

2019

# Workforce Development Study

This report is dated June 2019 and incorporates information and events up to that date only. All surveys, forecasts, projections and recommendations contained in this report are made in good faith and on the basis of the information supplied by the respondents.

RDA Far West has made all reasonable enquiries necessary in preparing this report.

*This project has been developed in partnership to provide the evidence that enables strong planning, industry growth and a sustainable and prosperous region.*

The project partners are:

NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet  
NSW Department of Industry, Training Services NSW



Broken Hill City Council



Central Darling Shire Council



Country Universities Centre Far West



Regional Development Australia Far West



# 1.0 Executive Summary

The best workers achieve the greatest outcomes, but many businesses in the Far West report issues finding and keeping them.

It's remarkable how much of a productivity kicker an organisation gets from top talent. A recent study of more than 600,000 researchers, entertainers, politicians, and athletes found that high performers are 400 percent more productive than average performers.

However, as employees become increasingly interested in more than 'just a job' and seek 'Employers of Choice', employers face competition to attract and retain employees at a time when too few workers are available to replace the baby boomers now departing the workforce in advanced economies.

To ensure the Far West continues to be a productive and sustainable region with meaningful and productive employment, career pathways and relevant training options, it's important to understand the current issues employers are facing, their satisfaction with current training pathways and their workforce needs of tomorrow.

Whilst the population of the region has declined over a number of years the number of jobs in the region has increased.

Businesses across the region have confidence with 86% of responding business planning growth over the next 10 years, however many report issues attracting staff with almost 50% reporting they have advertised a position in the past 12 months they couldn't fill. Employers report a number of issues associated with not being able to attract the right employees with missed opportunities and delays in production, reported as the biggest issues.

Employability skills across the region are reported as important, with 16% of employers raising the lack of employability skills as a barrier to growth, reporting they attract people with technical skills but with very few employability skills.

Training opportunities in the region have grown and 67% of employers report being satisfied with training options for their current workforce. However, 46% are not confident their training needs over the next 5 years will be met within the region and 50% don't believe the training opportunities currently provided align with the required skills in the region.

A number of skills gaps have been reported and coordinated strategies to increase the region's skill base and capacity could help to address some of the recruitment issues faced by employers.

It appears there is a range of factors that are impacting on the ability of businesses to recruit and retain staff, including a lack of basic and specialised skills. There are opportunities for collaboration and improved communication across the region, better alignment of training to employer needs and substantially, better promotion of the region to ensure perception and reality closer align.

There will always be barriers and issues that cannot be addressed, however there are also a number of strategies that could be developed and employed to increase the region's skill base. A comprehensive Regional Workforce Planning and Development Strategy could be developed as the next stage to this report.

A number of focus areas are listed below and in the recommendations section of this report, they seek to provide a starting point for discussion and collaboration.

From the responses to the study it is very obvious there is no shortage of employment opportunities within the Far West across a variety of industry sectors and at a variety of levels. The region has capable and talented people that are able to fill these positions with the right training and support.

This report highlights a number of issues facing the region in workforce development, however, it is also beyond argument that there are jobs available in the region and before the region builds its population it must create jobs. The evidence presented in the report suggests the region has jobs and the issues local employers are facing filling those jobs is a barrier to the region's population growth, sustainability and economic development.

**Workforce attraction and retention** – A decline in population and the pending retirement of the baby boomers coupled with the region's aspirations to grow, mandates contemporary strategies be developed to support employers to attract and retain a suitably skilled workforce. Regional businesses have reported significant missed opportunity as a consequence of not being able to attract and retain the skills they require.

**Aligning Training to the needs of the region** – Growth in the region's population and workforce must be underpinned by high quality, relevant, affordable and accessible training and professional development options. The region has increased employer satisfaction with regard to current training options with 67% of respondents reporting being satisfied with current options, however their confidence didn't extend to meeting their needs into the future.

**Job readiness and generic employability skills** – Employers are increasingly valuing generic employability skills, in some instances as highly as technical skills. Whilst the perception amongst employers is that people from all age groups are not ready for work, the evidence demonstrates employers are willing to consider them should they become "ready for work". Job ready skills are developed and modelled in a range of situations from home, school, sport and employment, yet some are still not developing, or at least demonstrating these skills.

**Transferable skills** – Transferable skills are a core set of skills and abilities, which can be applied to a wide range of different jobs and industries. They're usually picked up over time, and can be gained from previous employment, charity or voluntary work, hobbies, or even just at home. Regardless, the region's employers certainly value these skills and enhanced strategies to support job seekers and employers may build a greater understanding of transferable skills and help ensure the region makes the most of the skills available, thus reducing the instance of employers not attracting suitable employees and ensuring job seekers better articulate their transferable skills, regardless of the position.

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## 3.0 Background

In 2016 RDA Far West committed to undertake research into the workforce capacity of the Far West region. The purpose of the study was to build an evidence base around workforce issues affecting the region to inform the future planning, training and development needs and position the region to take advantage of current and emerging growth opportunities.

The study focused on several associated areas, including;

- Current and future workforce demand in the Far West
- How, and the extent to which, the region can meet the demand
- Skills gaps and shortages
- Current strategies for recruitment and retention of workers
- The capacity of the region to meet current and future training needs
- What skills employers need to grow their businesses
- The work-readiness of the region's job seekers

The 2019 Far West Workforce Development Study has been supported by regional stakeholders to investigate the effectiveness of strategies developed and adopted from the 2016 Study and build on the outcomes from the previous study, it recognises the changing environment of the region, its workforce, aspirations and opportunities.

It should be noted that at the time of this study the Far West, as with much of the State remains in severe drought.

Drought has substantial negative economic impacts on farmers and the local economy. These impacts have been frequently documented (e.g. Diersen et al. 2002, Horridge et al. 2005, Edwards et al. 2009). However, the broader social effects of drought have received far less attention. There are several mechanisms for social impacts of drought – for example, indirect effects of economic factors such as the hardship and the stress of lost productivity; population decline; disruption of social connections as a consequence of the negative economic effects of drought; and the trauma of witnessing damage to livestock, crops, soil and native vegetation (Berry et al. 2008).

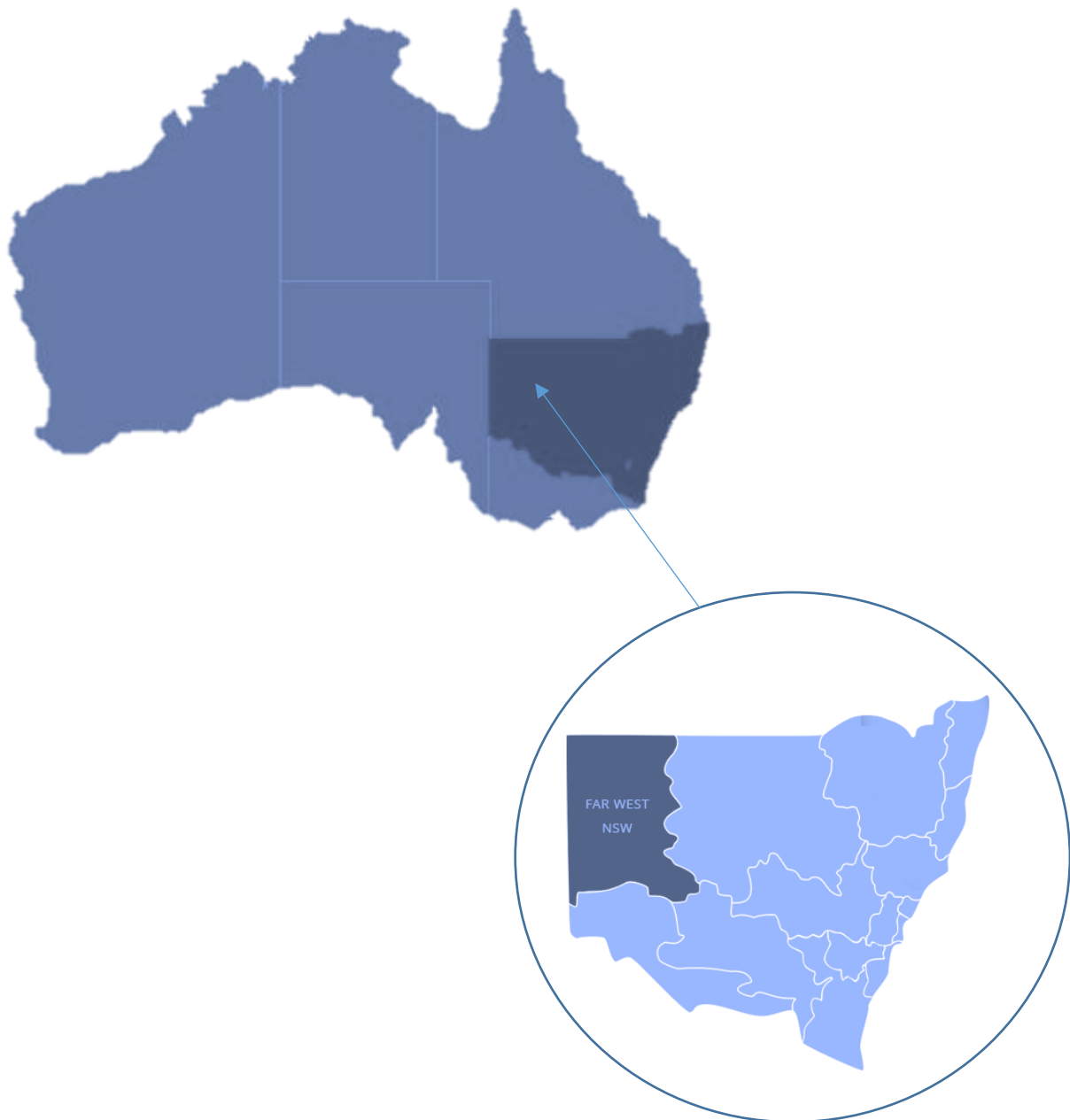
This study does not attempt to analyse the impacts of the ongoing drought but recognises the impact on all aspects of life and work in drought impacted communities of the Far West.

It should also be noted that this study has not included the significant opportunities across the region with new mining operations. Should these opportunities be realised the region will require significant additional labour at all skill levels to meet demand.



## 4.0 Study Area

The geographical area of this study focuses on Far West NSW. The region consist of two local Government Areas, Broken Hill City and Central Darling Shire and Unincorporated Area of NSW and covers approx. 146,000 km<sup>2</sup>



## 5.0 Methodology

This study retained the survey utilised in 2016 to enable a comparison of data over the two study periods.

The original survey was developed in consultation and trialled with a number of NSW RDA's to ensure its suitability in both content and structure.

The survey was comprehensively promoted across the region's media, and individual invitations to complete the survey were forwarded to over 500 businesses. Additionally, a significant number of businesses were contacted by phone and computer assisted telephone surveys were utilised to further engage with employers.



# Demographic Profile of Far West NSW

## 6.0 Profile of the Far West

This section provides an overview of the economic and labour market profile for the Far West region drawn from existing research and available data. It provides an important context by identifying key sectors by value and employment.

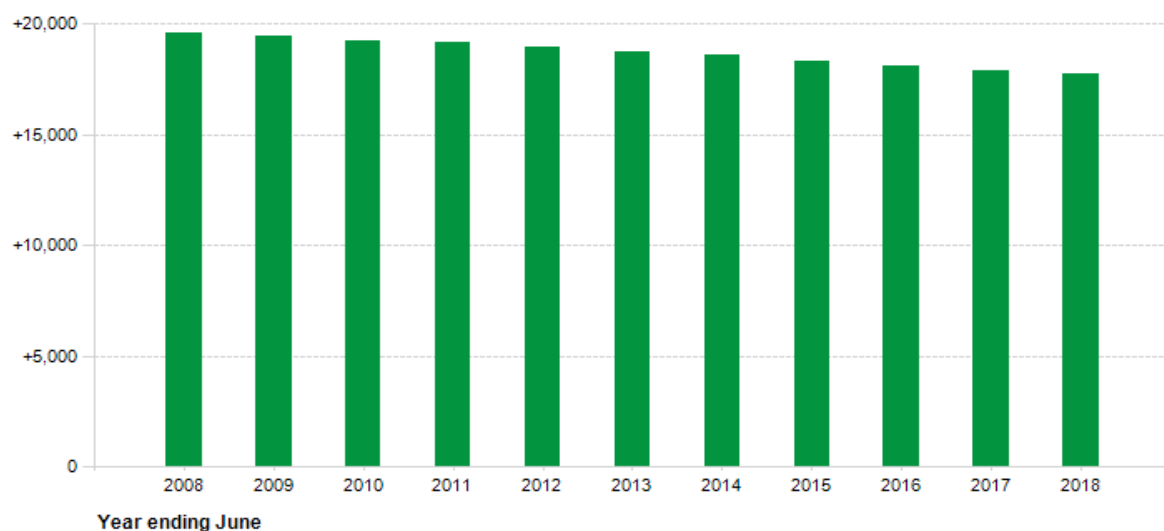
It should be noted that specific data related to the Far West only (RDA Far West footprint) is difficult to access. A significant amount of data exists for the wider Far West region, including Dubbo and all communities in-between, but data exclusively for the Far West is less obtainable and less comprehensive.

### 6.1 Regional Population

The population of Far West NSW has been in steady decline for a number of years. Modern mining practices have streamlined production and the associated labour requirements, however the region is developing strategies to address both the decline and strategic economic growth. Strategies and programs have been developed to reverse the trend of population decline, examples include the Country Universities Centre Far West, opened in 2018, the CUC Far West is supporting both population growth, retention and workforce development, likewise the Far West Proud Campaign has been developed to drive population growth and regional promotion.

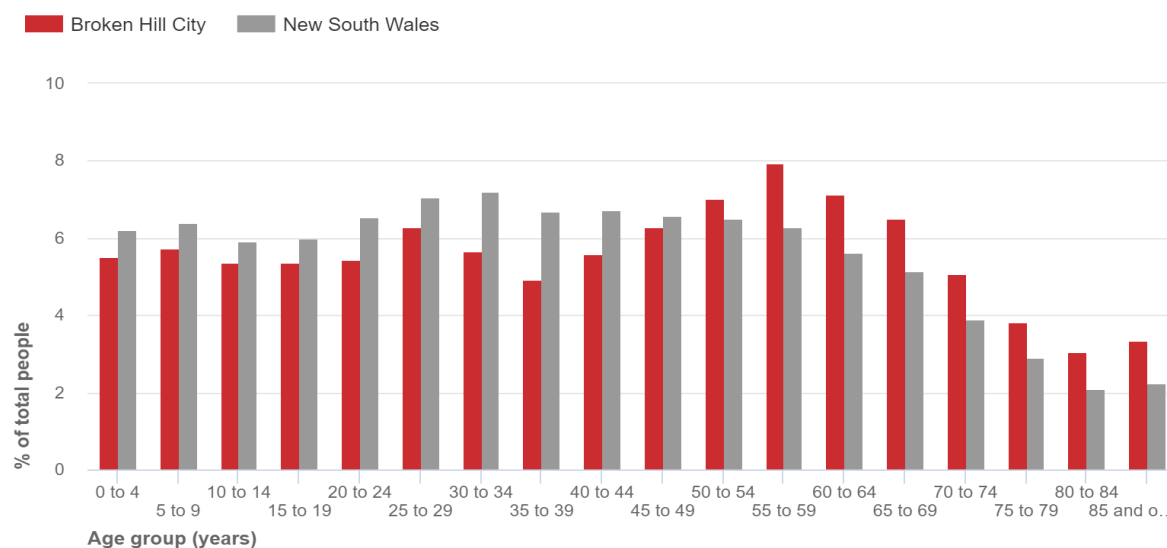
The population of Central Darling Shire, as measured in the 2016 Census was 1,833 people and the population of Unincorporated NSW was measured at 1084 people. The estimated population of Broken Hill at 30 June 2018 was 17,734 contributing to the overall regional population of 20,651 people.

