

Brisbane Valley Rail Trail

Workforce Plan



Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners of Country

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FURTHER ENQUIRIES

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LIMITATIONS

While the engagement process was comprehensive, some limitations are acknowledged:

- ▶ Geographic coverage gaps: Due to time and travel constraints, stakeholder representation from Toowoomba and Ipswich LGAs was more limited.
- ▶ Sample bias: Survey participation skewed towards local government representatives and tourism and hospitality operators, with fewer voices from health care, trades and education sectors.
- ▶ Engagement accessibility: The region's widely dispersed population and the predominance of micro and small business operators (unable to leave their businesses during work hours) made it difficult to convene larger group events across all LGAs. To help address this, the project team prioritised in-region visits and one-on-one interviews to capture local perspectives directly and minimise participation barriers.
- ▶ Data availability: The absence of a region-wide labour market data platform limits the ability to monitor progress or coordinate workforce initiatives in real time

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF CONTRIBUTION

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This project was undertaken in partnership between the University of Queensland and Griffith University. We gratefully acknowledge the expertise, effort, and support of the academic teams involved, including members of the University of Queensland's Service Innovation Alliance and Griffith University's Griffith Institute for Tourism.

IMAGE CREDITS

Photos courtesy of Somerset Shire Council



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Introduction

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) is more than a recreational trail. Stretching across multiple rural communities, it has become a catalyst for economic change, skills development and regional identity. By linking people, places and potential, the BVRT is emerging as a strategic platform for workforce development across Southeast Queensland's inland corridor.

The Workforce Development Plan for the BVRT region provides a locally led, evidence-based roadmap to strengthen workforce capability, resilience and participation across the Somerset, South Burnett, Toowoomba and Ipswich local government areas (LGAs). Developed as part of Jobs Queensland's Grow Your Own initiative, the plan supports sustainable regional growth by aligning education, training and employment strategies with the unique needs of local communities, businesses and industries.

This plan responds to a clear need for coordinated, place-based workforce strategies that reflect the region's social, economic and geographic characteristics. While the BVRT corridor is experiencing growth, particularly in tourism and hospitality, persistent workforce constraints continue to limit its full potential.

To address these challenges, the plan identifies five interlinked priorities:

1. Grow and sustain the future regional workforce: attract, retain and develop local talent by creating attractive career pathways and supporting place-based retention.
2. Support and develop small business owners: build the capability of small and micro-enterprises by enhancing confidence, digital capacity and access to tailored support.
3. Activate underutilised and emerging labour pools: unlock participation among underrepresented groups through inclusive recruitment, targeted outreach and wraparound support.
4. Enable regional access and workforce mobility: improve transport, housing and digital connectivity.
5. Align training and skills development with future needs: deliver relevant, accessible and demand-driven training that reflect the region's emerging industries.

A co-designed process ensured the plan reflects lived experience, shared ownership and practical solutions. Between March and July 2025, the project team conducted an Environmental Scan and engaged stakeholders across the region.¹ This confirmed common challenges, including the dominance of small and micro-enterprises, limited training access, mobility pressures and ongoing skill shortages in health care, trades and tourism.

Stakeholders also highlighted critical barriers such as staff shortages, transport limitations, low digital literacy and fragmented access to workforce programs. Despite these challenges, there is strong appetite for coordinated, localised solutions that are easy to access implement.

Sustainable workforce development in the BVRT region will rely on shared ownership and strong partnerships between employers, training providers, industry associations, local councils and community organisations.



¹ Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce - Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

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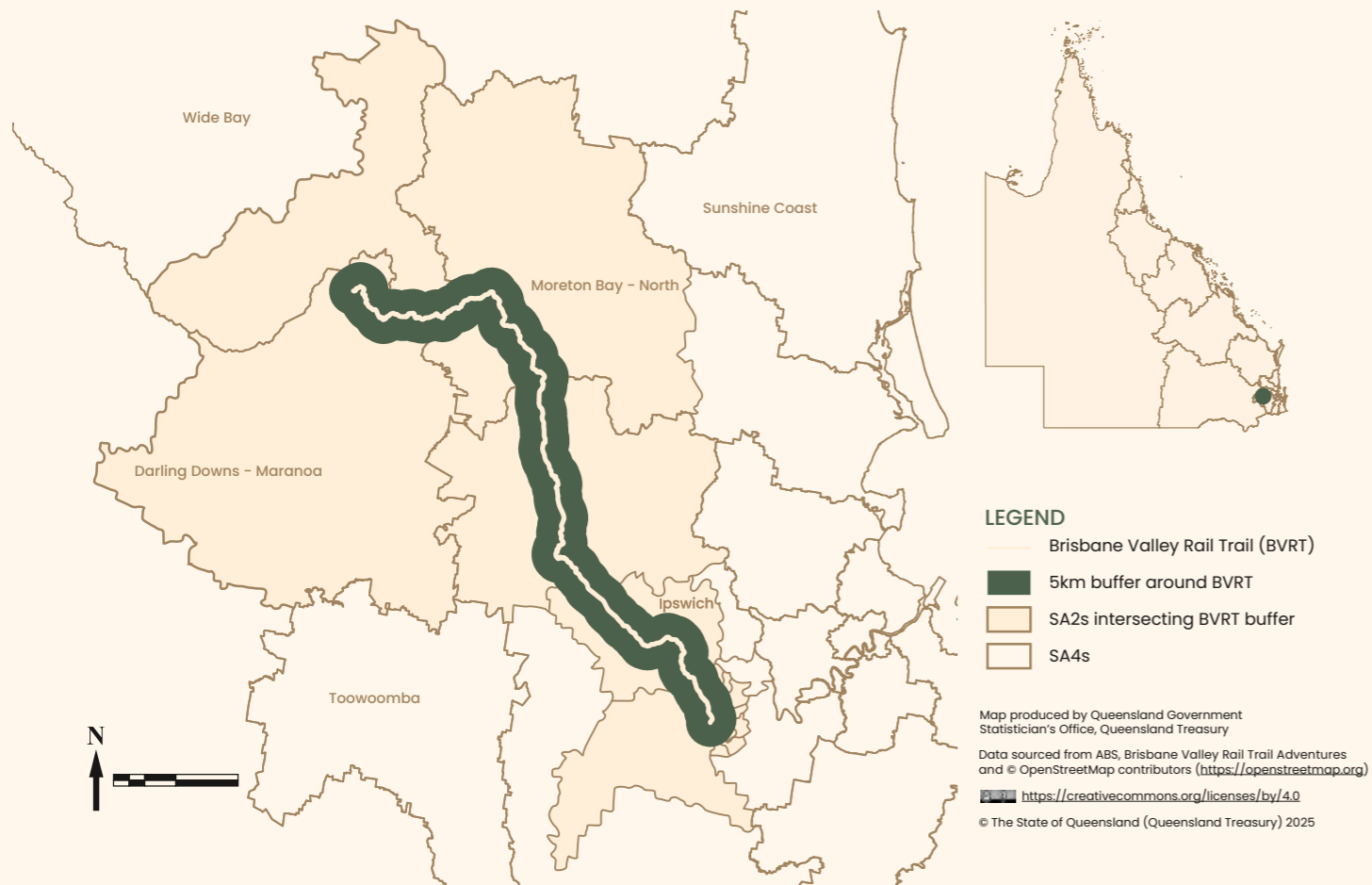
Overview

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail is Australia's longest recreational rail trail, stretching 161 kilometres from Wulkuraka (near Ipswich) to Yarraman in the South Burnett. Traversing farmland, forests, heritage sites and townships, the trail connects diverse communities that share both local character and regional ambition.



Figure 1 The BVRT region

BRISBANE VALLEY RAIL TRAIL AND QUEENSLAND STATISTICAL AREAS, 2021



More than a tourist attraction, the BVRT acts as a geographic and economic spine linking the local government areas of Somerset, South Burnett, Toowoomba and Ipswich. These areas, while varied in scale and infrastructure, are interconnected through workforce flows, shared industry bases and common development priorities.

The trail corridor includes small towns such as Fernvale, Esk, Toogoolawah, Linville, Blackbutt and Benarkin. These communities are economically reliant on tourism, agriculture, small businesses, and the trades, and are increasingly united by a shared commitment to localised economic development.

Rising visitation has driven investment in accommodation, food services, retail, events and recreation. It has also fostered a growing ecosystem of niche micro-enterprises, from bike repair shops and wellness retreats to artisanal food producers and guided tours, that reinforce the region's reputation for lifestyle-driven tourism and rural enterprise.

The BVRT also provides a platform for workforce development, supporting:

- Mobility and access to training for communities distant from major centres.
- Place-based skills delivery through local hubs and mobile training models.
- Growth of creative and cultural industries, including First Nations tourism and local arts.

Stakeholders increasingly view the region as an interconnected workforce ecosystem, where cross-regional collaboration delivers greater impact than isolated, LGA-specific efforts. The trail itself has become a symbol of regional renewal, identity and opportunity.

While agriculture remains a foundation, the BVRT corridor is undergoing diversification with:

- Expanding tourism-related roles driven by the trail and associated events.
- Rising demand for care workers and allied health professionals.
- Growth in construction and infrastructure activity.
- Emerging opportunities in creative industries, local food production and micro-enterprises.

