



AFAM ITAB

Agriculture, Food
& Animal Management

January - February 2026

In this newsletter

- New project to identify the true costs of VET delivery in regional NSW
- Engagement activities
- Educational Pathways Program Apprenticeship and Traineeship Head Start initiative
- New Retail Butchers and Smallgoods Project underway
- Please contribute: Jobs and Skills Australia OSL
- Smart and Skilled update
- Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant – Round 2 closing 28 February
- AgSkilled 3.0 update
- Richmond Agricultural Centre Construction Underway
- NSW Training Awards – nominations closing soon
- Working Together to Strengthen the Regional Agricultural Workforce
- Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) project updates
- NSW grants, opportunities and scholarships

Welcome to the first AFAM newsletter of 2026. We hope you had a safe and relaxing break over the holiday season. We wish you all the best for the new year and look forward to connecting with you to further understand your training issues and challenges. We will continue to advise the NSW Government on industry VET and skills related matters including those identified through stakeholder engagement in 2025 and outlined in the [AFAM Industry Training Priorities Report](#).

The NSW ITAB system has been reviewed over the last 18 months and there will be changes in the middle of the year. We will report more information on this as we receive it and as the year progresses. In the meantime, we remain focused on delivering outcomes for our stakeholders.

Please contact Ben if you would like to discuss your workforce development skills and vocational education and training needs at bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au.

Best wishes,
Ben
Executive Officer

New project to identify the true costs of VET delivery in regional NSW

AFAM will be conducting a new industry engagement project in the first half of 2026 to identify the true costs of Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivery in regional NSW. This work focuses on understanding the practical and financial realities faced by training providers operating outside metropolitan areas by identifying the full range of cost centres RTOs, employers and learners face in regional delivery.

AFAM will conduct in-depth interviews with a selection of RTOs that deliver training in regional communities. The project will also include surveying RTOs that deliver qualifications in meat processing in collaboration with the National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council Ltd. ([MINTRAC](#)). AFAM will explore the full range of pressures that affect training access, including staffing, travel, infrastructure, learner support and compliance requirements.

The findings will be used to develop clear and actionable recommendations that aim to improve equity and access to training for people and industry in regional areas. By identifying the range of costs experienced in regional delivery, a tripartite approach can be taken to re-designing the support systems used to fund the VET system in regional NSW.

AFAM looks forward to sharing the outcomes of this project with stakeholders as the work progresses.

Engagement activities

AFAM is continuing discussions with industry across a number of sectors including aboriculture, agtech, nursery, parks and gardens, and horticulture to develop school partnerships that offer career pathways experiences for students. These partnerships can provide domestic workforce solutions to address existing skills shortages. The Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) program is a key collaborator in these discussions.

Contact Ben at AFAM if you're interested in connecting with the RIEP program and schools or providing work experience opportunities to support new entrants.

[Learn more about RIEP.](#)



Students gain hands-on experiences and work opportunities in agriculture during RIEP programs.

Educational Pathways Program Apprenticeship and Traineeship Head Start initiative

The Educational Pathways Program (EPP) supports senior NSW public high school students to explore vocational options through the Apprenticeship and Traineeship Head Start initiative, which provides fee free prevocational training, work experience and a pathway into a school based or full apprenticeship or traineeship.

The program works with Group Training Organisations to help students build industry aligned skills and gain early exposure to real workplaces, while offering employers the chance to engage with their prospective future workforce. Employers can participate by offering work experience, industry immersion tours, invitations to events, mentoring, industry talks and employment opportunities for apprentices and trainees.

This is an opportunity to support local students while building your organisation's future workforce. Students arrive with several units of competency already completed, meaning they can spend more time learning on the job. This involvement also strengthens community connections and positions participating organisations as employers of choice for young people.

To get involved in the 2026 Head Start Program, [download the Employer Information Pack](#) from the website and contact Ben at AFAM bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au for advice and introductions to the EPP team.

New Retail Butchers and Smallgoods Project underway

Skills Insight and MINTRAC are undertaking a new project to update the Certificate III qualifications for retail butchers and smallgoods operators. This work aims to ensure training reflects contemporary job roles, regulatory requirements and the skills needed across modern industry settings. The project begins with workforce function analysis (WFA), which will help confirm trade roles, visa eligibility and emerging capability needs.

WFA workshops are an important opportunity for employers, industry professionals, registered training organisations and other stakeholders to shape how future training is designed. Participants will be invited to share practical insights about job roles, workflows and skills requirements so national training products remain relevant to real-world operations and future workforce demand. The following sessions are available for NSW-based stakeholders:

- Sydney - Tuesday 24 February
- Online - Thursday 5 March

[Learn more and register for a workshop.](#)

Please contribute: Jobs and Skills Australia OSL

Jobs and Skills Australia has invited you to take part in the Occupation Shortage List (OSL) Stakeholder Survey. Many government decisions at all levels start with consideration of the OSL, and the list depends on the feedback it gets from industry. The classifications are used in decision making for Smart and Skilled NSW Skills List funding. AFAM considers participation in the survey a valuable opportunity to contribute feedback and industry evidence to inform the next OSL.

