

Building Australia’s Next Sewing Machinist Workforce
A discussion paper on a nationally coordinated pathway into industrial sewing work

August 2026

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Executive summary

Australia's Sewing Machinist workforce is small, ageing and difficult to replace. Employers across the textile, clothing and footwear manufacturing, furnishing, upholstery, automotive trimming and marine trimming sectors continue to report difficulty finding people with the industrial sewing skills required for their specific machinery, materials, products and production processes.

The challenge is not simply a lack of training. Existing training is unevenly available, participation in the most directly relevant Industrial Sewing Skill Set remains low, and many potential learners need a supported transition from first contact with industrial sewing through to productive work. Employers also need practical support to recruit, supervise and retain new entrants.

This discussion paper proposes a **National Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Workforce Development Initiative**. The initiative would be nationally coordinated and locally delivered through selected pilot sites. Its purpose would be to create a more reliable pathway into industrial sewing work by linking employer demand, recognised training, production practice, workplace coaching, learner support and sustained employment outcomes.

The proposed initiative has three connected streams:

1. **Employer and union engagement and partnership**
Employers, unions and industry bodies would identify local workforce needs, define relevant entry-level skills, contribute to program design, support job and career promotion activities and provide workplace opportunities.
2. **Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway**
Learners would move through a staged pathway that may include career information and tasters, preparation and selection, nationally recognised foundation training, a production bootcamp, structured workplace learning or paid employment, specialist progression and follow-up support.
3. **Workplace Coach and Supervisor Pathway**
Experienced sewing machinists and related workers would be supported to coach new entrants during workplace learning and early employment. Their role would focus on technical instruction, safety, quality, production expectations and workplace adjustment.

The proposed pathway is intended to be accessible to school leavers, career changers, jobseekers, returning workers, people with informal or overseas sewing experience, migrants, refugees, women and other people who may face barriers to entering work. A Wraparound Service Provider would support learner engagement, practical participation needs, workplace English, settlement, confidence, transition into work and retention.

This discussion paper proposes that pilots be selected based on local employer demand, industry concentration, employer and union commitment, access to industrial equipment and RTO capacity, learner supply, support capability and local partnership readiness. Each pilot would adapt the pathway to local industry demand while operating within common national quality, employment and evaluation principles.

The paper seeks stakeholder advice on the pathway design, specialist streams, timeframes, employer commitments, workplace learning standards, coach arrangements, learner supports, governance, funding, and evaluation. The co-design process will inform a final design and implementation plan for possible pilot delivery.

1. Purpose of this paper

This discussion paper proposes a nationally coordinated pathway into industrial sewing work, co-designed with employers, unions, and other stakeholders. It draws on two recent research reports commissioned by TextileWorks under the New Entrants Sewing Machinist Project. These are:

1. *Demand and Supply of Sewing Machinists in Australia.*
2. *Review of Training Programs and Initiatives for Entry-Level Sewing Machinists.*

These reports identify a small and ageing Sewing Machinist workforce, continuing recruitment pressure for employers, limited access to skilled migration, and an uneven training pipeline. They also identify a wide range of Australian and international programs that demonstrate how entry-level industrial sewing training can be more effectively linked to workplace experience, paid employment and long-term workforce development.

This paper does not present a final program design. It provides a proposed framework for discussion and co-design. Its purpose is to test whether a nationally coordinated and locally delivered initiative could strengthen the supply of new entrants to Sewing Machinist work across textile, clothing and footwear (TCF), automotive and marine trimming, furnishing and upholstery, leather, canvas and related sewn-product sectors.

2. What is proposed for co-design

This paper sets out a proposed direction for a National Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Workforce Development Initiative. It is not a final program design. The purpose of the co-design process is to test the proposal with workers, employers, unions, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), social enterprises, community organisations, governments and other stakeholders, and to develop a practical model that can be piloted in selected locations.

Some elements of the proposal are intended to be fixed. These include:

- An entry-level training pathway for sewing machinists that connects job and career information, entry-level training, production practice, workplace learning and transition into employment or further training.
- Training on industrial sewing equipment and exposure to real or realistic production work.
- Meaningful employer and union involvement in identifying skills needs, workplace requirements and local demand.
- Safe, fair and structured workplace learning arrangements.
- Access to nationally recognised training, recognition of prior learning and clear progression options.
- Appropriate learner support, including support for people facing language, transport, caring, settlement, financial or other barriers to participation.
- A focus on employment, retention, progression and employer satisfaction, rather than enrolments or completions alone.
- National coordination, common quality standards and consistent evaluation, combined with local flexibility in delivery.
- Articulation and credit transfer arrangements that provide graduates of the foundation skill set access to and advanced standing in higher level nationally recognised qualifications
- Multiple exit points that enable learners to access paid employment, work placements or further education and training.

Other elements are proposed for stakeholder consideration and may be adapted through co-design. These include:

- The mix of tasters, preparation, foundation training, production bootcamps, workplace placement and paid employment.
- The duration and delivery mode of each stage.
- The most suitable training products, including the Industrial Sewing Skill Set, Certificate II units and sector-specific qualifications.
- The appropriate role of RTOs, employers, unions, social enterprises, Group Training Organisations, community organisations and employment services in each location.
- The specialist streams that should be available in regions, such as apparel, textile products, leather, canvas, furnishing, upholstery, automotive trimming or marine trimming.
- The practical requirements for Workplace Coaches, learner-support arrangements and employer participation.
- The funding and co-investment arrangements needed to make the pathway sustainable.

The proposed pilot sites are intended to test these design features across diverse industry and regional settings. The co-design process should identify what must be nationally consistent, what should be locally adaptable, and what should be evaluated through pilot delivery before a larger-scale model is adopted.

3. Why consider a national initiative?

Sewing Machinists are a relatively small, predominantly female and ageing workforce. The occupation is concentrated in manufacturing and related production settings, but industrial sewing capability is also needed in apparel and uniforms, technical textiles, textile products, canvas and marine products, leather goods, furnishing and upholstery, and automotive trimming.

The demand-and-supply research undertaken for this project indicates that the occupation has experienced a long-term decline in employment, which has reduced the pool of experienced workers available to companies. As a result, even modest recruitment activity can create significant difficulties for individual businesses, particularly where they need workers with experience in specific materials, machinery, products or production processes.