This shift requires a broader mix of skills, including customer service, care qualifications, trades, logistics and digital capability.

2.1 Key insights

The environmental scan and stakeholder engagement process highlighted a set of interconnected workforce challenges that constrain growth and resilience across the BVRT region:

1. CRITICAL SKILLS GAPS AND DISRUPTION:

Persistent shortages affect aged care, health, trades, digital services, tourism and hospitality. Many of these jobs are casualised, seasonal and vulnerable to climate change impacts such as floods and drought, which disrupt employment continuity and business confidence. Entry-level roles often lack clear pathways, limiting retention and career progression.

2. UNDERUTILISED LABOUR POOLS AND POPULATION RETENTION:

Large segments of the potential workforce remain underrepresented, including First Nations peoples, disengaged youth, older residents, women re-entering the workforce and people with disability. Youth out-migration is a pressing concern, with many leaving the region due to limited local training and career options. Without targeted activation strategies and clearer pathways, the region risks losing its next generation of workers.

3. TRAINING AND SKILLS ACCESS LIMITATIONS:

Access to vocational and higher education is a barrier, particularly in Somerset and remote parts of the South Burnett. Training delivery is often inconsistent, poorly aligned to employer needs and constrained by distance, inflexible formats and limited local options.

4. SMALL BUSINESS CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY:

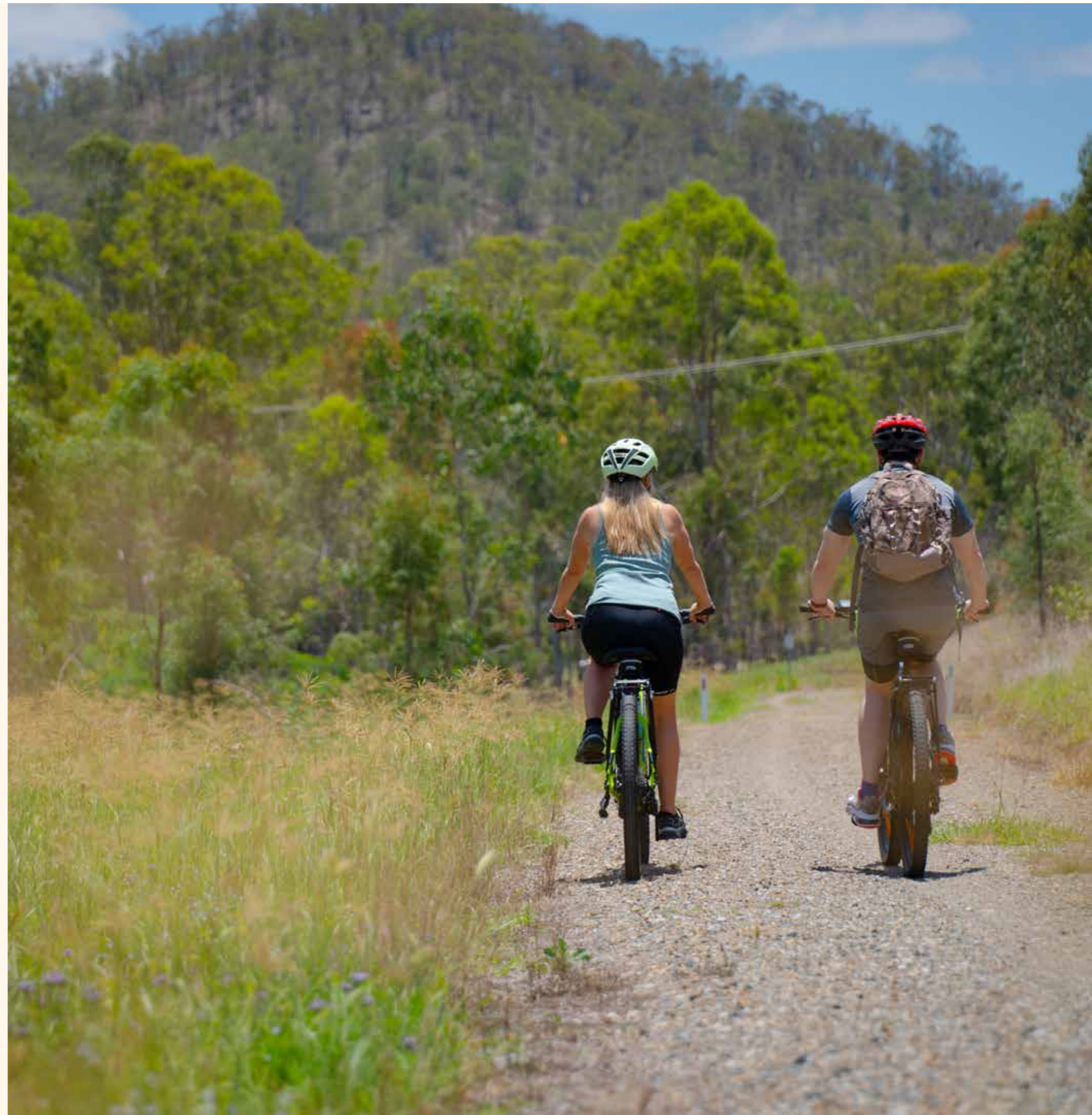
Small and micro-enterprises dominate the economy but often lack the resources or capacity to engage with workforce initiatives. Recruitment is typically ad hoc, with low awareness of government supports. Many owners report limited digital skills and a need for practical, face-to-face training.

5. WORKFORCE MOBILITY AND ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE:

Transport, housing and digital connectivity are major barriers to participation. Many communities face conditions similar to remote areas, with limited public transport, digital connectivity and restricted housing supply. These issues limit mobility, reduce access to jobs and training and constrain business growth.

6. REGIONAL IDENTITY AND OPPORTUNITY:

The BVRT corridor offers lifestyle advantages and a strong sense of community identity. These assets can be leveraged to attract and retain workers, promote microenterprise development and position the region as a lifestyle and employment destination. The trail itself can serve as a focal point for training, skills development and community connection.





Regional population and employment characteristics

This plan draws on the *BVRT Environmental Scan*, which combined Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, labour market trends, business counts, vacancy rates and stakeholder insights.² The scan confirmed that the region's workforce is relatively small, highly mobile and unevenly distributed across industries. It also highlighted the reliance on micro and small businesses, the expanding role of tourism and persistent shortages in healthcare, aged care, trades, logistics and hospitality.

Ten key findings underscore the need for a place-based workforce plan:

- 1. Ageing population and low diversity:** Most communities have a median age above the state average, low migration rates and limited cultural diversity. This reduces labour market flexibility and can constrain recruitment, innovation and resilience.³
- 2. Population growth without participation:** While population is increasing, especially in Somerset, 37.8 per cent of working-age residents are not participating in the labour force, well above the Queensland average of 32 per cent. This highlights both untapped potential and underlying barriers.⁴
- 3. Low educational attainment and Vocational Education and Training completions:** Only 52.1 per cent of residents have completed Year 11 or 12 and vocational education and training (VET) completion rates, particularly in hospitality programs, remain below state averages.⁵
- 4. Youth transitions and VET opportunities:** Young people show strong interest in hospitality and food-related roles. Structured pathways could harness this interest and improve employment outcomes.⁶
- 5. Growing competition from other service industries:** Health, aged care, education and construction offer more stable, higher-paid jobs. These industries are drawing workers away from tourism and hospitality, intensifying workforce shortages.⁷
- 6. Decline of legacy sectors and growth of tourism:** Industries such as mining, manufacturing and wholesale trade have declined, while the visitor economy has expanded. However, tourism jobs remain vulnerable due to low wages and seasonality.⁸
- 7. Microbusiness dominance and vulnerability:** Around 61 per cent of local businesses earn less than \$200,000 annually, compared to 55 per cent statewide. This fragile base relies heavily on sole traders and small operators, many of whom lack capacity for workforce development.⁹
- 8. Chronic shortages in key tourism occupations:** Skills gaps persist in roles such as chefs, cooks, hotel managers and tour guides. These shortages are long-term and documented across state and national levels.¹⁰
- 9. Mismatch between training availability and labour demand:** Although Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Training (SIT) aligned qualifications are offered, course availability is inconsistent and completion rates low.¹¹
- 10. Lack of tourism-specific data for planning:** The absence of detailed occupational data, particularly for front-line tourism roles, limits visibility of the industry's contribution and hinders evidence-based responses.

These findings reinforce the urgency of coordinated action. The BVRT presents a unique opportunity to build a regionally aligned, inclusive workforce strategy that strengthens pathways, addresses shortages and supports long-term growth across tourism and allied industries.¹²

2 Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce - Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

3 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General community profile: 2021 Census Community Profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

4 Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Small area labour markets*. Canberra: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General community profile: 2021 Census of Population and Housing*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

6 NCVER. (2025). *Total VET students and courses*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/collections/students-and-courses-collection/total-vet-students-and-courses>

7 Jobs Queensland. (2024). *Hospitality on the horizon: Queensland hospitality industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

8 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Time series profile: 2021 census community profile*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

9 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *8165.0 counts of Australian businesses, including entries and exits*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/business-indicators/counts-australian-businesses-including-entries-and-exits/latest-release#data-downloads>

10 Jobs Queensland. (2024). *Hospitality on the horizon: Queensland hospitality industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

11 NCVER. (2024). *Total VET students and courses by SA2 for SIT courses*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

12 Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce - Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Ipswich: Jobs Queensland.