Figure 1 – Estimated resident population of Broken Hill 30 June 2018



Source – Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth*, compiled by .id the population experts

Figure 2: Age structure – Five year age groups comparison, Broken Hill/NSW, 2016. Source Economy ID



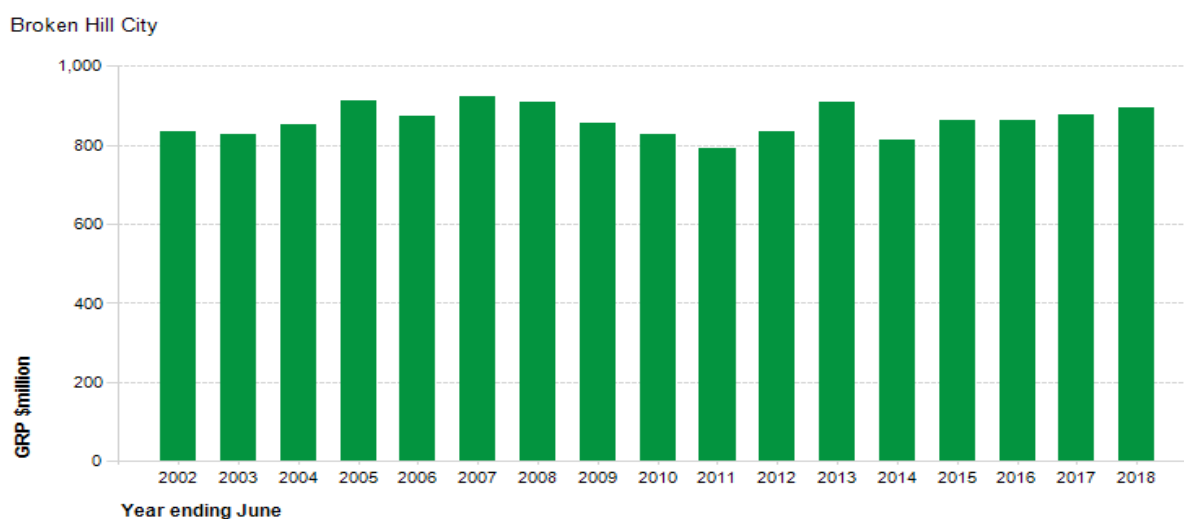
Analysis of the five year age groups of Broken Hill City in 2016 compared to New South Wales shows that there was a lower proportion of people in the younger age groups (under 15) and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (65+).

## 6.2 Economic Profile

The region consists of 2 Local Government Areas (LGA's) and the Unincorporated Area of NSW, covering approximately 146,000sq.km. The region is sparsely populated and has a diverse range of industries and economic environments.

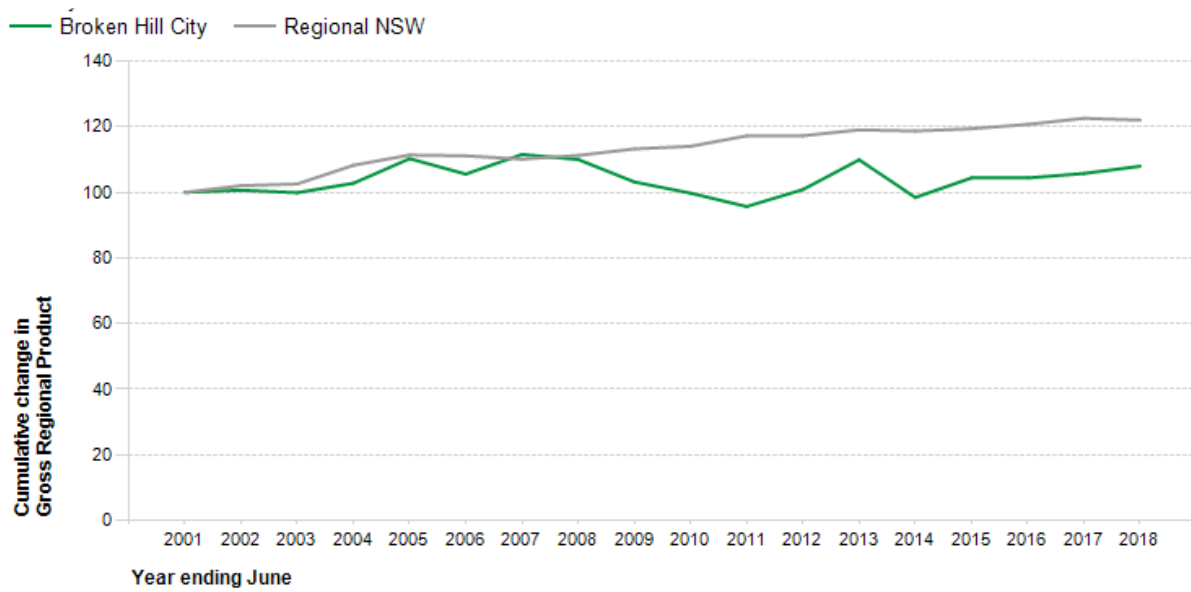
Broken Hill City's Gross Regional Product was \$894m as of the 30th June 2018, a growth of 2.1% on the previous year

Figure 3 – Gross Regional Product Broken Hill City



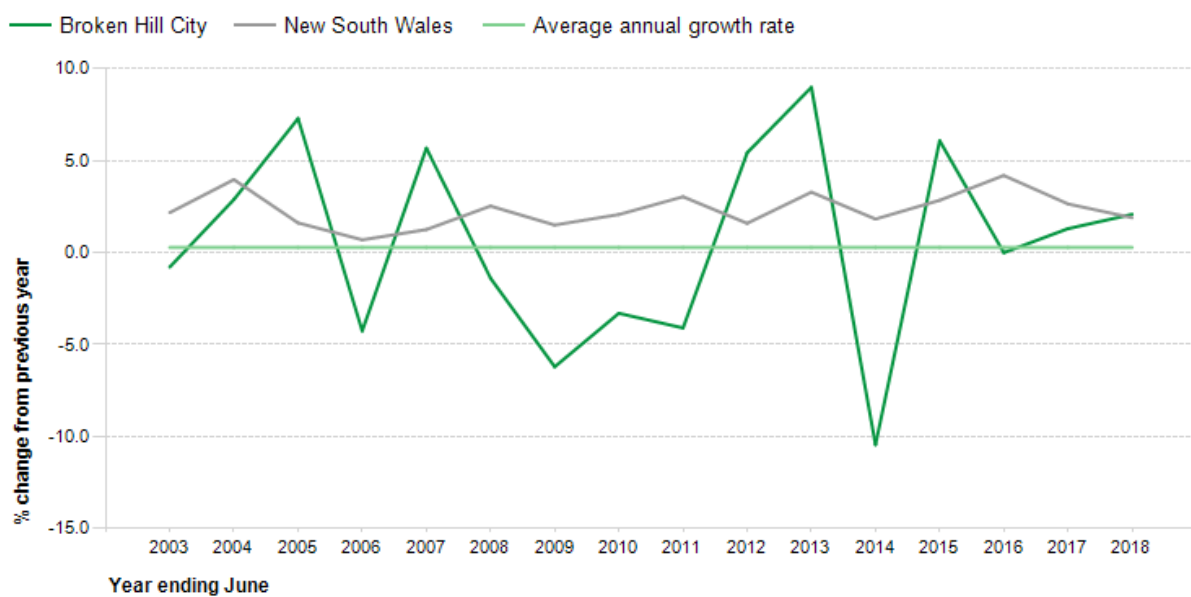
Source: National Institute of economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

Figure 4 – Cumulative change in Gross Regional Product



Source: National Institute of economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

Figure 5 – Annual Change in Gross Regional Product



Source: National Institute of economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

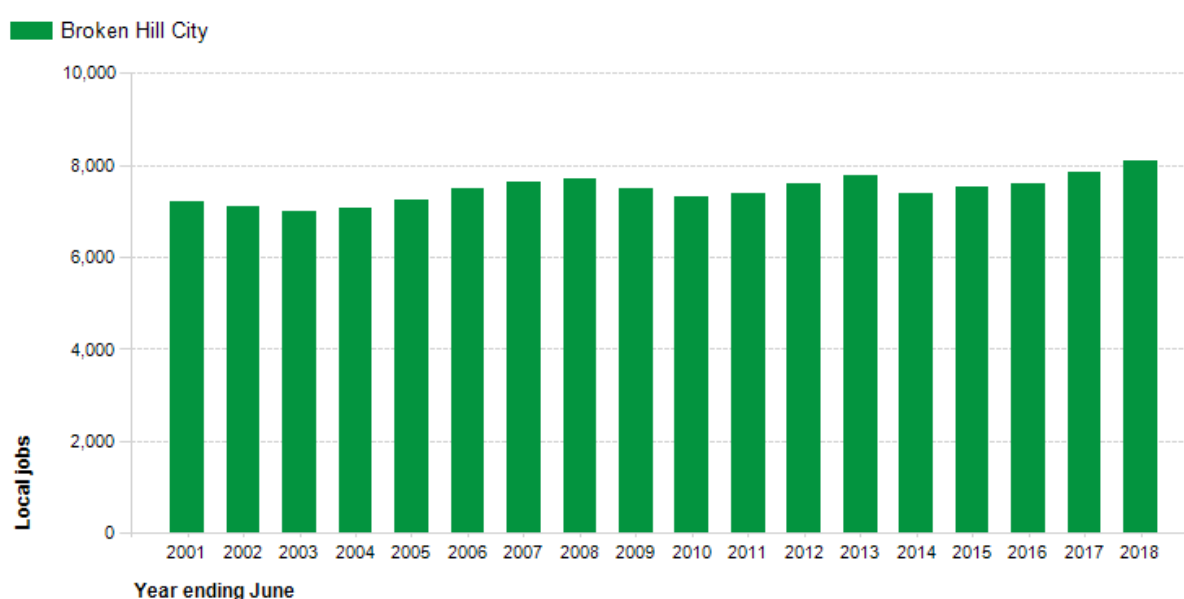
## 6.3 Employment

The year ending June 2018 saw more jobs in Broken Hill and the Far West region than in previous years.

In Broken Hill City, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employer, generating 1,494 local jobs in 2017/18.

There were 8,098 jobs located in the Broken Hill City in the year ending June 2018, 599 jobs in Unincorporated NSW and 564 jobs in Central Darling Shire.

Figure 6 - Local Jobs Broken Hill City 2001 - 2018



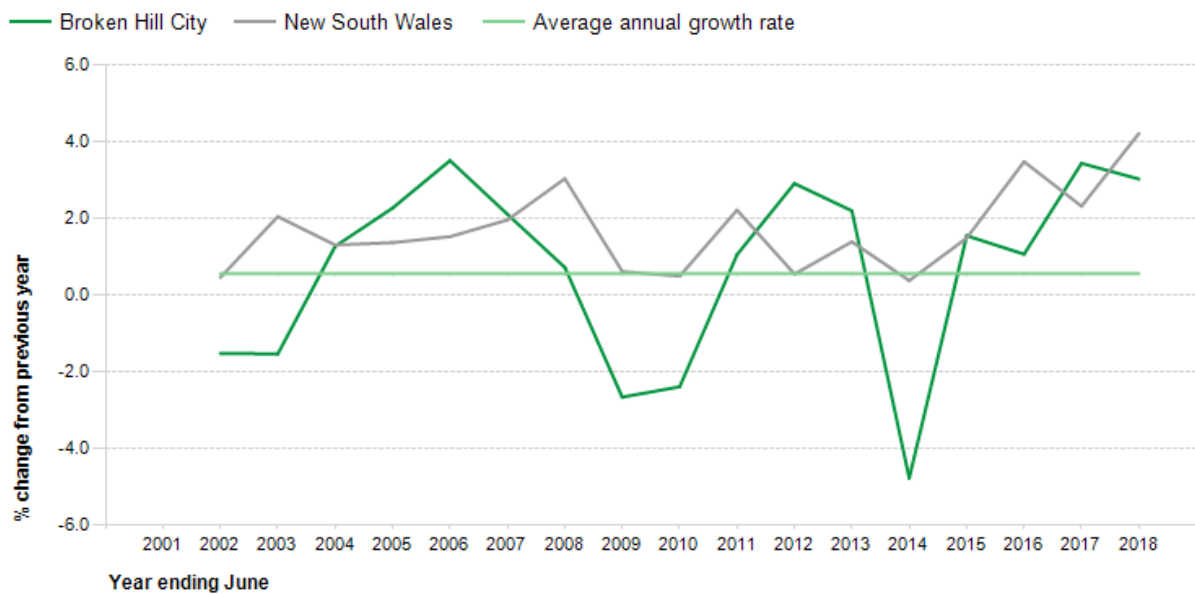
Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

Table 1 – Local jobs Broken Hill City 2008 - 2018

Year (ending June 30)	Broken Hill City	
	Number	% change
2018	8,098	+3.03
2017	7,859	+3.44
2016	7,597	+1.07
2015	7,517	+1.56
2014	7,402	-4.77
2013	7,772	+2.21
2012	7,605	+2.92
2011	7,389	+1.06
2010	7,311	-2.39
2009	7,490	-2.66

2008	7,695	+0.73
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Figure 7 – Annual change in jobs



Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

Figure 8 – Employment by Industry 2017/18

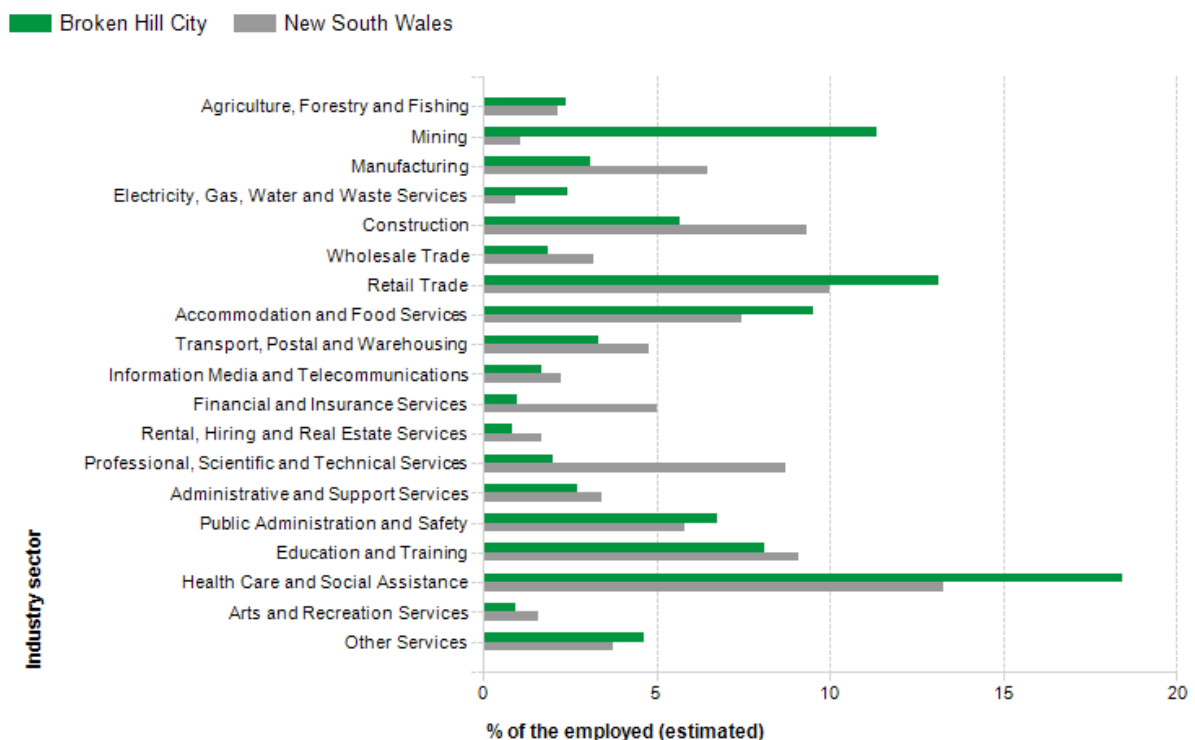
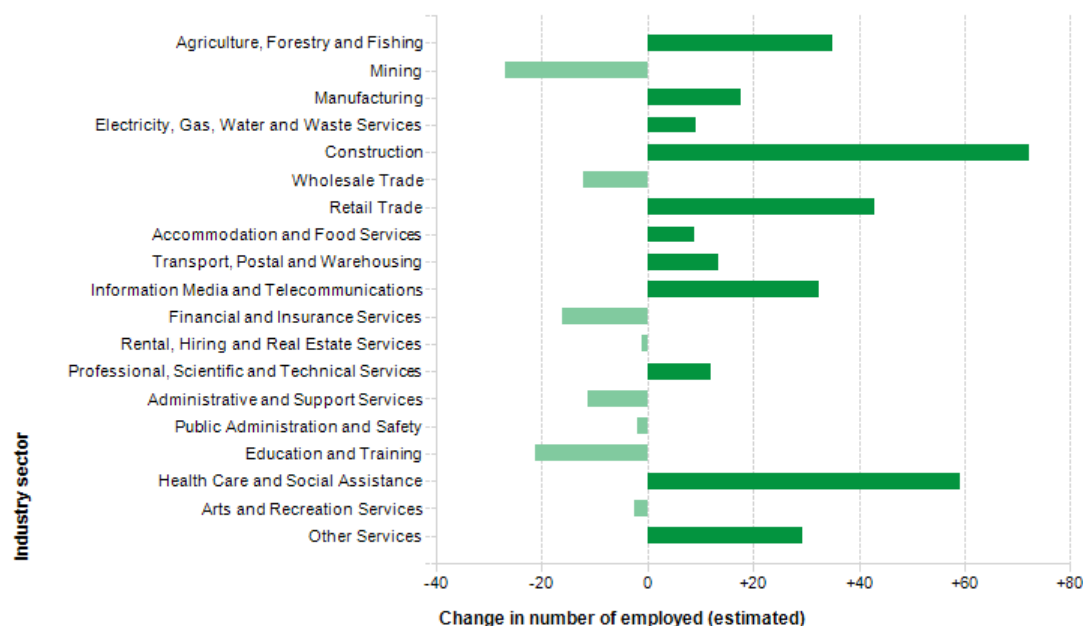


Figure 8, above indicates a greater percentage of the Broken Hill population employed in mining, retail, accommodation and food services and health care and social assistance.



Figure 9 – Change in employment by industry, 2016/17 to 2017/18

Broken Hill City



Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, compiled by .id the population experts

An analysis of the jobs held by the local workers in Broken Hill City in 2017/18 shows the three largest industries were:

- Health Care and Social Assistance (1,494 people or 18.4%)
- Retail Trade (1,064 people or 13.1%)
- Mining (919 people or 11.3%)

In combination these three industries accounted for 3,477 people in total or 42.9% of the local workers.

In comparison, New South Wales employed 13.3% in Health Care and Social Assistance; 10.0% in Retail Trade; and 1.1% in Mining.

The major differences between the jobs held by local workers of Broken Hill City and New South Wales were:

- A *larger* percentage of local workers employed in Mining (11.3% compared to 1.1%)
- A *larger* percentage of local workers employed in Health Care and Social Assistance (18.4% compared to 13.3%)
- A *smaller* percentage of local workers employed in Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (2.0% compared to 8.7%)

### 6.3.1 Emerging Groups

The number of local workers in Broken Hill City increased by 239 between 2016/17 and 2017/18.

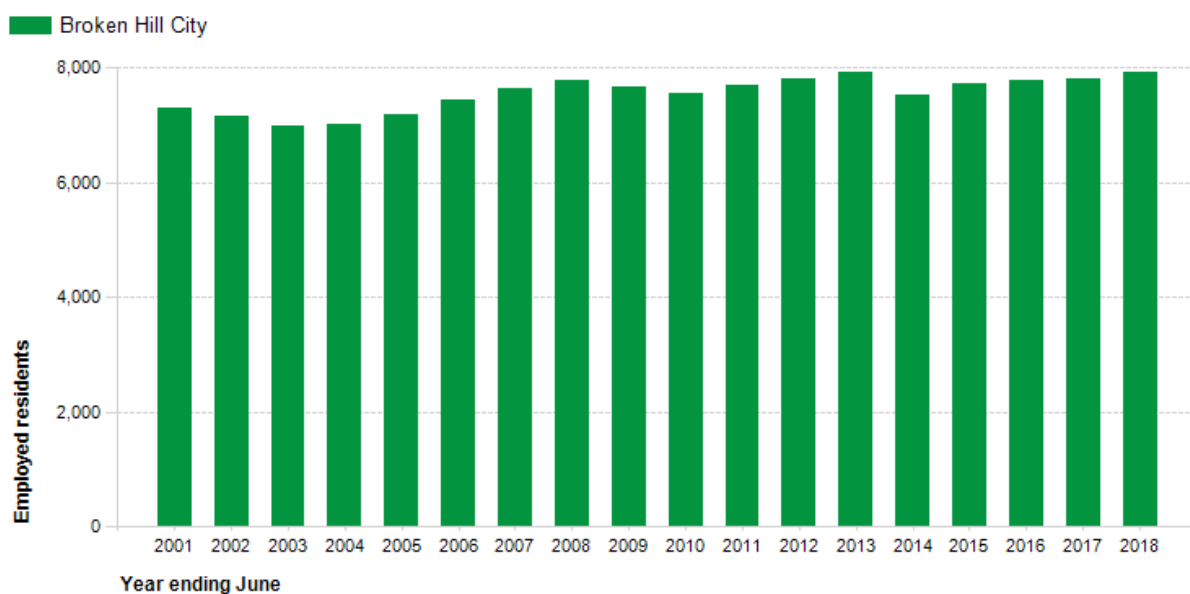
The largest changes in the jobs held by local workers between 2016/17 and 2017/18 in Broken Hill City were for those employed in:

- Construction (+72 local workers)
- Health Care and Social Assistance (+59 local workers)

The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry had the largest number of total registered businesses in Broken Hill City, comprising 16.4% of all total registered businesses, compared to 6.8% in New South Wales.

In Broken Hill City, there were 7,911 residents employed in the year ending June 2018 and 1034 registered businesses.

Figure 10 – Employed residents Broken Hill City



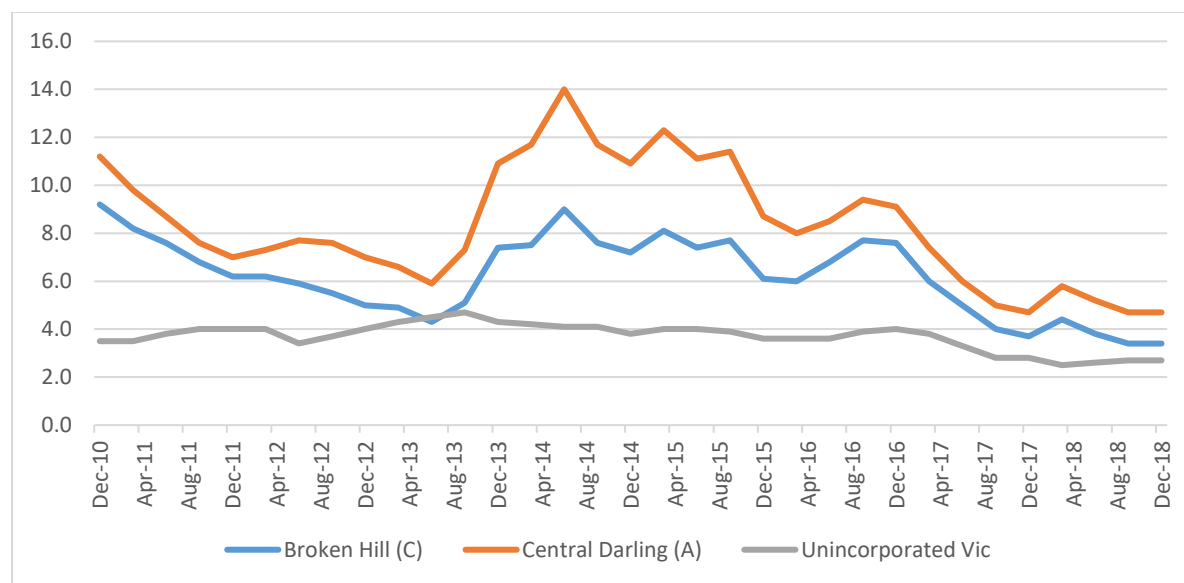
Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research

## 6.4 Unemployment

Unemployment across the region remains low with:

- Broken Hill recording an unemployment rate of 3.4% (December 18) with a long term average over the past 10 years of 6.2% (December 2010 – December 2018)
- Central Darling Shire recorded an unemployment rate of 4.7% (December 18) with a long term average over the past 10 years of 8.3% (December 2008 – December 2018)
- Unincorporated NSW recorded an unemployment rate of 2.7% (December 18) with a long term average over the past 10 years of 3.7% (December 2008 – December 2018)

Figure 11: Unemployment by Centre Far West NSW December 2010 – November 2018

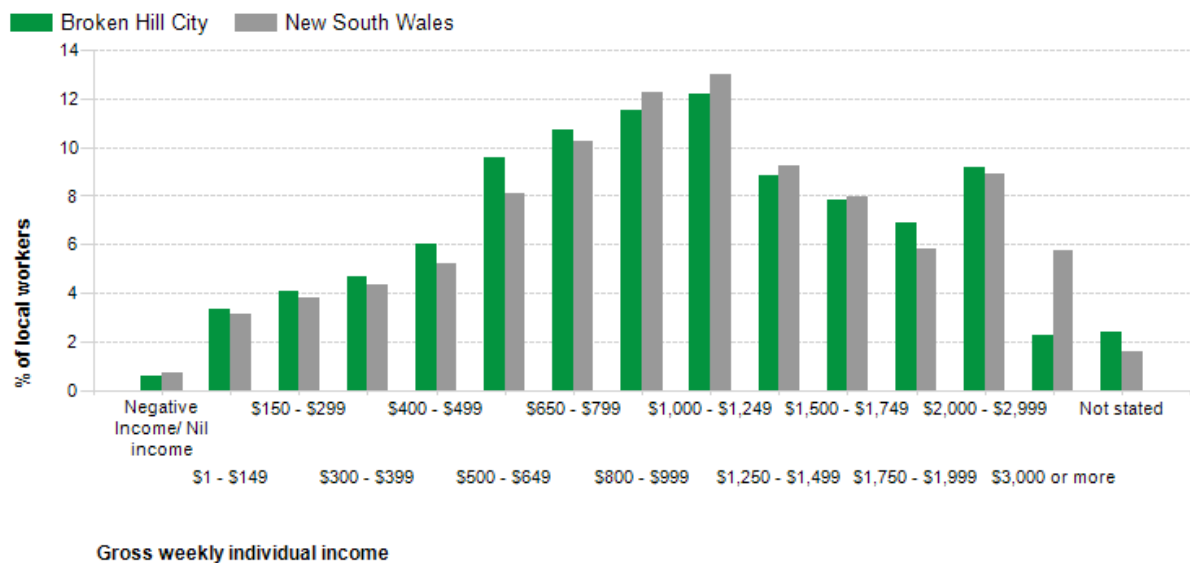


Source: Australian Government Department of Jobs and Small Business, Small Area Labour Markets, December 2018

The region performs well against the NSW average 4.3% (December 2018) and the Australian average of 5.0% (December 2018)

## 6.5 Individual Incomes

Figure 12 – Individual income comparison Broken Hill/NSW 2016



Source: Australian bureau of Statistics, complied by .id the population experts

Analysis of the individual income levels in Broken Hill City in 2016 compared to New South Wales shows that there was a lower proportion earning a high income (those earning \$1,750 per week or more) and a higher proportion of low income persons (those earning less than \$500 per week).

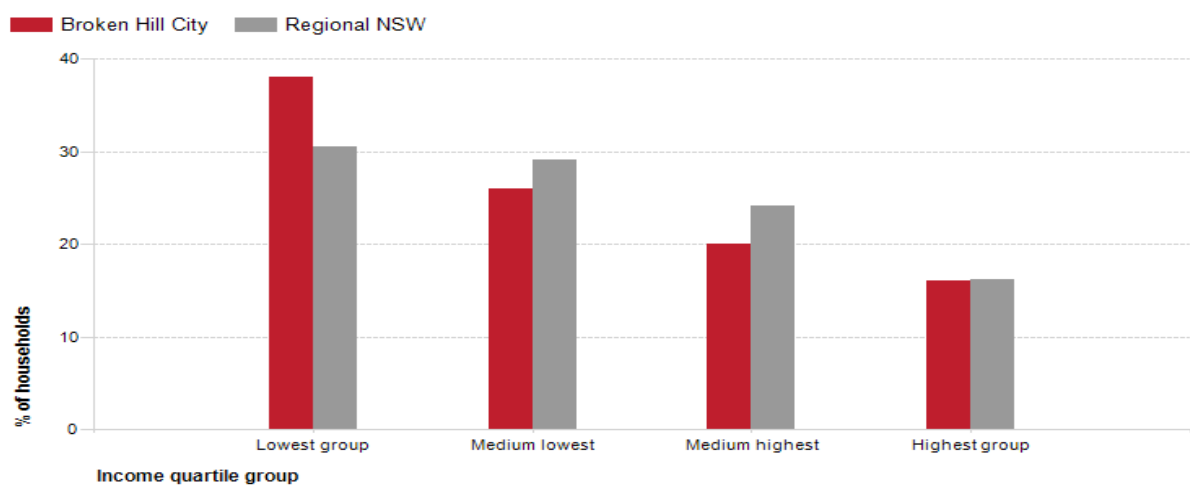
The major differences between the weekly income in Broken Hill City and New South Wales were:

A larger percentage of local workers who earned \$500 - \$649 (9.6% compared to 8.1%)

A larger percentage of local workers who earned \$1,750 - \$1,999 (6.9% compared to 5.8%)

A smaller percentage of local workers who earned \$3,000 or more (2.3% compared to 5.8%)

Figure 13 – Equalised household income quartiles, 2016



Source: Australian bureau of Statistics, complied by .id the population experts

Analysis of the distribution of households by income quartile in Broken Hill City compared to Regional NSW shows that there was a similar proportion of households in the highest equalised income quartile, and a greater proportion in the lowest equalised income quartile.

## *6.6 Education and Training*

Analysis of the qualifications of the workforce in Broken Hill City in 2016 (ABS data) compared to New South Wales shows that there was a lower proportion holding formal qualifications (Bachelor or higher degree; Advanced Diploma or Diploma; or Vocational qualifications), and a higher proportion with no formal qualifications.

