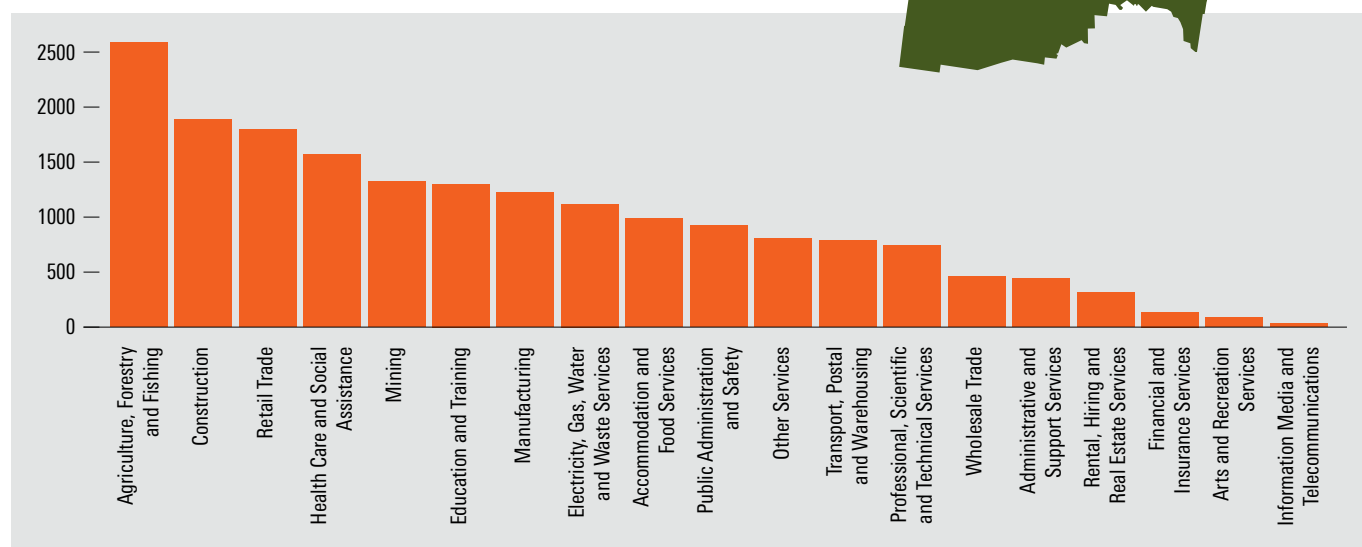
- 'Implement workforce attraction & retention strategies'
- 'Developing skills and providing career opportunities will assist in youth retention'
- 'Collaborating with industry and other governments'
- 'More access to trade courses'
- 'Housing availability; childcare availability; improved access to health services especially doctors'
- 'Embrace technology'

Workforce Snapshot 2025

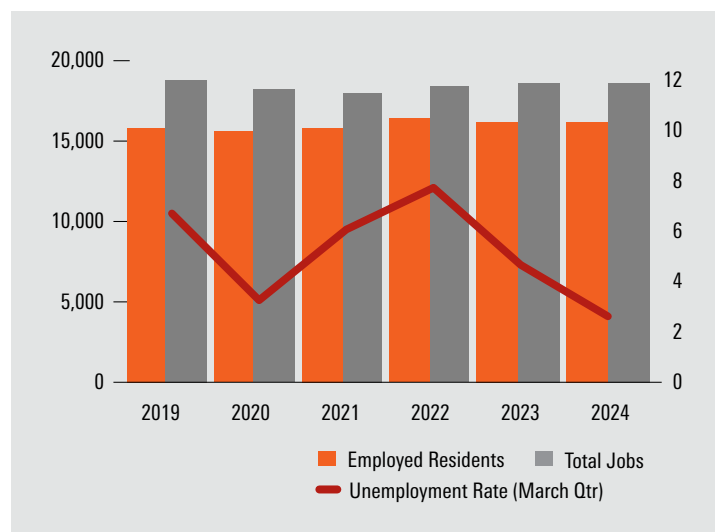
Total Estimated Resident Population (ERP)¹