The research also indicates that:

- The direct VET pipeline for industrial sewing is small and unevenly distributed.
- The Industrial Sewing Skill Set is the most directly relevant entry-level program, but enrolments have been low and concentrated in a small number of locations.
- The Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles has a much larger learner base, but it is a broad, multi-stream qualification and only a minority of learners undertake the key industrial-sewing unit.
- Related qualifications in upholstery, automotive and marine trimming, leather production and textile products can develop relevant capability, but their graduates are not automatically job-ready Sewing Machinists.
- Mainstream skilled migration provides very limited access to overseas Sewing Machinists.
- Existing programs are most effective where training is connected to industrial equipment, realistic production work, workplace learning, employer involvement and transition into paid employment.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the workforce challenge is not simply to deliver more training. It is to create a supported pathway from first engagement through to productive employment and specialist industrial-sewing capability.

4. The Proposed National Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Workforce Development Initiative

The proposed National Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Workforce Development Initiative would be a five-year national workforce-development project, initially delivered through selected local pilot sites.

It would combine:

- National coordination, quality assurance and evaluation.
- Promotion of Sewing Machinist jobs, careers and employment options.
- Ongoing employer and union engagement and local workforce planning.
- Accessible and flexible entry and exit points for potential new workers.
- Nationally recognised industrial-sewing training skill sets or qualifications.
- Production bootcamps using real or realistic work.
- Structured workplace training.
- A parallel pathway for Sewing Machinist Workplace Coaches and Supervisors.
- Specialist progression routes across TCF, automotive finishing and furnishing industries.
- Employment, retention and progression measures.

The initiative would be nationally consistent but locally responsive. It would use a common industrial-sewing foundation while allowing pilot sites to focus on local demand in apparel, textile products, leather, canvas, upholstery, automotive trimming, marine trimming or related sectors.

5. Proposed national and local structure

5.1 National coordination

TextileWorks, or a similar industry-facing body, could act as the National Workforce Pathways Coordinator. This body would not manage every learner or workplace placement. Its role would be to provide the national framework, support local pilots and ensure that the initiative is evidence-based, consistent and continuously improved.

Potential national functions include:

- Establishing national governance and a stakeholder steering group.
- Developing the pathway framework, guidance materials and quality standards.
- Supporting pilot-site selection and local partnership development.
- Developing employer-engagement tools and partnership agreements.
- Supporting the use of relevant nationally recognised training products.
- Developing workplace learning plans, coach resources, and learner tools.
- Establishing a common data collection and evaluation framework.
- Sharing lessons between pilot sites.
- Reporting outcomes and recommending future scale-up options.

5.2 Local pilot-site management

Each pilot site would have a Local Pathways Lead responsible for local implementation. Depending on the location and industry base, this role could be undertaken by a:

- State or Territory industry training advisory body.
- Employer body or industry association.
- Trade union

- Regional industry organisation.
- Group Training Organisation.
- RTO or training consortium.
- Social enterprise with a focus on TCF or TCF-related industries
- another organisation with strong local industry, workforce-development or community building capability.

The Local Pathways Lead would build local employer and union commitment, coordinate delivery partners, recruit and select learners, arrange workplace placement opportunities, facilitate the provision of wraparound services for learners and report outcomes to the National Workforce Pathways Coordinator.

5.3 Roles and responsibilities

The initiative requires clear responsibilities across national coordination, local delivery, training, workplace participation and learner support. The following arrangements are proposed for co-design.

Partner	Main responsibilities
National Workforce Pathways Coordinator	Establish national governance and quality standards; support pilot selection; develop common resources, partnership templates and learner tools; coordinate data collection and evaluation; share lessons across pilot sites; and report on outcomes and options for scale-up
Local Pathways Lead	Coordinate the local partnership; engage employers and unions; identify workforce demand and specialist streams; recruit and support learners; coordinate RTO, workplace and learner-support partners; arrange workplace opportunities; monitor local delivery; resolve issues; and report to the National Workforce Pathways Coordinator
Employer	Identify workforce needs and suitable entry-level roles; advise on machinery, materials, products and production requirements; provide workplace exposure, work placements, interviews or employment where possible; nominate Workplace Coaches; provide safe supervision; and give feedback on learner readiness and pathway relevance
Trade union	Contribute worker knowledge and advice on job roles, workplace conditions, career paths and safety; support worker participation in co-design; assist in promoting the pathway; provide advice on fair workplace participation; and help identify issues affecting sustainable employment and retention
RTO	Deliver and assess nationally recognised training; ensure trainers, assessors, equipment and learning resources are fit for purpose; support recognition of prior learning where appropriate; work with employers to align training with local requirements; maintain training records; and participate in learner-progression discussions
Wraparound Service Provider	Engage potential learners through trusted networks; identify practical and personal support needs; provide or arrange language, literacy, transport, caring, settlement, wellbeing and employment support; help learners transition into training and work; and maintain appropriate support contact during early participation and retention stages
Workplace Coach	Induct learners into the work area; demonstrate tasks; explain safety, quality and production requirements; observe early work; provide feedback; gradually increase task complexity and independence; and identify issues that require employer, RTO or learner-support intervention
Learner	Participate in training and workplace activities; follow safety and workplace requirements; communicate support needs; engage with agreed learning and progression plans; and provide feedback on the pathway experience

The Local Pathways Lead should be the primary point of coordination for each learner. It should ensure that the employer, RTO, Workplace Coach and Wraparound Service Provider understand their respective roles before a learner begins workplace learning or employment.

Where a concern arises about safety, supervision, participation, progress or learner wellbeing, the Local Pathways Lead should coordinate an appropriate response in consultation with the relevant

employer, RTO, learner-support provider and, where appropriate, the union. Urgent safety, workplace rights, or wellbeing concerns should be referred immediately to the organisation responsible and authorised to address them.