Overall, 29.3% held educational qualifications, and 39.1% had no qualifications, compared with 47.2% and 31.1% respectively for New South Wales.

The major differences between the qualifications held by the workforce in Broken Hill City and New South Wales were:

- A larger percentage of local workers with Certificate III & IV Levels (28.2% compared to 18.7%)
- A larger percentage of local workers with no qualifications (39.1% compared to 31.1%)
- A smaller percentage of local workers with Bachelor or Higher degrees (16.5% compared to 32.6%)
- A smaller percentage of local workers with Advanced Diploma or Diplomas (8.5% compared to 11.1%)

In Broken Hill City, 24.9% of people aged over 15 years had completed Year 12 schooling (or equivalent) as of 2016.

Analysis of the highest level of schooling attained by the population in Broken Hill City in 2016 compared to Regional NSW shows that there was a higher proportion of people who had left school at an early level (Year 10 or less) and a lower proportion of people who completed Year 12 or equivalent.

Overall, 54.4% of the population left school at Year 10 or below, and 24.9% went on to complete Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 44.8% and 38.0% respectively for regional NSW.

## *6.7 Social and Economic Disadvantage*

The social and economic disadvantage in the region has been highlighted through several reports. Both the Closing the Gap Report and the Dropping of the Edge Report (2015) have highlighted the social and economic disadvantage of the Wilcannia community, particularly in relation to the disconnect of the community from services provided to and enjoyed by community members and services that are taken for granted by other communities.

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) is a product developed by the ABS that ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage.

The indexes are based on information from the five-yearly Census. SEIFA 2016 is based on Census 2016 data, and consists of four indexes, each focusing on a different aspect of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage, and being a summary of a different subset of Census variables.

The indexes are assigned to areas, not to individuals. They indicate the collective socio-economic characteristics of the people living in an area.

As measures of socio-economic conditions, the indexes are best interpreted as ordinal measures that rank areas. The index scores are based on an arbitrary numerical scale and do not represent a quantity of advantage or disadvantage.

Rank: All areas are ordered from lowest to highest score, then the area with the lowest score is given a ranking of 1

Deciles: All areas are ordered from lowest to highest score, the lowest 10% of areas are given a percentile number 1

State Rank: Ordered from lowest to highest score

Table 2: SEIFA Ranking, Far West NSW region, 2016 ABS Data

	Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage				Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage				Index of Economic Resources				Index of Education and Occupation			
	Score	Decile	Rank within Australia	Rank within State	Score	Decile	Rank within Australia	Rank within State	Score	Decile	Rank within Australia	Rank within State	Score	Decile	Rank within Australia	Rank within State
Broken Hill	901	2	67	7	887	2	62	7	918	2	71	6	895	2	57	7
Central Darling Shire	817	1	37	2	855	1	40	2	855	1	42	2	931	4	164	32
Unincorporated NSW	1042	9	477	108	1028	9	461	103	1048	10	41	2	1033	9	464	104

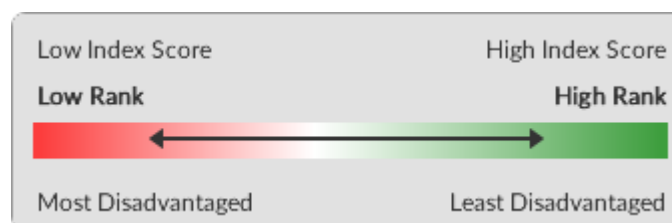


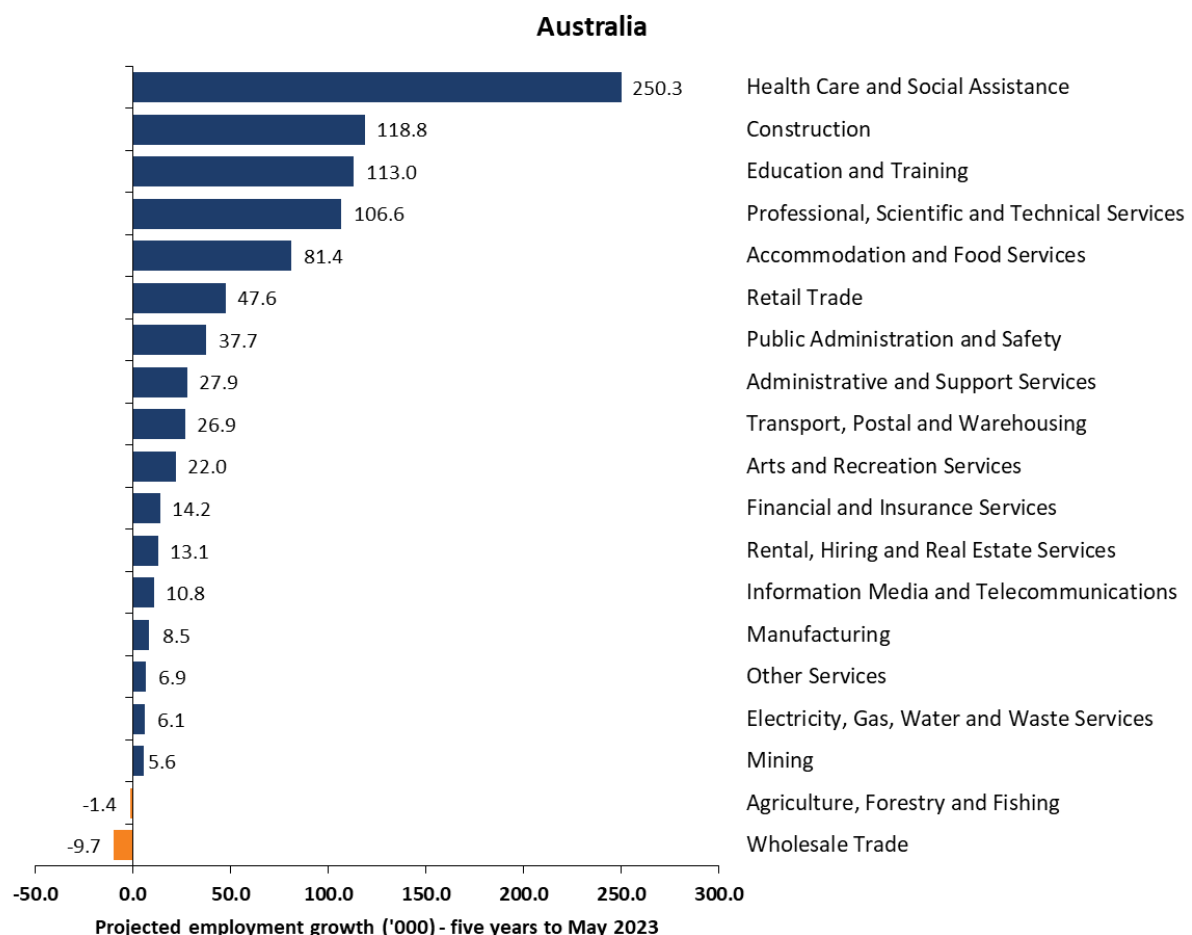
Table 3: SEIFA ranking comparison Far West Region/Australia/NS, 2011

	Broken Hill	Central Darling Shire	Unincorporated NSW	Regional Australia	Outer Metropolitan Australia	Inner Metropolitan Australia	Sydney Inner
SEIFA index of Education and Occupation	885	913	1025	947	966	1063	1181
SEIFA Index of Economic Resources	912	880	1073	950	1020	1029	921

## 7.0 Projected Employment Growth in Australia by Industry

Employment is projected to increase in 17 of the 19 broad industries over the next four years to May 2023. Health Care and Social Assistance is projected to make the largest contribution to employment growth (increasing by 250,300), followed by Construction (118,800), Education and Training (113,000) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (106,600). Together, these four industries are projected to provide almost two-thirds (or 66.4 per cent) of total employment growth over the five years to May 2023.

Figure 14 – Projected employment growth Australia to May 2023 ('000)





At the more detailed level, occupations that are mainly employed in industries with strong projected employment growth feature prominently in the high projected employment growth.

- Almost all Aged and Disabled Carers (up by 69,200 or 39.3 per cent) and Registered Nurses (51,400 or 18.4 per cent) and 75 per cent of Child Carers (27,600 or 17.6 per cent) are employed in the Health Care and Social Assistance industry.
- Over 75 per cent of Construction Managers (up by 13,400 or 13.3 per cent) and over 40 per cent of Gardeners (10,900 or 13.9 per cent) work in the Construction Industry.
- Over 60 per cent of Software and Applications Programmers (up by 25,500 or 21.0 per cent) are employed in the Professional, Scientific and Technical Services Industry.
- Over 90 per cent of Education Aides (up by 18,800 or 20.8 per cent), 99 per cent of Primary School Teachers (16,300 or 9.6 per cent) and most of the remaining Child Carers are employed in the Education and Training Industry.
- At least 70 per cent of Waiters (up by 21,800 or 15.8 per cent), Chefs (up by 16,800 or 16.7 per cent), Kitchenhands (up by 16,100 or 11.7 per cent) and Bar Attendants and Baristas (up by 14,100 or 13.4 per cent) are employed in the Accommodation and Food Services industry.

The occupations with the weakest projected employment growth show the ongoing challenges that globalisation and technological change present for some occupations.

Some of these occupations are from the Clerical and Administrative Workers group, where work is routine in nature and susceptible to automation, such as Contract, Program and Project Administrators (13,800 or 14.5 per cent), Secretaries (down by 13,600 or 32.5 per cent), Personal Assistants (5,800 or 11.0 per cent), Information Officers (4,100 or 6.6 per cent) and Bank Workers (2,400 or 5.5 per cent).

Continuing technology developments in the Agriculture Industry are also expected to reduce projected employment in several occupations including Livestock Farmers (down by 2,100 or 2.7 per cent), Livestock Farm Workers (1,600 or 5.7 per cent) and Mixed Crop and Livestock Farmers (1,000 or 3.4 per cent). However, the ongoing drought may have a significant impact on employment opportunities.

The impact of continuing structural change on the Manufacturing Industry in Australia is expected to sustain the pre-existing trend of falling projected employment in occupations like Engineering Production Workers (down by 4,300 or 23.9 per cent), Industrial, Mechanical and Production Engineers (2,200 or 7.2 per cent) and Metal Engineering Process Workers (1,800 or 14.6 per cent). (Australian Government, Department of jobs and Small Business, employment outlook to May 2023)



# 2019 Employer Survey Results

# 8.0 Survey Results

## 8.1 Demographic Profile of Responding Businesses

The Far West NSW region (RDA Far West region) incorporates Broken Hill City, Central Darling Shire and the Unincorporated Area. To ensure a relevant cross section of employers the region was separated into Local Government Areas (LGA's). Figure 15 and 16 below, indicate the population spread in comparison to the survey respondents whilst Figure 18 identifies the industry breakdown of respondents.

Figure 15: Distribution of population, ABS 2019

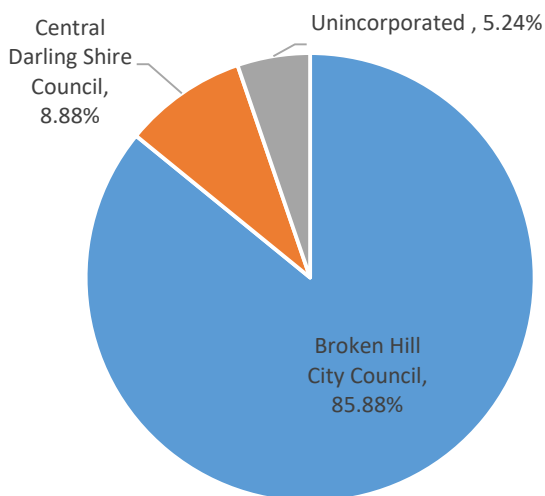


Figure 16: Distribution of respondents

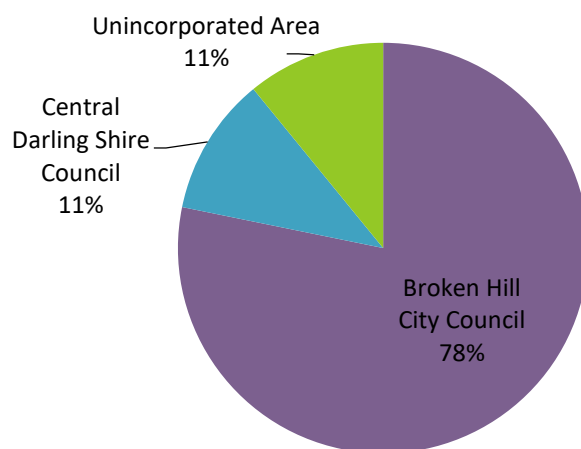


Figure 17: How long has your business been operating?

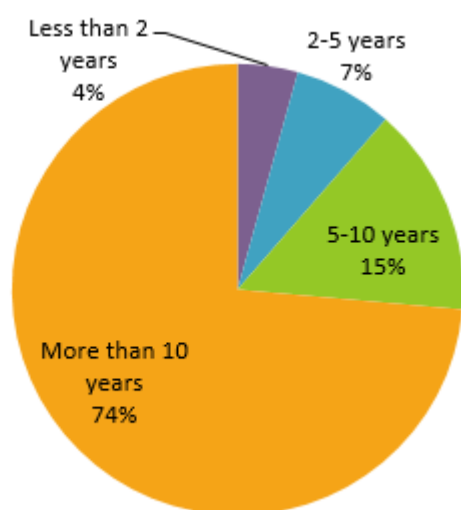
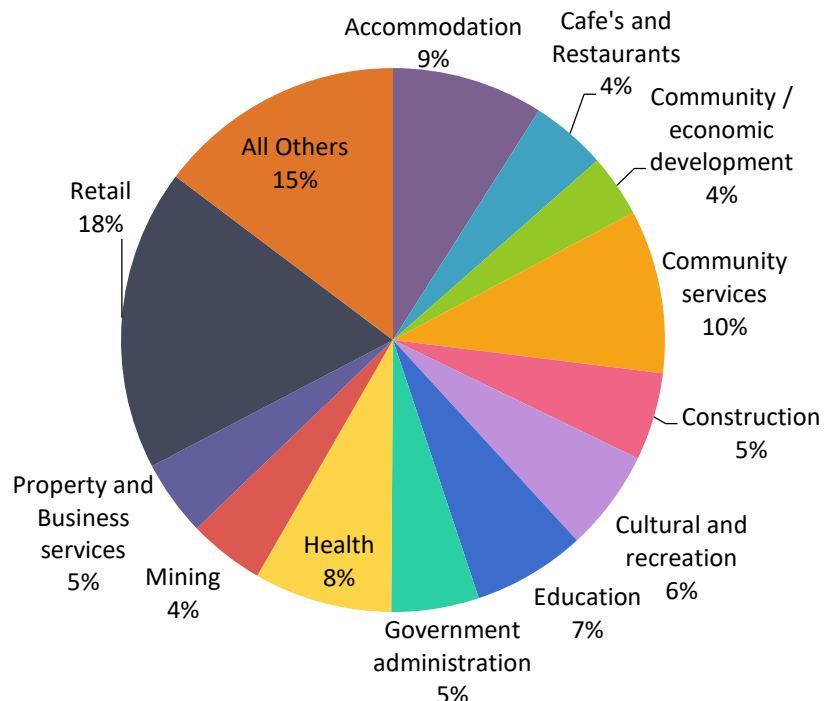


Figure 18: Industry breakdown of survey respondents



## 8.2 Technology

Telecommunications, in particular, high speed broadband and mobile phone coverage has been highlighted as a barrier to growth in the region over an extended period of time. Respondents were asked about their use of technology, whether the organisation has a website, what the website is mainly used for and to what extent the organisation relied on electronic communications.

