

JSC Stakeholder Forum Communique

22 April 2026

The first Skills Insight Stakeholder Forum meeting for 2026 was held at the Novotel Melbourne Airport, on Wednesday 22 April 2026. Present at the meeting were Forum representatives, Board members, representatives from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and Jobs and Skills Australia.

Address from Minister Giles

The Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training, was unable to make the meeting in person but provided a pre-recorded message to the Forum. The Minister highlighted the importance of supply chain resilience and food security in light of global conflict, alongside ongoing skills shortages. He stressed the value of forums like this in capturing stakeholder expertise to develop practical solutions.

Industry Advisory Panels (IAPs)

The Forum discussed the intent of the IAPs to strengthen industry engagement, improve consistency, transparency and accountability, and clarify how advice is captured to inform decision-making. Feedback was received from members, including general support for the intent of the IAPs noting that proposed amendments should be worked on.

Address from the Timber, Furnishing and Textiles Union (TFTU)

National Secretary Michael O'Connor spoke to the correspondence from the TFTU, raised the importance of genuine tripartite engagement and suggested amendments to the IAP's Terms of Reference.

Project Development Framework

The Chair confirmed that the final decision-making responsibility for determining which projects are submitted to DEWR will move from the CEO to the Board. The Forum endorsed the new framework with its intent to:

- strengthen early and structured industry engagement
- focus on identifying industry problems and co-designing solutions
- position IAPs as central to evidence gathering and project development
- ensure transparency through robust supporting evidence for proposals
- clarify the roles of IAPs, the Forum, partners and the Board
- shift toward industry-initiated rather than internally generated projects.

Project submissions

Members discussed a series of industry-specific issues connected to the proposed projects. Members endorsed all proposed projects for consideration by the Board, noting that further work was required on identified projects to go back to their respective networks.

Project strategy to 2028

The Forum supported the proposed *Project Strategy to 2028* and the associated framework for prioritisation and funding allocation. Members emphasised the importance of maintaining flexibility, transparency, and strong industry engagement.

Strategic matters including research and advocacy agenda

Members discussed a broad range of issues connected to the strategic priorities for Skills Insight over the next 6-12 months, including research priorities, policy engagement, and areas for advocacy.

Workforce planning direction

Members noted and supported the workforce planning updates and were invited to provide final comments on the distributed (embargoed) *Workforce Plan 2026-2027*.

DEWR performance metrics

The Chair outlined the performance monitoring approach for the JSC Program.

Presentation from Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)

Dr Simon Booth provided an overview of JSAs role in delivering independent labour market advice and maintaining datasets to inform workforce planning, including employer surveys, projections, and regional analysis. Members raised concerns that official data does not always reflect industry experience, particularly in sectors with informal recruitment practices or reliance on migration, which may mask underlying shortages.

Action register

Action	Owner	Status update
Following the June Board meeting, Skills Insight will circulate the revised IAP Terms of Reference and discuss the changes with each member.	CEO	Engagement continues with TFTU and Forum members to finalise changes to the IAP Terms of Reference.
Aquaculture project proposals to move to Networks, or to undergo further work, based on Forum feedback.	Executive Director Skills Strategies	The Aquaculture Network has convened and proposed delaying the projects for further work.
Skills Insight Board to make the final determination on which projects will be submitted to DEWR for the May round.	Board	Board meeting in June
Next Forum to receive a broader overview of completed, underway, and proposed projects across each sector.	CEO	This item will be included on the next Forum agenda
Skills Insight to further investigate deeper analysis across each of the 13 sectors.	CEO	This item is underway

Summary of industry insights discussion

Outlined below is a capture, in no particular order, of conversations and insights relevant to the agenda and specific to some or all sectors from the day's sessions.

- **Workforce resilience in seasonal and shock-exposed industries:** build a stronger evidence base on workforce composition, productivity, and risk exposure to support proactive – not reactive – policy decisions.
- **Continuity of employment and skills portability:** support skills-based, cross-industry workforce pathways that improve continuity of employment and industry resilience.
- **Ageing workforce and succession support:** research age-related workforce risks and promote models that support safe participation, mentoring, and skills transfer across the workforce lifecycle, including through workplace-based training and school-based apprenticeships
- **Address weak industry demand and training market failures:** identify where training gaps exist, which levers (policy, funding, delivery models) are most effective to address them, and explore impactful projects (founded on place-based evidence from [Exploring Training Demand and Supply Challenges](#) research and other sources).
- Seasonality of work opportunities
 - **Horticulture:** regional exposure to migration programs and potential productivity risk. Workforce composition needs to be better understood. Large migrant and **PALM** scheme worker cohorts are important, but they can mask underlying problems. We need to boost local workforce supply to mitigate against shocks such as COVID and the fuel crisis, which expose supply chain pressures and potentially fragile migrant labour supply. The *JSA Food Supply Chain Capacity Study* recommended quicker visa approvals, but that is not seen as a robust solution. The evidence base needs to be stronger to protect against reactive decision-making – this could be a Skills Insight focus.
 - **The Harvest Trail Scheme** – an Australian Government initiative that connected workers with agricultural jobs, helping growers fill seasonal labour shortages – discontinued in 2024. What lessons could we take from a review of its efficacy, both for horticulture and other seasonal industries.
 - **The cotton industry** has explored job/role sharing with the sugar industry.
 - **National Skills Passport** and other resources could support workers to find appropriate employment across seasons, regions and industries to enable employment and industry resilience – requires articulation of transferable skills.
 - Can we explore productivity profiles for seasonal labour forces?
- **Chicken meat sector**
 - Barriers to school-based apprenticeships continue.
 - Emerging discussions on age group-related tasks: What is appropriate for different age groups, especially to protect younger workers/learners?
- **Cotton**
 - Research on participation, attraction, retention is a priority.

- Impact of an ageing workforce – what is being done to support knowledge transfer to apprentices and trainees?
- **Forestry**
 - Ageing workforce, skills exiting the sector, productivity drop are critical issues.
 - The JSC needs to adequately scope projects, especially when seeking to support small and medium enterprises, because there are various local/state-based resources and support mechanisms that may be ignored. We need to ensure we are filling a gap.
 - Need to keep people in regional communities and skill them
- **Conservation and ecosystem management**
 - TAFE has stopped delivering many qualifications, which requires industry to work with private RTOs to get any delivery. Small industries struggle to gain traction. Fee-free TAFE has downstream consequences that should be understood.
- **National Farmers' Federation**
 - Demands for new and emerging skills is a critical issue and age-related discrimination continues to be an issue. Interested in exploring what adjustments need to be made to accommodate workers at all ages.
- **Australian Workers Union**
 - Ageing workforce and skills transferability remain priority issues.
 - Concerns remain with labour hire licensing and the need to remove bad actors who cause a drain on workforce productivity and retention. JSCs can play a supportive role in such matters of 'industry stewardship'.
- **Animal care and management**
 - Regional, rural and remote workforce, low training (high travel costs for practical work for learners and RTOs).
 - Licensing issues (e.g. pet groomers need to do 5 days).
 - School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships, career guidance, improved information clarity on training pathways.
- **Racing and Breeding**
 - TAFE delivery in thin markets is not matching need.
 - Pre-vocational training is reducing and therefor reducing pathways.
 - Equine veterinarian shortages has a big impact on welfare, which threatens industry survival.
- **Textile, Clothing and Footwear**
 - Local procurement from governments could support our sector as the volume of work is important for workforce resilience and sovereign capability.
 - Similar issues to forestry and wood product and pulp and paper industries.
- **Additional comments**
 - Empower industry with evidence. Needs to be predictive, including modelling based on industry-supported data.
 - Skills Insight and industry need arrangements to share/access data.
 - Government agency data improvements could be triggered by better industry data. Skills Insight will present industry data beside government data to show difference and encourage improvement across the board.

- Issues include regional centres and travel for block release; for example, NT students must go to TAS for glass training. Learners are often young and the rates don't account for financial burdens like petrol.
- Local training is often not an option -
- Skills Insight has a broad industry coverage and there is a risk of losing the detail on sectors and reinforcing data gaps. Greater depth of sector-specific analysis is needed.
- Need to address industry classification (ANZSIC) shortcomings; for example, there is no delineation between the chicken meat and eggs industries. Need better mapping and classification influence.
- JSA to work with Skills Insight to support industry in providing input to the Occupation Shortage List (OSL).
- Lack of representation on OSL because jobs aren't advertised on mainstream websites and therefore are under-represented in collections and in JSA SERA contact. Skills Insight industries are more impacted than other industries: lower job demand signals ⇒ less training incentives.
- Stakeholders interested in completion rates data across variables (including regions).



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