5.4 Selecting pilot sites

Pilot sites should be selected through an expression-of-interest process. Selection should be based on:

Criterion	Evidence required
Sewing Machinist employment	Substantial local or regional employment in Sewing Machinist or relevant industrial-sewing work
Employer demand	Employer evidence of current or expected recruitment, replacement need or difficulty finding suitable workers
Employer commitment	Commitments of employers to participation in work placements job and career exhibitions, interviews, traineeships or employment
Industry mix	Relevance to TCF, furnishing, upholstery, leather, canvas, automotive trimming or marine sectors
Training capacity	Access to suitable industrial equipment, RTO delivery, assessors, trainers and relevant training products
Local management capacity	A capable Local Pathways Lead with industry relationships, project-management capability and connections with community and wraparound service providers
Learner supply	Access to potential entrants through schools, employment services, community organisations, career-change, migrant, refugee and womens' networks
Support capacity	Availability of language, literacy, transport, settlement, caring, wellbeing or employment support where needed
Sustainability	A realistic plan for employer, union, RTO and other stakeholder participation, co-investment and continuation beyond pilot funding
Funding	Capacity to attract sustained co-funding from government, private and philanthropic sources

Initial pilot sites should be considered in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, subject to demonstrated demand and local partnership capacity. The final selection should be based on evidence of employer need and local partnership readiness rather than State / Territory representation alone.

5.5 Preferred characteristics of pilot-sites

Pilot sites should test the proposed pathway in locations with demonstrated employer demand and a realistic local partnership capable of supporting learners from initial engagement through to employment or further training.

The final size and structure of each pilot should be determined through co-design. However, an indicative pilot site may include:

- A defined local or regional industry cluster with current or expected demand for entry-level Sewing Machinists or related industrial-sewing workers.

- A Local Pathways Lead with strong industry relationships, project-management capability and links to community and support providers.
- A group of employers representing the relevant industry cluster or specialist stream.
- Union involvement in worker co-design, workplace-rights advice, promotion and ongoing pathway review.
- An RTO with access to industrial sewing equipment, appropriate trainers and assessors, and scope to deliver the relevant nationally recognised training.
- A Wraparound Service Provider or network of providers that can engage learners and support practical, language, settlement, caring, wellbeing and transition needs.
- A defined specialist focus for the first learner group, such as apparel and uniforms, textile products, canvas and marine, leather and heavy materials, furnishing and upholstery, or automotive and marine trimming.
- A learner-recruitment strategy using schools, employment services, community organisations, migrant and refugee networks, women's networks, career-change channels and other relevant local sources.
- Confirmed opportunities for industry exposure, production projects, workplace learning, interviews, employment, traineeships or apprenticeships.
- Agreed local arrangements for learner progress, workplace coaching, data collection, feedback and issue escalation.

Pilot sites should begin at a scale that is manageable for local employers and partners. The intention is to test a high-quality pathway, not to maximise enrolments before the local partnership has demonstrated its capacity to support learners successfully. Initial learner groups may be relatively small, particularly where the pathway is being tested with a new specialist stream, a dispersed industry base or learners requiring substantial support.

Pilot sites should regularly review their delivery model. This review should consider learner completion, workplace progression, employer feedback, coach capacity, support needs, employment outcomes and the sustainability of the partnership before expansion is considered.

6. Proposed model

The National Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Initiative would comprise three connected streams.

Stream	Purpose	Main participants
1. Employer and union engagement and partnership	Establish demand, secure commitments and keep delivery linked to real jobs	Employers, trade unions, industry bodies, Wraparound Service Provider, Local Pathways Lead, National Workforce Pathways Coordinator
2. Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway	Prepare and support new entrants into industrial sewing work	National Workforce Pathways Coordinator, Local Pathways Lead, RTO, Wraparound Service Provider, and learners - this may target specific or mixed learner groups - school leavers, adult career changers, jobseekers, women, returning workers, people with related or overseas skills, refugees, migrants or vulnerable learners

3. Workplace Coach and Supervisor Pathway	Support experienced workers to coach entrants during workplace learning and early employment	National Workforce Pathways Coordinator, Local Pathways Lead, Employers, RTO, Trade Union, and Experienced sewing machinists, trimmers, upholsterers, leather workers, supervisors and team leaders
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6.1 Employer and trade union engagement and partnership

6.1.1 Overview

Employer and trade union engagement should be the foundation of the initiative, rather than an activity added after training begins. Before learner recruitment or training commences, the Local Pathways Lead should engage employers and unions to identify workforce needs, likely vacancies, specialist skill requirements and workplace-learning capacity.

Employers and unions may contribute in different ways, according to their capacity. Participation could include:

- Identifying current or expected vacancies and replacement needs.
- Advising on entry-level skills, machinery, materials, products and quality standards.
- Hosting workplace visits or contributing to career-information sessions.
- Providing samples, production projects or technical input for training and bootcamp activities.
- Offering work placements.
- Identifying real workplace tasks for inclusion in training programs.
- Nominating workplace coaches when learners enter their company.
- Providing feedback on learner readiness and the relevance of training.
- Advising on job roles, career paths and workplace rights and conditions.

Employer and union commitments should be proportionate. For example, smaller businesses may contribute through a factory visit, a guaranteed interview, one placement, technical advice or participation in an employer reference group. Unions may provide strategic advice, facilitate worker co-design of the initiative and participate in program promotion.

Employer and union engagement should continue throughout the initiative through regular workforce discussions, local employer reference groups, feedback after placements and reviews of training and specialist-stream content.

6.1.2 Suggested employer and union engagement timeframe

A pilot site should allow **up to three months** for initial employer engagement and partnership development before recruiting its first learner group. This period should be used to promote the initiative, provide information on Sewing Machinists jobs and careers, identify demand, establish the local partnership, secure employer and union commitments, and confirm the first specialist stream(s).

Employer and union engagement should then remain active throughout the pilot. The Local Pathways Lead should maintain regular contact with participating employers and unions and undertake a formal demand and partnership review at least every six months.

