

Review of training programs and initiatives for entry- level sewing machinists



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TextileWorks, a part of ForestWorks, is providing support for the management of this JSC project as part of our collaborative partnership with Skills Insight. ForestWorks has an enduring and strong connection working with the forestry, timber, paper, fibre and furnishing industries and have been engaged by Skills Insight to deliver this project in partnership.



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Executive summary

This report examines fifty-six Australian (27) and international (29) programs and initiatives that develop entry-level sewing machinist skills. It aims to identify effective practices and propose design principles for an employer-driven, nationally applicable training model that meets workforce needs across the apparel, technical textiles, furnishing and upholstery, and automotive and marine trimming sectors.

Industrial sewing is a transferable manufacturing capability required across diverse production settings, including clothing, uniforms, leather goods, shade products, luggage, marine products, vehicle interiors, furniture, upholstery and specialist textiles. However, Australia's sewing machinist workforce is ageing, predominantly female and geographically uneven. With a median worker age of 59 and limited participation by younger people, the central workforce challenge is that insufficient new entrants are being prepared to replace experienced machinists leaving the industry.

This challenge exists despite continuing employer demand in several sectors. The clothing and footwear manufacturing base has contracted over time, but employer-reported shortages persist in garment manufacture, automotive trimming, furnishing, upholstery and technical textiles. Sewing machinists are not identified in national skill shortage reports, which do not capture the recruitment difficulties experienced by businesses. Training provision is similarly fragmented. RTO capacity is concentrated in a small number of states, and access is limited in some regions.

The review finds that the existing national training framework provides a useful foundation but has not generated sufficient participation. The MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set offers a short, open-entry, nationally recognised starting point for people with no previous industrial sewing experience. It develops industrial machine operation and basic maintenance and provides a potential credit-bearing pathway into the MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles. However, enrolments remain low, and delivery is not consistently linked to employer recruitment, paid work or longer-term progression.

Australian and international evidence shows that the most effective approaches are integrated workforce pathways, not stand-alone sewing and machining courses. Strong programs combine occupational and industry promotion, accessible entry, industrial equipment, practical production experience, recognised learning, employer involvement, and direct transition to employment or further training. They also recognise that potential entrants include school leavers, unemployed and underemployed adults, career changers, existing workers seeking recognition, and migrant, refugee and ethnic-community learners with informal sewing experience.

Programs such as The Social Outfit, Assembled Threads, Second Stitch, the Queensland SEQ Prevocational Project, Take A Seat With Us and TasTAFE's partnership with Be Hers demonstrate the value of linking community engagement, introductory training, accredited VET, live or realistic production, workplace exposure and paid work. International examples reinforce the importance of stackable credentials, apprenticeships, work-based learning, employer-supported recruitment, SME-appropriate funding, school-to-work channels and targeted support for disadvantaged learners.

Any new nationally applicable entry-level sewing machinist model should be guided by the following principles:

- **Provide a low-barrier entry point.** Offer short, practical, low- or no-cost introductory training with no unnecessary educational or prior-experience requirements. Tasters, pre-vocational programs and the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set can allow prospective entrants to test their aptitude and interest before committing to a longer pathway.
- **Build a common industrial sewing foundation including employability skills across sectors.** Develop transferable capabilities in safe machine operation, basic maintenance, materials handling, production methods, quality requirements, communication and problem-solving. This common foundation should support later specialisation in apparel, technical textiles, furnishing and upholstery, or automotive and marine trimming.
- **Create visible progression pathways.** Link entry training to recognised units, skill sets, qualifications, apprenticeships and sector-specific roles. Learners should receive credit for completed learning and be able to advance without duplicating training or navigating disconnected providers.
- **Embed learning in industrial and commercial practice.** Deliver training on industrial machinery and, where possible, through live production, real customer orders, structured work placements, factory visits or closely simulated production settings. Learners need exposure to production pace, quality, workflow, teamwork and customer requirements.
- **Connect training directly to paid employment.** Involve employers and unions before training commences through vacancy identification, curriculum input, work exposure, placement commitments, guaranteed interviews, paid apprenticeships or direct recruitment. The pathway should lead to genuine workforce outcomes rather than credentials alone.
- **Build employers' capacity to support new entrants.** Support participating businesses with mentoring resources, supervisor training, onboarding tools and assistance to navigate training arrangements. Experienced workers may

require recognition of prior learning and gap training to become qualified workplace supervisors.

- **Make delivery workable for SMEs.** Use shared training facilities, coordinated recruitment, subsidised placements, equipment access and blended public, industry and employer funding. Small businesses cannot be expected to independently absorb all costs of recruitment, supervision and entry-level training.
- **Provide culturally safe wraparound support.** Integrate language, literacy and numeracy assistance; interpreters; mentoring; careers information; transport and caring support; settlement assistance; and workplace orientation where needed. Trusted community partners and social enterprises can be central to engagement, retention and transition.
- **Embed fair-work and ethical-production content.** Include workplace rights, award conditions, health and safety, respectful workplace behaviour, ethical employment practices and strategies to avoid exploitation. This is particularly important where informal, insecure or home-based work is prevalent.
- **Use flexible, locally responsive delivery.** Retain national consistency in core skills and credentials while adapting scheduling, location, duration and sectoral emphasis to local demand. Part-time, evening, weekend, hub-and-spoke, mobile and blended models may be necessary for regional, remote and low-provider-capacity areas.
- **Develop school-to-work and career-change recruitment channels.** Use school-based traineeships, industry tasters, factory visits, competitions and credit-bearing work experience to improve awareness among young people. Provide equally accessible short courses and recognition pathways for adults, career changers and experienced but unqualified workers.
- **Coordinate the pathway across partners and stages.** Entry-level sewing machinist development should be coordinated as a single workforce pathway rather than a series of disconnected programs. A designated coordinating body, such as a jobs and skills council, industry association, lead RTO, regional partnership or program manager, should align employer demand, participant recruitment, training delivery, work placements, learner support and progression arrangements.

The report supports a tiered pathway for entry-level sewing machinists comprising engagement and taster activities; short industrial sewing training; structured work exposure and transition into paid work; progression to Certificate II, Certificate III, apprenticeship or sector-specific qualifications; and ongoing retention, mentoring and career advancement support. The model should be employer-led but partnership-based, with employers, industry bodies, unions, RTOs, governments and

community organisations each contributing distinct capabilities. Initial delivery should be piloted in areas with demonstrated employer demand and enough business concentration to support placements and recruitment. Evaluation should focus on outcomes that matter to learners and employers: participation by priority cohorts, completion, transition to paid employment, retention at six and twelve months, earnings, employer satisfaction, further-training progression and workplace capability to recruit and retain new entrants.

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1.0 Introduction

This report, prepared by TextileWorks with support from Skills Insight, examines Australian and international projects and initiatives addressing the entry-level skill needs of sewing machinists. It identifies features of effective practice to inform the development of an employer-driven training model for national application across Australia.

The case studies are based on an environmental scan conducted in mid-2026, drawing on interviews with key respondents, a targeted review of relevant reports and program information, and desktop research and literature review supported by AI-assisted information retrieval and synthesis techniques.

Sewing machinist skills underpin several Australian manufacturing sectors. However, the occupation faces an ageing, shrinking and geographically uneven workforce, uncertainty over the extent of skills shortages, and a training system that struggles to attract new entrants. The findings of this report are intended to inform the design of a more effective entry-level pathway into the occupation (IBSA 2019).

1.1 Sewing machinist skills across industry sectors

Sewing machinist skills are not confined to garment-making. The Industrial Sewing Skill Set developed under the MST Training Package was designed specifically because industrial sewing is "... a skill required in a broad range of contexts within furnishing, automotive, marine and textile fabrication industries", making it a transferable, entry-level skill set that can move workers between related sectors experiencing shortages.

In practice, the demand for entry-level sewing machinist skills spans four related industry areas:

- **Apparel and garment manufacturing** – machinists operate industrial sewing machines to stitch together pre-cut pieces of fabric, attach fasteners, and assemble complete clothing items or components according to strict production and quality specifications.
- **Non-garment cut-and-sew manufacturing** – machinists operate heavy-duty industrial machines to assemble technical textiles, leather, and thick materials into items like shade sails, car seats, luggage, tents, pool liners, tarpaulins, sails, and safety airbags.
- **Automotive and marine trimming** – machinists use heavy-duty industrial sewing machines to fabricate, repair, and assemble durable interior and exterior fabric components, including seating, covers, and panels for vehicles and vessels.

- **Furnishing and upholstery** – machinists operate heavy-duty industrial sewing machines to join and finish heavy fabrics, leather, and vinyl for items like sofas, chairs, cushions, and curtains.

1.2 Current employment situation and workforce profile

Jobs and Skills Australia estimate that about 6,100 people are employed as Sewing Machinists nationwide. The workforce is predominantly female and aging, with 87% of Sewing Machinists being women (Jobs and Skills Australia n.d.). The median age is 59, and only 16% are under 34 years old, compared to 37% in all occupations (Jobs and Skills Australia 2025). Formal education levels are low relative to the workforce, with 31.1% holding Year 10 or below against 9.7% across all occupations, and median full-time earnings of \$1,164 per week compare unfavourably with \$1,697 across all occupations (Jobs and Skills Australia n.d.).

The occupation sits within a manufacturing base that has been contracting for decades. Clothing and Footwear Manufacturing employment fell 21.3% over the decade to November 2024, to around 15,300 workers (Jobs and Skills Australia 2025); and Australia now makes only about 3% of its apparel and textile products domestically (Australian Geographic 2025).

Yet this decline coexists with genuine employer-reported shortages of sewing machinists in automotive trimming, garment production, furnishing and technical textiles. Despite this, sewing machinists are not currently included on Jobs and Skills Australia's national or state skills shortage lists; however, in 2026 sewing machinists were added to the job shortage list in Western Australia. To some extent, this reflects a tension arising from a demographic problem of too few new entrants to replace an ageing workforce, rather than a simple lack of work.

1.3 Geographic dispersal of the workforce

The sewing machinist workforce and the training capacity that supports it are unevenly distributed across Australia. By state and territory, the occupation is distributed as NSW 30.3%, Victoria 22.4%, Queensland 21.2%, Western Australia 15.6%, South Australia 5.1%, Tasmania 2.1%, Northern Territory 1.6% and ACT 1.6%. This broadly matches the 2021 Census distribution of textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) employment across Victoria 32%, NSW 28%, Queensland 20%, WA 9%, SA 8%, Tasmania 2%, ACT 1% and NT <1%.

Training capacity mirrors this imbalance and, in some jurisdictions, worsens it. Of the 34 Registered Training Organisations nationally with scope for Manufactured Textiles, Apparel and Footwear (MST) qualifications, head offices are concentrated in Queensland (11), Victoria (10) and Western Australia (5), with only 4 in NSW, 2 in the ACT, and just 1 each in SA and Tasmania, and none headquartered in the Northern Territory. This geographic unevenness is a key reason a nationally consistent,

employer-driven entry-level model – rather than reliance on existing, thinly and unevenly distributed RTO provision – is needed.

1.4 Recruitment challenges and the historic reliance on migrants and ethnic communities

The industry has long struggled to attract and retain new workers, particularly young people. Skills Insight attributes this to factors such as the industry's poor public image, limited investment in training and development, a lack of relevant training options, restricted career growth opportunities, and high turnover rates. School leavers are a poor recruitment source for sewing machinists. For example, in Darwin, "... few school leavers pursue careers in the textiles, clothing, and footwear industries" (Skills Insight 2025), a pattern that holds across Australia. Additionally, the Sewing Machinist role is classified as Skill Level 4, which Skills Insight considers a structural barrier to using skilled migration to fill vacancies, even when genuine shortages exist.

In the absence of a reliable domestic pipeline, the industry has long relied on recent migrants and ethnic communities to fill sewing machinist roles. In 1991, Census data presented to a Senate inquiry showed that textile sewing machinist was the largest occupational group among Vietnamese-born residents of Springvale, Victoria, accounting for 21.3% of that group.

This reliance persists today and is central to the sector's workforce strategy. Social enterprises working with migrants and refugees confirm this pattern. Sewing is consistently observed to be '... one of the most dominant skillsets held by migrants and refugees when they arrive in Australia' (Assembled Threads n.d.). Together, these findings confirm that any national entry-level sewing machinist training model must address the needs of refugee, migrant and ethnic-community learners while remaining open to the smaller pool of school leavers and other jobseekers who may be drawn to the sector.

1.5 Structure of this report

The remainder of this report is organised into three parts. Section 2.0 reviews Australian projects and initiatives across all states and territories that develop entry-level sewing machinist skills for the textiles, clothing, furnishing and automotive-trim sectors. Section 3.0 reviews approaches used in comparable countries to develop the same entry-level skills. Both sections identify the best-practice features of existing programs and initiatives. Section 4.0 draws on this work to identify the best-practice features of these programs that should inform the development of the proposed employer-driven, nationally applicable entry-level training model for sewing machinists, which is the ultimate purpose of this report.

2.0 Australian Practice: Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Training Programs and Initiatives

This section reviews Australian projects and initiatives, organised by state and territory, that build entry-level sewing machinist skills.

