

Consultation paper

Leading a safer, inclusive and resilient workforce



Skills Insight acknowledges that First Nations peoples have been living on and caring for Country for thousands of years.

This is respected in our values and the way we work.



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About this consultation paper

Background

Safe, healthy and supportive workplaces are foundational to productivity and workforce resilience across Australia's agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries.

The Stakeholder Forum advising Skills Insight Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) identified workforce safety and wellbeing as a major priority requiring deeper analysis and coordinated action. In response, Skills Insight's [Workforce Plan 2025-2026](#) confirmed safety and wellbeing as a central theme for the *Workforce Plan 2026-2027*. This consultation paper has been developed to inform that work and ensure stakeholder perspectives shape the next phase.

Purpose

This consultation paper seeks stakeholder views on how the jobs and skills system can better support safe, healthy and equitable work across the agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries. Outcomes will be designed to focus collective attention on a critical workforce challenge to help build intelligence and insight, navigate policy complexity, and advocate for a strong VET system that enables safe, skilled and diverse workforces.

Proceed straight to the consultation questions

Why this consultation matters

Your input will directly shape how Skills Insight prioritises and delivers its work to improve safety and wellbeing outcomes. Feedback will guide priority activities and practical recommendations for industry, government and other skills system actors. These will be highlighted in the *Workforce Plan 2026-2027* and will inform actions to:

- build leadership capability for safety and wellbeing transformation,
- embed safety skills into training and recognise workplace learning,
- enable inclusive and culturally safe workplaces and training,
- strengthen data systems to drive evidence-based safety interventions.

Introduction

Workplace safety and wellbeing sit at the heart of productivity across Australia's agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries.

Although well understood, achieving consistently safe workplaces is complex, shaped by structural constraints, practical realities and cultural norms.

Stakeholders have long reported that safety and wellbeing are fundamental priorities. However, safety-related data and evidence are not consistently central in workforce or skilling policy decisions. Risk exposure faced by workers is rarely treated as a core variable in classification systems (e.g. in the OSCA or ANZSIC) or in programs addressing skills shortages (e.g. the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List). This sits uneasily alongside the Australian Government's aspiration to equip people with 'the right skills to engage in safe, secure, fairly paid work' (Australian Government, 2023).

Skills Insight's [Workforce Plan 2025-2026](#) identifies four underlying priorities:



1. Leadership: outcomes are strongest when organisations lead using a holistic safety approach that addresses physical, psychosocial and cultural dimensions.



2. Skills: education and training are a foundation of safe work, equipping people with the knowledge and skills to prevent harm and respond effectively to risks.



3. Accessibility: safety is the cornerstone of workforce inclusion, resilience and productivity, creating environments where all workers can participate and thrive.



4. Data and evidence: robust data and evidence are essential for informed decisions that build a safer, more resilient workforce and enable targeted interventions where they matter most.

By strengthening education and training pathways that embed safety, wellbeing and leadership capabilities, industries can build more resilient, productive and sustainable workforces, where safety is both a precondition for, and an outcome of, skilled, valued work.

Understanding safety and wellbeing

How we define safety and wellbeing in this paper

In this consultation paper, *safety* refers to freedom from harm and *wellbeing* to the overall physical, psychological and cultural conditions that enable workers to thrive. These outcomes require active leadership, continuous reinforcement and cultural embedding. Safety and wellbeing span three interconnected domains:

- **Physical:** preventing injury, illness and fatality through effective hazard identification, risk management, equipment design, safe work procedures, and

relevant skills and training. Risks may include vehicle incidents, heavy machinery, working at height, animal handling, exposure to chemicals or biological agents, and outdoor and remote environments.

- **Psychosocial:** protecting mental health by managing stressors such as high job demands, poor role clarity, bullying and harassment, exploitation, remote or isolated work, and burnout. These risks arise from how work is designed, managed and experienced across environments and interactions.
- **Cultural:** ensuring all workers feel respected, valued and able to express their identity without discrimination or exclusion. It requires understanding and addressing power dynamics, institutional biases and systemic inequalities affecting cohorts such as First Nations workers, migrant workers, workers with disability and women.

These dimensions overlap and reinforce one another: physical hazards compound psychosocial stress, culturally unsafe environments heighten vulnerability to harm and inadequate psychosocial support reduces capacity to maintain physical safety.