Employer-engagement phase	Suggested timeframe	Main activities
Initial promotion and outreach	Months 1-2	Industry briefings, employer meetings, site visits and information through industry networks

Demand confirmation and partner recruitment	Months 2–3	Identify vacancies, replacement needs, priority skills, potential placements and employer contributions
Partnership agreements and pilot readiness	Month 3	Confirm employer commitments, form employer reference group, nominate likely Workplace Coaches and finalise local delivery arrangements
Ongoing partnership management	Throughout pilot	Regular employer contact, learner-progress updates, placement planning and feedback
Formal employer-demand review	Every 6 months	Review vacancies, specialist skills, placement capacity, coach capacity and future cohort requirements

6.2 Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway

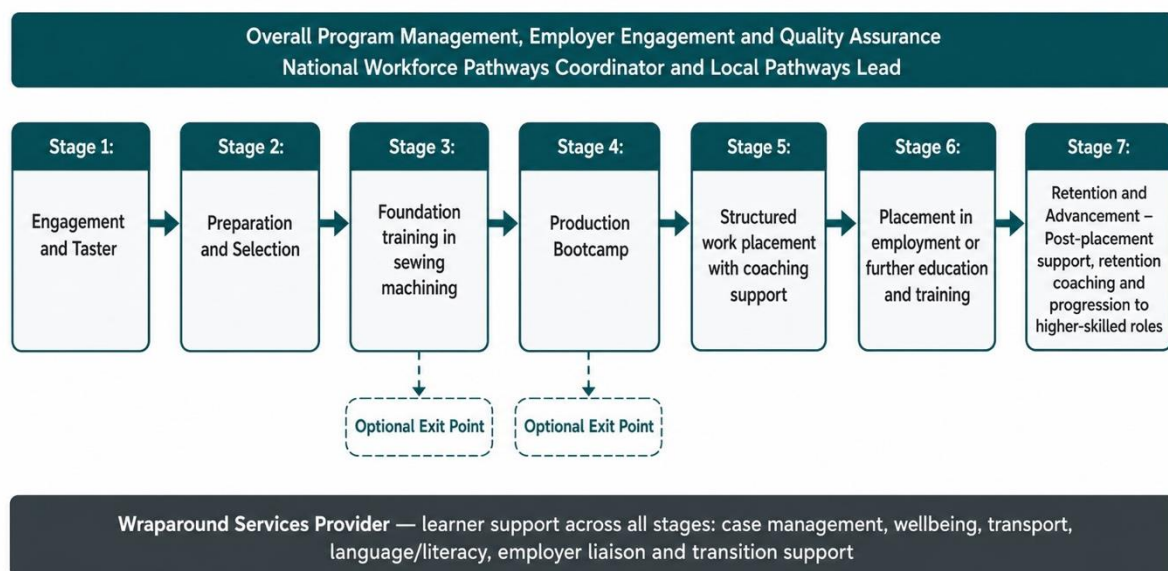
6.2.1 Overview

The entry-level pathway, outlined in the table and diagram below, is proposed as a flexible, staged route into industrial sewing work. It should be open to specific or mixed learner groups, including school leavers, adult career changers, jobseekers, women, returning workers, people with related or overseas skills, refugees, migrants, or vulnerable learners.

Stage	Activity	Intended outcome	Suggested timeframe
1. Engagement and taster	Career information, workplace visits and practical industrial-sewing tasters	Informed applicants who understand the work	2–5 days, or up to 2 weeks where delivery is part-time
2. Preparation and selection	Workplace readiness, learner support, skills screening and recognition of existing experience	Learners ready for participating in nationally recognised foundation training in sewing machining	1–4 weeks, depending on learner needs
3. Foundation training in sewing machining	Skill Set that may comprise - Industrial Sewing Skill Set and / or selected Certificate II units where needed	Nationally recognised foundation industrial-sewing capability	4–6 weeks full-time equivalent
4. Production bootcamp	Realistic or live production work focused on speed, quality and workflow	Learners ready for workplace production	2–6 weeks full-time equivalent
5. Structured workplace placement with coaching support or entry to employment	Structured work placement or paid employment	Workplace capability confirmed by employer	4–12 weeks for a placement; ongoing where an employment arrangement begins

6. Placement in employment or further education and training	Transition into ongoing work and /or further training in Certificate II, apprenticeship or traineeship in sewing machining or sector-specific capability	Employment or structured education and training program	12-24 months for enrollment and completion of full nationally recognised qualification ie Certificate II /III; ongoing where an employment arrangement begins
7. Retention and advancement	Follow-up and further skill development	Retention and progression at six and 12 months	Follow-up at 1, 3, 6 and 12 months after employment or enrollment in a nationally recognised qualification

Entry Level Sewing Machinist Pathway



6.2.2 Suggested Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway timeframe

The timeframes proposed below are indicative. A pilot should allow for variation based on local industry needs, the specialist stream, learner readiness, part-time delivery, and the availability of paid workplace opportunities. Information on the duration of key stages of the program should be collected and tested during pilot delivery.

Stage 1: Engagement and taster

The pathway should begin with short industrial-sewing tasters, normally lasting two to five days. Tasters should provide practical exposure to industrial sewing machines, materials, production work, quality standards and workplace conditions.

They should include:

- Basic industrial sewing activities.
- Factory visits or employer presentations where available.
- Information about wages, work conditions, safety and career opportunities.
- Information about the difference between domestic and industrial sewing.
- Initial identification of learner-support needs.

Tasters should support informed choice, not act as an exclusionary test.

Suggested timeframe: Two to five days of direct delivery. Where delivered through schools, community organisations or part-time settings, the activity may be spread across one to two weeks.

Stage 2: Preparation and selection

This stage should help participants who need additional support before formal training. It may include:

- Transition from domestic to industrial machines.
- Basic fabric handling, accuracy and sewing confidence.
- Workplace English, literacy, numeracy and production vocabulary.
- Work health and safety.
- Workplace communication, work rights and employment expectations.
- Transport, caring, settlement or wellbeing referrals where needed.
- Recognition of informal, overseas or related sewing experience.

Selection must be fair and accessible and should be informed by employers and unions. It should consider learner motivation, interest in production work, safe-work behaviour, willingness to learn and support needs. It should not require formal qualifications or prior Australian work experience unless genuinely required by the intended job.

Suggested timeframe: One to two weeks for learners who are work-ready, with up to four weeks available for learners needing additional confidence-building, language, literacy, numeracy or settlement support.