Figure 19: Does your organisation have a website?

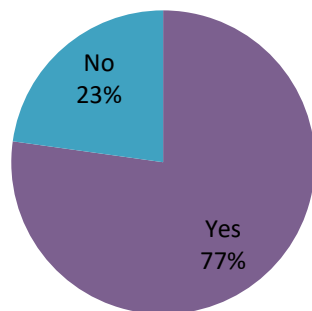


Figure 20: Does your organisation rely on electronic communications (email, smart devices)?

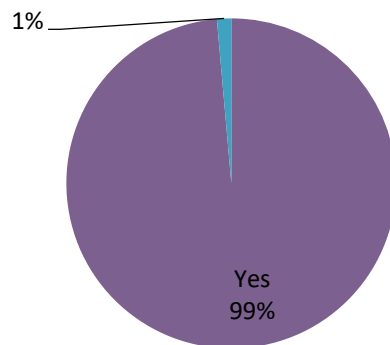
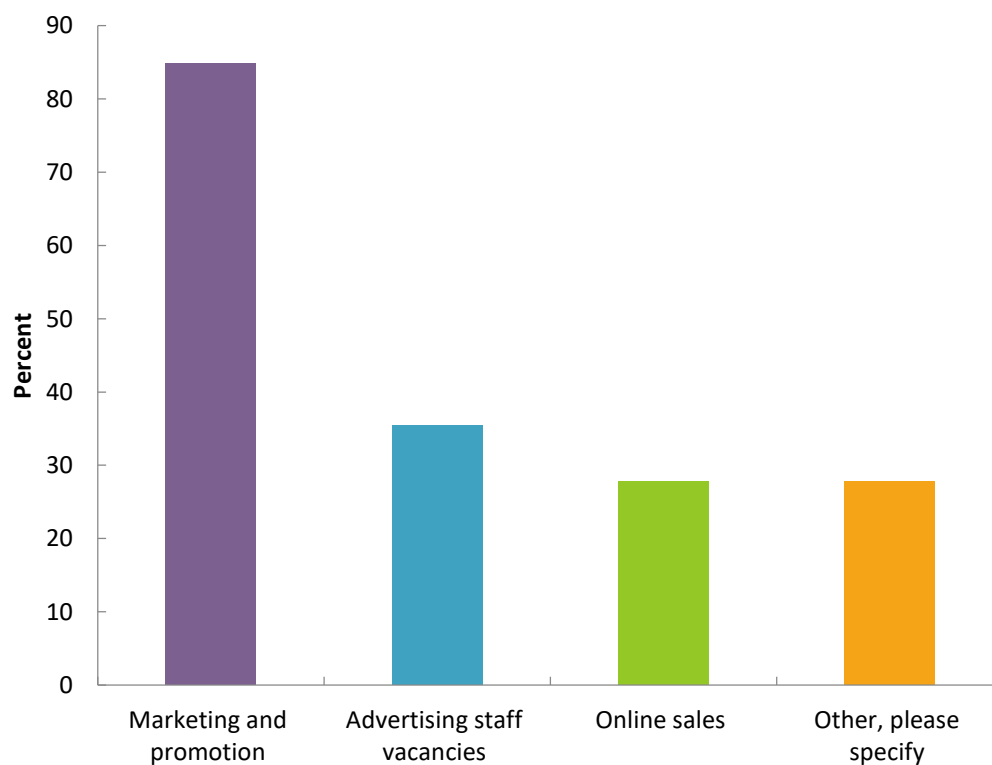


Figure 21: For what purpose does your organisation use its website?



## 8.3 Growth Aspirations

The outcomes of this survey and subsequent report offer potential for a number of strategies to be developed and implemented across the region to address highlighted gaps in workforce development and capitalise on positive outcomes. In order to undertake long term planning the survey sought to uncover the growth aspirations of regional businesses.

The survey found a majority of businesses (84%) are planning for growth over the coming years with only 16% of businesses not planning for growth. Interestingly, a number of businesses that indicated they were not planning for growth have not made comments regarding a negative growth potential with comments including;



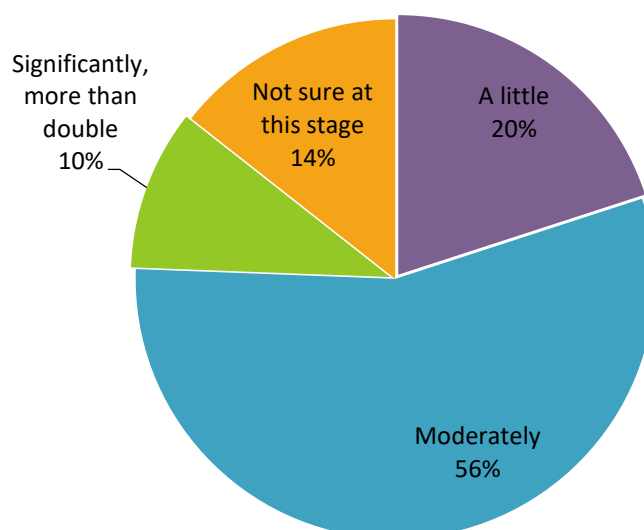
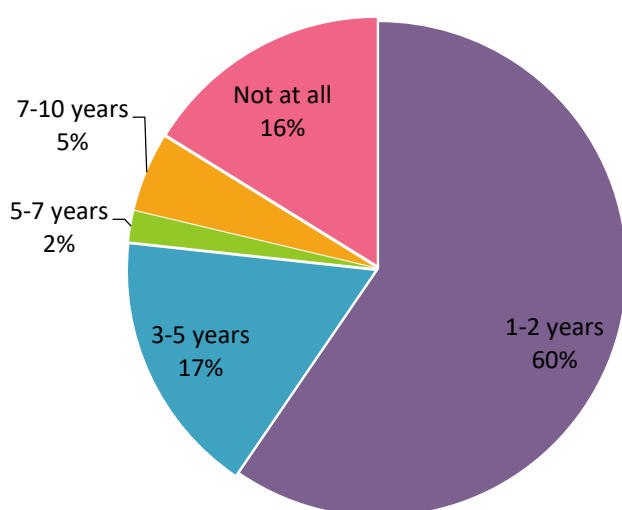
As shown in Figure 22 below, overall 86% of businesses are planning growth in the next 10 years, indicating greater workforce demand, with 60% planning for growth in the next 1-2 years.

In comparison, the 2016 survey reported 80.8% of business planning growth and almost 20% not planning for growth at all.

An increase in plans for business growth may indicate confidence in the region and the vast opportunities across the Far West. Whilst 14% of the businesses planning growth were unsure of the extent of that growth 10% are planning for significant growth and 56% are planning for moderate growth.

Figure 22: Survey responses to the question "Do you have plans for your organisation to grow in?"

Figure 23: If you are planning for your organisation to grow to what degree are you planning to grow?



## 8.4 Barriers to Growth

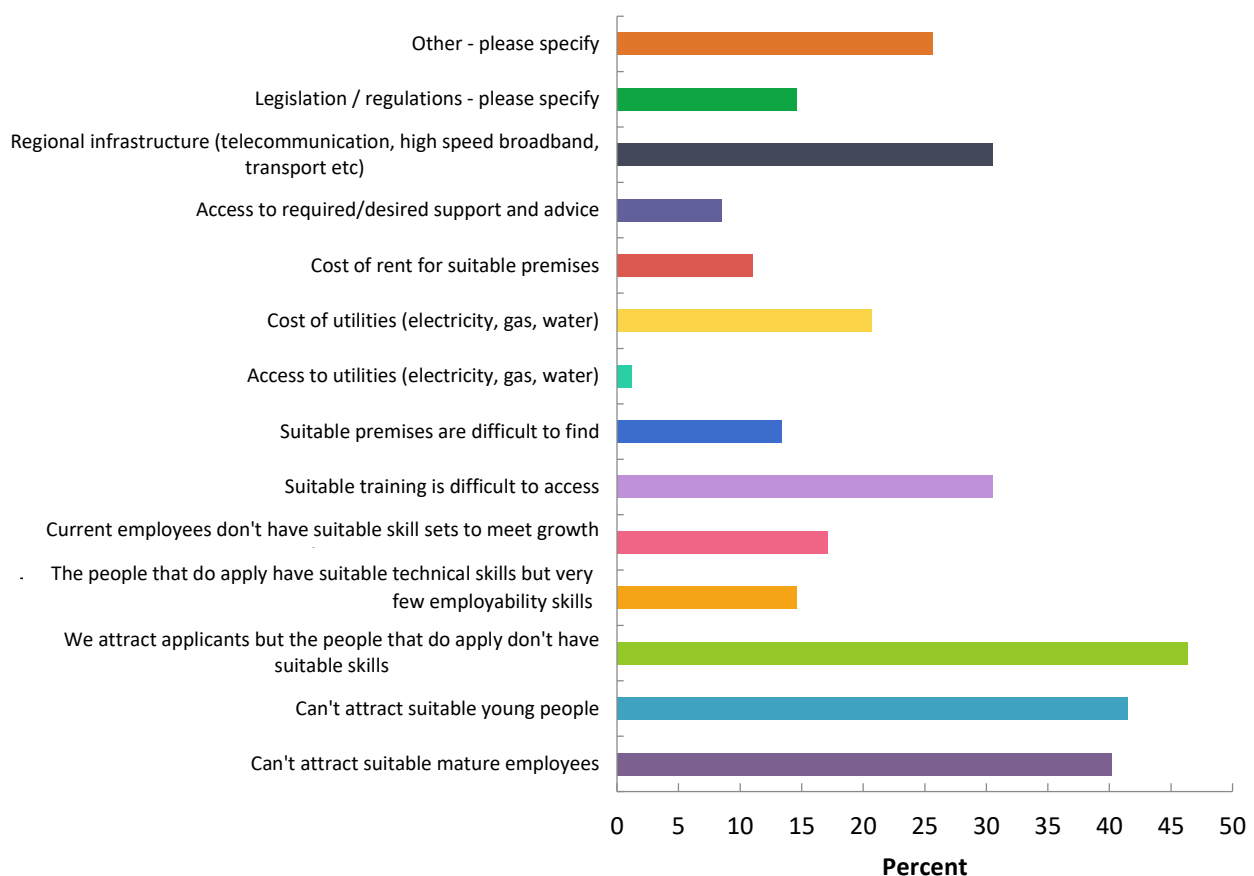
As reported, 86% of business are planning growth, to better understand the barriers the region's businesses face achieving that growth, respondents were asked about the barriers they faced. A significant number of the region's business are unable to attract the personnel required to achieve their growth aspirations with 40% reporting they are unable to attract suitable mature employees, almost 42% that can't attract suitable young people and 46% are attracting applicants that don't have the required skills.

Training and professional development present barriers for a number of businesses with 17% reporting their current staff don't have the required skills and 30% reporting that suitable training is difficult to access.

The region's infrastructure presents barriers for some businesses with 30% reporting infrastructure (high speed internet, transport etc.) as a barrier to their growth. Specifically a number of respondents reported barriers of;

- High speed broadband
- Affordable and frequency of transport links, freight and people
- Cost of flights
- Isolation and road conditions in parts of the region
- Transport networks, high quality accommodation, fine dining
- Mobile coverage

Figure 24: If you envision your organisation growing are there any fundamental barriers?



Interestingly almost 15% of respondents reported legislation as a barrier to growth and almost 26% reported 'other'. Respondents that reported other were invited to expand on their response. A snapshot of responses is provided below;

- Drought
- Finance and access to funding
- Attracting people with the appropriate qualifications who are willing to live in the Far West, many relocate but do not stay for more than a couple of years.
- Declining population and online shopping
- Dependency on the visitor economy
- Little to no assistance in promoting tourism in the region

- The lack of middle management in government and private enterprise, mandating many decisions about the region are made elsewhere without real and meaningful consultation

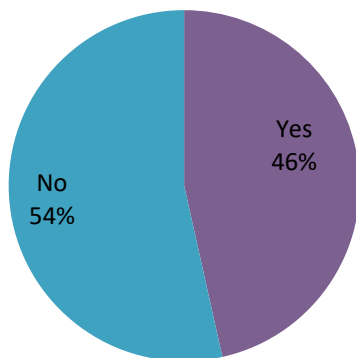
## 8.5 Current Workforce Demand

Respondents were asked about their current workforce demands and any difficulties they have experienced recruiting staff over the past 12 months.

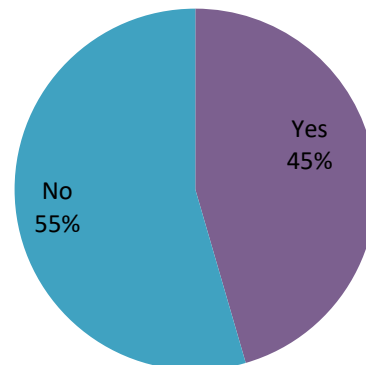
### 8.5.1 Recruitment

Respondents were asked about their current workforce demands and any difficulties they experienced recruiting staff over the past 12 months. Close to 50% of respondents reported advertising a position they were unable to fill and 45% reported settling for an employee that didn't really meet expectations during the interview stage.

*Figure 25: Have you advertised/promoted vacancies over the past 12 months and not been able to fill the position?*



*Figure 26: Have you advertised/promoted vacancies over the past 12 months and settled for an employee that didn't really meet your expectations during the interview?, i.e. the best of the applicants*



Evidence suggests attracting a suitable workforce is becoming a greater challenge for employers. In 2016, 38% of employers reported advertising a position in the previous 12 months they were unable to fill. In comparison, in 2019 46% of respondents report the same issue. In 2016, 42% of respondents reported settling for an employee that didn't meet their expectations, in 2019 that figure has increased slightly to 45%.



To better understand any skill gaps within the region and the issues employers have raised in attracting suitable staff, respondents were asked to indicate the level of difficulties they have experienced in relation to a variety of different positions within their organisation. The table below indicates the level of difficulty employers have experienced attracting suitably qualified and experienced staff.

*Figure 27: Indicate the level of difficulty your organisation has faced over the past 12 months in attracting suitable staff in the following areas*

Individual business responses	Easy	Not easy but still attracted suitable staff	Difficult	Tried but couldn't attract
Accounting and finance	7.0%	12.3%	15.8%	8.0%
Administration	13.8%	15.5%	24.1%	
Apprentices and trainees	10.2%	11.9%	16.9%	3.4%
Education workers, teachers, assistants etc.		4.0%	6.0%	2.0%
Health professionals	1.9%	3.8%	13.2%	2.9%
Information technology	2.0%	7.8%	9.8%	
Labouring	7.1%	14.3%	16.3%	1.8%
Machinery operators and drivers	1.9%	13.0%	7.4%	
Managers and other professionals	1.9%	9.4%	20.8%	3.8%
Mechanical and engineering		5.6%	7.3%	3.6%
Mining specific		1.9%	3.8%	
Sales and marketing	8.8%	7.0%	12.3%	3.5%
Trades		2.1%	8.3%	10.4%

When asked about their experience with pre-employment medical tests, drug and alcohol testing and pre-employment aptitude tests, businesses reported pre-employment medical testing to be a major problem for 5% of respondents but 34% reported no problem at all. Drug and alcohol testing proved a moderate issues for 16% of employers and pre-employment aptitude testing was reported as a moderate issue by 14% of respondents.