As set out in Section 1.0, sewing machinist skills are needed across the apparel and garment, non-garment cut-and-sew, automotive and marine trimming, and furnishing and upholstery sectors, and the workforce delivering these skills is ageing, geographically uneven and increasingly reliant on refugees, recent migrants and ethnic communities. The programs reviewed cater for two broad groups of learners, namely school leavers and general jobseekers, although the majority are target, refugee, migrant and other disadvantaged learners.

2.1 Nationally recognised entry-level training programs for sewing machinists

The two key entry-level training programs for sewing machinists are:

- MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set is a two-unit, cross-sectoral skill set for complete beginners with no prior sewing skills. It covers industrial sewing machine operation and maintenance. Fourteen RTOs nationally – including TAFE NSW, TAFE Queensland, TAFE SA, Tactile Learning, and North Metropolitan TAFE in Western Australia – have this skill set on their scope of registration. According to NCVER, in 2025 only 55 learners enrolled in this skill set, with enrolments concentrated in South Australia and Western Australia. Of the fourteen providers, three were private, and the others were TAFE institutes. Over the period 2021-25, national enrolments remained stable at about 55 per year. One of the units in the skill set, Perform industrial sewing on textile products (MSTTX2014), is also a listed elective within MST20722, providing direct credit-bearing articulation into the Certificate II.
- MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles is the principal entry-level qualification for the textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) industry, reflecting the role of workers who perform basic, defined tasks under supervision. It comprises 12 units – six core plus six electives – with optional specialisations in dry cleaning, footwear, millinery or textile fabrication, and carries no formal entry requirements. According to NCVER, 2150 learners enrolled in this qualification in 2025 (NCVER 2026), with enrolments concentrated in Victoria (1190), New South Wales (395), Queensland (310), and

Western Australia (255). When considering this data, it is important to remember that this program covers a wide range of TCF-related entry-level occupations, not just sewing machinists. One indicator of the level of take-up of this qualification by entry-level sewing machinists is the enrolments in the unit of competency, Perform industrial sewing on textile products (MSTTX2014). In 2025, NCVER reports there were 115 learners enrolled in this unit (NCVER 2026). Of these, 55 were enrolled in the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set. This suggests that about 60 learners were enrolled in this unit in MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles.

Despite low enrolments, these programs incorporate several best-practice design features. Taken together, the two programs offer a low-stakes, credit-bearing pathway for entry-level sewing machinists. MSTSS00015's open entry, two-unit structure, and likely short delivery period remove a major deterrent for disadvantaged and career-change entrants – the time required to complete training. It also provides an entry point for sewing machinists seeking work in the apparel, textile manufacturing, automotive trim, or furnishing sectors.

Critically, the Perform industrial sewing on textile products unit (MSTTX2014) sits within MST20722's elective bank, allowing learners to articulate into the Certificate II with credit. MST20722 adds structural flexibility to the skill set, as there are no formal entry requirements and the packaging rules allow learners to complete the same base qualification while specialising in footwear, millinery, dry cleaning or textile fabrication. This single national qualification can be tailored to employers across a range of sectors without a bespoke course being built for each.

These programs have provided the backbone for a range of state-based initiatives and programs designed to bolster training opportunities for entry-level sewing machinists. The ensuing section of this paper describes a range of these programs on a state-by-state basis.

2.2 New South Wales

NSW offers the widest range of entry-level sewing machinist pathways of any state reviewed in this paper. These include nationally recognised qualifications such as the Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (see 2.2.2) and the Certificate III in Automotive and Marine Trimming Technology (see 2.2.3), delivered by TAFE NSW, alongside a community-sector program tailored to refugee and migrant learners, delivered by The Social Outfit (see 2.2.1) in association with TAFE NSW; a school-based traineeship with the NSW Department of Education (see 2.2.4); a regional community program run by the Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council with SisterWorks (see 2.2.5); and a custody-based industry pathway operated by Corrective Services Industries (CSI) in partnership with TAFE NSW (see 2.2.6).

2.2.1 Industrial Sewing Training – The Social Outfit (with TAFE NSW) (The Social Outfit n.d.).

Location: The program operates in Newtown and Marrickville, Sydney.

Learner group: The program targets women on refugee, humanitarian or bridging visas.

Key features: An accredited TAFE NSW course sits inside a four-tier progression model: Community Engagement, then Industrial Sewing Training, then Earn and Learn (paid at the Australian Textile Award rate), and then Retail Training. This structure allows a woman to enter with no machining or English skills and progressively move through community engagement, accredited training, paid production work and retail experience, exiting into paid work without ever needing to change organisation between stages.

Dates: The program is ongoing. The organisation is 12 years old and has moved more than 140 women into jobs.

Best-practice features: Accreditation through the TAFE partnership keeps the skills gained portable and recognised beyond this one organisation. Award-rate pay during the earn-and-learn stage avoids the unpaid-labour trap common in some social enterprises, ensuring genuine paid work rather than extended unpaid training. The tiered structure also removes the need to change provider as a participant's confidence and skill grow, keeping the entire journey within one continuous relationship.

2.2.2 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (MST20722) (TAFE NSW n.d.a).

Location: TAFE NSW delivers this qualification across its NSW campus network.

Learner group: General entry-level; no formal entry requirements, with Year 10 literacy/numeracy recommended rather than required.

Key features: This national program, as described in section 2.0, provides hands-on industrial sewing machine training.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: The no-entry-requirement design combined with industrial rather than domestic machine training makes this a genuine machinist entry point rather than a hobby course.

2.2.3 Certificate III in Automotive and Marine Trimming Technology (AUR32320) (TAFE NSW n.d.b).

Location: TAFE NSW delivers this qualification across its NSW campus network.

Learner group: The program is available through two pathways: an apprenticeship pathway for people already employed as an apprentice and registered with an Apprenticeship Network Provider, or a non-apprenticeship recognition-of-prior-learning pathway for applicants aged 21 or over with at least two years' relevant work experience who are currently employed in the industry. A Year 10 level of language, literacy and numeracy is recommended, with TAFE NSW able to require an LLN skills test.

Key features: The national qualification requires 30 units of competency (12 core, 18 elective), covering design elements, industry machinery and tools, adhesive selection and application, fabric selection, trimming and fitting and sewing operations.

Dates: The qualification is ongoing with rolling or campus-dependent enrolments.

Best-practice features: The non-apprenticeship RPL and gap-training pathway lets experienced, but formally unqualified workers convert existing industry skill directly into a recognised trade qualification, without needing to restart training from scratch through a full apprenticeship. Embedding sewing operations as one core unit within the broader trimming trade also gives industrial sewing skill a transferable pathway into automotive and marine work, distinct from standalone MST-based textile training routes.

2.2.4 School-Based Traineeship – Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (NSW Department of Education n.d.)

Location: The traineeship is offered statewide across NSW, delivered through participating schools.

Learner group: Participants are school students, specifically HSC candidates. National industry reports identify this group as the sector's weakest recruitment channel, making this a deliberate attempt to reach an underrepresented group of entrants (NSW Department of Education).

Key features: The traineeship requires a minimum of 100 days in paid employment and training, combining classroom learning with genuine workplace experience rather than school-based study alone. It yields 3 HSC units of credit, with an optional Industry-Based Learning course worth a further 4 units available to students who want deeper industry exposure. The qualification also articulates directly into Certificate III, giving school-leavers a defined next step rather than an isolated credential.

Dates: The traineeship is ongoing.

Best-practice features: The traineeship converts industry exposure into credit towards the HSC or senior secondary certificate while providing paid employment, thereby removing the opportunity cost that typically deters school leavers from choosing an industry pathway over other subjects. Articulation into a Certificate III

ensures the school-based qualification is not a dead end, providing students with a clear, structured next step into further vocational training.

2.2.5 Sewing classes – Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council with SisterWorks (ABC News 2023)

Location: The program is delivered in Albury-Wodonga as a joint initiative between the Albury Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council and SisterWorks.

Learner group: Participants are women of refugee, migrant and asylum-seeker backgrounds, including Congolese refugees who had never sewn before arriving in Australia, brought together through AWECC and SisterWorks' existing community networks.

Key features: Saturday morning classes are capped at about six learners to allow closer one-on-one instruction, progressing from machine familiarisation and basic stitching through to pattern drafting and altering patterns to individual measurements. Instruction is delivered in English throughout, doubling as informal language practice alongside the technical sewing content. The structure was originally prompted by pandemic-era demand for reusable face masks before evolving into a broader skills program.

Dates: The program commenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The program was still running in February 2024.

Best-practice features: The small-group, staged beginner-to-intermediate structure, paired with an explicit micro-enterprise ambition, elevates this beyond a purely social sewing circle, though it remains a pre-vocational feeder rather than an accredited training pathway. [abc.net](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-28/sewing-classes-for-refugees-in-albury-wodonga/10558544)

2.2.6 CSI Textiles – Corrective Services Industries, NSW partnership with TAFE NSW (Corrective Services Industries 2025)

Location: CSI is Corrective Services NSW's in-custody work and training program, operating more than 120 commercial business units, including a textiles division, and 60-plus service industries across 29 correctional centres statewide. CSI operates Textiles units at Bathurst, Cessnock, Clarence, Cooma, Goulburn, Junee, Lithgow, the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (Long Bay), Mid North Coast, Shortland and South Coast correctional centres, with the Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles and the Certificate III in Business, Certificate III in Supply Chain Operations and Certificate II in Workplace Skills as the associated qualifications. The skills pathway runs from industrial sewing through production line processes to supplier management.

Learner group: Participants are people in custody at NSW correctional centres who are eligible and rostered into CSI's Textiles business.

Key features: The Textiles unit is ISO 9001:2015 accredited and produces general ward and theatre apparel for healthcare, plus clothing, linen and towels for correctional centres, alongside custom products for other government agencies and private-sector clients, including retail and hospitality. Output ranges from laundry, library and body bags to blankets, sheets, tracksuits, workwear, dust coats and safety vests. Participants are supported in pursuing textiles qualifications delivered through partnerships with TAFE NSW and other training providers.

Dates: CSI has been in operation for over 30 years, and textiles is one of 14 core business divisions.

Best-practice features: Embedding ISO 9001 quality accreditation and genuine commercial output, including private-sector and healthcare contracts, into custody-based training provides real-world rather than simulated workplace conditions and a pathway to nationally recognised textiles qualifications. Backed by CSI's Work Release partnerships with over 100 employers, this gives graduates a documented route towards post-release employment.

2.2.7 Case Study: TAFE NSW Statement of Attainment in Sewing Level 1 (TAFE NSW n.d.c)

Location: TAFE NSW delivers the Statement of Attainment in Sewing Level 1 (900-83443) across its state-wide campus network.

Learner group: This short course targets people with no prior sewing background wanting to work in the fashion and textiles industry, as well as hobbyists pursuing sewing as a personal interest.

Key features: Through a combination of theory and practical workshop sessions, learners acquire skills in how to operate industrial sewing machines, read simple patterns, select appropriate tools and techniques for different fabrics, calculate fabric requirements from pattern and width specifications, finish garments to a commercial standard, and apply safe workshop practices. Graduates receive a nationally accredited Statement of Attainment, credit towards a full qualification, and a portfolio of practical work to support further study or recognition of prior learning.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: This short course is designed as a stackable credential that feeds into the Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (machinist), Certificate III in Apparel (dressmaker), Diploma of Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (production assistant), and the Bachelor of Fashion (business owner). Wraparound student supports, including disability services, language/literacy/numeracy support, Aboriginal learner support, careers counselling, and recognition of prior learning, reduce entry barriers for first-time industrial sewing students.

2.3 Victoria

Victoria has an active network of social enterprises that have developed entry-level sewing machinist programs, particularly targeting refugee and migrant groups. A key feature of these programs is that they often involve partnerships between social enterprises and Registered Training Organisations, as seen in programs delivered by The Social Outfit (see 2.3.1) and Assembled Threads (see 2.3.3).

2.3.1 The Social Studio School – Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles in partnership with RMIT (The Social Studio n.d.)

Location: This program is in Collingwood, Melbourne, Victoria.

Learner group: The program targets people from refugee, non-English-speaking new migrant or asylum-seeker backgrounds, with eligibility tied to specific visa classes plus a Health Care or Pension Card. No prior sewing experience is required.

Key features: The Social Studio School's Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles is a two-year program delivered in partnership with RMIT, at the social enterprise's own studio, co-located with a working production room and retail operation. It runs part-time, two days (12 hours) a week in line with the RMIT semester calendar, with intakes opening in January and June. Enrolment is free, and English literacy support is provided where needed.

Dates: The program was established in 2009 and is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: The program has no academic entry requirements. Learners train on live commercial work for the Studio's own ethical label, manufacturing service and print studio, which generates roughly half its revenue. A Student Pathways Coordinator and referrals for ESL, literacy and social support address non-academic barriers to completion. Flexible part-time scheduling, satellite delivery sites and diversified grant-plus-earned-revenue funding extend reach and sustainability. The model shows strong tracked outcomes: 90-96% retention and completion; around 89% of graduates moving into employment or further study; and 68% of new Studio hires drawn from refugee or migrant backgrounds.