Systemic drivers of safety and wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing outcomes are shaped by multiple structural, economic, environmental and workforce conditions:

- **Structural:** regulatory frameworks, workplace standards and training systems determine baseline safety expectations. Systemic inequities can limit access to culturally appropriate support, enforceable safeguards and high-quality learning, particularly for First Nations workers, migrants, workers with disability, and those in regional, rural and remote communities.
- **Economic and environmental:** fluctuating commodity prices and tight margins can constrain investment in training, safety equipment and workplace adjustments. Climate change intensifies risks through severe weather, heat stress, biosecurity threats and disease outbreaks.
- **Workforce dynamics:** labour shortages, high turnover and an ageing workforce can increase workloads and reduce capacity for safe supervision or work practices. The physical and psychological demands of many roles introduce ongoing risks that need proactive management.

Improving safety and wellbeing requires coordinated, place-based approaches that address whole-of-system conditions, not individual incidents alone. Effective strategies must also be tailored to specific industry and regional contexts that influence the conditions for safe, healthy and sustainable work.

Understanding safety and wellbeing skills

Safety and wellbeing skills should be viewed as:

- **Holistic:** combining knowledge, practical capabilities and lived experience.

- **Relational:** shaped by interactions with others (including leaders, peers and customers).
- **Contextual:** varying across environments, tasks and risk profiles.

These skills are developed through learning and practice, and are applied, often implicitly, across all aspects of work. Embedding them effectively requires training, modelling, reinforcement and organisational systems that support safe, healthy behaviours.

How the VET system currently addresses safety and wellbeing

The VET system plays a critical role in mitigating safety and wellbeing risks by strengthening worker capability, embedding safe practices and supporting resilient, inclusive workplaces. Evidence shows that formal safety and wellbeing training assists businesses in meeting their legal workplace health and safety (WHS) obligations, reduces accidents, improves wellbeing, and supports workers' confidence and career progression (Skiba, 2020).

This section outlines how safety and wellbeing are embedded in VET policy, training products and delivery, and highlights structural gaps limiting consistent, high-quality outcomes.

How safety is embedded in training product frameworks

Safety and wellbeing are built into training package product development through the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' (DEWR) *Training Package Organising Framework* (TPOF).

Key TPOF mechanisms include:

- **Purpose-driven approach to qualification development:** Training products for higher-risk and regulated work can be developed with greater specificity to ensure that licensing, safety and regulatory requirements are met.
- **Flexibility with guardrails:** training products must allow for industry/occupation contextualisation (specificity) and cross-sector transferability.
- **Strong equity and access settings:** Companion Volume Implementation Guides provide guidance on reasonable adjustments (the aligned Anti-Discrimination Assessment process also reinforces inclusive and psychologically safe training environments).
- **Prioritisation for safety-critical work:** the Training Product Prioritisation Framework flags 'health and safety reasons' as justification for fast-tracked training product updates.

The TPOF recognises that safety requires both broad principles and industry-specific application. Safety is both a transferable capability and highly contextual, requiring curriculum development to consider local and environmental risks and associated safety practices.

Safety in qualifications, skill sets and units of competency

Safety is integrated throughout training packages through a combination of dedicated WHS units and embedded requirements within technical units. Even where learners are not enrolled in WHS-coded units, safety requirements typically appear in:

- **Elements and performance criteria:** the skills required to perform a work task safely; e.g. in [AMPWHS201 Sharpen and handle knives safely](#).
- **Knowledge evidence:** what the learner must know to safely and effectively perform the work task; e.g. in [SFICRO306 Work safely in crocodile habitats](#).
- **Assessment conditions:** assessment of skills must take place under safe conditions; e.g. in [AHCMOM217 Operate quad bikes](#).
- **Pre-requisite units:** can be used to ensure foundational safety skills are attained before progressing to related and higher-risk units; e.g. in [ACMAIM202 Participate in an incident involving large animals](#).

These components support safety and wellbeing outcomes relating to duty of care, hazard mitigation and incident response: essential skills in industries where a mistake can put people, animals or environments at risk.

Safety in VET delivery

The 2025 Standards for RTOs require providers to maintain safe facilities, foster inclusive and culturally safe learning environments, and contextualise training to jurisdictional WHS legislation and Codes of Practice.

In practice:

- RTOs model industry expectations through their own safety practices
- trainers and assessors act as safety leaders, meaning their capability and currency strongly influences outcomes
- safety may be delivered as discrete units or through integrated 'clustered' delivery across multiple related units.

Workplace-based training and assessment as a safety enabler

Workplace-based learning improves safety and productivity outcomes for workers and industry. Workplace-based training delivery (notably apprenticeships and traineeships) is particularly effective for embedding safe work practices, as it combines theoretical knowledge with supervised, real-world application. Reinforcing safety skills through repeated, practical experience builds situational awareness and

problem-solving skills that classroom-based training alone cannot achieve as effectively, especially when working with living plants and animals.