Stage 3: Nationally recognised foundation training in sewing machining

There should be a common foundation, nationally recognised Skill Set. This could be the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set and may be supplemented by selected units from MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles, or other relevant nationally entry-level qualifications, depending on local employer needs.

The foundation Skill Set should focus on:

- Safe operation of industrial sewing equipment.
- Threading, adjustment, cleaning and routine machine maintenance.
- Material and component handling.
- Basic stitching, seam quality, alignment and finishing.
- Basic machine maintenance.
- Reading simple job sheets and production instructions.
- Quality checking, defect identification and rework.
- Production workflow, teamwork and workplace communication.
- Basic problem-solving and safe work practices.

Training should occur on industrial equipment and use realistic production tasks. Learners should receive a skills record that identifies the machines, materials, products and sewing operations they have completed.

Suggested timeframe: The foundation stage should normally not exceed six weeks full-time equivalent before the learner moves into production bootcamp, workplace learning or another agreed progression pathway.

Early exit option: Learners who are ready may move into paid employment, a traineeship, apprenticeship or further sector-specific training after this stage.

Stage 4: Production bootcamp

The production bootcamp should help learners translate basic competence into workplace-ready performance. It should use live commercial work, social-enterprise production, industry projects or realistic production simulation.

The bootcamp should focus on:

- Speed and consistency.
- Quality control and fault correction.
- Production workflow and task sequencing.
- Working to job sheets, tolerances and deadlines.
- Teamwork and communication.
- Reliability, attendance and production discipline.
- Exposure to locally relevant materials and products.

At this stage, learners should identify an intended specialist direction, based on their interests, capability and local employment opportunities.

Suggested timeframe: Two to six weeks full-time equivalent. The shorter period may suit learners who have already demonstrated strong industrial sewing skills. The longer period may suit learners preparing for more demanding materials, production standards or specialist streams.

Early exit option: Learners ready for work may move directly into employment, a traineeship, an apprenticeship, or a workplace placement.

Stage 5: Structured workplace placement

Learners who continue to this stage undertake a structured work placement.

Structured work placements should be time-bound, linked to genuine learning outcomes, and connected to a credible employment opportunity.

Before a learner starts a structured work placement, the Local Pathways Lead, employer and the RTO should agree on a workplace learning plan. This should identify:

- Outcomes to be achieved.
- Initial tasks and expected progression.
- Time frame.
- The nominated Workplace Coach.
- Feedback and review points.
- The learner-support contact outside the workplace.

Suggested timeframe: Four to twelve weeks.

Stage 6: Employment and specialist progression

Learners should transition into employment or a full, nationally recognised qualification that matches their workplace experience and local sector demand.

Potential specialist streams include:

Stream	Typical products and materials
Apparel and uniforms	Garments, workwear, uniforms, woven and knit fabrics
Textile products and technical textiles	Bags, bedding, covers, protective products and technical textiles
Leather and heavy materials	Leather goods, footwear components and heavy sewn products
Canvas and marine	Canvas, PVC, awnings, shade products, covers and marine products
Furnishing and upholstery	Upholstery fabrics, vinyl, leather, cushions and furniture covers
Automotive and marine trimming	Vehicle and vessel interiors, seating, covers, trim and panels

Progression options may include ongoing employment, traineeships, apprenticeships, Certificate II or Certificate III qualifications, gap training, or social-enterprise employment where local commercial employment is limited.

Suggested timeframe: This will vary depending on the learner's progression route. It could be 12-24 months for learners enrolled in a full nationally recognised qualification, i.e. Certificate II /III; and might be ongoing where the learner exits to paid employment

Stage 7: Retention and advancement

The Local Pathways Lead should provide follow-up after employment or placement in a nationally recognised qualification at 1, 3, 6, and 12 months.

Support may include:

- Referral for additional technical training.
- Language, literacy, wellbeing or employment support.
- Career advice and progression planning.
- Employer feedback and problem resolution.
- Referral to specialist training or qualification pathways.

The purpose is to improve retention and support progression beyond initial entry-level work.

Suggested timeframe: Follow-up should occur at one month, three months, six months, and twelve months after the commencement of employment, a traineeship, an apprenticeship, or a placement. Additional support may be provided where an employer or learner identifies a risk to retention.

6.2.3 Minimum employer commitments before learner intake

A learner group should not begin foundation training until the Local Pathways Lead has confirmed sufficient local employer demand and workplace participation to provide credible progression opportunities for learners.

The exact number of participants required to commence a pilot program should be determined by the Local Pathways Lead in consultation with local stakeholders and may vary by local industry structure. However, each pilot should normally demonstrate:

- Evidence of current or expected recruitment, replacement demand or a defined need to develop entry-level industrial sewing capability.
- A group of participating employers.
- Employer advice on the core machinery, materials, products, tasks, safety requirements and production standards that should inform training.
- Commitments to practical industry exposure, such as factory visits, guest sessions, production projects, technical advice or provision of samples and materials.
- Identified workplace opportunities, which may include structured placements, paid work trials, interviews, traineeships, apprenticeships or entry-level employment.
- Enough nominated or potential Workplace Coaches to support learners entering workplaces.
- Employer participation in learner-progress feedback and pathway review.
- Agreement to the Workplace Participation Charter - Appendix 3.

Small businesses should be able to participate in ways that match their capacity. For example, a small manufacturer may provide a factory visit, one workplace placement, technical advice, a production project, a guaranteed interview or a contribution to an employer reference group. The objective is not for every employer to provide every form of support. It is for the local partnership to provide enough workplace exposure and employment opportunity to justify learner recruitment.

The Local Pathways Lead should review employer commitments before each new learner intake and should not recruit beyond the realistic training, coaching and workplace capacity available in the local partnership.

6.3 Workplace Coach and Supervisor Pathway

6.3.1 Overview

The Workplace Coach and Supervisor Pathway runs alongside the Entry Level Sewing Machinist Pathway. It develops company-based workers to support new entrants once they begin a workplace placement, traineeship, apprenticeship or employment.

Workplace Coaches are not expected to recruit learners, deliver off-the-job training, provide case management or attend unnecessary external meetings. Their role focuses on helping learners become safe, productive, and confident in their own workplace.