2.3.2 The Industrial Sewing Program – South East Community Links (South East Community Links (SECL) n.d.)

Location: This program was delivered in Dandenong, in south-east Melbourne, Victoria.

Learner group: The program targeted newly arrived migrant women who have completed SECL's own three-level domestic sewing program.

Key features: The Industrial Sewing Program, which was conducted over 23 sessions, helped 19 newly arrived migrant women develop skills and confidence for machinist

roles. All participants had completed SECL's three-level sewing course beforehand and then gained practical experience with industrial machines, knowledge of Australian work conditions, and valued social connections—within a culturally safe environment. This program offers a culturally sensitive, practical route to employment for women with basic sewing skills. The program, which partnered with the Migrant Workers Centre, SECL's financial counselling and family violence teams, and local employers such as Selby's and a blinds manufacturer, created direct pathways to employment.

Best-practice features: The best-practice features of this program include active engagement with employers, end-of-program placement of participants in employment, the provision of wraparound services to support a group of vulnerable learners, and skills training that embeds workplace rights directly addressing the risk of exploitation in outwork-heavy supply chains.

2.3.3 Assembled Threads (Assembled Threads n.d.)

Location: This program is in North Melbourne, adjacent to the Flemington Housing Estate, with hub pilots in Geelong and Brimbank, Victoria.

Learner group: Assembled Threads is a Melbourne-based social enterprise that trains and employs people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and other disadvantaged job seekers facing employment barriers, in garment manufacturing.

Key features: Assembled Threads operates three interconnected sewing machinist training pathways in Victoria, all designed to prepare participants for commercial garment manufacturing while creating employment opportunities for migrants, refugees and other disadvantaged job seekers.

1. **Industrial Sewing Skills Set (Entry-Level):** This is the entry pathway into the program and leads to the award of the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skills Set by Holmesglen Institute. The program is two weeks and seeks to introduce participants to industrial sewing machines, develop safe operation and basic commercial sewing skills and build participant confidence before progressing to workplace training or an apprenticeship.
2. **The Certificate III in Clothing and Textile Production Apprenticeship** is Assembled Threads' flagship sewing machinist development program that is offered in conjunction with Holmesglen Institute. The program is offered as a paid apprenticeship and combines workplace learning at Assembled Threads with structured off-site training at Holmesglen Chadstone. The original apprenticeship model included: 3 days per week paid workplace production, 1 day formal classroom training and 2 days supervised in-house machine training. The apprenticeship runs for approximately 18 months.
3. **Earn-and-Learn Commercial Sewing Program:** Alongside the formal qualifications, Assembled Threads operates an embedded employment and

training model. The key features of this model include paid employment while learning, commercial garment manufacturing, mentoring by experienced machinists, language support where required, workplace English development, gradual progression from beginner to commercial sewing standards and ethical wages throughout training. Participants manufacture real products including uniforms and PPE for commercial customers, allowing them to gain genuine production experience rather than training in a simulated environment.

In 2026, Assembled Threads reported that it has commenced the development of a Sewing Machinist Taster Program which is intended to expose new entrants to industrial sewing.

Dates: Assembled Threads was established in February 2021 and offers programs on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: Assembled Threads is one of the clearest Australian examples of converting a community sewing pilot into a formal, paid apprenticeship. The program incorporates nationally recognised qualifications that formally recognise participants' skills; an earn-as-you-learn approach, underpinned by an ethical payment scheme; and the establishment of hubs in Geelong and Brimbank, which demonstrate that this is a replicable model.

2.3.4 Second Stitch – VICSEG New Futures (VICSEG New Futures n.d.)

Location: This program is offered in Coburg, with other sites at Braybrook and Epping, in Victoria.

Learner group: The target group for this program is migrant, asylum-seeker and refugee women.

Key features: Second Stitch – VICSEG New Futures is a social enterprise that combines live commercial production – alterations, repairs and small-scale manufacturing for local businesses – with accredited training, giving culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) learners, refugee and asylum-seeker women industry experience alongside study. Its RTO, New Futures Training, delivers the MST31022 Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles on-site, while seamstresses receive mentoring from volunteer industry professionals and customer-service training. A layered access model – free weekly "Open Seam" community sewing, paid short-course workshops, and the formal qualification – lets participants progress at their own pace, and graduates are often employed directly within the enterprise. It combines training, ethical production and community in one enterprise, with a commercial alterations business generating paid work and mentoring from volunteer industry professionals; the parent RTO delivers the Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles (MST31022).

Dates: This is an ongoing program that was founded in 2017 by VICSEG New Futures.

Best-practice features: Second Stitch embeds accredited training within live commercial work, undertaking real alterations, repairs and small-scale manufacturing so learners gain industry experience while the enterprise self-generates revenue. A tiered program structure lets participants start with free informal weekly sewing at the Open Seam Project, move into paid short-course workshops, then progress to the accredited MST31022 Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles. Graduates are frequently employed directly by Second Stitch, closing the loop between training and work. Volunteer industry mentors provide technical guidance alongside communication and customer-service training. The program sits within an established RTO, New Futures Training, which has supported over 65,000 learners and embeds wraparound student welfare supports, employer partnerships and Victorian and Commonwealth government funding for eligible participants. Its focus on empowering CALD women economically and socially provides a culturally safe, women-centred studio and learning environment.

2.3.5 Take A Seat With Us – Multi-Industry Collaboration Group / Australian Furniture Association (Australian Furniture Association n.d.)

Location: This program is located at Holmesglen Institute in Melbourne, Victoria.

Learner group: The program is open to anyone aged 16 and over.

Key features: Take A Seat With Us is a fully funded, cross-sector "taster" program created by the Australian Furniture Association and the Multi-Industry Collaboration Group, backed by five industry groups (furniture, caravan, boating, automotive and specialist textiles) to address shared labour shortages. Delivered at Holmesglen Institute's Chadstone campus over 12 weeks (three days a week), it's open to anyone aged 16 years and over with no prior experience. It samples units from three Certificate III qualifications in Automotive and Marine Trimming Technology, Upholstery, and Manufactured Textile Products, each of which builds industrial sewing machine skills alongside trade-specific trimming, upholstery and textile-fabrication techniques, while directly connecting participants with employers actively seeking workers.

Dates: First intake 5 June 2023, with further rounds through 2024.

Best-practice features: The only identified program deliberately bridging all three non-apparel machinist destinations – automotive/marine trim, upholstery and manufactured textiles. This allows undecided entrants to sample sectors with unmet demand at no cost. The program pools resources across five industry groups – furniture, caravan, boating, automotive and specialist textiles – rather than each running separate programs in response to a shared labour shortage. The Australian Furniture Association and the Multi-Industry Collaboration Group jointly designed it as a taster program. It is fully funded and open to anyone 16 years and over with no prior experience, removing financial and skills barriers. It is delivered at Holmesglen

Institute's Chadstone campus, using industry-standard facilities, over 12 weeks, three days a week. Employer connections are built directly into the program, linking graduates to businesses actively seeking staff. Repeated intakes through 2023–2024 established an ongoing pipeline. Industrial sewing skills are embedded across all three streams, giving participants technical foundations that transfer between sectors.

2.4 Queensland

Queensland has been particularly active in supporting entry-level training for sewing machinists. Through the VET Emerging Initiatives, the Queensland government has supported the Clothing and Textiles Industry SEQ Prevocational Project [see 2.4.1] and the related Textiles and Clothing Manufacturing Projects [see 2.4.2]. The former provides skills training for entry-level machinists, while the latter supports the development of workplace supervisors to support them. This important initiative sits alongside other employment-focused social enterprise programs, such as the one offered by the Mantua Sewing Centre [see 2.4.3].

2.4.1 Clothing and Textiles Industry SEQ Prevocational Project (Australian Furniture Association n.d.)

Location: This program was delivered in Brisbane, Queensland.

Learner group: The program targeted entry-level jobseekers with no prior experience needed; who held Australian citizenship or permanent residency, were aged 18 years and over, and had pre-intermediate English skills.

Key features: This project was designed to support eligible jobseekers in Southeast Queensland to enter the clothing and textile manufacturing industry through a tailored job readiness program and direct employment pathway. Participants completed a four-week training program comprising six units of competency delivered across two subjects: Fashion Workplace, covering workplace safety, textile materials and industry knowledge, and Sewing Skills, focusing on specialised machinery, sewing techniques, and fabric preparation. The training program drew on units from the MST20616 Certificate II in Applied Fashion Design and Technology, which was superseded by the MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles in December 2022.

Following completion of the training, participants were connected with employers through the National Work Experience Program and undertook a three-week work placement (20 hours per week) to gain practical industry experience. Participating employers committed to offering ongoing paid employment to suitable candidates, creating a direct pathway from training to workforce participation. The project also included a non-accredited employer mentoring component, providing Train the Trainer support to help businesses develop in-house mentoring capabilities and better support the recruitment, onboarding, and retention of new workers.

This project was funded by the Queensland Government under the VET Emerging Industries Initiative. Australian Pacific College was the RTO partner.

Dates: The program had intakes in November 2023 and February 2024.

Best-practice features: A four-week, zero-cost program with no prior experience required. The shortest credible, accredited entry point identified in any State, with a deliberately accessible pre-intermediate (not intermediate) English threshold. The SEQ Clothing and Textiles Prevocational Project's strength is its tight training-to-employment pipeline: a compressed four-week, six-unit package (drawn from MST20616/MST20722) builds only the safety, textile materials and sewing-machine skills needed for entry-level work, avoiding a lengthy full qualification. It pairs this with a structured three-week paid work placement via the National Work Experience Program, and – critically – employers commit upfront to ongoing paid employment for suitable candidates, converting training into a guaranteed job pathway rather than a certificate alone. A Train the Trainer component also builds employers' own onboarding and retention capability.

2.4.2 Textile and Clothing Manufacturing Projects

Location: Greater Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, Queensland.

Learner group: This program targeted skilled workers lacking qualifications who could mentor new entrants to the industry.

Key features: The Textiles and Clothing Manufacturing Projects were developed in response to significant growth within Queensland's textiles and clothing manufacturing sectors and the industry's need for qualified workplace supervisors to support trainees undertaking the MST31022 Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles.

Industry stakeholders identified that while many experienced workers possessed the required technical skills, few held formal qualifications necessary to provide compliant supervision to trainees.

Funded through the Department's VET Emerging Industries (Manufacturing) Fund (VEI), the project provided Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and gap training to existing workers, enabling them to gain formal qualifications and become suitably credentialed workplace supervisors for future trainees. The project also funded the development of training and assessment resources to support delivery of textiles and clothing manufacturing units of competency.

To meet industry needs, two specialised streams were established within the qualification:

- Textile Manufacturing Stream – 42 participants completed
- Clothing Manufacturing Stream – 68 participants completed

The project exceeded original participation targets and created a sustainable workforce development pathway for the sector. Its success contributed to industry proposals that resulted in both the Clothing Technician and Textile Technician streams of the MST31022 Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles being added to the Queensland Subsidised Training List, providing a long-term training solution for Queensland employers.

Dates: This program is ongoing, with intakes scheduled into 2026.

Best-practice features: The program helped provide qualified workplace personnel who could support new entrants to the industry, including sewing machinists. While not a program for new entrants, this initiative recognised the need to build infrastructure within workplaces to support new entrants. It should be viewed as a critical adjunct to the Clothing and Textiles Industry SEQ Prevocational Project. The combination of these two programs provides important lessons for the development of any new entry-level model for sewing machinist training.

2.4.3 Mantua Sewing Studio (The Good News Movement n.d.)

Location: Mantua Sewing Studio operated from Brisbane, Queensland, with production and training initially based in a low-cost workshop space provided at TAFE Queensland's Mt Gravatt campus.

Learner group: The program targeted women from refugee and migrant backgrounds – early groups included women from Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and New Zealand – recruited through community referral partners such as ACCESS Community Services, which runs sewing classes through local hubs and schools around Logan.

Key features: Mantua operated as an employment-focused social enterprise and registered charity, using an in-house (non-accredited) training model rather than a formal RTO qualification to teach practical machine-sewing and garment-construction skills. Training was paired with wraparound settlement support – covering workplace expectations, transport, leave procedures and other basics of working life in Australia – recognising that skills training alone was insufficient for a vulnerable, newly-arrived group. Skilled participants moved directly into paid manufacturing work producing garments for Australian clothing labels, with a further pathway for those wanting to design and launch their own label.

Duration: The status of this program is unclear.

Best practice features: The program's best practice features included embedding training within the employer rather than placing participants with external employers. Mantua trained women directly into its paid manufacturing workforce, closing the gap between skills acquisition and employment. Holistic wraparound support was provided alongside technical training. This addressed settlement, transport and workplace-culture barriers specific to a refugee/migrant cohort, not just sewing

competency. Community referral partnerships enabled the sourcing of participants through trusted local organisations (e.g. ACCESS Community Services) already embedded in refugee and migrant communities. A progression pathway beyond entry-level work offered a route from garment production into design and entrepreneurship for participants who wanted to build their own label.

2.5 Western Australia

Western Australia is one of the few states where the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set is publicly funded and listed on the state training list. The state has also seen active involvement from social enterprises, such as Loop Upcycling [see 2.5.1/2] and Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services [see 2.5.3], in providing entry-level sewing machinist programs for women, refugees, migrants and disadvantaged learner groups.