Business profile

The BVRT region’s economy is dominated by small and micro-businesses, particularly in accommodation, trades, tourism and agriculture. These operators are often time-poor, with limited resources to invest in structured human resources (HR), recruitment or training.

Key challenges include:

- ▶ Limited capacity for strategic workforce planning.
- ▶ Reliance on informal recruitment networks.
- ▶ Difficulty retaining reliable staff due to geographic isolation and multi-tasking demands.
- ▶ Low awareness of government programs and workforce supports.

Small and micro-enterprises shape the local economy:

- ▶ More than 97 per cent of businesses in Somerset and South Burnett have fewer than 20 employees.
- ▶ Sole traders and family-run businesses dominate tourism, agriculture, trades and retail.
- ▶ Many owners are nearing retirement and operate without succession planning, HR systems or access to professional development. While deeply embedded in their communities, these businesses often lack the capacity to navigate complex training, employment or funding systems.¹³

Stakeholder feedback included:

- ▶ Demand for practical, face-to-face support such as a “workforce concierge” service.
- ▶ Interest in simplified access to hiring incentives, apprenticeships and training pathways.
- ▶ Willingness to trial new models when engagement is local, trusted and easy to understand.

⚡ The regions small business community would benefit from additional support and training in HR requirements and business acumen.

CASE STUDY

FROM DISHIES TO DUTY MANAGERS— GROWING TALENT AT PORTERS PLAINLAND

Porters Plainland Hotel, located in the Lockyer Valley, offers a compelling example of how regional businesses can grow their workforce from within. The venue has built a strong internal pipeline by hiring for attitude and training for skills, enabling staff to progress from entry-level roles—like dishwashing and bar service—into leadership positions.

“We promote from within and invest in staff. Several of our chefs started as apprentices here,” General Manager Mel Porter explains. This philosophy is backed by partnerships with schools, TAFEs, and training providers, allowing staff to complete formal qualifications such as Cert III and IV through recognition of prior learning.

Key workforce strategies include:

- ▶ **Internal promotion:** Staff are encouraged to grow into leadership roles.
- ▶ **Training partnerships:** Collaborations with education providers support skill development.
- ▶ **Overseas sponsorship:** Used to fill persistent chef shortages.
- ▶ **Coaching for young staff:** School-age hires often need support with punctuality, communication, and workplace expectations.

With 70% of the workforce employed casually, Porter’s places strong emphasis on culture and capability. Clear values, structured mentoring, and rigorous reference checks help build loyalty and retention. Mel stresses that workforce challenges are not just about “staffing”—they’re also about “leading” Good management practices are essential.

Mel suggests that Queensland Country Tourism could play a role in lifting employer capability across the region by offering simple, practical resources—such as screening tips, HR templates, and peer advice—to support small operators.

Porters Plainland Hotel shows that with the right mindset and support, regional businesses can turn casual roles into career pathways and build a resilient, skilled workforce from the ground up.

13 Ibid

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Workforce diversification

The region's four LGAs show divergent demographic patterns. Somerset is growing through lifestyle driven in-migration, while South Burnett faces population stagnation and youth outmigration. Ipswich and Toowoomba continue to expand, particularly on their outer fringes.¹⁴



Key work implications include:

- ▶ An increasing proportion of older residents, driving demand for aged care, home services, and flexible work.¹⁵
- ▶ Ongoing youth outmigration, weakening the entry-level talent pipeline and reducing long-term workforce renewal.
- ▶ Growth in retirees and lifestyle migrants, contributing to community life but not necessarily to the workforce.
- ▶ Persistent participation gaps among First Nations people, women with caring responsibilities and people with disability.

These trends highlight the need for targeted diversification strategies that broaden participation and unlock underutilised labour pools.

Potential strategies include:

- ▶ Supporting families returning to work: expanding access to childcare, promoting flexible job design and offering school-hours employment options.
- ▶ Improving inclusion for people with disability: building employer awareness, increasing workplace accessibility and expanding supported employment pathways.
- ▶ Re-engaging older workers: developing flexible part-time or seasonal roles that leverage experience without requiring full-time commitments.
- ▶ Enhancing First Nations participation: co-designing culturally safe entry points, training and wraparound supports with local Elders and community organisations.
- ▶ Retaining young people: offering locally accessible training, career roadshows and clear progression pathways linked to the visitor economy, health and trades.
- ▶ Encouraging lifestyle migrants and career changers: promoting pathways into tourism, agribusiness and health services, supported by tailored training and micro-credentials.

Together, these strategies can help build a more diverse, resilient and inclusive workforce, positioning the BVRT corridor as a region where people of all ages, abilities and circumstances can participate meaningfully in work.

¹⁴ ABS. (2025). *Regional population, 2023-24 financial year*. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population>

¹⁵ Ibid.



Brisbane Valley Rail Trail industry

Tourism and hospitality businesses across the BVRT corridor have reported strong growth in accommodation, food services and events. While this growth is positive, it has intensified competition for labour, with many businesses struggling to recruit and retain skilled staff. The region is also undergoing accelerated economic and social transformation, influenced by rural geography, infrastructure limitations, and a fragmented education and business support ecosystem.¹⁶

¹⁶ Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce – Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

The BVRT provides a unique platform to expand employment, skills and inclusion. Stakeholders identified opportunities to:

- ▶ Grow tourism-linked microbusinesses such as bike hire, farm-to-plate dining, wellness retreats and guided tours.
- ▶ Develop tailored training pathways in hospitality, event management, outdoor recreation and visitor services.
- ▶ Showcase First Nations tourism, arts and storytelling, ensuring cultural integrity and employment opportunities.
- ▶ Position the BVRT as a flagship for lifestyle and rural tourism in Queensland, promoting the region as both a visitor and employment destination.

Workforce diversification strategies include:

- ▶ Support families returning to work through school-hours hospitality shifts, flexible rostering and job-share arrangements.
- ▶ Expand disability inclusion with accessible tourism ventures, workplace adjustments and targeted training for inclusive service delivery.

- ▶ Engage older workers in part-time seasonal roles (e.g., guiding, mentoring apprentices, customer service).
- ▶ Activate youth talent through traineeships, event volunteering and structured career pathways into tourism and hospitality.

Key constraints on industry growth were identified as follows:

- ▶ High casualisation and limited career progression.
- ▶ Seasonal demand and fluctuating visitation patterns.
- ▶ Chronic shortages in chefs, cooks, managers and tour guides.
- ▶ Limited affordable housing and transport access for workers.

These challenges highlight the need for integrated workforce strategies that build skills while creating inclusive opportunities for underrepresented groups, ensuring the benefits of BVRT growth are shared across the community.



6.1 Regional economic context

The *BVRT Environmental Scan* highlights a diverse and complementary economic base across the four LGAs:¹⁷

- ▶ **Agriculture** remains foundational, with South Burnett specialising in beef, peanuts and timber; Somerset in beef and horticulture; and Toowoomba in intensive cropping and food production. This industry faces climate and succession risks.
- ▶ **Tourism** is rapidly growing, driven by the BVRT's popularity. Hospitality, accommodation, rail-trail services (e.g. bike hire, shuttles) and community events are key contributors. Opportunities exist in culinary tourism, outdoor recreation and nature-based experiences.
- ▶ **Health care and social assistance** is the largest employing sector in Ipswich and Toowoomba and a growing need in Somerset and South Burnett. Shortages exist in aged care, allied health and disability support.
- ▶ **Trades and construction** are in high demand, particularly in Somerset and western Toowoomba, with skill shortages in carpentry, plumbing, electrical work and machinery operation.
- ▶ **Education and training** infrastructure is concentrated in Toowoomba and Ipswich, leaving gaps in Somerset and South Burnett.
- ▶ **Emerging sectors** such as digital marketing, creative industries and value-added manufacturing (food and timber products) offer future growth potential if local workforce capabilities are developed.

Labour market dynamics present both constraints and opportunities:

- ▶ High reliance on small business and self-employment, especially in agriculture, food services, construction and health care.
- ▶ Persistent skills shortages across trades, aged care, education, hospitality and allied health.
- ▶ Significant outbound commuting, particularly to Ipswich, Toowoomba and Brisbane. Some communities function as "dormitory zones", limiting local economic growth and placing strain on infrastructure.
- ▶ Labour market seasonality, especially in tourism, events and agriculture, creates peaks in demand for short-term or casual workers.
- ▶ Underutilised labour reserves, particularly among young people, older workers and people with disability.

These patterns highlight the need for localised workforce activation strategies that reduce commuter dependency, address seasonal mismatches and support small businesses in creating long-term employment pathways.

The region's growing visitor economy aligns with the state and national priorities. Frameworks such as *THRIVE 2030*, *Destination 2045*, and Queensland Tourism Industry Council workforce priorities emphasise place-based attraction and retention strategies, training pipeline reform and improved employer engagement.^{18,19,20}

CASE STUDY

PEOPLE COME FOR THE TRAIL, BUT NOT ALWAYS FOR THE WORK – ESK GRAND HOTEL

Joe, the owner of the Esk Grand Hotel (and former high school maths teacher) is navigating the complex realities of staffing in a small town experiencing a tourism boom. The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail has brought a steady stream of visitors to Esk, and the hotel now employs around 36 staff to meet growing demand. Yet, despite the increased foot traffic, building a reliable local workforce remains a challenge.