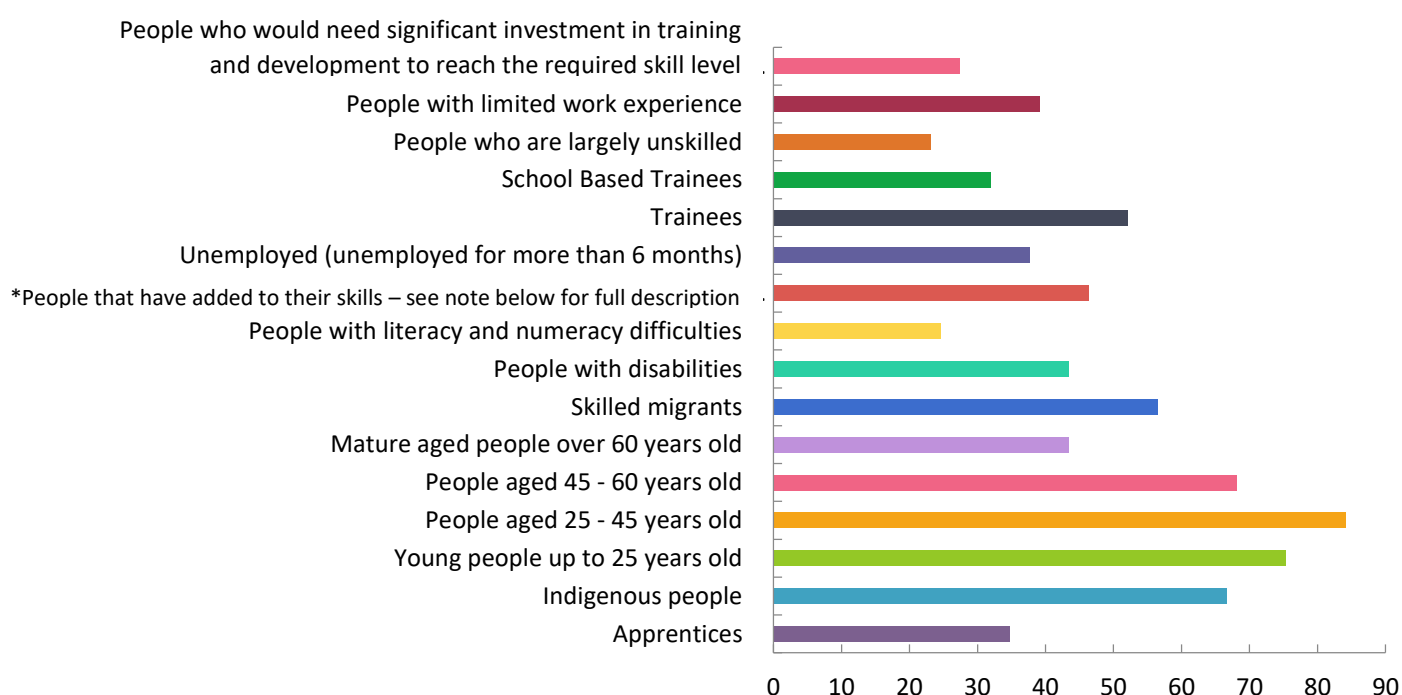
Employers in the region report being open to employing people of all age groups with 85% reporting they would employ people 25 - 45 years old, 75% would employ people under 25 and almost 70% would employ people aged 45 - 60 years old, 45% reported they would employ people over 60.

Employers appear willing to develop vocational pathways with 35% willing to employ apprentices, 52% willing to employ trainees and 32% report they are willing to employ school based trainees.

When asked about their current practices in employing apprentices, trainees and school based trainees, the responses indicate a growth in vocational pathways since the 2016 study. 17.5% of respondents report employing apprentices, 18.6% employ trainees and 11.3% employ school based trainees indicating growth in career pathways for young people across the region, up from 10%, 20% and 8% respectively.

Unskilled and people with limited literacy and numeracy skills will need to enhance their skills to become more attractive to employers, with employers reporting they would employ long term unemployed and people with limited work experience above unskilled people and people with literacy and numeracy difficulties.

Figure 28: When looking for new staff would you employ?

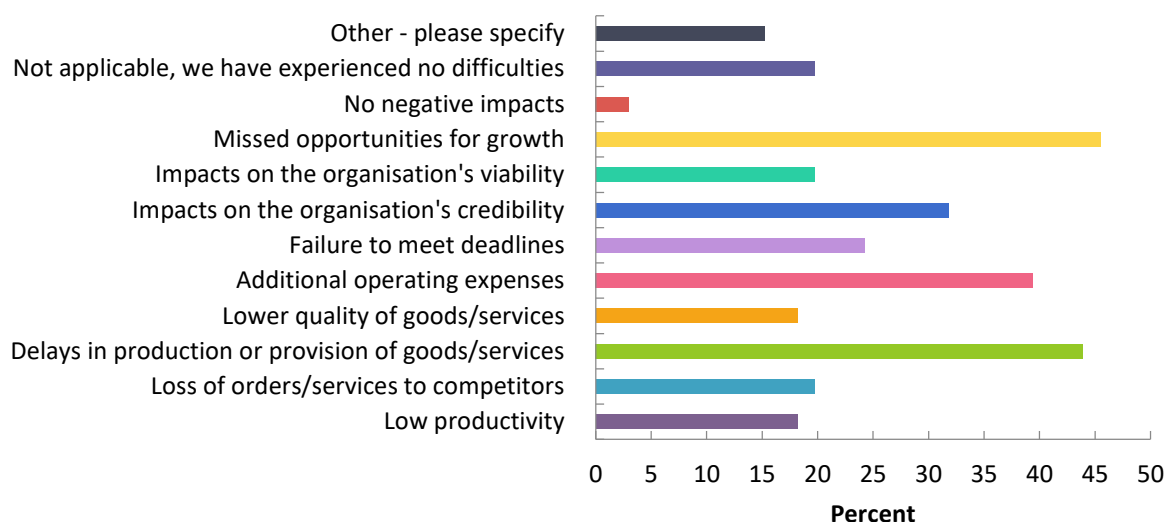


\*People that have added to their qualifications and skills over time even if those skills are not relevant to your organisation

## 8.6 The Impacts of Staffing Difficulties

Being able to attract the right staff is critically important for the success of businesses, when asked about the impact of unfilled or hard to fill vacancies, employers reported missed opportunities for growth, additional operating expenses and delays in production as the major impacts on their organisation, whilst impacts on credibility and failure to meet deadlines were also reported as significant issues.

Figure 29: What impact has hard to fill vacancies had on your organisation? (tick as many as relevant)



When asked about their experience in attracting suitable staff from outside of the region 60% of employers reported isolation and the region's location as a major barrier whilst almost 50% reported the perception of the region and more than 40% reported opportunities for employment for partners as a major barrier.

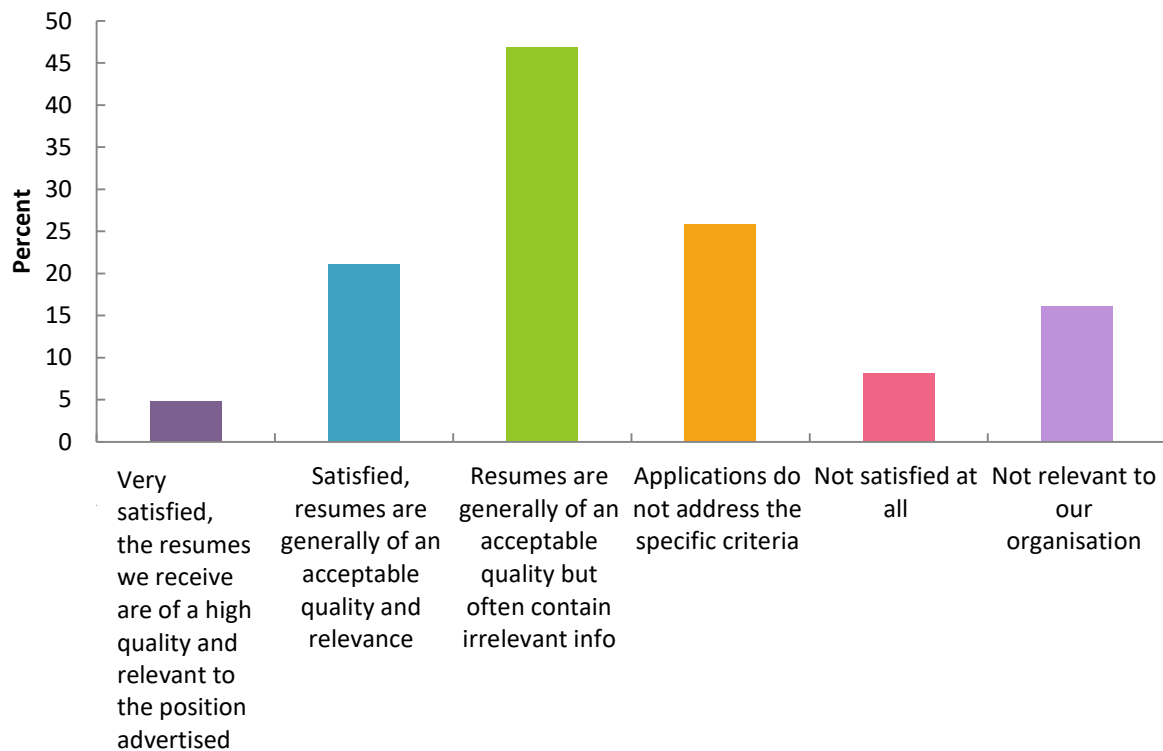
Figure 30: From your experience what are the major barriers to attracting suitable staff from outside of the region?



## 8.7 Advice to Job Seekers

Respondents were asked about advice they would offer potential employees and job seekers regarding their resume and applications. Whilst personal preferences allow for a variety of styles and information, a significant number of respondents made comments around applicants addressing selection criteria, following instructions outlined in the application package, presenting well at an interview and ensuring resumes and cover letters are relevant to the position being applied for.

Figure 31: As a general rule, how satisfied are you with the quality and relevance of resumes and applications you receive?



The comments below represent a cross section of the advice employers have offered about resumes and applications. As demonstrated above in Figure 31, only 5% of respondents are very satisfied with the quality of resumes they receive and whilst 46% stated resumes were generally of an acceptable quality, 25% stated applications don't address the selection criteria and another 8% were not at all satisfied with resumes and applications. Employers offered the following advice;

- Address the criteria, Use independent referees not relatives
- Use a generic email address that is appropriate
- Clean up your social media accounts
- Only include experience in your letter of application if you can directly relate it to how it will assist you in the current role.
- Address criteria for position first and foremost. A general CV is of little interest if it does not accompany a cover letter and detailed responses to criteria that addresses position essentials.

- Have them checked by a 3rd party for spelling errors and slang!
- Address the key selection criteria but the covering letter briefly sets the scene and your resume should tell them the rest
- Research the job you are going for and know about the business/industry and why you want to work in this field.
- The generic resumes do not stand out and appear run of the mill.
- I often wish that somebody would sit down with the young ones leaving school and explain to them that a well prepared resume may get them an interview but perseverance, fantastic attitude, loyalty and a can do positive attitude will get them the job
- Do not bend the truth about your ability and be honest about commitment

## 8.8 Employability Skills

Employability skills are the general skills, personal qualities and values required to perform most jobs. Many of the most highly sought-after skills today are soft skills pertaining to the ability to communicate and work with a team. While education and experience may make people eligible to apply for a job, to be successful in the role, employees need to exhibit a mix of skills; 'employability skills'.

Nationally, many employers are demanding skills from graduates and new entry employees which are outside the subject area of study in Higher Education. Indeed, some employers have placed less importance on graduate's actual degree discipline in favour of the more generic skills which they have acquired.

Producing employable graduates' forms part of the process of educating. It encompasses the full educational spectrum of values from imparting knowledge and understanding to developing skills and attributes.

When asked about communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers, almost 97% of respondents reported listening and understanding, and speaking clearly and directly important.

Employability skills, or soft skills are learnt in many environments, school, home, sport and community involvement and it may be a case of better helping job seekers and young people articulate the skills they have already started to develop.

Generic employability skills are defined as:

- |                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Communication skills               | • Planning and organising skills |
| • Team work skills                   | • Self-management skills         |
| • Problem solving skills             | • Learning skills                |
| • Personal and social responsibility | • Technology skills              |
| • Initiative and enterprise skills   |                                  |

### 8.8.1 Communication

Communication is possibly the most sought after skill by most employers and involves elements such as being a good listener, expressing yourself clearly, verbally and in writing, explaining things to people from different backgrounds and presenting a clear case.

Figure 32: Communication that contributes to productive and harmonious relations across employees and customers

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Listening & understanding	96.8%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Speaking clearly & directly	96.8%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Writing to the needs of the audience	60.0%	23.3%	8.3%	8.3%
Negotiating responsively	78.3%	13.3%	3.3%	5.0%
Understanding the needs of internal & external customers	93.4%	4.9%	0.0%	1.6%
Persuading effectively	61.7%	25.0%	6.7%	6.7%
Establishing & using networks	78.0%	10.2%	1.7%	10.2%
Sharing information	76.7%	16.7%	1.7%	5.0%
Reading independently	62.7%	25.4%	6.8%	5.1%
Using numeracy effectively	72.9%	20.3%	5.1%	1.7%

As shown above communication is important and the region's employers value the ability to communicate effectively.

When asked about teamwork 100% of respondents reported the ability to work as part of a team and as an individual as important. Overall the ability to work as part of a team, regardless of age, race or gender is important to employers.

## 8.8.2 Team Work

Team work involves working well with others to achieve results and recognising the value of other people's contributions and ideas. As demonstrated below employers within the region clearly value teamwork and the ability to work as part of a team and valuing the contribution of team members.

Figure 33: Teamwork that contributes to productive working relationships and outcomes

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Working as an individual & as a member of a team	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Working across different ages, irrespective of gender, race, religion or political persuasion	98.4%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Knowing how to define a role as part of the team	95.0%	3.3%	1.7%	0.0%
Applying team work to a range of situations	95.1%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Coaching & mentoring skills including giving feedback	83.1%	13.6%	3.4%	0.0%
Identifying the strengths of team members	80.0%	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%

### 8.8.3 Problem Solving

Problem solving involves being able to offer a solution to a problem by analysing a situation and working out how to arrive at a favourable outcome. It often involves making optimum use of available resources and enlisting others to achieve an outcome.

Problem solving that contributes to productive outcomes is again viewed as important by the majority of the region's employers with almost 90% reporting independence and innovation to solve problems as important to them.

Figure 34: Problem-solving that contributes to productive outcomes

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Developing creative, innovative and practical solutions	85.0%	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Showing independence and innovation to solve problems	88.9%	9.5%	1.6%	0.0%
Solving problems in teams	85.5%	12.9%	1.6%	0.0%
Applying a range of strategies to problem solving	81.7%	16.7%	1.7%	0.0%
Applying problem solving strategies across a range of areas	78.3%	18.3%	3.3%	0.0%
Using mathematics including budgeting and financial management to solve problems	61.7%	28.3%	5.0%	5.0%
Resolving customer concerns in relation to complex projects issues	77.4%	9.7%	3.2%	9.7%



### 8.8.4 Personal and Social Responsibility

Refers to the ability to be able to apply equity values and a sense of social responsibility, sustainability and sensitivity to other people's cultures and the environment.

Figure 35 below, clearly demonstrates the attitude of employers towards personal and social responsibility with almost 97% of respondents reporting a high standard of manners and a respect for ethical practice and social responsibility as important.