2.5.1 Industrial Sewing Training for a Stronger Workforce – Loop Upcycling (Loop Upcycling n.d.)

Location: Loop Upcycling is a Western Australian social enterprise operating in Perth.

Learner group: The program targeted learners from Loop's existing group of people experiencing barriers to employment who had completed Loop's internal training and demonstrated ability, confidence, commitment, and essential sewing skills on domestic machines. This was Loop's first group to undertake external industrial sewing training, marking a step up from foundational in-house skill-building. Selection was based on demonstrated readiness rather than open enrolment, positioning the training as a progression pathway for already-engaged participants rather than an entry point for new learners.

Key features: The program extended Loop's existing domestic-machine sewing training to industrial sewing machine operations. The program was delivered externally by a TAFE provider. This enabled participants to apply existing sewing and textile knowledge to new techniques and machinery, sew more complex products across a wider range of textiles, and improve efficiency in their Loop-based work. The training was directly linked to addressing a shortage of local industrial machinists.

Duration: The first group began industrial sewing training in February 2025. The training was funded through the WA Department of Communities' Women's Grants for a Stronger Future Grants Program.

Best practice features: The program illustrates several best practice features. A staged progression model moves participants from in-house domestic-machine training to external industrial-machine training only after foundational skills and confidence are demonstrated. An external specialist delivery partner, in this case TAFE, provided the industrial sewing component of the program. Employer

engagement ensured that the skills gained were industry-relevant and could be immediately applied to participants' paid work for Loop.

2.5.2 Uniform Upcycling Project – Loop Upcycling with MercyCare (ABC News 2022)

Location: The Uniform Upcycling Project operated in Mirrabooka, Perth, Western Australia. It was run by Loop Upcycling in partnership with Mercy Care.

Learner group: The program engaged 17 refugee and migrant women from Iraq, Iran, Syria, Ethiopia, Burma and Afghanistan, brought together at MercyCare's Mirrabooka office to build employment-relevant sewing skills within a supportive, multicultural group setting.

Key features: Participants attended weekly sessions using decommissioned corporate uniforms as raw material, upcycling them into new products such as tote bags, duffle bags, backpacks and hats. After four training sessions, participants were certified to upcycle products and begin being paid per item depending on complexity. No-interest loans were also made available to help participants purchase their own sewing machines, extending the skills gained toward independent, home-based work.

Dates: The project commenced in January 2022, with new training sessions being offered as further groups of women were engaged.

Best-practice features: The model paired a corporate waste stream that supplies free raw material with a paying end customer; piece-rate payment from the earliest stage of training gave participants immediate income rather than requiring long unpaid training periods; and No Interest Loans enabled the participants to acquire machinery and materials for home-based businesses.

2.5.3 Sewing Seeds – Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services (Scanlon Foundation n.d.)

Location: Sewing Seeds was delivered in Mirrabooka, Perth, Western Australia, through Ishar Multicultural Women's Health Services.

Learner group: The initial group of learners in 2022 comprised 20 women from African, Middle Eastern and Asian communities, engaged through Ishar's existing multicultural women's health service network.

Key features: The program integrated sewing skills with financial literacy, work rights education, and job-search skills into a cohesive package. Training occurred within Ishar's multicultural women's health service, providing a trusted and familiar environment for participants. Funded interpreters facilitated the sessions, ensuring language barriers did not prevent access to the content on working rights, financial literacy, and job-seeking, alongside practical sewing training.

Dates: The program was supported from 2022 to 2023.

Best-practice features: Approximately 25% of the 2022 participants transitioned into employment with local social enterprises, demonstrating a true training-to-employment pathway rather than mere skills development. The program's dedicated funding for interpreters, rather than dependence on informal language support, guaranteed fair access to rights and financial literacy training included with sewing skills. This approach meets settlement and workplace-readiness needs alongside technical training.

2.6 South Australia

In South Australia, the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set is offered through TAFESA [see 2.6.1]. The state has also seen the development of machinist programs for migrant communities, such as I Made it Sewing [see 2.6.2] and the free sewing program for migrant and refugee women offered by the Multicultural Communities Council of SA [see 2.6.3], both of which provide a pathway into the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set.

2.6.1 Industrial Sewing Skill Set (MSTSS00015) – TAFE SA (TAFE SA n.d.)

Learner group: The program targets complete beginners, with the program outline explicitly stating that no previous sewing skills are required to enrol.

Key features: Delivery is classroom-based and government-subsidised, making entry-level industrial sewing skills accessible without upfront tuition costs as a barrier. The curriculum covers entry-level industrial sewing techniques alongside machine maintenance, giving participants a working understanding of how to operate and care for industrial equipment, not sewing skills alone. This dual focus builds a more self-sufficient, work-ready operator rather than one dependent on separate technical support for basic machine upkeep. R.M. Williams has been an industry partner in delivering this entry-level industrial sewing pathway, providing facility visits and guest speakers, which have given learners useful exposure to production standards and the workplace.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis, rather than as a time-limited pilot or one-off intake.

Best-practice features: The program is accessible to all entry-level applicants. Incorporating machine maintenance into the program helps address the national shortage of textile mechanics. This approach better prepares graduates to support ongoing production rather than only perform sewing tasks, addressing a broader workforce gap beyond the sewing operator role.

2.6.2 "I Made It" Sewing Enterprise Program – Australian Migrant Resource Centre (Australian Migrant Resource Centre (AMRC) n.d.)

Location: The program is delivered through the Mount Gambier branch of the Australian Migrant Resource Centre, in South Australia

Learner group: Participants are migrant and refugee women of Congolese, Karen and Karenni backgrounds, reflecting the settlement communities served by the Mount Gambier region.

Key features: The program teaches basic business skills alongside sewing technique, rather than technical training alone, and gives participants an immediate income channel by selling their finished items at local markets. It sits within a broader women's empowerment program that also covers employment law and citizenship pathways, situating sewing and enterprise skills as one part of a wider settlement and self-sufficiency offering rather than a standalone craft course.

Dates: The program was described as ongoing on 17 February 2025.

Best-practice features: The program uses a self-employment enterprise model rather than a pathway into paid employment, pairing sewing technique with business skills and a ready sales channel through markets. This is a rational design choice for a regional centre without a local apparel-manufacturing employer base, creating income opportunity even where conventional job placement is not realistically available to participants.

2.6.3 Free sewing program for migrant and refugee women – Multicultural Communities Council of SA (Multicultural Communities Council of SA (MCCSA) n.d.)

Location: Free sewing program for migrant and refugee women – Multicultural Communities Council of SA

Location: The program runs from the Multicultural Communities Council of SA in Adelaide, South Australia.

Learner group: Participants are women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Key features: The program offers a choice between a Thursday or Sunday group session, giving participants flexibility around other weekly commitments. A bilingual teacher delivers instruction, removing language as a barrier to participation, and sewing machines and materials are provided in full, so participants incur no equipment or material cost to attend.

Dates: The program runs from 11 January to 24 May 2026.

Best-practice features: The program is free, with machines, materials and a bilingual teacher all supplied, and a Sunday option accommodates women constrained by

weekday work or caring duties. It is explicitly pre-vocational rather than job-ready, positioning it to function best as a feeder program into further training such as the MSTSS00015 that is offered by SATAFE, rather than an endpoint.

2.7 Tasmania

Tasmania has the second-smallest TCF base in the country, and TasTAFE is the state's sole MST-scope RTO. TasTAFE has partnered with Be Hers (see 2.7.1/2) to deliver an innovative entry-level training program for migrant and refugee women.

2.7.1 Dream Again Mentoring Program – Be Hers and TasTAFE (Be Hers n.d.a)

Location: The program is delivered by Be Hers in conjunction with TasTAFE in Hobart, Tasmania.

Learner group: Participants are women from migrant and refugee backgrounds recruited through Be Hers, including women from Palestine, Israel and Pakistan.

Key features: The program delivers a 15-week tailored, accredited Sewing and Textiles stream, running alongside a parallel Hair and Beauty stream so participants can choose the pathway matching their interests. Both streams are built on a peer-mentoring model, co-designed jointly by Be Hers and TasTAFE, combining community-based mentoring support with formal, accredited vocational delivery rather than treating the two functions separately.

Dates: The program launched in 2025 and is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: The program is a co-design between a refugee-women's organisation and a public TAFE, with Be Hers handling recruitment and mentoring and TasTAFE providing accredited delivery on a mainstream campus. The training is tailored to a 15-week timeframe rather than a standard qualification length, adapting the delivery model to participants' circumstances rather than requiring them to fit a generic program structure.

2.7.2 Be Hers Sewing Centre (Be Hers n.d.b)

Location: The Be Hers Sewing Centre is in Hobart, Tasmania.

Learner group: The Centre serves local refugee and other vulnerable women.

Key features: The Centre operates as a single hub combining employment, mentorship and emergency support, rather than separating these functions across different services. In 2022, it partnered with CatholicCare to employ 45 vulnerable women on a sewing project, demonstrating its capacity to convert training and support directly into paid work at scale, and giving participants access to practical support alongside skills development and income.

Dates: The Centre launched in 2019 and continues to operate on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: The Centre reports 3,464 hours of paid employment delivered in the past financial year, measuring its impact in actual paid hours worked rather than simply participants enrolled, giving a more concrete indicator of employment outcomes. It also functions as a feeder into the accredited "Dream Again" TasTAFE program, connecting informal, hub-based support directly into a formal, accredited training and qualification pathway.

2.8 Australian Capital Territory

The ACT has the smallest TCF base of any state (Section 1.3), and Skills Insight reports '... minimal activity' in the sector (Skills Insight 2025). The Canberra Institute of TAFE [CIT] offers the Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles as an entry-level pathway for machinists [see 2.8.1].

2.8.1 Certificate III in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles – Canberra Institute of Technology (Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) n.d.)

Location: The program is delivered at CIT's Woden campus in Canberra, ACT.

Learner group: The program targets entry-level students, including mature-age returners aged 20 and over as well as those with Year 10 completion, with the aim of being machinists or assistant dressmakers.

Key features: The program runs part-time over four semesters, with two evenings a week plus up to one Saturday a month, structured to fit around existing work or caring commitments. Delivery takes place in a simulated industry production room using industrial machinery, giving participants exposure to realistic workplace equipment and conditions.

Dates: The program runs on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: The evening-plus-occasional-Saturday timetable allows people already in work or with caring responsibilities to gain a machinist qualification without leaving employment, directly addressing a common barrier to further training.

2.9 Northern Territory

The Northern Territory has the smallest TCF workforce in Australia, and no RTO with MST scope is headquartered there. Against this background, Albertini Clothing and Fashion has implemented an innovative non-accredited program for entry-level sewing machinists [see 2.9.1].

2.9.1 On-the-job training and remote community sewing classes – Albertini Clothing and Apparel (Skills Insight 2025)

Location: The business is based in Darwin, with outreach classes delivered directly into rural and remote Northern Territory communities (Skills Insight, A Changing Workforce).

Learner group: The program serves three employed trainees who cut, design and sew garments to measure, alongside First Nations community members in rural and remote NT who attend outreach sewing, machining and construction classes.

Key features: Training is delivered directly by the employer on the job, established explicitly to address the absence of any NT-based MST training provider rather than waiting for one to emerge. This on-the-job model is paired with outreach classes taken directly into remote communities, and a commercial arrangement that pays remote Aboriginal artists for printed fabric used in manufacturing, connecting training and production to a broader First Nations economic relationship rather than a purely internal skills function.

Dates: The program is currently under review.

Best-practice features: Where no registered training organisation exists locally, the employer itself becomes the trainer, delivering machining skills on the job to paid trainees and taking outreach training directly to remote communities rather than requiring travel to Darwin. The clear limitation is scale, with only three trainees engaged and no accredited training outcome attached to the model.

2.10 Best-practice features of Australian sewing machinist programs and initiatives

The reviewed entry-level sewing machinist programs indicate that the strongest models combine credible industrial sewing training, practical employment pathways, and tailored learner supports. These programs recognise that machinists work across a range of industry sectors, including apparel, textile manufacturing, upholstery, automotive, and marine trimming. They also acknowledge that new entrants frequently face barriers to participating in skill development programs, such as English language proficiency, low confidence, high costs, caring duties, transport issues, unfamiliarity with Australian work environments, or a lack of industry contacts. The most effective programs address these three matters and include the following design features.

- Low-barrier, staged entry points. Short skill sets, tasters, pre-vocational programs and introductory community sewing programs allow learners with no prior experience to test their interest and build confidence before committing to a full qualification. The MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set is particularly

valuable because it is short, nationally recognised and provides credit towards the Certificate II qualification. Programs such as Take A Seat With Us, TAFE NSW's Sewing Level 1 course, and community-based sewing initiatives similarly reduce the risk and opportunity cost of entering training.