The kitchen is staffed entirely by visa holders, while front-of-house roles tend to attract older workers. Younger locals are noticeably absent. Few apply, and those who do often lack the social confidence or interest to see hospitality as a viable career. Recruitment is informal and largely driven by word-of-mouth. Fortunately, the hotel's strong reputation means it rarely needs to advertise.

To manage staffing pressures, Joe relies on several key strategies:

- ▶ **Cross-training:** Bar staff are trained to handle phones and accommodation bookings, allowing the team to operate flexibly across roles.
- ▶ **Informal recruitment:** Hiring is based on local networks and reputation, rather than formal channels.
- ▶ **Adaptability:** Staff are expected to stretch across functions, making the most of a small but committed team.

Joe believes that stronger school-to-work transitions and more localised training pathways could help shift perceptions of hospitality work. He sees potential in promoting hospitality not just as a temporary job, but as a long-term career option for young people in Esk. For regional tourism to be sustainable, he argues, the workforce must be nurtured from within the community.

This case highlights the importance of flexible staffing models, community-based recruitment, and the need to reframe hospitality as a career—especially in towns where tourism is growing faster than the local labour supply.

¹⁷ Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce – Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

¹⁸ Australian Trade and Investment Commission. (2023). *THRIVE 2030: The re-imagined visitor economy*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁹ Queensland Government. (2025). *Destination 2045: Delivering Queensland's tourism future*. Brisbane: Queensland Government.

²⁰ Queensland Tourism Industry Council. (2023). *QTIC workforce priorities report*. Brisbane: Queensland Tourism Industry Council.


6.2 Workforce participation and inclusion

The BVRT corridor has a combined population exceeding 300,000, spanning urban, peri-urban and rural zones. While Ipswich is Queensland's fastest-growing regional city, Somerset and South Burnett have lower population densities and Toowoomba functions as a regional service hub. Across all LGA's, labour force participation remains below the state average. Many residents are underemployed or not participating in the workforce.

Key inclusion challenges include:

- ▶ **Youth disengagement:** South Burnett recorded a 'Not in Employment, Education or Training' (NEET) rate of 15.5 per cent in 2023 (vs 8.7 per cent in Queensland and 10.6 per cent nationally). Many school-leavers relocate for education and employment, with limited incentives or pathways to return.²¹
- ▶ **Ageing workforce:** Median ages in South Burnett and Somerset exceed 42 years, compared to 38 years statewide. Older workers represent an underutilised resource; flexible roles and purpose-built part-time opportunities could re-engage this group.²²
- ▶ **Women returning to work:** Carers and women re-entering the workforce face barriers such as inflexible jobs, limited transport and childcare availability.²³
- ▶ **People with disability:** Participation is limited by workplace readiness gaps, low employer awareness and transport constraints.²⁴
- ▶ **First Nations employment:** Pathways exist but are fragmented, lacking culturally safe entry points, wraparound supports and sustained employer engagement.²⁵

A region-wide inclusion strategy addressing these barriers could unlock the latent potential of underrepresented workforce segments through flexible training, mobility solutions, employer education and locally embedded support services.

 The region would benefit from unlocking the latent potential of underrepresented workforce segments through flexible training, mobility solutions, employer education and locally embedded support services.

²¹ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Small area labour markets*. Canberra: Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.

²² ABS. (2025). *Regional population by age and sex*. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population-age-and-sex/latest-release>

²³ ABS. (2022). *Childcare still largest barrier to female participation*. Canberra: ABS. <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/childcare-still-largest-barrier-female-participation>

²⁴ BCEC. (2024). *Employment and disability in Australia. Improving employment outcomes for people with disability*. Perth: BCEC.

²⁵ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2023). *First Nations People workforce analysis*. Canberra: Australian Government.

6.3 Mobility and infrastructure

The BVRT traverses diverse landscapes and dispersed townships including Fernvale, Esk, Linville, Blackbutt and Benarkin. Limited public transport, limited digital infrastructure and housing constraints hinder workforce participation, particularly for young people, older workers and those with disability.

Key mobility challenges:

- ▶ Limited public transport between townships and job clusters
- ▶ Patchy or slow internet connectivity in many rural areas
- ▶ Inadequate housing stock for seasonal, entry-level or mobile workers

These patterns result in labour mismatches, where jobs exist but cannot be filled due to transport, skills gaps, housing or awareness barriers. For residents without private transport, especially young people, older adults and people with disability, these challenges limit participation in training and employment.

Stakeholder priorities:

- ▶ Improve transport linkages along the trail.
- ▶ Relieve housing pressures for workers and potential in-migrants.
- ▶ Expand access to online training through digital infrastructure upgrades.

6.4 Regional strengths and community assets

Despite workforce and infrastructure constraints, the Environmental Scan of the region identified considerable assets:²⁶

- ▶ **Unifying infrastructure:** The trail provides shared identity and connectivity across towns, businesses and labour markets.
- ▶ **Civic pride and engagement:** High volunteerism and community-led events reflect strong social cohesion.
- ▶ **Innovative small businesses:** Operators trial flexible staffing, digital marketing and diversified income streams.
- ▶ **Local government support:** Councils actively promote data-sharing, tourism and small business growth.
- ▶ **Lifestyle and location appeal:** Affordability, natural beauty and proximity to south-east Queensland markets attract lifestyle migrants, career changers and remote workers.
- ▶ **Employer readiness:** Stakeholders are willing to trial new workforce models if practical and locally supported.
- ▶ **Untapped labour:** older adults, people with disability, carers and women returning to the workforce are underutilised but willing to engage.
- ▶ **Creative economy:** Artists, makers and event operators contribute to workforce diversification, youth pathways and tourism experiences.

These assets support a "grow your own" workforce approach, with enabling conditions in transport, housing, training delivery and business support essential for success.

²⁶ Jobs Queensland. (2025). *Grow your own regional workforce - Brisbane Valley Rail Trail: Regional and industry environmental scan*. Brisbane: Jobs Queensland.

6.5 Workforce seasonality and fluidity

Seasonal cycles in tourism, agriculture and events creates peaks in demand and tension with income stability and year-round service needs.²⁷

Key issues:

- ▶ Peaks in workforce demand during school holidays, harvest seasons and events, requiring flexible staffing models.
- ▶ Limited short-term accommodation for itinerant workers.
- ▶ Fatigue and burnout among core staff during peak seasons.
- ▶ Poor alignment between training calendars and seasonal demand.

Implication: Workforce strategies must incorporate modular, on-demand and seasonal learning or support interventions.

6.6 Digital transformation

Digital technologies are reshaping tourism and hospitality in the BVRT region. While adoption is uneven, digital engagement offers significant opportunities for business efficiency, customer experience and workforce capability development.

Trends and challenges:

- ▶ Widespread adoption of online booking, automated check-in and contactless payment.
- ▶ Growing reliance on digital marketing, though often limited in sophistication.
- ▶ Gaps in back-end systems such as inventory management, Customer Relationship Management software and online rostering.
- ▶ Inconsistent digital skills and support, particularly among small or remote operators.
- ▶ Connectivity limitations in outlying towns.
- ▶ Stakeholder priorities:
 - ▶ Basic digital literacy tailored to tourism and hospitality.
 - ▶ One-on-one digital mentoring on social media, website design and analytics.
- ▶ Systems integration to streamline business operations.

Several BVRT operators are pioneering innovative digital solutions, including integrated booking systems, Instagram marketing and online storefronts. Tailored digital capability programs can support regional growth, digital inclusion and productivity uplift.



Several BVRT operators are pioneering innovative digital solutions, including integrated booking systems, Instagram marketing and online storefronts. Tailored digital capability programs can support regional growth, digital inclusion and productivity uplift

CASE STUDY

YARRAMAN CARAVAN PARK – FLEXIBLE STAFFING, BETTER PLANNING

Tania, manager of Yarraman Caravan Park, has witnessed a noticeable increase in visitation thanks to the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail. Yet, she's quick to point out that tourism growth doesn't automatically solve regional challenges. Limited worker housing, underdeveloped trailhead facilities, and cafés unable to scale up when large groups arrive all create friction in delivering consistent service.

Rather than trying to "find more people," Tania focuses on flexible staffing and smart planning. She engages itinerant couples for administration and maintenance roles, partners with food vans to meet food and beverage needs and fosters a positive workplace culture that encourages staff to return seasonally.

Her approach includes:

- ▶ Flexible staffing models: Hiring travelling couples, retirees looking for community engagement and casual workers to fill key roles.
- ▶ Partnerships: Collaborating with mobile vendors to meet demand without overextending.
- ▶ Workplace culture: Creating a supportive environment that encourages staff loyalty and return employment.

For Tania, most staffing issues are actually management and infrastructure challenges. Predictable rosters, surge planning, stocked supplies, and basic amenities are what make service delivery possible. She advocates for council support in improving trailhead facilities, coordinating events, and providing simple promotional tools to help draw trail users into town. Her message is pragmatic: regional tourism success depends on aligning infrastructure, flexible staffing, and good employer practices—not just increasing headcount.