Safety training uptake

Safety-related units show some of the highest enrolments in training products over which Skills Insight has custodianship. Most of these units are delivered as part of qualifications, where they often appear as 'core' competencies. In 2024, there were notably high enrolments in:

- *ACMWHS201 Participate in workplace health and safety processes* (9,050 enrolments)
- *AHCWHS302 Contribute to workplace health and safety processes* (7,390 enrolments, plus 5,350 enrolments in its superseded version, *AHCWHS301*)
- *MSFFM2018 Operate basic static machines safely* (2,700 enrolments).

In 2024, high stand-alone unit enrolments (not part of a qualification or skill set) were recorded in:

- *FWPCOR2210 Follow workplace health and safety policies and procedures in forest and wood products operations* (1,150 enrolments)
- *AHCMOM217 Operate quad bikes* (1,060 enrolments).

Some industries also widely use specific skill sets such as *AHCSS00074 Agricultural Chemical Skill Set* (4,245 enrolments in 2024).

Continuous learning through targeted units and skill sets can support workers' currency in identifying and managing risks in evolving workplace environments. Evidence published by Skills Insight (2025a) shows strong stakeholder interest in shorter-form training to support upskilling and reskilling, especially where there are lower time and cost barriers. However, delivery options remain constrained by limited funding and ongoing viability challenges for RTOs.

Safety training challenges and barriers

Significant barriers constrain the supply of safety training and its effective delivery:

- **Compliance over capability:** Safety training often emphasises compliance requirements over adaptive capability building for recognising and responding to workplace hazards.
- **Physical safety dominates:** psychosocial and cultural safety are addressed inconsistently, despite mounting obligations under WHS legislation and evidence of the benefits of inclusive and supportive workplaces.
- **Access barriers:** small enterprises, regional learners and priority cohorts face greater difficulty accessing training.

- **Leadership capability gaps:** Safety culture is fundamentally shaped by leadership at all levels. However, leadership competencies relating to safety, wellbeing and inclusion are not consistently embedded across qualifications and training delivery.

Where the current system falls short – and where opportunities lie

While technical safety is covered sufficiently in training products, there are gaps in workplace wellbeing and psychosocial risk management. Recently developed units have begun to address this gap, for example:

- *AHCSHG218 Maintain own health to promote personal wellbeing in the wool harvesting industry*
- *ACMGEN304 Promote positive wellbeing in self and others in animal care workplaces.*

However, there are opportunities to strengthen training products for:

- emotional intelligence and resilience skills (Skills Insight, 2025b)
- supporting employers to meet their obligations for addressing psychosocial hazards under WHS legislation (*ibid.*)

Opportunities also exist for JSC activities to:

- support RTOs in contextualising training and assessment materials for delivery in higher-risk and culturally diverse environments
- support teachers, trainers and assessors' access to capabilities development and resources for delivering leadership, wellbeing and resilience training
- develop Companion Volume Implementation Guides with sector-specific contextualisation information
- improve the assessment of knowledge and skills gaps among new entrants and career changers, drawing on JSA's forthcoming National Skills Taxonomy to evaluate skill transferability and highlight where gap training may be required for people to work safely in new contexts
- explore cross-JSC initiatives aimed at improving safety and wellbeing outcomes, including the potential development of shared resources or scalable approaches that could be applied across multiple industries
- research and develop a return on investment (ROI) 'formula' for employers using VET, including for safety, wellbeing and productivity outcomes
- support industry in advocating for greater funding and access to skill set delivery to help supply the right skills, at the right times, in the right places.

We're collecting your insights on the next steps for advancing safety and wellbeing

Improving safety and wellbeing requires collaboration and practical change that strengthens leadership, embeds safety skills and training, ensures accessibility and inclusion, and leverages data and evidence for informed decision-making.

The following priorities outline what needs to happen within the jobs and skills system to lead safer, more inclusive and resilient workforces. Each proposed action is paired with a consultation question to guide stakeholder input.



Outcomes are strongest when organisations lead using a holistic safety approach that addresses physical, psychosocial and cultural dimensions



Opportunity: Support industry and workplace leaders to drive both technical and cultural safety improvements, while equipping workers with leadership capabilities to embed safety and wellbeing practices across all levels of an organisation.



Question: How does your workplace or industry promote physical, psychosocial and cultural safety and wellbeing?

