

## Summit Outcomes

On 11 March 2022, the Queensland Government convened the Queensland Workforce Summit 2022 (the Summit). This Summit brought together over 350 international and Queensland community, industry and economic experts, all levels of government (federal, state and local), thought leaders and change makers to address current and future workforce challenges and plan for the future of work in Queensland.

Queensland's strong response to the COVID-19 pandemic has provided the foundation for our economic recovery. Queensland's economy is now 6.3% larger than before the pandemic, growing considerably stronger than the rest of Australia.<sup>1</sup> However, Queensland and the nation are experiencing one of the tightest labour markets in recent history, with businesses and employers continuing to face skills and workforce shortages.

In the weeks leading up to the Summit, we asked Queensland businesses to share their views through an online Survey. Results indicated:

- Regardless of industry or region, businesses across the State are having significant difficulty attracting and retaining staff. Non-skilled and semi-skilled labour are proving particularly challenging for employers to source.
- More than 91% of businesses have had significant or minor difficulties in recruiting staff over the last 12 months.
- Recruitment issues in the past year have been felt particularly acutely in regional areas and in the Accommodation and Food Services industry.
- On average, around three quarters of surveyed businesses experienced general workforce difficulties such as getting enough applicants for jobs, finding industry experience, and recruiting applicants with well-matched values and attitudes.

These shortages are likely to continue in the future, with Queensland's workforce needs set to grow. The latest Anticipating Future Skills employment projections by Jobs Queensland indicate employment in Queensland is projected to increase by 10.9% between 2020-21 and 2024-25. This represents over 280,000 additional people employed, with jobs growth projected to occur across every region and every industry in Queensland.<sup>2</sup>

The Summit focused on ideas and practical solutions that will help us build the workforce that the State needs, both now and in the future. It also considered which actions should be prioritised in designing the Queensland Government's future workforce strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> ABS (2021) Australian National Accounts: State Accounts, 2020-21. Australian Bureau of Statistics: Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see <https://jobsqueensland.qld.gov.au/anticipating-future-skills/>.

One of the most important outcomes of the Summit is the identification of some core guiding principles for the development of that strategy. In particular, solutions to workforce challenges must be:

- community-centred, industry-led and government-enabled
- designed and implemented in partnership, as no single stakeholder can solve these challenges on their own. As such, shared priority, purpose and responsibility between industry, employers, regions, communities and all levels of government (federal, state and local) were considered essential.
- flexible and agile enough to adapt to the current and future needs of local communities, employers and employees.

## New initiatives

The Queensland Government is committed to working in partnership with industry, communities and the government, training and education sectors to develop effective solutions for local communities.

We already invest significantly in the State's current and future workforce and we announced more new initiatives at the Summit. These include:

- Investing \$15 million in the VET Emerging Industries initiative (part of the Future Skills Fund) which will develop flexible industry strategies, comprised of:
  - \$5 million for a Manufacturing Skills Fund to lift manufacturing in our TAFEs;
  - \$4 million to support energy skills including for electric vehicles, hydrogen, and renewable energy
  - \$5 million for an Agriculture Skills Fund and Beef Processing Skills Fund; and
  - \$1 million to support TAFE to develop Screen and Digital skills.
- Launching a Growing Workforce Participation Fund pilot in target areas with one off grant funding between \$20,000 and \$200,000 for programs that allow industry to help employers to hire more diversely.
- A campaign, including incentives, to attract skilled tradespeople to Queensland.

## Summit Overview

A skilled and high performing workforce is key to Queensland's economic growth and recovery. However, Queensland businesses continue to face significant challenges accessing the skilled and unskilled workforce.

The Summit focused on *six key themes* identified as priorities by industry, small businesses and the education and training sectors during an engagement process that occurred over the 12 months leading into the Summit.

### 'Growing your own'

- While workforce shortages exist across the State, the way that these issues play out varies across industries and regions. These shortages are occurring against a backdrop of low levels of unemployment, reduced international migration, global demand for skills and talent and high demand for housing that is particularly acute in regional areas. 'Growing your own' means using local workforce approaches connected to local economic opportunities.

### Shaping work-ready Queenslanders through improved school-to-work experiences

- Effective partnerships between schools and industry are essential to ensure students can investigate career options, prepare for the workforce, and identify local work opportunities. For industry, having a connection to schools provides an opportunity to provide clarity on occupations, which generates increased interest from students and supports a better fit with the skills needed in workplaces.

### Maximising workforce participation

- To address current workforce shortages, every Queenslanders who wants to work needs to be participating fully in the labour market. There is an opportunity to address some long-term challenges, such as gender inequality and high levels of unemployment for groups such as young people and First Nations Queenslanders. We also need to make sure that we are fully utilising the skills that exist within the State, including those gained overseas.

### Attracting and retaining staff in the new norm

- COVID-19 has changed the ways that employees wish to engage with work, the drivers of attraction and retention and how they define 'meaningful work'. The 'new normal' gives us an opportunity to revisit how we respond to workforce trends.
- In the current competitive labour market, employers need to re-think their recruitment practices and the ways that they attract and retain staff. We also need to make navigation of the recruitment process easier and bring employers and jobseekers together.

Skills development pathways aligned to industry needs can ensure Queensland's workforce is ready for now, and the future

- Queensland has a strong system of post-school education and training, through our universities and vocational education and training, that is a source of strength. New and higher-level skills and a focus on lifelong learning will be essential to deliver on our future ambitions. Skills development pathways that are aligned to industry needs will ensure Queensland has a workforce for now and the future.

Harnessing workforce opportunities in emerging and growth industries for Queensland

- Our traditional and emerging industries, such as renewable energy, new economy minerals, advanced manufacturing, creative and digital services, underpinned by the innovation and skills of Queenslanders, will drive the jobs and skills of the future. Queensland has ample opportunities on the horizon, but our workforce will be key to our success. It is vital that we work together to harness our current and future opportunities and ensure that as many Queenslanders as possible can engage in and benefit from them.

Summit delegates focussed on these key themes and were asked to co-design innovative and practical solutions to ensure we have a ready workforce to support growth, strengthen our communities and keep Queensland at the forefront of new economic opportunities.

## Summary

The Summit concluded with a summary panel that discussed the common themes identified during the day. These included a recognition of the importance of:

- Partnerships - workforce approaches work best when they are community-centred, industry-led and government-enabled.
- People - in the new normal, responsiveness to workforce trends and being clear on what employees value is critical to attracting and retaining staff, while designing for diversity and inclusion makes for employers of choice
- Data and communication - access to the right information, understanding trends and communication of strategies that are working, to ensure evidence-based decision making.
- Future-focused - workforce and skilling alignment to future industries is critical to ensuring prosperous Queensland communities

## Next steps

The valuable contributions provided by delegates during the Summit will be used by the Queensland Government to inform current and future initiatives focussed on addressing workforce challenges.

The learnings, actions and priorities identified at the Summit will also be an important input to the development of the Queensland Government's Workforce Strategy. This strategy will position Queensland's workforce as a key enabler of our prosperity - now and into the future.

The Queensland Government will continue to work with stakeholders as the outcomes of the Summit are further developed and actioned. Consultation on the development of the Workforce Strategy will be a key priority as part of the Government's program of regional forums in coming months. There will be opportunities to contribute both in person and virtually. This will ensure all Queensland workforce stakeholders get the opportunity to have their say.