Stage	Activity	Intended outcome	Suggested timeframe
A. Employer and union nomination	Employer and union identify a suitable experienced worker	A Workplace Coach is available before learner commencement	During employer partnership stage; confirmed before placement starts
B. Recognition and preparation	RPL, gap training and short practical coaching preparation	Recognised technical capability and readiness to coach	1–6 weeks, flexible and largely completed before learner placement
C. Workplace coaching	Coach supports the learner during placement or early employment	Safe and supported transition into workplace production	Active during first 4–12 weeks of placement or early employment; reduced as learner becomes independent
D. Review and feedback	Coach provides short feedback on learner progress and workplace needs	Informed learner progression and pathway improvement	Brief reviews at commencement, midpoint and end of placement; additional review at 3 months of employment where needed
E. Knowledge transfer and continuing development	Coach contributes practical knowledge and receives refresher support	Stronger workplace capability for future entrants	Ongoing, with optional quarterly peer support or annual refresher activity

6.3.2 Workplace Coach involvement

Workplace Coaches are not required to participate in learner recruitment, off-the-job delivery, program administration or broad employer-engagement activities. Their role begins when the learner enters their workplace.

Learner stage	Workplace Coach involvement
Employer engagement and demand confirmation	No involvement required, except where the employer wishes to seek technical advice informally
Learner engagement and taster	No involvement required, except for optional short workplace demonstrations or visits
Preparation and learner selection	No involvement required
Accredited foundation training	No involvement required
Production bootcamp	No involvement required, except for optional technical input where practical
Workplace placement, traineeship, apprenticeship or employment	Active workplace coaching and technical support
Post-placement retention	Limited feedback at agreed review points only

6.3.3 Workplace Coach preparation

Workplace Coaches should receive short, practical preparation in:

- Demonstrating industrial sewing tasks.
- Working with employer to establish reasonable work goals for the learner ie: volume and type of work that can reasonably be expected
- Explaining safety, quality and production requirements.
- Providing clear feedback.
- Supporting learners with limited workplace English or Australian work experience.
- Identifying when additional support is required.
- Using simple learner progress tools.
- Referring matters to the employer, RTO or Workforce Pathway Coordinator.

Where appropriate, experienced workers should be supported to gain recognition and gap training toward a relevant Certificate III qualification.

6.3.4 Suggested timeframe:

Coach preparation should normally involve one to three days of practical training, which may be delivered in short sessions around production schedules. RPL and any Certificate III gap training may occur over a longer flexible period before or alongside the first learner placement.

6.3.5 Workplace Coach role

During placement or early employment, the Workplace Coach should:

- Induct the learner into the work area.
- Demonstrate machinery, materials, tasks and quality expectations.
- Observe early work and correct errors.
- Gradually increase task complexity, pace and independence.

- Explain workflow, job sheets and production requirements.
- Give practical feedback.
- Help the learner adjust to workplace routines.
- Refer issues requiring external support.

The coach does not act as a counsellor. This is the role of the Local Pathways Lead, in collaboration with the RTO trainer or employment service provider. The employer and Local Pathways Lead should ensure that coaches have sufficient time to support learners without compromising critical production responsibilities.

6.3.6 Suggested timeframe

Coaches should provide their most intensive support during the learner's first one to two weeks in the workplace. Support should then reduce progressively over the following period as the learner develops competence, confidence and independence. The exact period should reflect the complexity of the work, the material type, the production requirements, and the learner's prior experience.

6.3.7 Workplace Coach review and knowledge transfer

At the end of each workplace-learning period, the coach and employer should provide short feedback to the Local Pathway Coordinator and RTO.

Coaches may also contribute to simple workplace resources, such as:

- Visual task guides.
- Quality samples.
- Machine-setting notes.
- Common-defect guides.
- Safety and ergonomic instructions.
- Product-specific workflow notes.

This helps preserve specialist knowledge as experienced workers retire or move on.

Feedback should consist of no more than short reviews at the commencement, midpoint, and completion of a placement. When the learner enters ongoing employment, an additional brief review should occur at approximately 3 months. Knowledge-transfer resources can be developed progressively as part of normal workplace improvement activities, rather than as a major additional task for coaches.

6.3.8 Learner support

As discussed in the ensuing section, wraparound support should be provided by specialist providers. This support may include language, literacy and numeracy assistance, workplace English, transport, caring, settlement support, career guidance, work-rights information and wellbeing referrals. This ensures that Workplace Coaches can focus on technical and workplace support rather than case management.

7 Wraparound services

A Wraparound Service Provider would work alongside the Local Pathways Lead, RTO, employers and Workplace Coaches to help learners enter, complete and remain connected to the Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway. Its role would be particularly important for learners who are new to Australian workplaces, have limited confidence or recent workforce experience, or face practical barriers to participating consistently in training and employment.

The provider could be a community organisation, social enterprise, employment service, migrant or refugee service, women's organisation, or another specialist local provider with trusted links to the intended learner group. It should provide support outside the workplace, allowing Workplace Coaches to focus on technical instruction, production standards and day-to-day workplace adjustment.

Possible functions include:

- Reaching and engaging potential learners through community, employment, school, migrant, refugee, women's and career-change networks.
- Helping participants understand industrial sewing work, workplace conditions, wages, safety requirements and career options before they enter training.
- Identifying support needs at entry and developing a simple learner-support plan with the learner and Local Pathways Lead.
- Assisting with practical barriers such as transport, caring responsibilities, work clothing, digital access, financial stress, attendance routines and access to appropriate services.
- Providing or arranging workplace English, language, literacy and numeracy support, including sewing and production vocabulary, job-sheet language and communication with supervisors.
- Providing orientation to Australian workplace expectations, work rights, respectful workplace behaviour, safety responsibilities and employment conditions.
- Supporting learners to build confidence, manage transitions between training and work, and resolve issues early before they lead to withdrawal or job loss.
- Maintaining appropriate contact with learners during workplace placement, early employment, traineeships or apprenticeships, while respecting employer responsibilities and workplace processes.
- Referring learners to specialist services where issues require more intensive support, including settlement, health, family, financial, disability, housing or wellbeing assistance.
- Supporting follow-up at one, three, six and 12 months to improve retention, identify further training needs and assist learners to progress into ongoing employment or recognised qualifications.