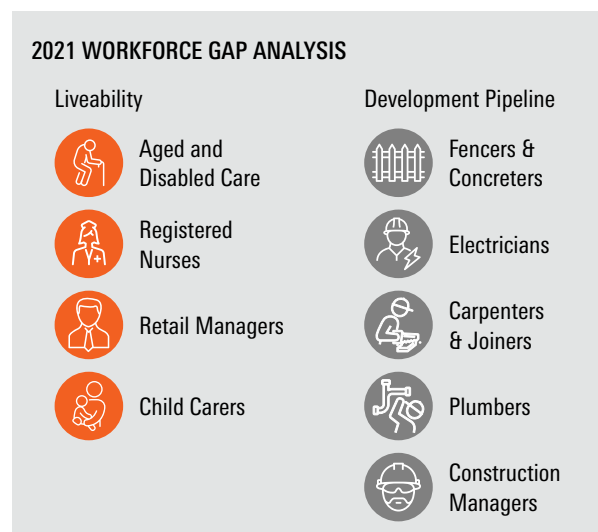
Employment by Industry



Growing Skills Gap²



Critical Workforce Gap³



¹ Source: Population and household forecasts, 2021 to 2046, prepared by .id (informed decisions), March 2023.

² Source: Deloitte Access Economics Western Downs Workforce Gap Analysis 2021.

³ Source: Deloitte Access Economics Western Downs Workforce Gap Analysis 2021.

Strength and Competitive Advantages

The Western Downs has a number of great strengths and competitive advantages that this strategy will leverage.

A Strong and Diverse Economy

- The region's strong and diverse economy results in a wide-range of local career opportunities.
- High salaries, with a higher-than-Queensland proportion of workers receiving weekly individual wage of \$2,000-\$3,499.
- The region is home to high performing industries, including in the agriculture and renewable energy sectors, which helps attract local businesses.

Adoption of Emerging Technologies

- The Western Downs is at the forefront of the changing world, with agriculture, energy and manufacturing leading innovation and transformation.

Educational Infrastructure

- The region is home to four state-of-the-art trade training centres in Chinchilla, Dalby, Miles and Tara.
- Western Downs Country University Centre offering a dedicated learning space.

Collaborative Ecosystem

- Strong collaboration across community and industry, investing in the future workforce and providing development and training opportunities.
- Commitment to leverage existing networks and platforms to amplify programs and initiatives already delivered.





Regional Workforce Plan

Purpose

To actively grow and skill the Western Downs workforce, ensuring our workforce supports the needs of industries now and into the future.

Strategic Pillars

Key pillars of the **Regional Workforce Plan** are:

- **Critical infrastructure & services** supporting strong liveability in the Western Downs
- **Attraction** of a talent pool from Australia and overseas to support the needs of our growing industries
- **Retention** through welcoming workplaces and a region that offers belonging, connection and a shared identity
- **Training & Skilling** to support our region's workforce to meet current and future needs
- **Participation** by enabling equitable and inclusive employment outcomes for our residents
- **Innovation & Technology** to continue to place the Western Downs at the forefront of the changing world

Guiding Principles

These Guiding Principles are aligned with Council's Economic Development Strategy:

- **Collaborative** Facilitate partnerships and relationships with community stakeholders, industry, education providers, levels of government and neighbouring regions
- **Socially Inclusive** Improve opportunities for individuals and groups to participate in the community and economy
- **Sustainable** Ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social wellbeing
- **Community Oriented** Focus on communities' needs and opportunities to move forward
- **Business Friendly** Enabling entrepreneurship and acknowledging businesses' valuable role in the community
- **Innovative** Continuously improving business processes and seeking new ideas to enable economic growth