- Clear pathways rather than isolated courses. The strongest initiatives integrate informal learning, short courses, accredited training, workplace experience and further qualifications. The Social Outfit, Second Stitch, Assembled Threads, Be Hers and Loop Upcycling demonstrate the value of progression models that enable learners to move from foundational sewing and confidence-building into industrial sewing, formal credentials and paid work without navigating multiple disconnected providers. Articulation between skill sets and qualifications is especially important to ensure that early learning is recognised rather than duplicated.
- Training with industrial equipment in real or realistic production settings. Entry-level programs need to prepare learners for industrial production, not domestic or hobby sewing alone. The most effective models provide access to industrial machines, production processes, commercial quality standards and workplace safety requirements. Live production environments, such as those used by The Social Studio, Assembled Threads, Second Stitch, CSI Textiles and Albertini Clothing and Apparel, provide learners with experience of production pace, quality expectations, teamwork and customer requirements that simulated training alone cannot fully replicate.
- Paid work integrated with learning. Earn-and-learn approaches are a defining feature of the strongest programs. Award-rate wages, apprenticeships, paid work placements, paid production and piece-rate work help remove the financial barrier to participation and confirm that trainees' work has economic value. This feature is particularly important for refugee and migrant women, mature-age entrants and people with caring or household responsibilities. Programs should avoid relying on extended unpaid labour under the guise of training.
- Direct employer engagement and credible job outcomes. Training is most likely to lead to employment when employers help shape the program, provide workplace exposure, commit to placements or jobs, and build their capacity to supervise new entrants. The Queensland SEQ Prevocational Project is notable for its employer commitment to employing suitable participants, while the related Textile and Clothing Manufacturing Projects addressed the complementary need for qualified workplace supervisors. Cross-sector collaboration in the Victorian Take A Seat With Us initiative also shows how industries with shared sewing-machinist needs can pool demand, facilities and recruitment effort.

- Accredited and portable skills, with flexible recognition of existing skills. Nationally recognised qualifications, skill sets and statements of attainment equip learners with skills that are portable beyond a single employer or social enterprise. At the same time, RPL and gap-training pathways enable experienced workers to formalise their skills without repeating learning they have already acquired. A balanced system should retain both functions: accessible entry-level credentials for new workers and recognition pathways that expand the pool of qualified trainers, supervisors and machinists.
- Wraparound, culturally safe and language-responsive support. For many learners from refugee, migrant and disadvantaged backgrounds, technical training alone is insufficient. Effective programs provide English-language support, interpreters, mentoring, settlement assistance, financial literacy, workplace rights education, career guidance and links to social services. Delivery through trusted community organisations and women-centred settings can also improve recruitment, retention and learner confidence. The Social Studio, SECL, Sewing Seeds, Mantua, Be Hers and the TasTAFE partnership demonstrate that these supports are critical skill development infrastructure, not just optional additions.
- Flexible delivery that accommodates real lives. Part-time, evening, weekend, local and satellite delivery models enable participation by people balancing work, care responsibilities or transport constraints. Free tuition, provision of machines and materials, and assistance in obtaining home-based equipment can further remove financial barriers. This is especially important for learners entering from communities with limited access to formal training, or from areas where the local industry base is small and geographically dispersed.
- Pathways tailored to local labour-market conditions. Programs should reflect the realistic employment opportunities available in their region. In metropolitan manufacturing centres, this may mean direct pathways into apparel, uniforms, specialist textiles, upholstery or trimming firms. In regional and remote locations with few local employers, enterprise, self-employment, home-based production and outreach delivery may be more appropriate. The I Made It enterprise model in Mount Gambier and Albertini's remote-community outreach model demonstrate that a single national delivery model will not meet all local needs.

Taken together, the Australian case studies suggest that a best-practice sewing machinist pathway should be designed as an integrated system rather than a standalone course. At a minimum, it should be well promoted and offer an accessible entry point, training on industrial machinery in work-like conditions, a recognised, articulated qualification, real-world production requirements, and a defined pathway to paid employment, further training, or self-employment. For vulnerable groups,

such as recent migrants, refugees, and disadvantaged learners, this core model should be strengthened through culturally safe recruitment, language and settlement supports, flexible scheduling, and trusted community partnerships.

No single program reviewed includes every feature. However, the most promising models combine the strengths of VET providers, employers, social enterprises and community partners. VET providers offer accredited, portable training; employers contribute real-world work, equipment and labour-market demand; social enterprises provide trusted, work-like training environments; and community partners contribute support for learners facing barriers. Future sewing machinist initiatives should therefore prioritise partnership-based models that integrate skills acquisition, workplace participation and employment progression into a single, continuous pathway.

3.0 International Practice: Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Training Programs and Initiatives

This section profiles projects and initiatives from countries and regions with textiles, clothing and footwear [TCF] industry conditions comparable to Australia, including import competition, shortages of sewing machinists, difficulty attracting entry-level workers, and an industry dominated by small-to-medium enterprises. It covers programs and initiatives for the full range of entry-level learner groups, including school leavers and other young jobseekers, apprentices, and career-changers, as well as programs for refugees, recent immigrants, ethnic-minority communities, and other disadvantaged people.

Coverage is most comprehensive in the UK, USA, and EU, strong in Canada, and limited in New Zealand—a gap addressed later in this section. Automotive trimming is a niche target sector worldwide. One notable exception is Germany's specialised apprenticeship in vehicle-trim upholstery. Specialist training for sewing machinists in the furniture and upholstery sector is more common, with programs such as the Carolina Textile District [USA], England's ST0549 standard [UK], and Belgium's [EU] combined clothing and furniture upholstery pathway.

3.1 United Kingdom

The UK fashion and textile sector reports a well-documented, worsening shortage of sewing machinists, alongside pattern cutters, textile technologists and other Cut-Make-Trim (CMT) roles. The workforce is ageing, and the sector carries an "outdated" image among young people, shaped by decades of offshoring, which discourages school leavers from entering (UK Parliament n.d.a). Craft and sewing skills have largely disappeared from the pre-16 curriculum, removing an early entry point into the trade (UK Parliament n.d.b). Despite this, demand is rising as manufacturers seek to reshore production for shorter supply chains and as the fast-growing secondhand/resale clothing market requires skilled machinists for repair and alteration work (UK Parliament n.d.b). Against this demand, the flagship Level 2 Sewing Machinist Apprenticeship attracted only 69 starts nationally between 2018 and 2023, against an initial target of 400–450 per year, with funding bands that initially failed to cover real delivery costs (Just Style n.d.).

Listed below are some of the initiatives that have been put in place to address this attraction, funding and pipeline problem.

3.1.1 Sewing Machinist Level 2 Apprenticeship Standard (ST0549) and college delivery (UK Fashion & Textile Association (UKFT) n.d.; Skills England n.d.).

Location: National program delivered in England with model programs delivered at Blackburn College (Lancashire), Bridgwater and Taunton College (Somerset) and Capital City College (London).

Learner group: The program targets general entry-level apprentices including new or existing employees at the school-leaver/GCSE-equivalent level. Blackburn College actively brokers an employer for applicants who cannot find one themselves, and Capital City College built a ready pool of student applicants before recruiting host employers.

Key features: Employer-designed national occupational standard covering industrial machine operation, quality/production standards and materials handling. It is applicable across clothing, leather goods, soft furnishings, marine and medical textiles. The program is 12–18 months in duration plus end-point assessment. The program typically is offered at no cost to learners.

Dates: The occupational standard was approved in 2018 and was revised and funding doubled in December 2023 after uptake stalled at only 69 starts nationally. The current version has been in place since December 2025. The program is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: A national, employer-designed, publicly funded apprenticeship standard specific to sewing machinists with a documented, transparent funding-band correction after slow SME uptake. This program is directly relevant to the Australian situation as it is funded on a basis that makes it accessible to small to medium-sized businesses.

3.1.2 UKFT Production Sewing Machinist Programme (UKFT Academy) (UKFT n.d.a; UKFT n.d.b).

Location: National online delivery has been extended to the prison system in England and Wales. A Skills Bootcamp variant has also been offered in Greater Manchester.

Learner group: The program targets a mixed learner group comprising new entrants to the industry with little sewing experience and a dedicated prison strand for ex-offenders preparing for release.

Key features: The program comprises seven modular online courses mapped to the ST0549 standard. UKFT trains and certifies prison instructors rather than delivering the program directly, reaching 73 textile workshops across 50 prisons. An 11-week Skills Bootcamp provides hands-on practice and guarantees employer interviews.

Dates: The program was launched in February 2023. It is offered on an ongoing basis, with prison rollout still expanding.

Best-practice features: Train-the-trainer design lets one sector body scale a national footprint cheaply from a low-cost, modular curriculum suited to small employers.

3.1.3 Making for Change (London College of Fashion, UAL)

Location: The program is offered at His Majesty's Prison / Young Offender Institution Downview, Surrey and Poplar Works, East London.

Learner group: The program targets female prisoners; marginalised local women; and a small number of female ex-offenders.

Key features: The program delivers Level 1 and 2 fashion/textile qualifications inside a live commercial production unit, with direct employment on the Poplar Works production floor for graduates. A part-time program is provided free of charge for benefit claimants, i.e., in the UK, these are people who apply for and receive financial support from the government. They may be out of work, on a low income, or living with a disability.

Dates: This is an ongoing program, with delivery in the Prison operating since 2014, and at Poplar Works since 2020.

Best-practice features: Training within an actual commercial factory provides authentic quality and throughput standards, ensuring seamless transition from prison training to paid civilian employment. About 75% of graduates find jobs after release.

3.1.4 Fashion-Enter Ltd / Fashion Technology Academy (including Leicester "Fashion Hub")

Location: The Fashion Technology Academy (FTA) is a collaboration with Fashion-Enter Ltd (FEL), Haringey Council, DWP and global e-tailer ASOS.com. It was opened in March 2016 and offers qualifications at Levels 1 to 5, which cover stitching, production and pattern cutting. Programs are delivered in London and Leicester.

Learner group: The program targets unemployed adults, at-risk young people, and general apprentices, including many from Leicester's South Asian garment-worker community.

Key features: Level 1 (5 weeks) and Level 2 (10 weeks) stitching courses, and apprenticeships up to Level 5, are delivered alongside a live factory and fashion studio. All learners complete a Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation award, and a 4-week Leicester Skills Bootcamp which offers guaranteed job interviews.

Dates: The program has been operating since 2006. The Leicester Academy was launched in November 2021 and rebranded as the Fashion Hub in August 2024.

Best-practice features: The vertically integrated training-plus-factory model embeds the employer's pace from day one; a full Level 1→5 progression ladder provides a clear career path; embedded workers' rights training directly addresses the risk of exploitation in the garment sector.

3.2 Canada

Canada's cut-and-sew apparel manufacturing base contracted sharply after trade liberalisation, following the passage of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA. This led to the clothing industry losing about 23,000 jobs in the year after the FTA's introduction and manufacturing overall shedding over 500,000 positions nationally between 2003 and 2009.

What remains is a design-led industry of small and medium-sized manufacturers. Greater Vancouver's factory base has fallen from 31 in 2000 to 13 today. Many experienced sewing machinists have reached retirement age and left the industry, with few trained replacements. In British Columbia, there is an estimated shortage of roughly 3,000 industrial sewing machinists. This has been identified as the single most significant occupational gap in the apparel sector. There is no national apprenticeship or Red Seal trade for the occupation. Wages are low relative to the physical demands of the work, and firms report rejecting orders or slowing growth solely due to a lack of sewing machinists. Québec is the exception, retaining a dedicated, publicly funded diploma pathway.

The initiatives below illustrate how provinces, colleges and community organisations have responded to this skill shortage.

3.2.1 Québec Diploma of Vocational Studies (DEP 5345) – Fashion and Custom Garment Making (Centre de services scolaire de Montréal (CSSDM) n.d.)

Location: The program is delivered on a province-wide basis through vocational training institutes including École des métiers des Faubourgs-de-Montréal and CFP de Limoilou.

Learner group: The program targets school leavers and the general population. It is open to people aged 16 years and older who have Secondary 4 credits, or 18 years and over via a general development test.

Key features: The program is a 1,470-hour state-funded diploma, comprising 21 modules including topics such as machine operation, garment assembly, pattern adjustment and grading, mass-production preparation and a 90-hour workplace-integration placement.

Dates: This is an ongoing provincial program with continuous intake.

Best-practice features: The program provides a school-leaver machinist pathway that is virtually free of charge, state-funded, and accessible directly from school at 16 years of age, with a documented 63.6% job placement rate (Gouvernement du Québec n.d.).

3.2.2 Industrial Power Sewing (F115) – George Brown College / Fashion Exchange (George Brown College n.d.)

Location: The program is offered in Toronto, Ontario.

Learner group: The program is open to all learners, including those with no prior sewing experience.

Key features: This is a 16-week part-time college certificate including a 100-hour work-integrated placement, which is delivered inside a working apparel-manufacturing production facility. Tuition is funded for eligible participants.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis with rolling intakes throughout the year.

Best-practice features: Training is embedded within a live production facility, so learners acquire factory pace and quality standards. The program was co-designed with industry. The program offers a structured pathway that leads to a related Apparel Fit Technician credential.

3.2.3 Industrial Sewing Training Program (ISTP) – Industry Ready (Industry Ready n.d.)

Location: This program is delivered in British Columbia and Alberta and is being extended to Ontario.

Learner group: The program targets new immigrants, minorities, unemployed/underemployed adults, social welfare recipients, and some prisoners.

Key features: This 10-week full-time program covers machine operation, safety, lean manufacturing, quality assurance and First Aid. It also includes up to 12 weeks of job placement support after training.

Dates: This program, which was provincially funded, ran between 2022-23.

Best-practice features: The program extends beyond machining into lean manufacturing, QA and numeracy, supporting progression toward supervisory roles. The 12-week work placement is funded by the provincial government.

3.2.4 Sewing for Jobs – EcoEquitable (EcoEquitable n.d.)

Location: This program is delivered in Ottawa, Ontario.

Learner group: The program targets new migrants and refugee women, Indigenous people, LGBTQ2S+ people, and people with disabilities.

Key features: This is a tiered program that includes a 15-week beginner program through to an advanced curriculum focused on industrial sewing. The program incorporates English as a Second Language instruction delivered by a settlement service partner. The program carries credits towards the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Dates: The program has been running for over 20 years.

Best-practice features: The program links vocational training to a mainstream secondary-school credential and aims to repair interrupted education alongside skills-building. It is reported that the program has a social return of \$5.12 for every \$1 invested (Apt613 n.d.).

3.2.5 Skills Ontario / Skills Canada – Fashion Design (Fashion Technology) student competition (Skills Ontario 2025)

Location: This skills contest, which is conducted at the provincial level, advances to a national Skills/Compétences Canada contest.

Learner group: The target group is secondary school students, in grades 9–12.

Key features: The skills context is a timed, practical construction contest of 8–12 hours) in duration. Participants are judged on industrial-standard construction criteria, covering areas such as interfacing, collars, closures, and seam finishing.

Dates: This is an annual event (Skills Ontario).

Best-practice features: The context is explicitly framed as an employment-readiness benchmark rather than a design showcase. It gives sewing visible status parity with other skilled trades. It provides a low-cost way to promote sewing machining as an attractive occupation for school leavers.

3.3 United States

The USA has a structural skills problem. Apparel manufacturing employment has fallen by 91% since 1990, from 908,500 jobs to around 84,100 today. The sector's overall textile-and-apparel workforce has declined by an estimated 55% since 1990 (Marketplace 2025; Talk Business 2025; IJSRA 2024).

Only about 2,500 new workers enter the trade each year. This falls far short of the estimated need for 50,000 additional trained workers over five years to support reshoring ambitions. Sewing classes have largely disappeared from middle and high schools, removing the traditional early entry point. Industrial sewing is physically demanding, low-paid work that is difficult to market to young jobseekers who have come to view manufacturing careers as obsolete (Marine Fabricator 2018; Texintel 2026).

Tariff-driven reshoring has intensified demand for domestic sewing capacity. However, industry realises that tariffs alone cannot solve a problem caused by the absence of a trained pipeline and factory infrastructure.

The programs below represent a fragmented yet active response to this problem. This response includes standardised curricula, high-school pipelines, boot camps and registered apprenticeships. These programs have largely been developed by non-profits, community colleges and industry bodies rather than a single national scheme.

3.3.1 ISAIC – Fundamentals of Industrial Sewing and Production and Department of Labor Registered Apprenticeship (ISAIC n.d.)

Location: The program operates in Detroit, Michigan

Learner group: The program targets general entry-level jobseekers of all experience levels and fashion entrepreneurs.

Key features: The program comprises a 192-hour fundamentals course, which incorporates a 65-hour fast-track version that pre-qualifies graduates for a 2,000-hour US Department of Labor-registered Industrial Sewing Machine Operator apprenticeship. The program is delivered adjacent to a live production floor.

Dates: The program is ongoing with rolling enrolments.

Best-practice features: A key element of this program is the standardised, nationally recognised curriculum, developed with Carhartt Inc, a USA-based clothing company, which is explicitly designed to address the skill needs of sewing machinists across the apparel, automotive, and interiors sectors. The program has been licensed to other organisations, such as Arizona's FABRIC Incubator and a West Virginia high school program - see below. It is regarded as the single most transferable US model for building a portable national sewing machinist curriculum.

3.3.2 Industrial Sewing and Digital Design Program – Mercer County Technical Education Center (MCTEC) (Miller n.d.)

Location: The program operates in Mercer County, West Virginia

Learner group: The program targets high school students in an economically distressed region.

Key features: The program comprises 540 hours of class time per year, adapting the ISAIC/Carhartt curriculum for a vocational high-school setting, with added design-software training and local upholstery/alterations modules.

Dates: The program was offered for the first time in 2026 as part of a 3-year pilot program.

Best-practice features: Rather than writing curriculum from scratch, MCTEC licensed a proven national industry curriculum for a public high school (see 3.3.1). This is a highly

replicable model for any region with a machinist shortage. The program is underpinned by a blended funding model that includes State government funds, a foundation grant, and corporate sponsorship from Carhartt.

3.3.3 Carolina Textile District / The Industrial Commons – Industrial Sewing Boot Camp (Carolina Textile District n.d.)

Location: This program operates in Western North Carolina in the Burke County furniture/textile region. Burke County is a historic hub for American furniture and textile manufacturing, anchored by major production facilities, a skilled regional workforce, and modern innovations in circular textile production.

Learner group: The program is targeted at general local entry-level trainees seeking a career in sewn trades.

Key features: This 97 credit-hour boot camp runs five times a year, covering industrial sewing on wovens and knits plus heavier walking-foot machines used for furniture and home goods. It includes manufacturer site visits. A parallel upholstery program is also offered.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis, with repeated programs being conducted throughout the year.

Best-practice features: This is the clearest US example of a program directly relevant to furnishing/upholstery work. It is short, community-college credit-bearing, and paired with manufacturer site visits that convert training into a direct hiring channel, with transparent wage signalling to support recruitment.

3.3.4 The Sewing Labs – Sewing Salon Training & Industrial Sewing Machine Operator Registered Apprenticeship (The Sewing Labs n.d.)

Location: This program operates in Kansas City, Missouri.

Learner group: The program is directed at low-income individuals, people in recovery, ex-offenders, immigrants and veterans.

Key features: This 20-month pathway comprises 8 months of training and a 12-month/2,000-hour paid DOL apprenticeship. A Missouri State government grant covers the full cost for up to 108 students. Over 60 partner employers spanning apparel, tents/awnings and mattress manufacturing are engaged in the program.

Dates: The program was founded in 2016, with the apprenticeship strand being added in 2021.

Best-practice features: The program formalises sewing machinist as a federally registered apprenticeship by creating a portable, wage-earning credential. The earn-while-you-learn design removes the income barrier that can contribute to learner

attrition. The inclusion of employer partners across the apparel, furnishing and industrial-textile sectors highlights the transferability of machinist skills.

3.3.5 Custom Collaborative Training Institute (Custom Collaborative n.d.)

Location: This program operates in New York City.

Learner group: The program targets no/low-income individuals and immigrant women.

Key features: This free, 15-week program combines garment construction, business education and ethical-manufacturing training. Participants receive a stipend, financial coaching and transit-fare assistance.

Dates: The program operates on an ongoing basis, and it is reported to have a 74% learner retention rate across 15 learner groups.

Best-practice features: A key feature of this program is direct financial support for learners. This treats poverty as the primary completion barrier rather than a skills deficit. The dual employment/self-employment pathway via a business incubator and worker-cooperative track is a particularly innovative feature of this program.

3.4 New Zealand

New Zealand's sewing machinist shortage dates to the removal of import tariffs in the late 1980s, which triggered the collapse of the country's largest apparel manufacturers and ended structured training for new entrant sewing machinists, as the industry was then considered a sunset industry.

Today, the workforce that remains is scarce and ageing. Full-garment-construction skills have been described as a 'dying art', and design graduates entering the sector greatly outnumber the skilled machinists needed to produce what they design (NZ Herald n.d.a; NZ Herald n.d.b).

Industry analysis attributes low uptake among school leavers to poor awareness of non-design production careers, seasonal work, low pay, and ongoing competition from lower-cost offshore manufacturing (NZ Herald n.d.c; Ruby n.d.).

Formal training pathways have shrunk. The industry-designed National Certificate in Clothing Manufacture closed to new entrants in 2017, and recent industry engagement confirms the sector still lacks a formal on-the-job training pathway for machinists seeking to upskill (Mindful Fashion New Zealand n.d.).

Responses to this skill shortage are very limited. In general, they are restricted to school-to-work programs and a small number of disadvantage-focused community programs.

3.4.1 Gateway (national school-to-work program) (Tertiary Education Commission n.d.)

Location: This is a nationwide program.

Learner group: The target group is senior secondary students (Years 11–13).

Key features: This is a structured, credit-bearing workplace learning program aligned to NCEA Vocational Pathways (Manufacturing and Technology; Creative Industries). It typically involves learners in a one-day-a-week program over about 10 weeks. Gateway funding supports school students' transition into the workforce by offering them workplace learning placements while at secondary school.

Dates: This is an ongoing national program.

Best-practice features: Within this program, work placements are government-funded. This enables small clothing manufacturers to host learners for trial periods without building their own training infrastructure. This may be attractive in an SME-dominated industry that cannot resource in-house training.

3.4.2 Sewing School – New Zealand Ethnic Women's Trust (New Zealand Ethnic Women's Trust (NZEWT) n.d.)

Location: This program is offered in Auckland.

Learner group: The program targets migrant and refugee women, predominantly from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East

Key features: The program offers free beginner-to-advanced sewing classes at community centres, delivered alongside English classes and enterprise support.

Dates: The program has been operating since 2001.

Best-practice features: The program, co-located with a wraparound settlement service, which provides language, financial planning and other support for migrant and refugee women.

3.4.3 Poneke-based Nisa Workshop (NZ Herald n.d.d)

Location: This program operated in Wellington.

Learner group: The program targeted women from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Key features: The program was offered by an employment-first social enterprise which specialised in the production of underwear, swimwear and activewear. Women were hired and paid from day one while learning machining on the job. They were recruited via the Red Cross Pathways to Employment program.

Dates: The program operated between 2017 – April 2025 (closed after eight years) and employed about 30 women.

Best-practice features: This is one of the strongest 'wages from day one' designs in this review of Australian and international programs. However, it closed when retail revenue alone could no longer cover training costs. This suggests that, publicly, industry or institutionally co-funded models are more durable than reliance on commercial margin alone.

3.5 European Union

The EU textile and clothing sector is a large but shrinking employer, composed almost entirely of small firms. There are nearly 200,000 companies across the EU, 99.7% of which are micro-enterprises or SMEs, employing around 1.2 million people. Employment is down 2.8% year on year, and the trade deficit is widening, with imports reaching €122 billion against €61 billion in exports (EURATEX 2024).

Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, projects that the occupational group containing garment trades workers will shrink by more than 13% by 2035, despite almost 1.5 million job openings arising from retirements. This means entry-level recruitment is driven by replacement demand from an ageing workforce, not by industry growth. This mirrors the Australian pattern. The European Labour Authority's shortage/surplus analysis shows this is a fragmented, country-specific problem rather than a uniform EU shortage. Sewing machinists are in shortage in Belgium, Italy, Czechia, Romania and several other countries, but in surplus in Germany, Spain and Austria (European Labour Authority (ELA) 2025). The European Commission's own monitoring found that in 2024, production, turnover and employment all fell simultaneously across the EU textile industry amid weak consumer demand, low-cost import competition and digital-transition costs. The surviving European sewing capacity sits mainly at the higher-value, shorter-run end of the market, which raises rather than lowers the skill bar for entry-level machinists (European Commission 2025).

The European Commission states that the sector faces an image problem that hinders recruitment of young talent, contributing to the core skills gap, alongside issues such as ageing, skills mismatch, and low mobility. The EU's policy response is organised through the Pact for Skills, a large-scale partnership for textiles, the TCLF (Textile, Clothing, Leather, Footwear) Skills Alliance, which targets upskilling or reskilling 5% of the sector workforce annually to 2030, a 20% expansion of apprenticeships, and 20 new regional skills partnerships, delivered through successive EU-funded projects.

The completed Skills 4 Smart TCLF Industries 2030 (2018–2022), and the current AEQUALIS4TCLF and METASKILLS4TCLF initiatives, are producing an EU TCLF Skills Strategy committed to modernising VET curricula by 2027 (European Commission n.d.; AEQUALIS4TCLF 2024; Cedefop n.d.). At national level, individual member states run their own national VET and apprenticeship programs for sewing machinists,

including Germany's dual apprenticeships, Italy's regional leFP pathways, Spain's fully dual FP system and Portugal's sector-governed adult training centre.

3.5.1 EU TCLF Skills Alliance – AEQUALIS4TCLF and METASKILLS4TCLF (Erasmus+ Blueprint)

Location: an EU-wide initiative. AEQUALIS4TCLF spans 8 countries including Belgium, Croatia, Lithuania and the Netherlands, coordinated by EURATEX. METASKILLS4TCLF spans 11 countries including Portugal, Italy, France, Spain, Germany and Poland.

Learner group: The program targets the full pipeline of potential workers. This includes school children and school leavers, VET and higher-education students, existing workers, and migrant workers.