Wraparound support should operate across the full Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway. It should not be treated as a separate service that begins only when a learner has trouble. Early and practical support can improve participation, completion, transition into work and retention. The level and type of support should reflect each learner's circumstances and should be agreed with the learner. Support should be culturally safe, strengths-based and designed to build independence rather than create unnecessary dependency.

Pathway stage	Possible wraparound support
Stage 1: Engagement and taster	Outreach through trusted community, school, employment, migrant, refugee, women's and career-change networks; accessible information about industrial sewing work; support to attend tasters; explanation of wages, workplace conditions, safety and career options; and early identification of support needs
Stage 2: Preparation and selection	A learner-support discussion and simple support plan; workplace English, literacy and numeracy support; confidence-building; transport, caring, financial or settlement referrals; recognition of overseas or informal experience; and support to understand workplace expectations and work rights
Stage 3: Foundation training	Attendance support; help with transport, work clothing, digital access or materials where needed; workplace English and production vocabulary; study support; communication with the RTO; and early intervention where a learner is struggling with confidence, safety, attendance or personal circumstances

Stage 4: Production bootcamp	Support to manage the transition to production pace and workplace-style routines; reinforcement of communication, teamwork and problem-solving; practical assistance to maintain attendance; and preparation for workplace interviews, placements or paid work
Stage 5: Workplace placement or entry employment	Pre-placement orientation; assistance with transport, work clothing, documentation and workplace communication; regular but proportionate contact during the early transition; support to resolve practical issues; and referral where more intensive assistance is required
Stage 6: Employment and specialist progression	Career advice; support to enrol in further training; assistance to understand progression options; support with workplace communication and confidence; and coordination with the employer and RTO where further skill development is required
Stage 7: Retention and advancement	Follow-up at agreed points; early identification of risks to retention; referral for additional technical training, language support, wellbeing or employment assistance; career planning; and support to move into more skilled work or recognised qualifications

The Wraparound Service Provider should work closely with the Local Pathways Lead but should not replace the employer's responsibilities for supervision, workplace safety and employment conditions, the RTO's responsibility for training and assessment, or the Workplace Coach's responsibility for technical support. Its function is to help learners overcome barriers that may otherwise prevent them from entering, completing or remaining connected to the pathway.

8 Possible roles of social enterprises

Social enterprises may play an important role in the Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Pathway, particularly in locations where they have established industrial sewing capability, trusted relationships with potential learners or access to real production work.

Depending on local circumstances, a social enterprise may act as one or more of the following:

- A community-engagement partner that reaches potential learners through trusted relationships with women, migrants, refugees, disadvantaged jobseekers or other groups underrepresented in industrial sewing work.
- A provider of introductory sewing, confidence-building or pre-vocational activities that help learners decide whether industrial sewing is a suitable career pathway.
- A host for production bootcamps, using live commercial work, customer orders or realistic production projects to develop quality, speed, workflow, teamwork and production discipline.
- A workplace-learning or transitional-employment setting for learners who need a supported step between formal training and a commercial production workplace.
- An employer that provides paid work, earn-and-learn arrangements or progression into commercial employment.
- A Wraparound Service Provider that offers mentoring, language support, practical assistance, workplace orientation or links to specialist services.
- A Local Pathways Lead where the organisation has sufficient employer relationships, delivery capacity and workforce-development capability.

Social enterprises should be included because they can combine industrial production, learner support and trusted community engagement in ways that are difficult to replicate through training delivery

alone. However, they should not be expected to absorb the full cost of training, learner support, equipment, coaching or wages through commercial revenue. Where a social enterprise contributes to the pathway, funding arrangements should recognise the full cost of its training, support, coordination and employment functions.

The role of social enterprises should be determined locally. In some areas, they may provide a central delivery setting. In others, they may be most effective as a referral, support or transition partner within a broader employer-led pathway.

9 Proposed measures of success

The initiative should be evaluated using employment and workforce outcomes, not enrolments alone. Measures should include:

- Number and diversity of employers engaged.
- Employer commitments to workplace exposure, placements, interviews and jobs.
- Learner engagement, completion and transition to workplace learning.
- RPL and qualification outcomes for Workplace Coaches.
- Paid employment, traineeship and apprenticeship outcomes.
- Retention at six and twelve months.
- Progression into specialist roles or further qualifications.
- Employer satisfaction and repeat participation.
- Participation and outcomes for priority learner groups.
- Capacity of pilot sites to sustain delivery beyond the initial funding period.

10 Next steps

The proposed next step is a structured co-design process involving workers, employers, RTOs, industry associations, unions, social enterprises, community organisations, state and territory bodies and government agencies across the TCF, automotive finishing and furnishing sectors. A framework of questions to guide this process is provided in Appendices 1 and 2.

The co-design process should:

- Test the proposed framework,
- Identify suitable pilot sites,
- Confirm employer demand and commitments,
- Refine the learner and coach pathways,
- Test the proposed timeframes,
- Assess governance arrangements
- Inform an implementation plan
- Gather employer support for the co-designed pathway for entry-level sewing machinists.

The central proposition for discussion is:

A nationally coordinated but locally delivered initiative could create a more reliable pathway into Sewing Machinist work by linking employer demand, recognised training, production practice, workplace coaching and sustained employment outcomes across the TCF, automotive finishing and furnishing industries.

Appendix 1 - Co-design Questions - Stakeholders

The following questions seek stakeholder advice on the skills, training design, workplace support and learner supports needed to develop an effective entry-level sewing machinist pathway.

Employer demand, pilot sites and employer-engagement timeframe

- Which regions and industry clusters have the strongest current or expected need for entry-level Sewing Machinists?
- What evidence should be required before a pilot site is established?
- Is an initial employer-engagement period of three to six months realistic for building local partnerships, confirming employer demand and securing workplace commitments?
- What employer commitments are realistic for SMEs, medium-sized manufacturers and larger businesses?
- What level of employer engagement should be required before a learner cohort begins training?
- How often should local employer demand, placement capacity and specialist skill requirements be reviewed?
- Which sectors should be included in the first pilot sites?