Regional Workforce Plan

Strategic Pillars	Key Actions	Responsible Agency	Timeline	Measurable Outcome
Critical infrastructure & services	Deliver the Local Housing Action Plan to expand diverse housing stock, with targeted solutions for temporary and permanent workforce.	WDF Housing Working Group	2027	Vacancy rates at or above 2%. SQM Research
	Establishment of a local child care training facility.	Training Provider	2028	Increase in ECEC certifications.
	Support ID Connect Initiatives funded by Workforce Australia in conjunction with Services Australia and TMR, assisting people without ID to obtain licenses for work.	WDF Employment Working Group	2027	Reduced reporting of transport as an employment barrier
	Support expansion of the PCYC Braking the Cycle program driver mentor program.			
	Advocacy for community transport to support residents access employment and training opportunities.	WDF Employment Working Group and WDF Health Sustainability Futures Group	2028	Reduced reporting of transport as an employment barrier
Attraction	Promote the Western Downs as a top choice for affordability, lifestyle and career opportunity, leveraging the RAI's Move to More Campaign.	Western Downs Regional Council	2026	Increased total labour force and ERP by 2% annually. ABS
	Launch of a 'Regional Liaison' role that supports the attraction and connection of new residents, supported by the Western Downs Health Sustainability Futures Group.	Toowoomba Surat Basin Enterprise	2026	Role viable based on fee-for-service.
	Leverage Skilled Migration pathways and explore Designated Area Migration Agreement opportunities.	Regional Development Australia Darling Downs South West / Migration Qld	2028	Increased total labour force and ERP by 2% annually. ABS
	Continued delivery of the Welcoming Cities pilot program, supporting workplaces to be more culturally inclusive.	Welcoming Australia	2026	Program KPIs met.
Retention	Deliver an annual skills summit supporting local SMEs addressing employee value propositions, development of a talent pipeline, flexible work arrangements, and wellbeing.	Western Downs Regional Council (in partnership)	2025	Program KPIs met.
	Facilitate partnerships between industry and education providers to identify gaps in local jobs and create local solutions.	BEST Groups WDF Education Working Group and WDF Employment Working Group	2025	Decreased gap local jobs vs. employed residents. NIEIR

Strategic Pillars	Key Actions	Responsible Agency	Timeline	Measurable Outcome
Training & Skilling	Establish a 'Queensland first' Renewables Academy that supports R&D, testing, installation and maintenance of solar and wind.	Training Provider	2028	Facility supported by increasing enrolments.
	Position Trade Training Centres as career launchpads with an emphasis on high-demand industries.	Trade Training Centres	2026	Increase in enrolments at the Trade Training Centres
	Deliver a program that celebrates and recognises excellence in trades under 25 aimed to attract more youth in this pathway.	Western Downs Regional Council (in partnership)	2026	Increase in enrolments at the Trade Training Centres
	Continued support for BEST Groups in Chinchilla and Dalby aimed to expose and inspire youth to local career opportunities.	BEST Groups	2026	Program KPIs met
	Expand Apprenticeships & Traineeships for professional workforce participants to retain youth in the region	Industry	2026	Increase in available apprenticeships and traineeships
	Promote region-wide awareness of the Country Universities Centre	Country University Centres	2025	Increase in enrolments
	Maximise opportunities to build aspirations in local youth to engage in tertiary studies in high-demand industries	University Widening Participation Programs	2025	Increase University enrolment in Year 12 Leavers Next Steps
Participation	Continued identification of disengaged cohorts and development of flexible employment programs aimed to overcome workforce barriers.	Department Trade Employment Training (in partnership)	2025	Increased total labour force
	Prepare, develop and coordinate a plan to enhance childcare services in the region, including creches on business premises, family daycares, in-home childcare, and afterhours services.	WDF Education Working Group	2028	Reduction in waitlists.
	Explore flexible working options to support hybrid and remote working opportunities across the Western Downs region.	Industry	2025	Increased total labour force. NIEIR
Innovation & Technology	Identify and support a shift towards industry 4.0 capability (through, automation, Internet of Things (IOT), artificial intelligence, advanced analytics and advanced manufacturing).	Industry	2025	Increased worker productivity. NIEIR
	Explore and consider options for the workforce to keep up with technological advancements through a consolidated strategic approach to digital investment, smart technology and connectivity improvements.	Industry	2025	Increased worker productivity. NIEIR
	Continued advocacy for strong digital connectivity and telecommunications, supporting technological advancements.	Western Downs Regional Council	2027	Increased Digital Inclusion Index

A Call to Action

The Western Downs **Regional Workforce Plan (2025-2028)** presents an **ambitious, well-defined strategy** to ensure **long-term workforce resilience**—one that requires **collective commitment from businesses, educators, policymakers, and the community**.

By investing in strategic solutions, we secure the talent pipeline needed to **drive economic strength** and **future-proof** our industries.

Your partnership matters. This **Regional Workforce Plan** has been developed by Western Downs Regional Council and Western Downs Futures, with support from the below organisations.

Developed in partnership with:

