



AFAM ITAB

Agriculture, Food
& Animal Management

May 2026

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AFAM continues to hear the stories of resilience that underpin the strength of our industries, even as many sectors navigate difficult conditions. Expanding drier conditions across large areas of NSW, fuel supply disruptions, rising costs of living and persistent workforce shortages are placing pressure on businesses, communities and regional economies.

Despite these challenges, industry stakeholders across agriculture, food and animal management are adapting, supporting their workforces and maintaining production. AFAM ITAB remains committed to working alongside industry, government and training partners to ensure workforce and skills responses remain practical, responsive and fit for purpose.

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

Project update - Identifying the true costs of RTO delivery in regional NSW

As part of this project, select NSW registered training organisations (RTOs) were invited to provide feedback to help identify the true costs of delivery in regional NSW

through interviews, structured questionnaires and site visits. AFAM's partner in this project, [MINTRAC](#) (National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council), obtained additional feedback through distribution of the questionnaire at a national RTO forum covering the meat processing sector.

As a result of feedback, AFAM has identified the cost centres relating to variations in delivery between metropolitan and regional NSW. A project report will be submitted to NSW Government in June and provide recommendations to incorporate these costs into flexible funding models and improve the efficiency and accessibility of regional training delivery.

For more information contact Ben at AFAM, bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au

Engagement activities

AFAM thanks the training providers and learners who welcomed us during recent visits where a wide range of approaches to delivering quality training in regional areas was demonstrated. Stakeholders included Australian Agricultural Training Company delivering shearing qualifications at Ballot Box Farm in Yeoval and Squad Training delivering pork production qualifications from Albury-Wodonga and across the Riverina. In other areas, Fusion Walan Miya in Merimbula delivering parks and gardens, conservation and ecosystem management qualifications, and Tocal delivering a wide range of agriculture, horticulture and conservation and land management qualifications and specialised AgSkilled short courses.

AFAM also attended industry events discussing current and emerging training needs linked to the [2025 AFAM Industry Training Priorities report](#). The Australian Vocational Education and Training Conference provided useful insights into registered training organisation challenges, as well as the work of Jobs and Skills Councils on national workforce planning and project initiatives.

An Industry Training Advisory Body meeting with the Department of Education's Industry Workforce Programs team in Parramatta also brought together Training Services and Department representatives to discuss workforce challenges, training system performance and emerging priorities across sectors. A challenge across multiple industry sectors includes the delivery of training in regional areas and digital skills are recognised as a priority across sectors.



During the site visit to Australian Agricultural Training Company. L-R: Wool Harvesting Coordinator Janice Behsmann, Trainer and Assessor Melissa Armstrong, students Jack Phillipson and Jack Gadsby, Ben and Managing Director John Dwyer.



Meeting with Tocal College staff members Sally Friese and Julie White for valuable discussion informing the true costs of RTO delivery project.



L-R: Department of Education Sarah Hayes, Pamela Novo (ACFIPS ITAB), Debbie Joyce (ATB ITAB), Mellissa Wortman (U&E ITAB), Jackie Zelinsky (SkillsIQ ITAB), Leon Drury (MSkills ITAB), Ben (AFAM), Susan Snowcroft (CSH ITAB), Tim Cleary (Forestworks ITAB) and Department of Education Gail Silman.

Smart and Skilled update

Performance-based contracting model

A phased approach is being taken as part of the Skills Plan commitment to develop a new Performance-Based Contracting (PBC) model. The department is beginning a gradual implementation of the Smart and Skilled PBC transitional model to establish a strong foundational structure. Key pillars of the existing model, including the NSW Quality Framework and the performance assessment process, will continue to be maintained throughout this transition. The transitional phase will not impact the 2026-27 Smart and Skilled contract review process.

For more information, read the [Smart and Skilled update](#).

AgSkilled 3.0

AgSkilled continues to deliver strong outcomes across regional NSW, with more than 2,400 participants approved for training. In just nine months, almost 800 courses have been delivered across 177 locations, helping industry access practical, targeted training where it's needed most.

AFAM recently explored AgSkilled training demand in regional NSW with the Tocal College team at Yanco and ProTen team members who identified a need for vehicle, machinery and safety training across the Riverina. Ben also met with Callum Champagne, the CEO of Grow The Future based in Bega. The program supports young people through a horticultural social enterprise model.

With the recent [extension of AgSkilled](#), NSW primary producers now have more opportunities to strengthen on-farm workforce capability.

Explore the [endorsed list of courses and units of competency](#) or contact Ben at AFAM, bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au for further information.



AFAM Executive Officer Ben Holmes with Callum Champagne, CEO of Grow The Future.