Entry-level pathway design and timeframes

- Is MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set the appropriate common national foundation skill set?
- What additional units or capabilities should be included in the foundation stage skill set?
- Are the proposed timeframes for the learner pathway realistic: two to five days for tasters; one to four weeks for preparation; two to six weeks for foundation training; two to six weeks for production bootcamp; and four to 12 weeks for structured workplace learning?
- Should the foundation and bootcamp stages be delivered intensively, part-time, in blocks or through a blended model?
- What is the appropriate balance between RTO delivery, social-enterprise production and employer-based learning?
- What should be the minimum requirements for workplace learning, paid work trials, traineeships, apprenticeships or employment arrangements?
- At what point should learners be able to exit early into work, further training or another pathway?
- Should there be alternative exit points as highlighted in the model?

Specialist streams

- Which specialist streams should be available nationally, and which should only be offered where there is local employer demand?
- What bridging training is required when workers move between apparel, technical textiles, leather, canvas, upholstery, automotive trimming and marine work?
- How can existing qualifications and skill sets be used more effectively without creating unnecessary new training products?

Workplace Coaches and timeframes

- What technical experience and workplace capability should be required of Workplace Coaches?

- Is one to three days of practical coach preparation realistic and sufficient before a coach supports a new entrant?
- What recognition-of-prior-learning and Certificate III gap-training arrangements should be available for experienced workers who become Workplace Coaches?
- Is a flexible RPL and gap-training period of up to six weeks appropriate, given production requirements and the availability of experienced workers?
- Is intensive coach support during the learner's first one to two weeks, followed by reducing support over two to 10 weeks, realistic for different sectors and production environments?
- How can employers protect coach time while maintaining production requirements?
- What short progress-review points are practical for coaches, employers and learners?

Learner access and support

- Which learner groups should be prioritised in each location?
- What supports are needed to enable participation by women, young people, mature-age workers, migrants, refugees and people returning to work?
- How can the model remain accessible while ensuring learners understand the reality of production work?

Governance, funding and evaluation

- What national governance arrangement would provide industry confidence and accountability?
- Which organisations are best placed to act as the National Workforce Pathways Coordinator?
- Which organisations are best placed to act as Local Pathways Leads?
- What funding model should support training, learner support, workplace coordination, coaching and employer participation?
- Which measures should determine whether the pilot is successful and ready for expansion?
- Is a five-year pilot period realistic / appropriate for establishing, testing and evaluating the initiative, or should different implementation timeframes be considered?

Appendix 2 - Co-design questions - Experienced Sewing Machinists

The following questions seek advice from Experienced Machinists on the skills, training design, workplace support and learner supports needed to develop an effective entry-level sewing machinist pathway.

Starting the job

1. What should a new Sewing Machinist know or be able to do before starting work?
2. What machines, materials or sewing tasks should a beginner learn first?
3. What mistakes do new workers often make? How could training help them avoid these mistakes?
4. Besides sewing, what other skills does a new worker need? For example, checking quality, following job sheets, working with others or keeping up with production.

Safety and machine care

5. What safety skills should every new Sewing Machinist learn before using an industrial sewing machine?
6. What basic machine care and simple fault-checking should a new worker be able to do, and when should they ask for help?

Training before work

7. What should a learner be taught before they start in a workplace?
8. The program includes a short production bootcamp after the first training stage. Learners would practise making real products, or products like those made at work, to improve their speed, accuracy and quality. Do you think this would help new Sewing Machinists? What should they practise, and how long should the bootcamp run?
9. Do you think the proposed length of the program is realistic for new workers? The model includes short tasters, 2–6 weeks of foundation training, 2–6 weeks of production practice, and 4–12 weeks of workplace learning. What should be shorter, longer or different?

Learning at work

10. What is the best way to teach a new worker in a sewing workplace?
11. What can only really be learned by working in a sewing workplace?
12. How long does it usually take for a new worker to become safe, confident and reasonably productive?

Job readiness and performance expectations

13. What does “job-ready” mean in your workplace? What level of quality, speed, reliability and independence should a new Sewing Machinist reach before they are considered ready?
14. How should a learner’s progress be checked during training and workplace learning? What evidence would show that they are ready to move to the next stage?

Workplace coaching

15. What makes someone a good workplace coach for a new Sewing Machinist?
16. What would a workplace coach need from the employer to help a new worker properly? For example, time away from production work, clear instructions or support from a supervisor.

Support and inclusion

17. What extra help might be needed by workers who have sewing experience but do not speak English confidently or have not worked in an Australian workplace before?

18. What personal or practical problems might make it hard for a new worker to stay in training or work? For example, transport, family responsibilities, money, language, confidence or fitting into a new workplace. What support would help?

Appendix 3 - Draft Workplace Participation Charter

The following is a draft statement for employers participating in the initiative to review and commit to. The Workplace Participation Charter aims to ensure that workplace learning is safe, meaningful, fair and connected to genuine workforce opportunities.

Employers participating in the initiative agree to:

- Provide a safe workplace, appropriate induction and suitable supervision for learners.
- Explain the work area, machinery, materials, relevant safety requirements, production processes, quality standards and workplace expectations.
- Nominate a suitable Workplace Coach before a learner begins workplace learning or early employment.
- Give the learner access to meaningful tasks that are appropriate to their level of skill and are linked to the agreed workplace-learning plan.
- Provide practical feedback on safety, quality, accuracy, pace, attendance, communication and progress.
- Allow sufficient time for the Workplace Coach to support the learner, particularly during the learner's initial period in the workplace.
- Respect workplace rights, applicable industrial instruments, workplace health and safety obligations and respectful workplace standards.
- Notify the Local Pathways Lead promptly if the learner is not receiving adequate instruction, if workplace arrangements need to change, or if there is a concern about safety, attendance, progress or suitability.
- Participate in agreed progress reviews and provide feedback on the relevance of training and learner readiness.
- Support a credible next step for the learner, which may include further workplace learning, a guaranteed interview, paid work trial, entry-level employment, traineeship, apprenticeship or referral to further training.

This Charter is not intended to create unnecessary administrative requirements for employers. It is intended to provide a practical standard that protects learners, gives employers clarity and helps ensure that workplace participation contributes to genuine skill development and workforce outcomes.