Figure 35: Personal and social responsibility

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Knowledge of codes of conduct	87.5%	10.9%	0.0%	1.6%
High standard of manners	96.8%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Showing interest and respect for the opinions of others	95.2%	4.8%	0.0%	0.0%
A respect for ethical practice and social responsibility	96.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
An appreciation of, and respect for, diversity	91.8%	8.2%	0.0%	0.0%

### 8.8.5 Initiative and Enterprise that Contributes to Innovative Outcomes

Involves being able to see innovative ways of doing things, seizing opportunities, and taking initiative. It may involve a different way of looking at a situation or the addition of a new idea to improve or streamline an existing process in the workplace.

Figure 36: Initiative and enterprise that contributes to innovative outcomes

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Adapting to new situations	88.5%	11.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Developing a strategic, creative and long-term vision	66.1%	30.5%	3.4%	0.0%
Being creative	70.5%	27.9%	1.6%	0.0%
Identifying opportunities not obvious to others	72.6%	25.8%	1.6%	0.0%
Translating ideas into action	80.3%	19.7%	0.0%	0.0%

### 8.8.6 Planning and Organising

The ability to identify what is required in a given situation and to manage people and resources effectively to achieve results. It also involves being able to manage time efficiently and prioritise what tasks need to be done to achieve an overall goal.

As demonstrated with the responses below (page 43), employers clearly believe time management, being resourceful and taking initiative are important skills when interviewing potential new employees.

Figure 37: Planning and organising that contributes to long and short term strategic planning

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Managing time and priorities – setting timelines, coordinating tasks for self and with others	88.9%	4.8%	6.3%	0.0%
Being resourceful	93.7%	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Taking initiative and making decisions	85.7%	14.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Adapting resource allocations to cope with contingencies	68.9%	23.0%	4.9%	3.3%
Establishing clear project goals and deliverables	63.9%	29.5%	3.3%	3.3%
Allocating people and other resources to tasks	68.9%	27.9%	3.3%	0.0%
Planning the use of resources, including time management	80.3%	14.8%	4.9%	0.0%
Participating in continuous improvement and planning processes	66.1%	27.1%	6.8%	0.0%
Developing a vision and a proactive plan to accompany it	63.3%	26.7%	8.3%	1.7%
Predicting – weighing up risk, evaluating alternatives and applying evaluation criteria	68.3%	23.3%	8.3%	0.0%
Collecting, analysing and organising information	64.4%	25.4%	8.5%	1.7%
Understanding basic business systems and their relationships	74.6%	22.0%	3.4%	0.0%

### 8.8.7 Self-Management that Contributes to Employee Satisfaction and Growth

Referring to the ability to take responsibility for your own actions and life direction, and to set goals and successfully achieve them. It involves setting achievable goals and using time and resources effectively to achieve them.

Figure 38: Self-management that contributes to employee satisfaction and growth

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Having a personal vision and goals	77.4%	22.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Evaluating and monitoring own performance	81.4%	18.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Having knowledge and confidence in own ideas and visions	83.9%	16.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Articulating own ideas and visions	80.3%	19.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Taking responsibility	96.8%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%

### 8.8.8 Learning that Contributes to Ongoing Improvement and Expansion in Employee and Company Operations

Referring to the ability to manage one's own learning and contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion of knowledge and skillsets. This also refers to one's ability to learn workplace skills and expectations specific to the organisation.

Figure 39: Learning that contributes to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Managing own learning	72.9%	22.0%	5.1%	0.0%
Contributing to the learning community at the workplace	63.8%	32.8%	3.4%	0.0%
Using a range of mediums to learn – mentoring, peer support and networking, IT and courses	55.9%	39.0%	5.1%	0.0%
Applying learning to technical issues (e.g. learning about products) and people issues (e.g. interpersonal and cultural aspects of work)	71.2%	28.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Having enthusiasm for ongoing learning	77.0%	23.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Being willing to learn in any setting – on and off the job	75.4%	23.0%	1.6%	0.0%
Being open to new ideas and techniques	91.8%	8.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Being prepared to invest time and effort in learning new skills	85.5%	14.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Acknowledging the need to learn in order to accommodate change	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%

### 8.8.9 Technology that Contributes to Effective Carrying out of Tasks

Describes the ability to keep abreast of current technology and apply it to problems, as well as the ability to embrace life-long learning in the field of technology.

Figure 40: Technology that contributes to effective carrying out of tasks

	Important	Nice to have but not really important	Not so important	Not relevant
Having a range of basic IT skills	79.0%	17.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Applying IT as a management tool	57.4%	36.1%	3.3%	3.3%
Using IT to organise data	65.0%	28.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Being willing to learn new IT skills	77.0%	14.8%	4.9%	3.3%
Having the WHS knowledge to apply technology	61.7%	33.3%	1.7%	3.3%
Having the appropriate physical capacity	61.7%	31.7%	3.3%	3.3%

Employability skills or 'soft skills' are the foundation of career building blocks and they are frequently referenced in the media as lacking in school-leavers, graduates and those already in employment. Many organisations spend a lot of time and money training staff, not in job specific areas but in general and basic skills.

Whilst education and experience may make people eligible to apply for a job, to be successful in the role, employees need to exhibit a mix of skills; 'employability skills'. This means that the specialist and technical skills associated with different roles may be less important than the 'soft skills' that can be transferred between different jobs and different employment sectors.

For employers, getting the right people means identifying people with the right skills and qualities to fulfil the role and contribute to the organisation's success. Candidates may have the qualifications and 'hard skills' needed to be able to manage the job role but, without a well-honed set of 'soft skills', employers are less inclined to hire.

### 8.8.10 Generic Employability Skills Satisfaction

Employability skills are generic and appear to be valued by most employers. Respondents were asked if they were generally satisfied with the employability skills of the majority of employees and new job seekers. More than half (54%) reported being happy with the generic employability skills of their current workforce, yet few reported being happy with the employability skills of the unemployed.

Figure 41: Thinking of the employability skills above are you satisfied the majority of your employees and new job seekers have these skills?

	Yes	No	Sometimes	Not relevant
Young people seeking employment (18-25 years old)	13.3%	15.0%	65.0%	6.7%
People seeking employment (25-45 years old)	26.7%	5.0%	60.0%	8.3%
Mature aged people seeking employment (over 45 years old)	23.0%	4.9%	63.9%	8.2%
Unemployed	5.2%	22.4%	50.0%	22.4%
Current employees	54.1%	4.9%	34.4%	6.6%

## 8.9 Retention of Staff

Respondents were asked about both recruitment and retention difficulties, with 34% of respondents reporting difficulties in the past 12 months retaining staff.

Figure 42: In the past 12 months have you experienced difficulty in retaining staff?

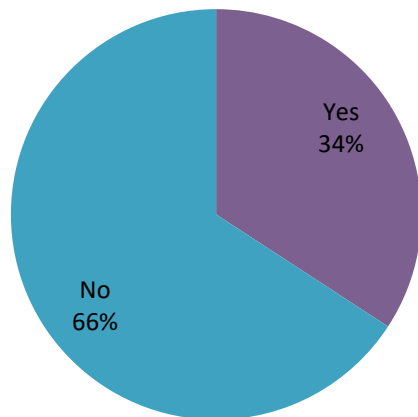


Figure 43: To what extent has your organisation experienced difficulty in retaining appropriately skilled staff in the past 12 months?

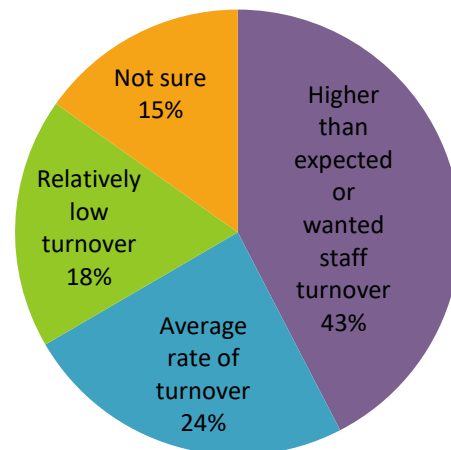
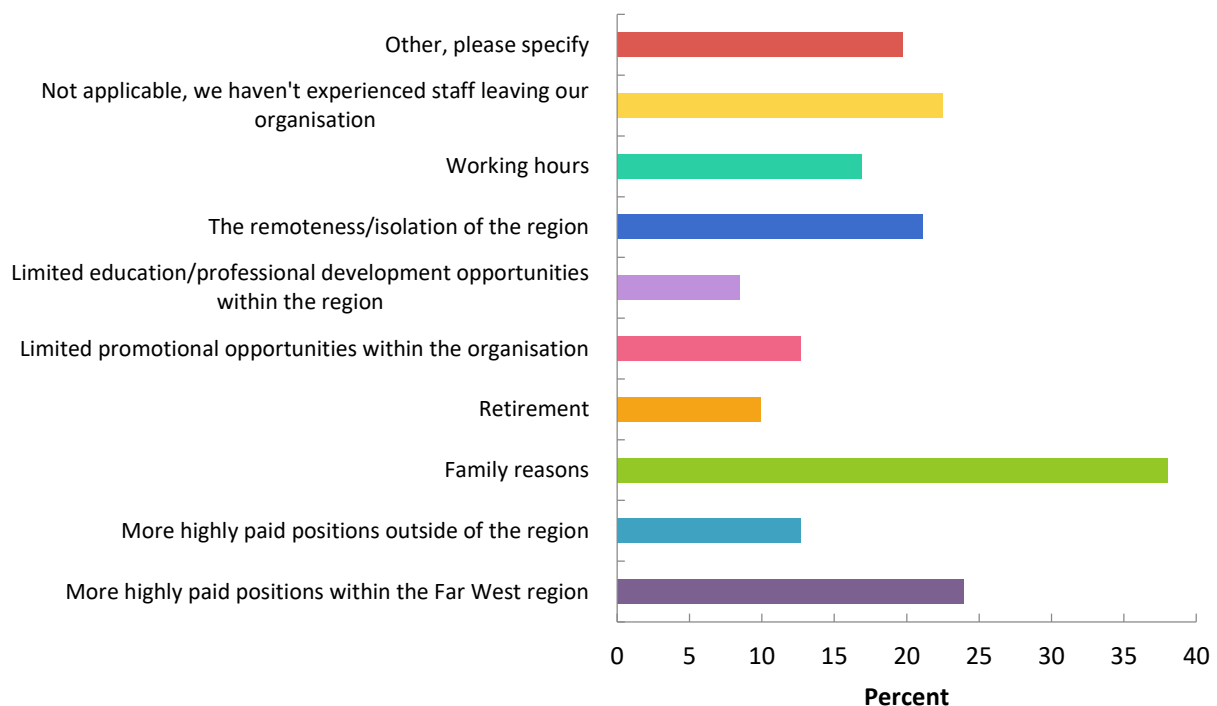


Figure 44: What do you believe are the main reasons for staff voluntarily leaving your organisation?



With 43% of respondents reporting higher than expected staff turnover in the past 12 months respondents were asked, what they believe were the main reasons for staff voluntarily leaving their organisation? With a significant increase in the 'higher than expected' staff turnover up from 25% in 2016, it appears that staff retention is a significant barrier for local employers.



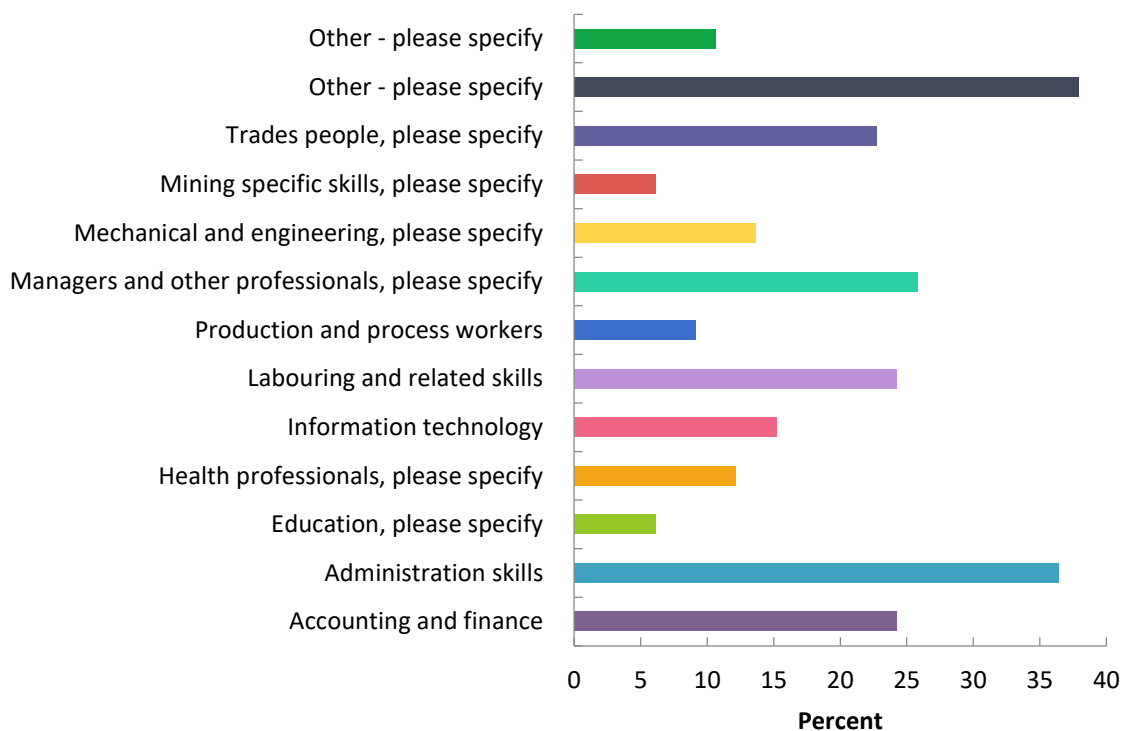
## 8.10 Future Workforce Demands

The survey asked respondents to consider what skills and positions they envisioned being required in the next 5 years, including what priority their organisation was currently giving to managing skill shortages in the future.

Employers reported a number of expected skill areas required over the next 5 years, including:

- 36% Administration
- 26% Managers and other professionals
  - Aged Care
  - Business analysis and advice
  - Caravan park / Motel managers
  - Store managers
  - Project managers
- 24% Accounting and finance
- 23% Trades, including:
  - Building, tilers, brick layers, electricians, security and communication
  - Chefs

Figure 45: What skills and positions do you envision being required in the next 5 years? (tick as many as relevant)



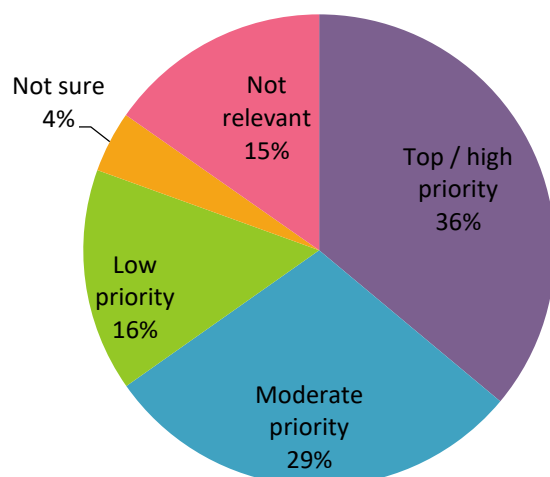
Respondents that reported in the 'other' category were asked to specify, responses include:

- Chefs
- Architectural cadet
- Arts workers
- Bricklayers and painters
- Employment consultants
- Mortuary workers
- Retail and sales
- Special hospitality
- Tour guides, operators
- Real estate

In consideration of the reported issues in attracting and retaining suitable staff, respondents were asked what priority their organisations placed on managing skill shortages.