- *What works well and why?*



Opportunity: Enable collaboration between industry, RTOs and regulators to co-design and adopt practical resources that strengthen workplace safety and wellbeing.



Question: How can collaboration between industry, RTOs and regulators best support leaders in embedding a culture of safety and wellbeing across workplaces and industries?



Education and training are a foundation of safe work, equipping people with the knowledge and skills to prevent harm and respond effectively to risks.



Opportunity: Embed safety and wellbeing skills into relevant qualifications, tailored to the specific risks and requirements of industry.



Question: To what extent do current VET qualifications and units of competency prepare learners to manage safety and wellbeing risks?

- o *What works well, and where are the gaps?*



Opportunity: Formally recognise the value of safety skills gained through on-the-job learning and experience, so these capabilities can be transferred between occupations and industries.



Question: What forms of training (e.g. apprenticeships, micro-credentials, mentoring) are most effective for building and maintaining safe work practices?



Safety is the cornerstone of workforce inclusion, resilience and productivity, creating environments where all workers can participate and thrive.



Opportunity: Support employers – notably small and medium-sized enterprises – to embed structured diversity and inclusion initiatives that address varied employee needs.



Question: What practical actions or supports would help your workplace or industry better meet the safety and wellbeing needs of a diverse workforce (e.g. across age groups, cultures, abilities, or background)?



Opportunity: Support the uplift of cultural competence in the VET workforce for the delivery of safe, inclusive training.



Question: How can safety training be delivered and assessed in a more inclusive manner for different cohorts?

- *You may consider providing feedback on effective delivery for cohorts such as First Nations peoples, people with disabilities, people with low foundation skills, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and people living in regional, rural and remote areas.*



Robust data and evidence are essential for informed decisions that build a safer, more resilient workforce and enable targeted interventions where they matter most.



Opportunity: Enable workplaces and industry bodies to use data and evidence to identify safety and wellbeing trends, improve risk management and target training interventions that deliver measurable impact.



Question: What data or sources of information do you currently rely on to monitor and manage safety and wellbeing in your workplace or industry?

- *What gaps or limitations in the data make it difficult to understand risks or address inequities in safety and wellbeing?*



Opportunity: Align occupation and industry classifications with skills and VET frameworks so data can guide funding, regulation and workforce development priorities.



Question: What improvements to data collection, reporting, or use would most help your organisation, industry, or government develop better safety strategies and decisions (e.g. including priorities for education and training)?



Question: What other activities or projects not covered in your feedback above would help with leading a safer, resilient, inspired workforce?



Question: What does a 'safer, resilient and inspired workforce' look like in your industry five years from now?

Potential recommendations

Skills Insight invite stakeholder feedback (consultation questions are below) on draft recommendations for addressing systemic issues and enabling better safety outcomes.

Opportunity area	Enabler / Policy Lever	Action areas to explore
 Data and evidence systems	Integrate safety as a dimension of occupational and industry classifications and labour market data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ABS to consider workplace safety data when prioritising OSCA updates under its maintenance strategy. JSA to include workplace safety and wellbeing indicators in the National Skills Taxonomy (if developed).
 Qualification and training system levers	Embed safety and wellbeing capabilities in qualifications and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the TPOF 2025, require all qualifications to include explicit safety and wellbeing learning outcomes appropriate to occupational risk. Review/develop training products on emerging safety issues (e.g. psychosocial safety), including opportunities to

Opportunity area	Enabler / Policy Lever	Action areas to explore
		<p>import from training packages outside of Skills Insight's coverage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review VET trainer standards to ensure competencies in training and assessing safety, wellbeing and inclusive practices.
 Leadership	<p>Strengthen leadership capability to drive safety and wellbeing culture across workplaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and review the leadership capabilities required to support psychologically safe, inclusive workplace cultures.
 Industry and cultural change enablers	<p>Promote approaches and recognition systems that reinforce inclusive workplaces and training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene cross-sector safety, wellbeing and inclusion leadership forums and feed evidence into workforce planning guidance and policy recommendations.
Funding, incentives and program design	<p>Prioritise supporting or funding training in industries where safety education can markedly enhance performance and productivity, notably in industries such as agriculture and construction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for the use of safety data as criteria for the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List methodology.
Regulatory and governance alignment	<p>Ensure WHS intelligence informs skills and training policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a cross-agency working group (JSA, DEWR, Safe Work Australia, Skills Ministers, JSCs) to consider how to integrate safety data into workforce planning and training priorities.

Feedback

Feedback is being collected on this paper and the consultation questions from 28 January to 3 March 2026. For more information, visit the Skills Insight website.