You can get involved through the [Jobs and Skills Australia website](#) or through your industry peak body, and [Skills Insight](#) welcomes copies of contributions to enable them to support industry positions.

Survey closes 18 March 2026

[Learn more and have your say](#)

Smart and Skilled update

Have Your Say on Performance-Based Contracting

A reminder to participate in the survey to assist with performance-based contracting. Smart and Skilled is transitioning to a new performance-based contracting model to improve clarity and support quality outcomes for students. Providers are invited to complete a short survey to share experiences and help shape the transitional model. Your feedback will guide future engagement activities and inform upcoming reforms.

If your organisation has not received an email requesting you to complete the survey or if you have further questions, **please contact your Regional Provider Support Manager.**

Update: Financial cap management for 2025–26

The NSW Department of Education has increased flexibility for Smart and Skilled providers for the remainder of the 2025–26 activity period. Providers may request to transfer financial caps across regions or programs, or convert continuing student only caps to allow new commencements, where this supports Critical Skills Areas, National Skills Agreement priorities, thin markets, market gaps or students experiencing disadvantage.

All requests must be submitted through an Approved Qualifications Activity Schedule Adjustment form in STS Online under Smart and Skilled Contract Management. Providers are encouraged to review the full Financial Cap Management Framework and contact their Regional Provider Support Manager with any questions.

Read more in the [Smart and Skilled update](#).

Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant – Round 2 closing 28 February

The Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant promotes diversity, innovation and service responsiveness in the NSW workforce. The Grant contributes funding towards the salary and development of First Nations employees in NSW Public Service Agencies or Local Government Authorities promoting education, employment and training outcomes for First Nations people.

There are several grant elements available including:

Adult Apprenticeships and Traineeships (AAAT) – up to \$40,000 to support the creation of employment of an AAAT. Learners must be a minimum 21 years of age to be eligible.

Permanent Ongoing Employment – up to \$40,000 to support the creation of permanent employment.

Round two applications close 28 February 2026. [Learn more about the grant.](#)



AgSkilled 3.0 update

AgSkilled program outcomes for July to December 2025

The AgSkilled program supported strong training activity in the second half of 2025. A total of 1369 people were approved for training, with 1123 commencing and 990 completing their course. This reflects an 88 per cent completion rate.

Participation was diverse, with 24 per cent female participants, 21 per cent under the age of 25, 7 per cent identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and fewer than 1 per cent identifying as having a disability. Training was delivered across 445 courses and 138 locations, covering 273 endorsed units of competency and 105 endorsed skillsets.

Livestock accounted for most enrolments at 65 per cent, followed by production horticulture at 17 per cent, grains at 15 per cent and fibre (cotton) at 3 per cent.

Newly endorsed units

Two additional livestock units have been added to the AgSkilled endorsed course list to support the poultry industry:

- **AHCLSK403 Develop feeding plans for an intensive livestock production system**
- This unit of competency describes the skills and knowledge required to develop feeding plans for an intensive livestock production system.
- **AHCLSK424 Implement and monitor animal welfare programs** - This unit of competency describes the skills and knowledge required to develop feeding plans for an intensive livestock production system.

For more information visit the [AgSkilled website](#).

Richmond Agricultural Centre Construction Underway

Construction is now underway on the new Richmond Agricultural Centre in Western Sydney, marking a major step forward for school to industry pathways in agriculture and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The purpose-built facility will offer modern classrooms, science laboratories and farming infrastructure, and will be co located with Western Sydney University to create clear links between school, vocational education and higher education.

The new location provides a long-term home for agricultural learning. The Centre will continue to operate in partnership with Richmond High School strengthening access to practical learning, exposure to industry, and opportunities to engage with agricultural specialists and tertiary partners. Agricultural STEM selective students and Agricultural STEM specialty students will attend the centre three days per week and Richmond High School two days per week.

AFAM notes that this investment is significant for domestic workforce solutions, particularly as demand grows for skilled workers in agricultural science, farm operations, data and technology, and sustainability disciplines. The integration of school programs with vocational training pathways supports long term workforce development by preparing young people with the skills needed across agriculture and related industries.

Learn more about the [Richmond Agricultural Centre](#).