²⁷ The Service Innovation Alliance (2024). *Brisbane Valley Rail Trail (BVRT) visitor research program phase 2 report*. Brisbane: The University of Queensland.



Megatrends

The BVRT corridor is shaped by broad external forces that directly impact its businesses, industries and communities. These known megatrends are already influencing the region's economy and workforce, creating both challenges and opportunities for employers and workers.²⁸

Four trends stand out as particularly relevant to the BVRT region:

- ▶ Environmental and climate change, with natural hazards and resource pressures affecting business continuity and employment stability.
- ▶ Transformative technology, changing how businesses operate, connect with customers and build new opportunities.
- ▶ Geopolitical impacts, disrupting supply chains, migration and the cost of goods and services.
- ▶ The rising care economy, reflecting population ageing and the growing demand for health, aged care and community services.

Recognising and responding to these trends is critical for ensuring the BVRT corridor develops a resilient, skilled and adaptable workforce.

²⁸ CSIRO. (2022). *Our Future World: Global megatrends impacting the way we live over coming decades**. CSIRO. <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/technology-space/data/Our-Future-World>



7.1 Environmental and climate change

The BVRT region is highly exposed to natural hazards, including floods, droughts and heatwaves. These events disrupt employment, infrastructure and business continuity, creating ongoing uncertainty for both employers and workers. Current and emerging impacts include:

- ▶ Severe weather events such as floods and droughts, which interrupt economic activity, damage infrastructure and affect service delivery.
- ▶ Seasonal volatility, which undermines employment stability in agriculture, events and tourism.
- ▶ Changing water availability, influencing land use, farming practices and shaping new job opportunities in industries such as nature-based tourism and water-based recreation.

7.2 Transformative technology

Digital adoption and automation are reshaping business models across tourism, hospitality, agriculture and services in the BVRT region. While technology creates opportunities to streamline operations and expand markets, uneven uptake risks widening capability gaps.

Current and emerging impacts:

- ▶ Digital service delivery: Online booking, e-commerce platforms and digital marketing are now essential for tourism and hospitality operators.
- ▶ Ag-tech and automation: Smart irrigation, drone monitoring and precision farming are increasingly relevant for agriculture, requiring new technical skills.
- ▶ Remote work and connectivity: Digital platforms allow professional and creative industries to grow locally, but patchy internet and low digital confidence limit participation.

Workforce implications:

- ▶ Small businesses require targeted support to adopt and benefit from new technologies.
- ▶ Digital literacy, cyber-awareness and online customer engagement are becoming baseline skills across sectors.
- ▶ Training pathways must integrate technology with traditional skills, ensuring local workers are competitive in a digital economy.

7.3 Geopolitical impacts

Global and national disruptions continue to shape regional workforce dynamics, with direct consequences for the BVRT corridor.

Key drivers:

- ▶ Supply chain disruption: Geopolitical tensions and freight delays affect the availability and cost of food, construction materials and tourism goods.
- ▶ Migration and workforce mobility: Shifts in visa policy and global labour flows influence the availability of seasonal and skilled workers, particularly in hospitality, health and agriculture.
- ▶ Energy and commodity markets: Rising energy costs and volatility in commodity prices impact regional industries and household affordability.

Workforce implications:

- ▶ Local businesses must adapt to changing input costs and workforce availability.
- ▶ Greater emphasis on self-sufficiency and local skills development can buffer against external shocks.
- ▶ International visitor markets remain an important, but variable, driver of tourism employment.

7.4 Rising care economy

An ageing population and growing demand for health, disability, and aged care services are reshaping the regional labour market. Across Ipswich, Toowoomba, Somerset and South Burnett, health care and social assistance is among the largest and fastest-growing sectors.

Current and emerging impacts:

- ▶ Aged care and disability support: Increasing demand for qualified carers, allied health staff and support workers, with shortages already evident.
- ▶ Health infrastructure growth: Investment in hospitals, aged care facilities and community health creates both clinical and non-clinical employment opportunities.
- ▶ Community-based services: Home care, wellness, and preventative health programs are expanding, often requiring flexible and part-time staffing models.

Workforce implications:

- ▶ Significant opportunities exist to upskill local residents, particularly women returning to work, young people and mature-age workers.
- ▶ Training providers must expand delivery in regional locations, with flexible models to attract and retain staff.
- ▶ Cross-sector linkages (e.g. hospitality, recreation and care) create new hybrid roles such as wellness tourism, therapeutic recreation and nutrition-focused services.

7.5 Demographic change and population shifts

The BVRT corridor is experiencing contrasting demographic trends, with strong population growth in areas such as Ipswich and parts of Somerset, alongside ageing populations in South Burnett and rural communities. Lifestyle migration, primarily from South East Queensland is driving demand for housing, services and recreation, while younger cohorts often leave smaller towns for education and employment opportunities elsewhere.

Current and emerging impacts:

- ▶ Population growth in peri-urban areas increases demand for construction, retail, hospitality and community services.
- ▶ Population ageing in rural communities drives demand for health, aged care and transport services.
- ▶ Lifestyle migration boosts interest in recreation, outdoor experiences and food tourism.

Workforce implications:

- ▶ Strong opportunities for job creation in both the care and service economies.
- ▶ Workforce shortages likely in rural towns unless new attraction and retention strategies are developed.
- ▶ Targeted training pathways can support local residents, including women, young people and mature-age workers, to fill regional demand.

7.6 Tourism and lifestyle economy

Tourism is a defining feature of the BVRT corridor, with the rail trail itself acting as a significant drawcard for domestic visitors. Coupled with growing lifestyle migration, the region is becoming known for nature-based and wellness experiences, events and outdoor recreation. Seasonal tourism remains a key driver of casual and part-time work.

Current and emerging impacts:

- ▶ Nature-based tourism is expanding, with the BVRT positioned as a leading regional attraction.
- ▶ Events and festivals are drawing visitors, creating short-term employment opportunities.
- ▶ Wellness and lifestyle tourism is on the rise, blending hospitality, recreation and health services.

Workforce implications:

- ▶ Ongoing need for skills in customer service, hospitality, event management and digital promotion.
- ▶ Seasonal employment patterns require flexible workforce planning and pathways for casual workers to transition into longer-term roles.
- ▶ Potential for cross-sector growth, linking tourism with food, agriculture and health to create new employment niches.

CASE STUDY

PARKRUN ON THE BVRT

Parkrun is a free, community event hosted across a wide variety of locations worldwide, where participants can walk, run, volunteer or spectate the 5km event every Saturday morning.

The BVRT hosts two different parkrun events, Old Esk Railway Station and Brisbane Valley Rail Trail parkrun in Blackbutt. The two events attract numerous tourists to the region year-round, benefiting local businesses and the region's economy



Regional training profile

A skilled and adaptable workforce is critical to supporting economic growth, tourism and community resilience across the BVRT corridor. Training and education pathways provide the foundation for developing the skills, knowledge and capabilities required by local industries, particularly in tourism, hospitality, health and emerging sectors.

However, access to relevant training in the region is uneven, with gaps in course availability, delivery modes and alignment with industry needs. Geographic dispersion, transport limitations and digital connectivity challenges further constrain participation, particularly for rural and remote communities.

To understand the region's training needs and opportunities in detail, the following subsections examine current provision, access barriers and potential pathways to strengthen workforce capability across the BVRT corridor.

8.1 Training and development

Access to relevant, high-quality training remains a significant constraint on workforce development across the BVRT corridor. While training opportunities exist, they are often inconsistently delivered, poorly aligned with industry needs or difficult to access due to logistical barriers.

Key statistics and issues include:

- ▶ Low senior school completion: Just 52.1 per cent of residents have completed Year 11 or 12, well below the Queensland average of 63.6 per cent.²⁹
- ▶ Low VET completion: Tourism-related certificate completion rates sit at only 34 per cent, weakening the pipeline for hospitality and customer-facing roles.³⁰
- ▶ Delivery gaps: Availability of tourism, travel and hospitality aligned qualifications varies significantly across towns, with some offering as few as three courses while others offer up to seven.³¹
- ▶ Access barriers: Common challenges include lack of transport, poor digital connectivity, training timetables that clash with work schedules and limited on-the-job learning options.

Stakeholders noted that employers are increasingly hiring unskilled workers simply to fill roles, reflecting the urgency of the skills shortage. Waitlists for apprenticeships further limit training access.

National workforce initiatives have highlighted the importance of structured school-to-industry engagement as a key pipeline mechanism. This plan aligns with those objectives by promoting immersive experiences such as school-based apprenticeships, career roadshows and local "gap year" placements. Strengthening these connections will help raise awareness of local career options and counter the perception that young people must relocate to succeed.

These findings point to systematic challenges in training availability, relevance and delivery format. Addressing them will require new approaches that are more flexible, responsive and embedded in local contexts.