Key features: The €3.8m AEQUALIS4TCLF initiative aims to produce a phased EU TCLF Skills Strategy prioritising VET curriculum modernisation and Centres of Vocational Excellence by 2027. The METASKILLS4TCLF has established a range of regional public-private skills partnerships (e.g. Portugal Norte, Sweden Borås, Valencian Community), a European Virtual Fashion Campus, and national fashion competitions culminating at MICAM Milano. These initiatives build on the completed Skills 4 Smart TCLF Industries 2030 (2018–2022), which delivered eight MOOCs and national skills strategies for nine countries

Dates: S4TCLF 2018–2022 (completed); METASKILLS4TCLF September 2023 – August 2027; and AEQUALIS4TCLF February 2024 – January 2028

Best-practice features: A long-term EU funding system, the Pact for Skills, provides stability for national programs that cannot be achieved through one-off grants. Regional public-private partnerships serve as the delivery unit, and emphasis is placed on training and skills recognition for migrant workers, alongside mainstream skills development, within the same project.

3.5.2 Textil- und Modenäher/in [Textile and Fashion Sewer] - National dual apprenticeship (Germany) (BIBB n.d.a; IHK Hamburg n.d.)

Location: This nationwide apprenticeship program is offered in Germany and delivered through industrial chambers, e.g. IHK Hamburg.

Learner group: The target group comprises mainstream school leavers entering the dual VET system.

Key features: This is a deliberately short, 24-month recognised apprenticeship program for sewing machinists (Monoberuf) covering cutting, joining and sewing, machine set-up and maintenance, pattern processing and quality assurance, with employer-paid company training alongside vocational school. The program carries

formal credit towards the longer Textil- und Modeschneider/in tailoring qualification and onward to Industriemeister Bekleidung.

Dates: The program was introduced in 2015. It was initially time-limited until 2021, pending a labour-market evaluation. It was made permanent by a 2021 regulatory amendment.

Best-practice features: A rare example of a qualification piloted with a sunset clause and made permanent only after evidence of labour-market value. This approach could provide a transferable model for testing a new Australian sewing machining training model before locking it in. The short two-year design lowers the barrier to entry for an initial entry-level credential while still providing formal pathways to higher qualifications.

3.5.3 Sattler/in, Fachrichtung Fahrzeugsattlerei - Vehicle-trim apprenticeship (Germany) (BIBB n.d.b; HWK Stuttgart n.d.)

Location: This is a nationwide program offered in Germany.

Learner group: The target group for this program is mainstream school leavers entering a paid dual apprenticeship.

Key features: This program is a 36-month recognised apprenticeship with three specialisations – vehicle trim (Fahrzeugsattlerei), fine leather goods and equestrian saddlery – covering upholstery and covering work, manufacture and fitting of soft tops/tarpaulins and vehicle interior linings, and material/leather assessment. Apprentices are paid a rising wage across the three years

Dates: This is an ongoing program that has operated since 2005.

Best-practice features: This is one of the clearest European examples of a formally recognised, paid sewing/upholstery qualification specific to automotive trim. It is directly relevant to this report's automotive sector. The program has specialisation branches that allow the base qualification to also serve furniture and technical-leather manufacturers.

3.5.4 Stitch by Stitch (Germany) (Crespo Foundation n.d.)

Location: This program is offered in Frankfurt in Germany.

Learner group: The program is targeted migrant and refugee women who already have informal tailoring skills

Key features: The program combines a commercial made-to-measure tailoring workshop with a training facility. The program duration is 3–5 years and leads to a formally recognised German apprenticeship. The program receives blended funding from a philanthropic foundation, the City of Frankfurt and the Hesse state government. The program supports around 25 trainees from 10 countries of origin.

Dates: This is an ongoing program.

Best-practice features: The program allows participants to receive recognition for their informal skills. Revenue from genuine commercial production helps cover training costs and provides a real work-like training environment.

3.5.5 École de Production Industrielle de Couture et Confection – EPICC (France) (EPICC n.d.)

Location: The EPICC in Roubaix, France is an industrial sewing and apparel production school that trains young people through hands-on work. It focuses on the principle of learning by doing.

Learner group: The program targets 15–18-year-olds, including young people who have disengaged from mainstream schooling.

Key features: This is a two-year state-recognised training program. Learners work 20–24 hours per week on real, paying customer orders in the school's own production workshop while also undertaking 10–12 hours of general education. The program is funded roughly one-third by EU regional funding, one-third by apprenticeship tax, and one-third by own commercial revenue.

Dates: The program commenced in October 2021 and is provided on an ongoing basis. Four further training programs of this type have now opened and are operating elsewhere in France.

Best-practice features: The "Real-order" approach gives learners genuine commercial production pressure from day one. The provider has reported a 90% pass rate and full employability for graduates. The tripartite funding model, comprising public, apprenticeship levy, and commercial revenue, ensures the financial viability of the model (France Culture n.d.).

3.5.6 Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle pathway (CQP) and the Agent de fabrication industrielle adult pathway (AFPA) - France (FrenchTex/IFTH n.d.)

Location: This is a nationwide, dual stream program offered in France.

Learner group: The CQP is a school-based program that targets new entrants and existing employees in garment manufacturing, whereas the AFPA is an industry-owned program that targets unemployed adults and career-changers of any background.

Key features: The employer-recognised CQP certifies competence on flatbed and overlock machines in two structured blocks. The parallel AFPA adult pathway is a four-month or 595-hour qualification.

Dates: Both programs are offered on an ongoing basis with rolling intakes.

Best-practice features: Running a short, industry-owned certificate alongside the school-based CAP gives France two separate, appropriately-paced entry-level programs for sewing machinists – one for school leavers and the other for adult learners (AFPA n.d.).

3.5.7 leFP Operatore dell'abbigliamento (Italy)

Location: The program is delivered regionally across Italy.

Learner group: The program targets 14-18-year-olds who have completed lower-secondary school, with some regional delivery targeting unemployed youth specifically.

Key features: This is a free, compulsory three-year national vocational qualification (990 hours/year in the Campania model (Regione Campania/EITD n.d.)) blending core, technical and cross-cutting competences with a legislated dual/work-based component from year one (simulated enterprise) and year two onward (school-work mix or apprenticeship). It covers garment cutting, assembly and finishing at production level.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: This is a nationally recognised, free, three-year school-leaver pathway with a legislated work experience component built in from year one. Critically, it includes a built-in bridge back to mainstream upper-secondary schooling at year four, so choosing the vocational track at 14 is not an irreversible decision (Regione Emilia-Romagna n.d.).

3.5.8 Técnico en Confección y Moda – dual Formación Profesional (Spain) (Gobierno de Navarra n.d.)

Location: This is a nationwide program offered in Spain.

Learner group: This program targets mainstream upper-secondary VET students.

Key features: This 2,000-hour, two-year mid-level VET qualification produces, amongst other outcomes, industrial sewing and embroidery machine operators. The program includes company placements in both years.

Dates: The program is offered on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: Rather than building a separate apprenticeship system, Spain converted its existing school-based VET programs into a dual model with employer placements in both years.

3.5.9 Certificados de Profesionalidad in garment alterations – ASECOM (Madrid) and Cáritas (Valladolid), Spain

Location: This program is offered in Madrid and Valladolid in Spain.

Learner group: The program targets unemployed adults registered with public employment services. The Valladolid program specifically targets disadvantaged jobseekers as part of a social-inclusion and youth-guarantee program.

Key features: The program delivers a national competence standard (TCPF0109). However, it is delivered differently in each region – by an employers' association in Madrid (310 hours) (Industry Ready n.d.), and by a welfare NGO in Valladolid (275 hours, including 100 hours of company placement) (UK Fashion & Textile Association (UKFT) n.d.). The latter is co-financed by the European Social Fund.

Dates: Both programs are offered on an ongoing basis with rolling enrolments.

Best-practice features: This is an example of a national competence standard being flexibly delivered by an industry body and a welfare charity, depending on the target group. The EU Social Fund provides financial support for the inclusion-focused version. Learners can articulate to Spanish certificates (TCPF0209, TCPF0309) for upholstery and soft-furnishing sewing as separate, formally recognised trades (Centre de services scolaire de Montréal (CSSDM) n.d.).

3.5.10 MODATEX – Costureiro/a Modista (Portugal)

Location: The program is offered by the MODATEX centres in Porto, Lisbon, Covilhã, Vila das Aves and Barcelos.

Learner group: The program targets unemployed adults aged 18 and over who have completed year 9 of schooling.

Key features: This 1,020-hour adult qualification provides 850 hours of technical training and 120 hours of workplace practice. It is built from stackable national competence units, progressing from basic sewing through to tailored jacket construction. MODATEX is jointly governed by the public employment institute (IEFP) and three industry associations (ATP, ANIL, ANIVEC). MODATEX also offers a Portuguese-language course for migrant learners.

Dates: The MODATEX program has been operating since 2011 and is provided on an ongoing basis.

Best-practice features: genuine tripartite governance with the state and industry co-owning the training centre. This helps ensure that employer demand feeds directly into what is taught. The unit-based course design allows short-course entry, stacking and recognition of prior learning, with a clear progression to a Level 4 pattern-technician qualification (MODATEX n.d.a; MODATEX n.d.b).

3.5.11 Basisedewerker fashion and the Ontwikkelpad subsidy (Netherlands)

Location: This is a nationwide program offered in the Netherlands.

Learner group: The target group for this program is mainstream entry-level VET students (mbo level 2). The program is available through both school-based and work-based delivery and is open to school leavers and employed adults.

Key features: This 1-2-year qualification covers made-to-measure and ready-to-wear garment construction, pattern work, cutting and basic machine maintenance. A government development-pathway subsidy funds 90% of the cost of this entry-level production qualification. While government funding only subsidises 40% of higher-level design qualifications.

Dates: This is an ongoing program.

Best-practice features: A key feature of this program is deliberate price signalling by government. Government heavily subsidises entry-level operator qualifications while funding design-level qualifications at a much lower rate. This steers demand for funded training towards the job roles in shortage. The carpet and textile production industries are bundled into the same funded pathway as fashion, so furnishing manufacturers can draw on the same subsidies (KiesMBO n.d.; Rijksoverheid 2026).

3.5.12 IVOC sector fund and Flemish dual learning in clothing/furniture upholstery (Belgium)

Location: This program is offered in Flanders and Brussels in Belgium.

Learner group: This program targets existing garment-sector workers and, under certain conditions, jobseekers. There is also a dual-learning strand that targets mainstream secondary students.

Key features: IVOC is a collectively bargained, levy-funded sector training fund that offers free courses to sector employees, covering machine maintenance, textiles and quality. It includes a training-cost reimbursement account of up to €500 (including travel and childcare) and paid training leave. Flanders separately runs a dual-learning secondary program, Medewerker productielijn kleding confectie- en meubelstoffen, which combines garment production-line work with furniture upholstery in a single qualification.

Dates: This is an ongoing program with IVOC running a rolling twice-yearly training calendar.

Best-practice features: A sector-fund model, financed through collective bargaining rather than government grants, that removes indirect barriers to training (travel, childcare, paid leave) as well as direct course costs. Belgium's combined clothing/furniture-upholstery dual qualification is the clearest European example of a single program spanning both the TCF and furnishing sectors (IVOC n.d.; ABVV Algemene Centrale n.d.; Modeleerkracht n.d.).

3.6 Best-practice features of international sewing machinist programs and initiatives

The international program review confirms that sewing machinist shortages are not solved by a single qualification or short course offered in isolation. The strongest programs operate as connected workforce-development systems. They create an accessible entry point, provide training on industrial equipment, connect learners with real production and employers, and offer a recognised pathway to ongoing employment and further skill development. This is particularly important in industries dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises, where individual employers often lack the resources to recruit, train and retain new entrants.

Several best-practice features are evident across the programs reviewed.

- **Industry-designed, nationally recognised entry pathways.** England's Level 2 Sewing Machinist Apprenticeship, Germany's Textile and Fashion Sewer apprenticeship, Québec's vocational diploma and France's CQP pathway demonstrate the value of a recognised occupational pathway for sewing machinists. These programs define the technical, quality, safety and production skills required by industry, rather than treating sewing as a minor component of a broader fashion or design qualification. They also provide a clear occupational identity and a structured route into a skilled career.
- **Delivery and funding models that work for SMEs.** Small manufacturers are central to the TCF sector but often cannot absorb the full cost of training. Effective programs reduce this burden through public funding, levy-funded sector training funds, subsidised placements, shared training facilities, or sector-body coordination. The UK's revision of apprenticeship funding after low uptake, New Zealand's publicly supported Gateway placements, Belgium's IVOC sector fund, and EU regional public-private skills partnerships all illustrate the importance of designing funding and delivery models that take account of the capacity of smaller employers.
- **Short, flexible and stackable entry options.** The reviewed programs include short boot camps, modular online learning, introductory certificates, pre-apprenticeships and competency-unit models, alongside longer apprenticeships and diplomas. This allows learners to start with a manageable commitment, demonstrate capability and progress to higher-level training without repeating learning. ISAIC's fast-track course leading to a registered apprenticeship, MODATEX's stackable unit model and the UKFT modular program are particularly relevant examples.
- **Training within live commercial production.** Programs based in operating factories, production studios or real-order workshops provide a more credible pathway to employment than classroom training alone. Learners develop the

ability to work at production pace, meet quality specifications, comply with workplace safety requirements and meet customer deadlines. Making for Change, Fashion-Enter, George Brown College's Fashion Exchange, EPICC, Stitch by Stitch and ISAIC demonstrate the value of embedding training alongside genuine commercial work.