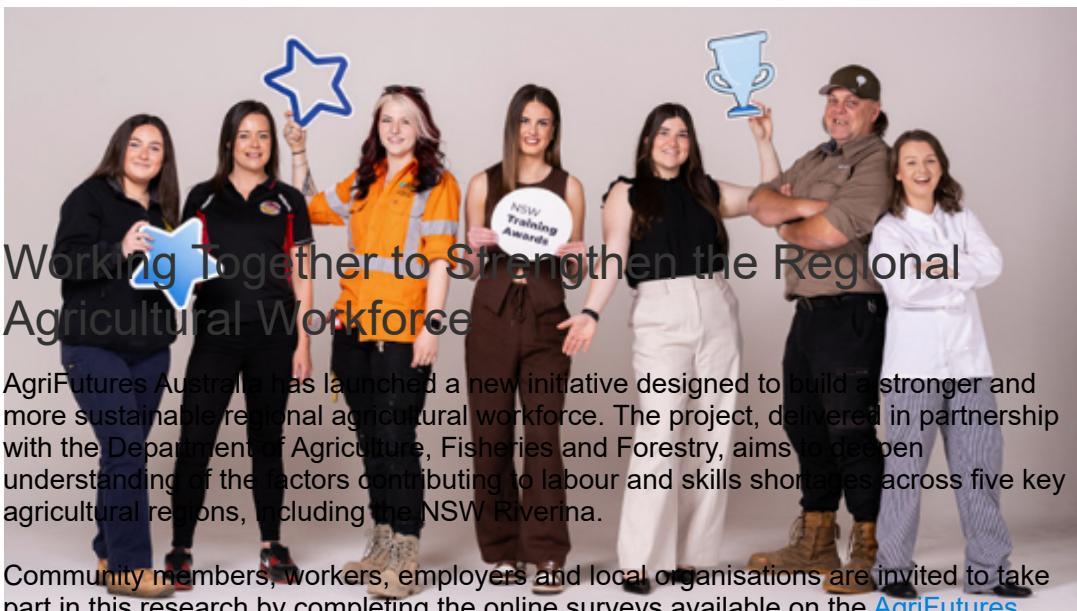
NSW Training Awards nominations closing soon

Applications for the 2026 NSW Training Awards are still open for the Organisation category. This is the 71st year for the awards celebrating vocational education and training (VET) in NSW and are a great way to receive recognition for the effort that employers and Registered Training Organisations put into VET.

The NSW training awards honour and reward the achievements of students, Trainers/Teachers, Registered Training Organisations and both large and medium employers. As well as providing the opportunity to celebrate achievements and hard work, entering the awards raises the profile of organisations and showcases their commitment to VET.

AFAM encourages stakeholders to nominate as a way to help raise the profile of industry and the value of vocational education and training programs. Nominations close for organisations 27 February 2026.

Learn more about the [NSW Training Awards](#).



Working Together to Strengthen the Regional Agricultural Workforce

AgriFutures Australia has launched a new initiative designed to build a stronger and more sustainable regional agricultural workforce. The project, delivered in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, aims to deepen understanding of the factors contributing to labour and skills shortages across five key agricultural regions, including the NSW Riverina.

Community members, workers, employers and local organisations are invited to take part in this research by completing the online surveys available on the [AgriFutures Australia website](#). Your insights will help shape practical workforce strategies that support regional industries now and into the future. [Access the survey](#) and [read more about the project](#).

Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) project updates

Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance (MISA) JSC have published their [2025 Workforce Plan \(WFP\)](#). The 'Make it ManuFACTuring' campaign to reshape public perceptions of manufacturing is exceeding expectations with more than 480 submissions having been made through the 'Find your Fit' profile tool and thousands of visitors to the campaign website. The initiative targets young Australians, showcasing the industry as modern, innovative, and future-focused and it aims to inspire career interest and boost apprenticeship uptake. Visit the interactive website at www.makeitmanufacturing.com.au.

Skills Insight JSC is exploring how the jobs and skills system can better support a safer, more inclusive and resilient workforce and adapt to shifting workforce conditions across agribusiness, fibre, furnishing, food, animal and environment care industries. You're invited to [help shape how this work progresses](#). Feedback is being collected from **28 January to 3 March 2026** and will inform the next Workforce Plan.

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

Project Planning:

- [Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations](#) (in Animal Care and Management)

Development Stage:

- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)

Broad Consultation:

- [Attraction and Retention Guidance](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Rural Operations](#) (project recommencement in planning)
- [Veterinary Nursing Skills and Qualification Review](#)

Consensus Gathering:

- [Vet Workforce Project](#)

Finalisation:

- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Essential Meat Processing Skills](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)



NSW grants, opportunities & scholarships

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

[2026 Hay Inc Rural Education Program](#): An opportunity for young people to gain new agricultural skills, education and experience in industry.

[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.

[Conservation Partners Grants](#): provide financial assistance for landholders managing conservation agreement areas to improve the biodiversity value of their properties.

[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.

[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.

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

Please feel welcome share this newsletter with anyone you think might be interested.

If you have been forwarded this email and would like to stay up to date with news from NSW AFAM ITAB, you are welcome to subscribe to our mailing list.

[Subscribe](#)



AFAM works in collaboration with Skills Insight.



AFAM is supported and funded by the NSW Government.

Copyright © 2025 Skill Insight Ltd, All rights reserved.

AFAM NSW ITAB
bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au
PO Box 7133, East Ballina, NSW 2478

[Unsubscribe](#) from the AFAM newsletter list.