8.2 Education and training barriers

Although training opportunities are available across the region, they often fail to meet the needs of businesses or learners. Barriers commonly cited include:

- ▶ Transport limitations, particularly for learners in small towns who must travel long distances for face-to-face delivery.
- ▶ Course misalignment. Where qualifications on offer do not match high demand roles such as customer service, practical trades and entry-level care work.
- ▶ Limited modular and short-form options, restricting opportunities for rapid upskilling without full-time study.
- ▶ Provider retention issues, with RTOs and training organisations struggling to sustain delivery in areas with low enrolments areas, resulting in gaps in VET continuity.

Stakeholders expressed strong support for community-embedded training models, blended delivery formats and programs that directly reflect business realities.

29 Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *General community profile: 2021 Census of Population and Housing*. Canberra: Australian Government. <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/search-by-area>

30 NCVER. (2024). *Total VET program enrolments and completions by SA2, 2023*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

31 Ibid.

Completion by training package

While enrolments are strong in many fields, a persistent issue in the VET system is low program completion rates. On average, only 30 per cent of enrolments result in completions across the region. Table 17 provides a breakdown of enrolments and completions by parent training package in 2023, highlighting significant variation between industry.²¹

Table 1 Training package enrolments and completions (2023)

| Parent training package | Enrolments (2023) | Completions (2023) | Average completion percentage |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Community Services (CHC) | 2425 | 640 | 26.4 |
| Business Services (BSA, BSB) | 1730 | 635 | 36.7 |
| Construction, Plumbing and Services Integrated Framework (BCF, BCG, BCP, CPC) | 1315 | 300 | 22.8 |
| Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (SIT, THH, THT) | 1235 | 425 | 34.4 |
| Foundation Skills (FSK) | 1220 | 430 | 35.2 |
| Sport, Fitness and Recreation (SIS, SRC, SRF, SRO, SRS) | 1015 | 315 | 31 |
| Metal and Engineering (MEM) | 945 | 290 | 30.7 |
| Health (HLT) | 815 | 320 | 39.3 |
| Resources and Infrastructure (BCC, DRT, MNC, MNM, MNQ, RII) | 715 | 190 | 26.6 |
| Automotive Industry Retail, Service and Repair (AUR) | 695 | 215 | 30.9 |

Source: NCVET, VOCSTATS

Some fields, such as construction and community services, are experiencing particularly low completion rates (23 per cent and 26 per cent respectively), putting additional pressure in training organisations and limiting the talent pipeline for key industries. The tourism industry is also impacted, with just over one-third completion in relevant qualifications, raising concerns about the future availability of a trained and job-ready workforce in the region.

²¹ NCVET. (2024). *Total VET Program Enrolments and Completions by SA2, 2023*. Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Education Research. <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/vocstats>

8.3 Training pathways and opportunities

Despite these barriers, the BVRT region holds significant opportunities to strengthen its training ecosystem and align pathways with local workforce needs.

Higher education and lifelong learning

- ▶ University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) and other SEQ universities offer blended and distance learning, providing progression from VET to higher qualifications in fields such as health, education, business and digital.
- ▶ Microcredentials and short courses allow residents to upskill without relocating or committing to full-time study.
- ▶ Promoting lifelong learning will be essential to ensure career resilience in the face of technological and climate-driven change.

Industry partnerships and work-integrated learning

- ▶ Stronger collaboration between TAFE, RTOs and employers could ensure training reflects real workplace contexts.
- ▶ Models such as structured traineeships, apprenticeships and paid placements remain the most effective tools for building industry-ready skills.
- ▶ Small business participation could be strengthened through shared apprenticeship arrangements, local employer networks and council-supported initiatives.

Digital training access

- ▶ Online learning expands training options but remains constrained by digital exclusion and patchy internet connectivity in rural areas.
- ▶ Blended models that combine online components with local workshops or community-based delivery are strongly supported as a practical solution.

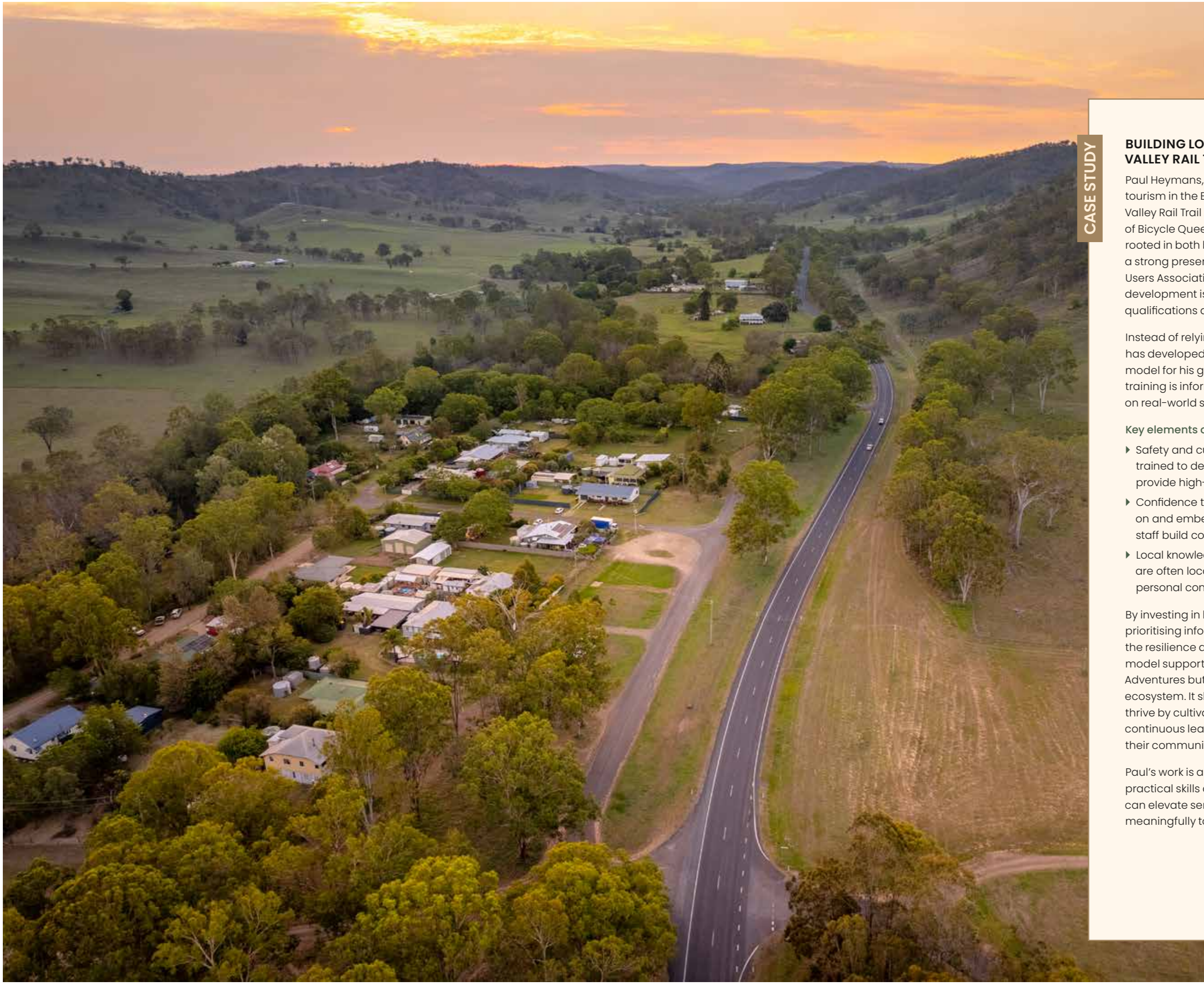
Equity and inclusion in training

- ▶ Targeted strategies are required to support women returning to work, disengaged youth, First Nations learners and mature-age workers.
- ▶ Embedding cultural safety, flexible scheduling and wraparound supports will help lift participation and completion rates among these groups.

Local training innovations

- ▶ Mobile training hubs and community-based delivery sites are being piloted elsewhere in Queensland and could be adapted to BVRT communities.
- ▶ Schools, libraries and community centres could serve as “training gateways”, reducing travel barriers and raising awareness of local career pathways.
- ▶ Stakeholders also expressed interest in piloting “gap year” style initiatives linking school-leavers with short-term employment, accredited training and volunteering.

The BVRT corridor faces persistent barriers in training access but also holds strong potential to create a more responsive, inclusive and locally grounded training ecosystem. Unlocking this potential will require coordination across training providers, employers, councils and community organisations, supported by state and national workforce policy frameworks.



CASE STUDY

BUILDING LOCAL EXPERTISE AT BRISBANE VALLEY RAIL TRAIL ADVENTURES

Paul Heymans, a driving force behind cycling tourism in the Brisbane Valley, operates Brisbane Valley Rail Trail Adventures and serves as Director of Bicycle Queensland. His leadership is deeply rooted in both business and community, with a strong presence as President of the BVRT Users Association. Paul's approach to tourism development is grounded in the belief that formal qualifications are not the only path to excellence.

Instead of relying on external certifications, Paul has developed a practical, in-house training model for his guides and ride leaders. This training is informal but highly effective, focusing on real-world skills that matter most on the trail.

Key elements of this approach include:

- ▶ Safety and customer experience: Staff are trained to deliver clear safety briefings and provide high-quality service.
- ▶ Confidence through practice: Training is hands-on and embedded in daily operations, helping staff build confidence and competence.
- ▶ Local knowledge and community ties: Guides are often locals who bring valuable insights and personal connections to the experience.