- **Paid employment and apprenticeships integrated with training.** Wages during training reduce the income barrier for people who cannot afford lengthy unpaid study, while allowing employers to develop workers in real production roles. Germany's dual apprenticeships, the US registered apprenticeship programs, The Sewing Labs, and Nisa's employment-first model demonstrate the strength of earn-while-you-learn approaches. However, Nisa's closure also offers an important caution: paid training models based solely on commercial margins may not be sustainable without public, industry, or philanthropic co-investment.
- **Employer engagement spans the curriculum through to recruitment.** The most effective programs do not leave employment outcomes to chance. Employers co-design curricula, provide placements, host site visits, guarantee interviews, contribute equipment or funding, and employ graduates. The Carolina Textile District, UK Skills Bootcamp programs, The Sewing Labs, and school-to-work models in New Zealand and the United States demonstrate that direct employer participation turns training into a recruitment pipeline rather than merely a source of credentials.
- **School-to-work pathways and the promotion of sewing machinist work as a career.** Several programs address the long-term decline in sewing skills by engaging students before they leave school. Québec's school-leaver diploma, Italy's vocational pathway, Spain's dual VET system, Skills Ontario's fashion-technology competition, New Zealand Gateway and US vocational high-school programs all expose young people to industrial sewing as skilled production work. Competitions, industry visits, work placements and recognised school credits help counter the perception that sewing is only a hobby, a low-skill activity or a design-related career.
- **Training designed for disadvantaged and underrepresented learners.** International practice shows that when programs address the barriers faced by refugees, migrants, women, ex-offenders, low-income learners and early school leavers, they can be an important source of new entrants. Effective initiatives combine technical training with English-language instruction, financial support, transport assistance, mentoring, workers' rights education, settlement support and employer connections. EcoEquitable, Custom Collaborative, Making for Change, The Sewing Labs, Stitch by Stitch and the New Zealand Ethnic Women's Trust illustrate this integrated approach.

- **Workers' rights, ethical production.** Programs in sectors with known risks of low pay, insecure work and labour exploitation should embed rights education and ethical manufacturing content alongside technical skills. Fashion-Enter's Workers' Rights and Labour Exploitation award is a particularly direct example.
- **Career progression.** Career pathways need to extend beyond entry-level machining, with options to progress into technical, supervisory, pattern, production management, upholstery, trimming or self-employment roles.
- **Cross-sectoral and regional approaches.** Sewing skills transfer across apparel, technical textiles, furniture and upholstery, automotive and marine trimming, medical textiles, and repairs and alterations. Programs that recognise this transferability can broaden learners' employment prospects and create a larger pool of employers. England's apprenticeship standard, Belgium's combined clothing and furniture-upholstery pathway, Germany's vehicle-trim specialisation, and US industrial sewing programs illustrate the value of building common foundation skills while allowing sector-specific specialisation.

The key message emerging from these international programs is that entry-level sewing machinist development should be viewed as an industry pipeline rather than solely a VET delivery issue. A viable model would combine a short, low-barrier industrial sewing entry program with nationally recognised, stackable credentials; structured work exposure; employer-supported recruitment; and clear pathways into paid employment, an apprenticeship, or a higher-level qualification. Such a model should be supported by funding arrangements that are workable for SMEs and flexible enough to meet the distinct needs of employers in apparel, manufactured textiles, furnishing and upholstery, and automotive and marine trimming.

International programs also show that the most inclusive models require more than technical instruction. Programs for vulnerable groups, including recent migrants, refugees, women returning to work, young people disengaged from education, and ex-offenders, must be supported by wraparound services, including financial, language, mentoring, and workplace-readiness supports. The strongest programs bring together industry, VET providers, schools, community organisations, and governments, with each partner contributing capabilities that no single provider or employer can provide alone.

4.0 Best-Practice Features for a New Entry-Level Sewing Machinist Training Model

This report has identified a persistent workforce challenge across Australia and comparable international jurisdictions: sewing machinist capability remains essential to apparel, technical-textile, furnishing, upholstery, automotive and marine-trimming production, but the workforce is ageing, entry pathways are weak, and training provision is fragmented and geographically uneven.

The projects and initiatives reviewed in this report show that an effective response cannot be a standalone sewing course or qualification. It must be an employer-driven workforce pathway linking accessible training, industrial production experience, recognised skills and paid employment.

Australian and international case studies also show that the industry's future workforce will need to be drawn from multiple learner groups. These include school leavers, unemployed and underemployed adults, career-changers, existing workers seeking formal recognition, and migrant, refugee and ethnic-community learners, who often bring valuable informal sewing knowledge but face language, settlement, confidence and workplace-access barriers. A national model should therefore be inclusive by design while maintaining clear links to real employer demand.

4.1 Design principles

Based on the preceding review of Australian and international programs, the following principles should inform any new nationally applicable entry-level training program for sewing machinists.

- Provide a low-barrier entry point. The initial offer should be short, practical, low- or no-cost to learners, and open to people with no previous industrial sewing experience or formal educational prerequisites. A taster, skill set or pre-vocational format reduces the risk of entering an unfamiliar occupation and enables learners to test their aptitude and interest before committing to a longer program. The existing MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set provides a strong national foundation for this purpose.
- Use a common industrial sewing foundation across sectors that incorporates employability skills. The program should develop transferable core capabilities: safe operation and basic maintenance of industrial sewing machines; materials handling; quality requirements; production methods; workplace health and safety; workplace communication, and basic problem-solving. This common

foundation should then allow learners to move into sector-specific applications in apparel and garments, technical and non-garment cut-and-sew manufacturing, furnishing and upholstery, or automotive and marine trimming. Such an approach reflects the cross-sector transferability of industrial sewing skills while enabling local delivery to respond to regional employer demand.

- Create a visible, stackable progression pathway. The model should link introductory training to nationally recognised units, skill sets and qualifications, with credit for prior learning and completed training. Learners should be able to progress from a short entry program to Certificate II or Certificate III-level training, an apprenticeship, a sector-specific trade pathway, or employment-based advancement into supervisory and technical roles. The pathway should not require learners to repeat training or move between disconnected providers as their confidence and skills develop.
- Embed learning in industrial and commercial practice. Training should take place on industrial machinery and, wherever possible, include live production, real customer orders, structured work placements, factory visits or closely simulated production conditions. Learners need exposure to production pace, quality standards, workflow, teamwork, materials and customer requirements—not solely garment construction in a classroom setting. The Australian social-enterprise models and international production-school, factory-based and work-integrated programs consistently show the value of this approach.
- Connect training directly to paid employment. Employers and unions should be involved before training begins, not only at its conclusion. This can include identifying vacancies, co-designing the program, providing work placements and factory visits, guaranteeing interviews, employing suitable graduates, or supporting paid apprenticeships and earn-and-learn arrangements. Paid work during or following training reduces the financial cost of participation and ensures that the pathway produces genuine workforce outcomes rather than credentials alone.
- Build employer capacity to train and retain new entrants. A program directed only at learners will be insufficient if participating businesses lack supervisors, mentoring capability, training resources or time to support inexperienced workers. The Queensland case study illustrates the value of pairing entry-level training with recognition and gap training for experienced workers who can become qualified workplace supervisors. A new model should therefore include practical support for employers, including mentor training, onboarding resources and assistance to navigate the training system.
- Make the model workable for SMEs. The sewing-machinist labour market is dispersed across many small and medium-sized businesses, which cannot be expected to carry all recruitment, training and supervision costs individually.

Funding should support shared delivery, employer placements, equipment access and coordinated recruitment. International evidence indicates that durable approaches commonly combine public investment, industry contribution, employer participation and—where relevant—commercial revenue, rather than relying on one-off grants or the margins of a social enterprise alone.

- Provide culturally safe and practical wraparound support. For priority cohorts, effective delivery requires more than technical instruction. Programs should have access to English-language, literacy and numeracy support; interpreters where needed; mentoring; careers advice; assistance with transport and caring responsibilities; settlement and workplace-orientation support; and information on workplace rights. Community organisations and social enterprises can play a crucial role in trusted recruitment, learner support and transition into formal VET or employment.
- Embed fair-work and ethical-production content. Training should include workplace rights, award conditions, health and safety, respectful workplace behaviour, and information about avoiding exploitation. This is particularly important in sectors and groups where informal work, outwork and insecure employment can create heightened risk. Ethical wages and clear employment conditions should underpin any earn-and-learn or work-placement component.
- Use flexible, locally responsive delivery. A nationally consistent model should not mean identical delivery everywhere. Timetables, duration, delivery location and sector emphasis should be adaptable to local employer demand and learner circumstances. Part-time, evening, weekend, hub-and-spoke, mobile or blended models may be necessary in regional, remote and low-provider-capacity locations, while metropolitan areas may support live-production hubs and larger employer networks.
- Create school-to-work and career-change recruitment channels. School-based traineeships, industry tasters, skills competitions, factory visits and credit-bearing work experience can improve awareness of industrial sewing among young people. At the same time, short, accessible programs and recognition pathways are needed for adults, career-changers and experienced but unqualified workers. The model should present sewing machinist work as skilled manufacturing with transferable technical capabilities and identifiable career progression, rather than as a hobby activity or an occupational dead end.
- Coordinate the pathway across partners and stages. Entry-level sewing machinist development should be coordinated as a single workforce pathway rather than a series of disconnected programs. A designated coordinating body, such as a jobs and skills council, industry association, lead RTO, regional partnership or program manager, should align employer demand, participant

recruitment, training delivery, work placements, learner support and progression arrangements. This coordination is particularly important where employers, RTOs, social enterprises, community organisations, schools, unions and government agencies each contribute different elements of the pathway. It should establish clear referral and handover processes, shared recruitment and eligibility arrangements, agreed employer commitments, consistent learner tracking, and responsibility for following up graduates into employment and further training. A coordinated model reduces duplication, prevents learners from being lost between pre-vocational, accredited and employment stages, and enables small and medium-sized employers to participate without individually managing the full training process.

4.2 Towards a model architecture

Taken together, the findings support a tiered national pathway with locally adaptable delivery:

1. Engagement and taster stage: community outreach, school engagement, industry promotion and low-risk introductory experiences that make industrial sewing visible to potential entrants.
2. Entry-level industrial sewing stage: short, practical training based on nationally recognised units or the MSTSS00015 Industrial Sewing Skill Set, delivered on industrial equipment and covering safety, machine operation, basic maintenance, materials, quality and production expectations.
3. Work exposure and transition stage: structured work placement, live production, employer visits, guaranteed interviews or direct entry into paid work, supported by workplace mentoring and employer onboarding resources.
4. Progression stage: articulation into the MST20722 Certificate II in Apparel, Fashion and Textiles and relevant qualifications in automotive and marine trimming, upholstery, manufactured textiles or other sector-specific pathways.
5. Employment retention and advancement stage: ongoing mentoring, workplace supervisor development, recognition of prior learning, and progression into advanced machining, technical, quality, production, supervisory, design-support or enterprise roles.

This structure would retain the advantages of existing Australian qualifications while addressing their low uptake, fragmented delivery and limited direct connection to employment. It would also allow entry-level sewing training to be delivered consistently across Australia without requiring every region to establish a full standalone qualification program.

4.3 Implementation considerations

The model should be employer-led but partnership-based. Employers, industry associations and unions should define priority sectors, recruitment demand, core job tasks, suitable work placements and expected employment outcomes; RTOs should provide accredited delivery and assessment; community partners should support engagement and learner retention; and governments should provide the funding and coordination needed to make participation viable for SMEs and learners.

Initial implementation should be piloted in areas with demonstrated employer demand and a sufficient concentration of businesses, while testing delivery approaches for regional, remote and low-RTO-capacity areas. The pilot should be evaluated against outcomes that matter to both learners and employers: enrolments from priority cohorts, completion, transition into paid work, retention at six and twelve months, employer satisfaction, trainee earnings, progression into further qualifications, and the capacity of participating workplaces to recruit and retain new entrants. The German example of trialling a dedicated sewing qualification before making it permanent provides a useful model for evidence-based refinement before national scale-up.

4.4 Final observation

The central finding of this report is that Australia does not need to start from zero. It already has a nationally recognised industrial sewing skill set, an entry-level Certificate II pathway, examples of paid and work-integrated learning, community-based recruitment models, and cross-sector employer collaboration. International practice offers tested approaches to national occupational standards, SME-responsive funding, production-based learning, apprenticeships, school-to-work recruitment, and long-term sector partnerships.

The task is to combine these elements into a coherent national entry-level pathway: one that is accessible to new learners, credible to employers, portable across related manufacturing sectors, and sufficiently supported to convert training into sustained, fairly paid employment. Such a model would help replace an ageing workforce, broaden participation in Australian manufacturing, and strengthen the capability of businesses that depend on industrial sewing skills.

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