L-R: Tocal Business Development Officer Vicki Mangan, National Human Resources Manager Meagan Carey and Natalie O'Leary from Proten, Ben Holmes.

Changes to the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive Scheme

The Australian Government has announced changes to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System that will take effect from 1 January 2027. The changes are designed to target support towards national workforce priorities and smaller employers, while reshaping how apprenticeship incentives are distributed.

- Employer incentive payments will reduce
The Key Apprenticeship Program Employer Incentive will reduce from up to

- \$5,000 to \$4,000 for eligible occupations from January 2027.
- Support will focus more on small and medium employers
Large employers with 200 or more employees will no longer be eligible for some incentive programs, although Group Training Organisations will remain eligible.
- Priority occupations may change
The Australian Apprenticeships Priority List will be reviewed to better align with workforce shortages and government priorities. This may affect which occupations across agriculture, food and related industries remain eligible for support.
- Current arrangements will continue for existing apprentices
Grandfathering provisions mean apprentices who commence before 1 January 2027 will remain under current arrangements.

AFAM will continue to monitor developments and share updates that help stakeholders understand the implications for workforce planning, skills priorities and apprenticeship pathways across the agriculture and food sectors.

[Learn more about the changes.](#)

NSW Government investment in aquaculture

Recently, the NSW Government and industry have invested \$20 million across NSW aquaculture.

The government announced \$14.3 million for South Coast aquaculture businesses, followed by a further \$5.7 million investment in Shoalhaven projects spanning oyster, kelp and seafood production.

The funding aims to boost production and productivity, enhance sustainability and create more jobs and economic growth. The funded projects include technology upgrades, processing capability and new product development under the NSW Aquaculture Vision Statement.

Learn more about the [\\$14.3 million South Coast investment](#), the [\\$5.7 million Shoalhaven investment](#) and [NSW Aquaculture Vision Statement](#).

Rural adversity mental health program

The challenges facing regional and rural areas can place strain on individuals, families and workplaces, particularly during extended periods of uncertainty. The Rural Adversity Mental Health Program (RAMHP) supports people across regional, rural and remote New South Wales by providing information, education and connections to mental health support services. RAMHP works with communities to build awareness, strengthen local support networks and help people access practical assistance when needed.

Visit [RAMHP](#) to learn more about the resources, programs and support available.

National campaign to raise awareness of quality RPL

The Australian Government has launched the Real Skills Deserve Real Recognition campaign to raise awareness of quality Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and help maintain trust and integrity across the VET sector.

The campaign provides practical resources to help learners, employers and registered training organisations understand what quality RPL looks like, identify warning signs of poor practice, and make informed decisions about recognising existing skills and experience.

By promoting robust assessment processes, the campaign aims to support confidence that qualifications reflect genuine capability and real workplace skills.

Learn more and access campaign resources at the [Your Career website](#).



Bert Evans scholarship - Applications open

The Bert Evans apprentice scholarships are a NSW Government-run program offering grants of \$5,000 annually up to three years to help applicants overcome personal barriers to finish their apprenticeships and go onto rewarding careers. The scholarship program is named in honour of the late Bert Evans AO, a passionate advocate of vocational education for more than 30 years.

Scholarships are open to NSW registered apprentices in both metropolitan and country areas, including school-based apprentices who have demonstrated: hardship in their personal circumstances capability for vocational education and training that leads to successful completion of their trade training a positive attitude and application in workplace and formal training.

Applications close 30 September 2026. [Learn more](#).



Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) project updates

Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance (MISA) JSC continues to work with the food and beverage sector to support workforce development across manufacturing through [Australia's Food Manufacturing Capability & Future Needs](#) project. The project will involve a deep analytical assessment of Australia's current and future food manufacturing capability, mapping the sector's capacity today and identifying what will be required by 2050 to support Australia's long-term food security and sovereign capability.

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

Project Planning:

- [Ag Trade Apprenticeship Qualification](#)
- [Biosecurity Skills Review](#)
- [Improved Training Pathways and Safety in Racing](#)
- [Retail Butchery and Smallgoods](#)

Development Stage:

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

Broad Consultation:

- [Landscaping Skills Review](#)
- [Rural Operations](#)
- [Veterinary Nursing Skills and Qualification Review](#)

Consensus Gathering:

- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Vet Workforce Project](#)

Finalisation:

- [Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations](#) (in Animal Care and Management)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)



NSW grants, opportunities and 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](#): financial assistance for landholders managing conservation agreement areas to improve the biodiversity value of their properties.

[Continuing Apprentices and Trainees Placement Service \(CAPS\)](#): 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 three 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](#).

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AFAM NSW ITAB

bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au

PO Box 7133, East Ballina, NSW 2478

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