By investing in his team's development and prioritising informal learning, Paul strengthens the resilience and capacity of his business. His model supports not only the growth of BVRT Adventures but also the broader regional tourism ecosystem. It shows how small businesses can thrive by cultivating local expertise, fostering continuous learning, and engaging deeply with their communities.

Paul's work is a compelling example of how practical skills and embedded learning pathways can elevate service quality and contribute meaningfully to regional tourism development.



Opportunities and challenges

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail region offers a compelling lifestyle, strong community cohesion and an emerging tourism economy. However, employers across the corridor face interlinked and persistent workforce challenges, constraining regional productivity, business growth and social inclusion. These challenges have intensified due to population shifts, cost-of-living pressures, environmental shocks and evolving industry needs.

At the same time, the region possesses workforce assets that remain underleveraged: untapped local talent, engaged employers, a growing sense of place-based identity and a willingness to innovate in education and employment models. This section summarises key challenges and identifies strategic opportunities to address them.

9.1 Persistent skills shortages across priority sectors

Employers consistently report difficulty sourcing workers in both low- and high-skill roles with the BVRT Environmental Scan identifying a number of affected key sectors, including:

- ▶ Hospitality and tourism: Chefs, cooks, front-of-house staff, cleaners, baristas; increasing need for digital skills in bookings, marketing and online customer engagement.
- ▶ Aged care, health and disability support: Nursing, allied health, support work; emerging skills in telehealth and technology enabled care.
- ▶ Trades and construction: Electricians, carpenters, plant operators, mechanics; growing demand for digital tool use and sustainable construction practices.
- ▶ Agriculture: Seasonal labour shortages in harvesting, fencing, irrigation, livestock care; emerging skills in climate-resilient farming and regenerative practices.
- ▶ Transport and logistics and digital/IT services: Small businesses seeking digital modernisation struggle to attract skilled workers.

Small and micro-businesses often lack the scale to compete on wages or career progression, leading to prolonged vacancies and limited growth.

CASE STUDY

BRISBANE VALLEY ROASTERS – STRONG TRADE, FRAGILE WORKFORCE

Brisbane Valley Roasters in Esk is a thriving regional business with a strong reputation and steady growth, particularly in its wholesale operations. Yet, behind the success lies a familiar challenge: workforce precarity. Despite its popularity and expanding trade, the business struggles to recruit and retain chefs—a process that often feels more like luck than strategy.

To manage this uncertainty, the team at Brisbane Valley Roasters has adopted an “always hiring” mindset. Recruitment is ongoing and opportunistic, relying heavily on informal networks and local schools. Formal advertising is rare; instead, the business taps into word-of-mouth and community connections to find potential staff.

Key strategies include:

- ▶ **On-the-job training:** New hires receive extensive practical training to uphold service standards.
- ▶ **School engagement:** The business builds early connections with young locals to spark interest in hospitality careers.
- ▶ **Flexible recruitment:** Hiring is continuous, with the team ready to onboard whenever suitable candidates emerge.

However, without coordinated talent sharing across local businesses, recruitment and training remain constant pressures. The case highlights a broader regional paradox: even successful businesses face persistent staffing challenges, especially in specialised roles like chefs.

Brisbane Valley Roasters demonstrates how informal recruitment, community engagement, and hands-on training can sustain service quality—but also underscores the need for more collaborative workforce solutions in regional hospitality.

9.2 Underutilised and disengaged labour pools

Despite shortages, many residents remain underemployed or disconnected from the labour market, including:

- ▶ Youth unemployment remains a key concern in the region particularly in South Burnett and Somerset.
- ▶ First Nations peoples, who face barriers related to discrimination, service access and employer readiness.
- ▶ Older workers seeking part-time or flexible roles but lacking digital skills or local pathways.
- ▶ People with disability, reporting few accessible or supported opportunities.
- ▶ Women returning to work, particularly mothers seeking school-hours or part-time roles with flexible arrangements.

Targeted programs, inclusive recruitment models, mentoring and flexible work arrangements can unlock this latent workforce potential.

9.3 Business capability

97 per cent of BVRT businesses are small or micro-enterprises. Many lack formal HR capability and struggle with:

- ▶ Workforce planning, recruitment and retention strategies.
- ▶ Navigating government support, grants or training subsidies.
- ▶ Onboarding, supervision and mentoring staff.
- ▶ Digital recruitment and marketing platforms.
- ▶ Reactive hiring practices reliant on informal networks.
- ▶ Limited entrepreneurial mindset and collaboration across businesses.

Stronger intermediary support and tailored employer programs are needed to uplift capability, connect them to workforce development initiatives and strengthen digital literacy and innovation.

9.4 Training access and education pathways

Training must be accessible, job-relevant and responsive to regional learners and employers.

Challenges include:

- ▶ Timing and scheduling: Conflicts with seasonal or shift-based work patterns.
- ▶ Transport and distance: Long travel times to training sites for learners without private vehicles.
- ▶ Digital exclusion: Inconsistent internet access and limited digital literacy among older workers and sole traders.
- ▶ Limited job-readiness: Graduates sometimes lack soft skills, confidence or applied experience for customer-facing roles.

Stakeholders recommended:

- ▶ Blended learning models combining online and in-person delivery.
- ▶ Work-integrated learning (WIL) tailored to small business settings.
- ▶ Local delivery in community venues, libraries and council halls.
- ▶ Flexible credentialing, including micro-credentials and skill sets tied to specific jobs.
- ▶ Alignment with emerging skill requirements in digital tourism, climate-adapted agriculture and technology-enabled health care.

9.5 Employment quality and career progression

Employment is concentrated in casual, part-time and seasonal roles, particularly in tourism, retail, hospitality and agriculture.

Challenges include:

- ▶ Limited long-term security and structured development.
- ▶ Low perception of career progression (“low ceiling”) in key industries.
- ▶ Employers’ structural constraints: flat hierarchies, seasonal reliance and few formal upskilling pathways.

Opportunities include:

- ▶ Developing structured career pathways, linking entry-level roles to supervisory, leadership and cross-sector roles.
- ▶ Promoting internal training, mentorship and recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- ▶ Showcasing local success stories (“first job to team leader”) to strengthen retention and aspiration.
- ▶ Highlighting transferable skills across tourism, aged care, events and logistics sectors.



9.6 Structural, environmental and infrastructure factors

- ▶ **Seasonality:** Peaks in tourism, events and agriculture create short-term labour demand.
- ▶ **Infrastructure gaps:** Housing availability, public transport limitations and patchy digital connectivity constrain workforce participation.
- ▶ **Climate and environmental risk:** Floods, droughts and heat events disrupt employment, service delivery and business continuity.

Opportunities include flexible staffing models, housing solutions, transport improvements and climate-adapted workforce strategies.

Table 2 BVRT workforce challenges and opportunities

| | Challenges | Opportunities |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| Skills shortages | Persistent vacancies across hospitality, tourism, aged care, trades, agriculture, transport/IT; small businesses struggle to compete. | Targeted training pathways, school-industry programs, apprenticeships, micro-credentials; emerging skills in digital literacy, climate adaptation and technology-enabled care. |
| Underutilised labour pools | Youth, First Nations peoples, older workers, people with disability, women returning to work. | Inclusive employment programs, flexible work, mentoring, upskilling, local career pathways. |
| Business capability | 97% small/micro businesses; limited HR, recruitment, digital skills; reactive hiring. | Employer support, mentoring, digital capability development, collaboration networks. |
| Training and education | Misaligned courses, scheduling conflicts, transport/distance barriers, digital exclusion, limited job readiness. | Blended learning, work-integrated learning, local delivery hubs, flexible credentials. |
| Employment quality | Casual/part-time roles dominate; low career progression; perception of limited opportunity. | Structured career pathways, internal training, RPL, mentorship, transferable skills development. |
| Structural and Environmental | Seasonal labour peaks, housing/transport gaps, climate impacts, cost-of-living pressures. | Flexible staffing models, housing solutions, transport improvements, climate-resilient workforce strategies. |



10

BVRT workforce plan strategies

The BVRT Grow Your Own Regional Workforce Development Plan is built around five interconnected priorities that address local workforce needs, opportunities and constraints identified through consultations, workshops and the environmental scan. These priorities align with state and national workforce policies while retaining a local focus. Each priority includes a clear goal to articulate its intended impact and key strategies to guide implementation.

The five priorities are:



1

Grow and sustain the future regional workforce ('Attract and retain')



2

Support and develop small business owners



3

Activate underutilised and emerging labour pools



4

Enable regional access and workforce mobility



5

Align training and skills development with future needs

These priorities are designed to work together, each addressing a different facet of the region's workforce ecosystem while collectively building a more resilient and inclusive labour market.



Priority 1

Grow and sustain the future regional workforce ('Attract and retain')

Goal: Increase the size and resilience of the regional workforce by attracting new workers from within the region, retaining local talent and positioning the BVRT as a launchpad for meaningful work and rural lifestyles.

Strategy 1:



STRENGTHEN THE BVRT REGION'S APPEAL AS A PLACE TO LIVE, WORK AND BUILD A CAREER (Priority: High)

- 1.1 Develop storytelling initiatives showcasing local role models across diverse industries.
- 1.2 Promote "Return to Region" programs targeting former residents and graduates with regional ties.
- 1.3 Launch a place branding campaign highlighting lifestyle, career and training opportunities.

Strategy 2:



BUILD AWARENESS OF CAREER PATHWAYS AND REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH (Priority: High)

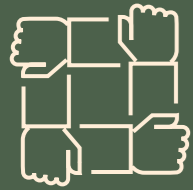
- 2.1 Partner with schools, career advisers and parents to map local job pathways, VET programs and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- 2.2 Offer immersive career experiences (school-based apprenticeships, gap-year placements, internships linked to the trail).
- 2.3 Show progression ("first job to team leader") and link each step to micro-credentials.
- 2.4 Highlight transferable competencies across sectors to support portfolio-style careers.

Strategy 3:



DEVELOP YOUTH-LED SKILLS AND LEADERSHIP INITIATIVES (Priority: Medium)

- 3.1 Encourage youth-led social enterprises in tourism, agriculture and land care.
- 3.2 Leverage the Young Tourism Leaders Program for local skills and leadership development.
- 3.3 Offer mentorship or shadowing with local industry leaders.



Priority 2

Support and develop small business owners

Goal: Strengthen small business capability to recruit, train and retain staff by enhancing owner confidence, digital capacity and access to tailored support.

Strategy 4:



PROVIDE TAILORED, RELATIONSHIP-BASED SUPPORT (Priority: High)

- 4.1 Pilot a Workforce Concierge service connecting businesses to trainers, councils and peer networks.
- 4.2 Simplify access to regional grants, wage subsidies and employment programs.
- 4.3 Offer one-on-one mentoring for micro-enterprises.
- 4.4 Establish a BVRT Business Connector Network to provide fast, in-person guidance.

Strategy 5:



BUILD PRACTICAL BUSINESS SKILLS THROUGH MICRO-LEARNING AND PEER SUPPORT (Priority: Medium)

- 5.1 Develop micro-learning modules for topics like hiring, job ads and budget training.
- 5.2 Facilitate peer mentoring circles (focus on women, solo operators and non-digital natives).
- 5.3 Deliver leadership and people-management training (HR basics, succession planning, multi-generational teams).

Strategy 6:



ENHANCE DIGITAL CAPABILITY (Priority: Medium)

- 6.1 Deliver digital enablement programs for small tourism operators (online visibility, bookings, customer feedback tools).
- 6.2 Provide step-by-step guidance for integrating digital tools.
- 6.3 Offer digital literacy programs covering cybersecurity and emerging technologies (AI, automation).



Priority 3

Activate underutilised and emerging labour pools

Goal: Increase workforce participation by reducing barriers for youth, First Nations peoples, older workers, people with disability and women returning to work.

Strategy 7:



ENABLE INCLUSIVE AND FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT (Priority: High)

- 7.1 Support employers to trial inclusive job design, supported placements and flexible rostering.
- 7.2 Develop "first steps" programs (e.g. Grey Barista pilot) for low-pressure entry into work.

Strategy 8:



BUILD TAILORED WORKFORCE READINESS (Priority: Medium)

- 8.1 Partner with trusted community organisations to deliver accessible programs building confidence and basic job-readiness.

Strategy 9:



LEVERAGE GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT (Priority: Low)

- 9.1 Establish peer mentoring programs for older workers, women returning to work and people with disability.
- 9.2 Reach potential workers through community spaces (Men's Sheds, sporting clubs, markets).



Priority 4

Enable regional access and workforce mobility

Goal: Improve access to jobs, training and services by supporting digital inclusion and inter-sector mobility.

Strategy 10:



PROMOTE INTER-SECTOR WORKFORCE MOBILITY

(Priority: High)

- 10.1 Recognise transferable skills and creating networking opportunities.
- 10.2 Map seasonal employment patterns to better match workers.
- 10.3 Establish a (virtual) seasonal jobs board and “who’s hiring now” feed.

Strategy 11:



REDUCE DIGITAL EXCLUSION

(Priority: Medium)

- 11.1 Provide public Wi-Fi and device-loan options at libraries/ community hubs.
- 11.2 Run “digital basics for work” drop-ins with roving support.



Priority 5

Align training and skills development with future needs

Deliver flexible, demand-driven training supporting lifelong learning and local capacity through place-based delivery models.

Strategy 12:



DELIVER FLEXIBLE, LOCALLY ACCESSIBLE TRAINING PROGRAMS *(Priority: High)*

- 12.1 Use local venues (pubs, showgrounds, libraries) and trial mobile or pop-up training.
- 12.2 Schedule training around seasonal peaks and offer hybrid options.
- 12.3 Support digital literacy to access online learning.

Strategy 13:



STRATEGY 15: CO-DESIGN TRAINING WITH EMPLOYERS *(Priority: High)*

- 13.1 Embed work-integrated learning into programs.
- 13.2 Develop micro-credentials in priority areas (hospitality, trail maintenance, tourism, digital marketing).
- 13.3 Support mutual recognition of foundational credentials across sectors.

Strategy 14:



BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY THROUGH RECRUITMENT AND MENTORING *(Priority: Medium)*³²

- 14.1 Align VET pathways with local employment opportunities and retention programs.
- 14.2 Recruit and develop local trainers where feasible.
- 14.3 Develop BVRT-focused micro-credential suites (First Nations tourism, trail maintenance, nature guiding).



Implementation

The Grow Your Own Regional Workforce Development Plan for the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail region provides a flexible, locally driven framework to support workforce resilience, capability building and inclusive participation. Implementation will require coordinated partnerships, aligned investment and ongoing review to ensure that strategies remain relevant, effective and responsive to local needs.

11.1 A platform for shared action

The priorities are designed to complement existing strategies rather than replace them. They provide a regional platform for:

- ▶ Coordinated action across councils, schools, TAFEs, universities, employment services and employers
- ▶ Targeted use of resources, funding programs and training pathways to maximise impact.
- ▶ Piloting and scaling new approaches across the Somerset and South Burnett LGAs.

This structure provides strategic clarity and practical flexibility, enabling local champions to act now while positioning the region to respond to emerging workforce trends.

11.2 Partnership and governance framework

The BVRT region benefits from deep local networks and community-driven initiatives, including local government, chambers of commerce, volunteer organisations, First Nations Elders, tourism associations and education providers. These networks already:

- ▶ Host community markets and events that create casual employment.
- ▶ Coordinate trail maintenance and infrastructure projects.
- ▶ Deliver grassroots training and mentoring (e.g. agritourism workshops).
- ▶ Respond to workforce displacement and recovery needs.

Successful implementation required collective effort across industry and level of government. The following partnership model is recommended:

Local Government: Facilitate integration of workforce priorities into regional economic development, infrastructure, tourism and planning strategies; support stakeholder coordination and convening.

Industry and Employers: Co-design initiatives, identifying skill gaps and champion workforce change; essential for grounding strategies in real workforce needs.

Education and Training Providers: Deliver place-based and flexible training, micro-credentials and school-to-work pathways.

Community and Support Services: Reach underrepresented labour pools; support participation for youth, mature workers and return-to-work cohorts.

State and Commonwealth Agencies: Provide policy alignment, funding coordination and program delivery expertise.

Local Coordination Group: A BVRT Workforce Coordination Group should be established with representation across all stakeholders to:

- ▶ Prioritise short-term actions
- ▶ Oversee pilot implementation
- ▶ Map funding opportunities
- ▶ Monitor outcomes
- ▶ Facilitate adaptive review processes

11.3 Risk and mitigation strategies

Key risks to successful implementation and corresponding mitigation actions, are outlined below:

Table 3: Risk and Mitigation strategies

| Risk | Mitigation Strategy |
|---|--|
| Misalignment of funding cycles and local needs | Map plan priorities to current grant timelines (e.g. SQW, GYO) and stage implementation to fit cycles. |
| Stakeholder fatigue or drop-off | Celebrate early wins, rotate leadership roles, and ensure communication remains purposeful and energising. |
| Geographic isolation and transport barriers | Prioritise mobile delivery models, flexible learning formats, and explore transport pilots or solutions. |
| Duplication or fragmentation of programs | Use coordination group to monitor program landscape and integrate delivery where possible. |
| Policy or political shifts | Embed flexible approaches, document local impact stories, and cultivate regional champions across sectors. |



12

Conclusion

The Brisbane Valley Rail Trail is more than a path through the landscape; it is a corridor of opportunity. Acting on the priorities outlined in this plan can grow not only the workforce, but also regional confidence, capability and cohesion.



YOUNG PEOPLE CAN TRAIN, WORK AND THRIVE LOCALLY.



MATURE RESIDENTS CAN STAY ACTIVE IN THE WORKFORCE, SHARING SKILLS ACROSS GENERATIONS.



TOURISM AND MICRO-ENTERPRISE CAN BE POWERED BY PROUD LOCAL WORKERS.



SMALL BUSINESSES CAN SCALE WITH RESPONSIVE TRAINING, PRACTICAL ADVICE AND DIGITAL TOOLS.

This vision is achievable if local champions, councils, businesses and communities move from planning to action. The BVRT has already demonstrated its power to connect communities, now it can connect people with real opportunity.





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