Regional employers are placing a greater significance on managing skill shortages with 36% reporting managing skill shortages as a top priority for their organisations, in comparison only 4% reported managing skill shortages as a top priority in 2016.

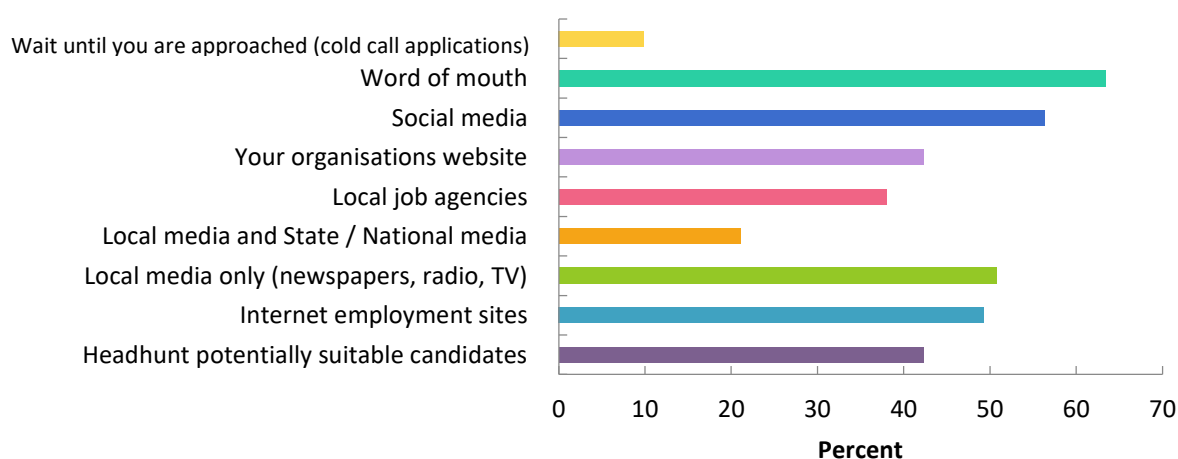
Figure 46: What priority is your organisation currently giving to managing skills shortages and workforce needs in the future?



## 8.11 Promoting Opportunities

To build an understanding of the strategies utilised to promote job vacancies in the region respondents were asked about how they promote vacancies? Just over 50% reported using local media only, whilst 21% reported using State and National media. Social media is utilised by 56% whilst 63% relied on word of mouth.

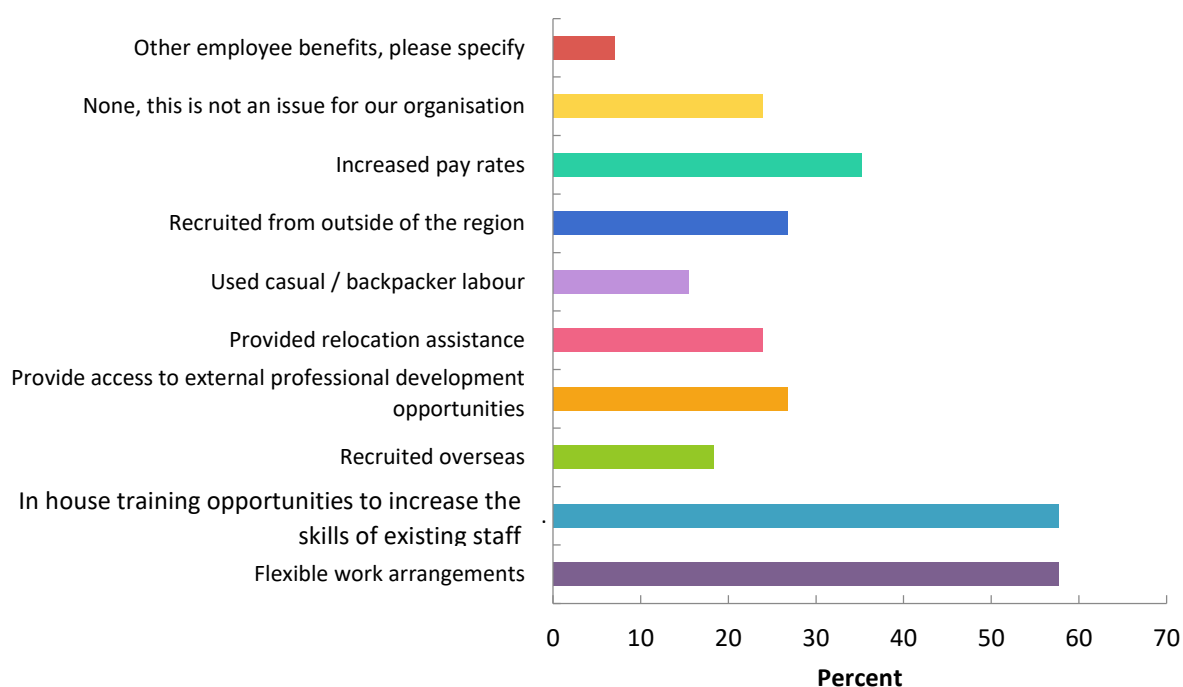
Figure 47: When you require new staff how do you advertise staff vacancies in your organisation or attract new staff members? (tick as many as relevant)



With employers reporting ongoing issues attracting suitable staff, it was important to better understand the adjustments that have been made by local businesses to attract and retain staff members.

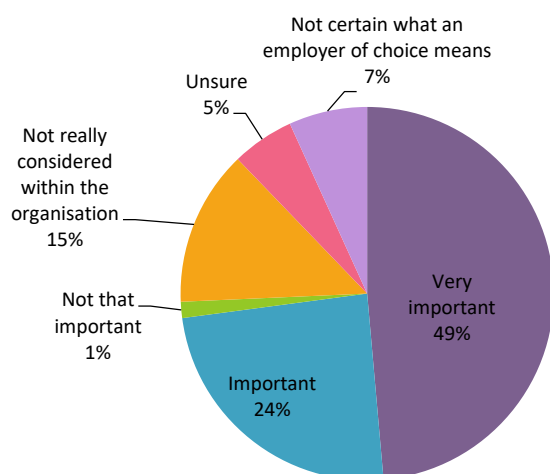
In-house training to increase the skill level of staff and flexible working arrangements have been utilised by 58% of respondents, 35% have increased salaries whilst 18% have resorted to recruitment from overseas.

*Figure 48: What adjustments / strategies have you introduced to assist with attracting / retaining staff? (tick as many as relevant)*



Respondents that reported other employee benefits were asked to elaborate on those benefits including staff bonuses, housing and vehicles being utilised. A number of employers reported promoting a harmonious and caring workplace, hinting at promoting being an 'Employer of Choice'.

*Figure 49: What importance does your organisation place on being an 'Employer of Choice'?*



As employees increasingly look for an 'Employer of Choice' that offers the flexibility, conditions and attitude that suits their lifestyle and aspirations, respondents were asked what value they place on being an 'Employer of Choice'. 73% reported being an 'Employer of Choice' as important or very important.

An 'Employer of Choice' is an employer that offers a fantastic work culture and workplace environment that attracts and retains superior employees. The features of the environment available at an 'Employer of Choice' favour the well-being of employees and customers.

In plain terms, being an 'Employer of Choice' means establishing a business that is a great place to work.

## 8.12 Support

Respondents were asked to identify any areas they were interested in receiving support or further information.

Strategies to retain staff and workforce skills management ranked highest with more than 44% of employers whilst marketing and recruitment strategies were identified by 40% of respondents.

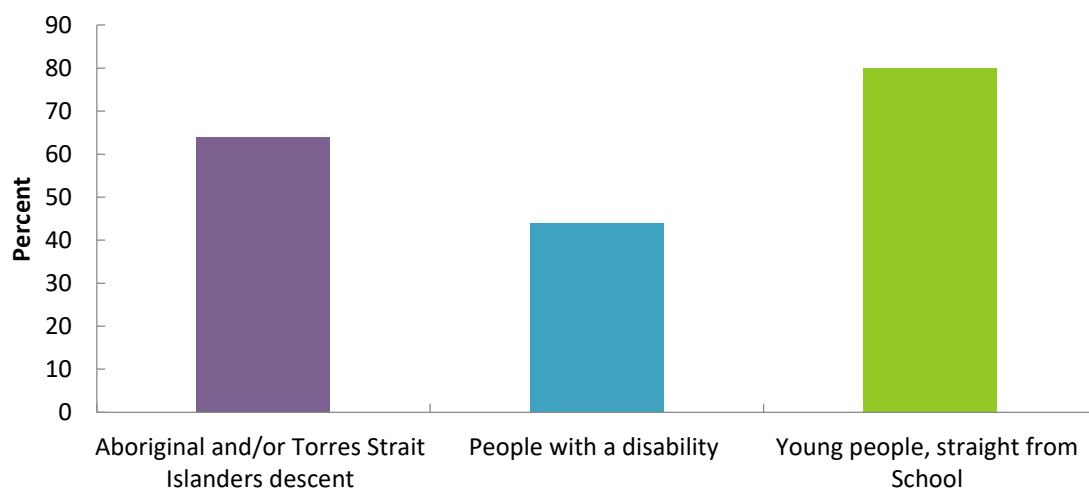
*Figure 50: Thinking about some of the challenges you may face over the next 5 years in attracting and retaining suitable staff would you like information or assistance with any of the following? (tick as many as are relevant)*



To further identify required support, respondents were asked specifically if they were interested in information and advice about recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities and young people straight from school.

More than 80% of respondents reported they were interested in further advice about employing young people straight from school, whilst 64% were interested in advice about employing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and 44% desire information about employing people with disabilities.

*Figure 51: Would your organisation be interested in getting information or advice on how to recruit and retain any of the following groups of people? (tick as many as relevant)*

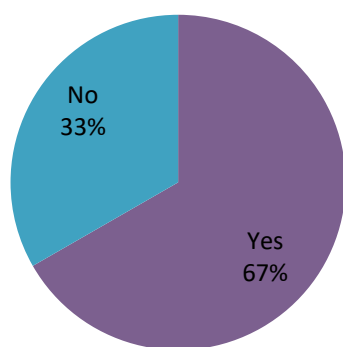


## 8.13 Training and Professional Development

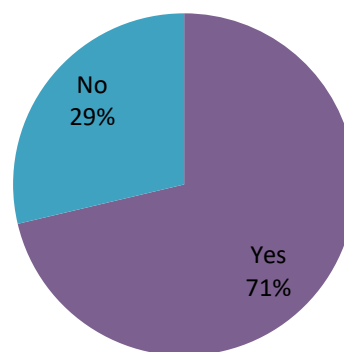
To build an understanding of the education and training expectations respondents were asked a series of questions about their satisfaction with current training and professional development options available currently in the region, how engaged they were and what ideally suits their needs.

67% of respondents report being satisfied with training and professional development options with 71% requiring further accredited training.

*Figure 52: Are you satisfied with the training and professional development options available to your current workforce?*



*Figure 53: When you think about the training and professional development for your organisation, is accredited training required? That is training that provides a recognised qualification upon completion.*



Respondents that reported not being satisfied with current training options were asked to elaborate on their response to identify what other options were required. Responses included:

- Mining training
- Architectural degree
- Greater access to industry based training
- Arts and art administration
- A variety of short courses delivered locally
- Customer service and telephone techniques
- Grant Writing
- Roof Plumbing
- To access training we must travel interstate
- Opal cutting and polishing
- Tour guides accreditation
- Project and Event management
- Governance
- Security training
- Technology
- Refrigeration

Centralisation of delivery of key skillsets and qualifications have been raised by many employers as a significant barrier in employing apprentices and upskilling their current staff.

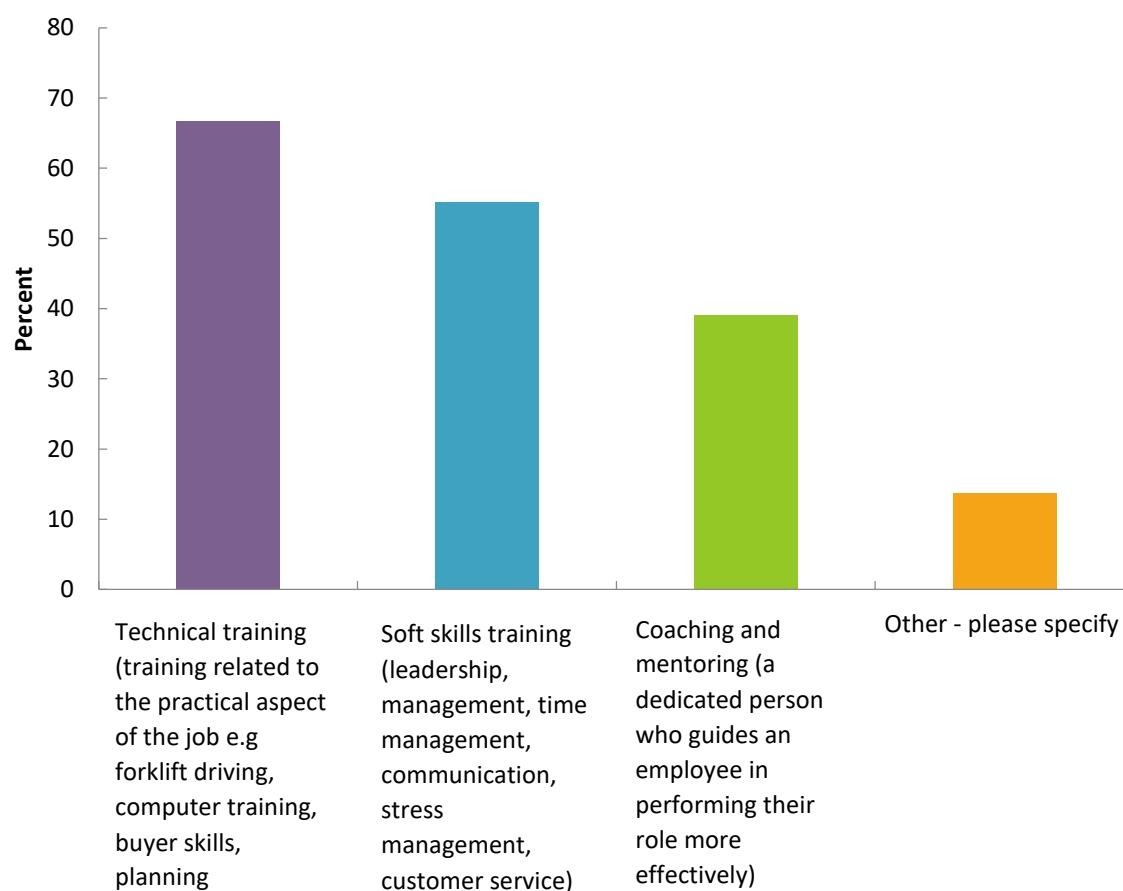
Employers have highlighted the inconvenience, costs and safety concerns of sending apprentices (mostly young people) very long distances on a regular basis for training.

Additionally, through the additional comments section many employers have stated with their 'parent hat' on, they have serious concerns for their young people travelling long distances and staying overnight (some up to 10 days at a time) in unfamiliar locations.

## 8.14 Training Needs

Education, training and professional development are critical to the success of business, to ensure the region builds a sound understanding of the needs of employers, respondents were asked about the most important training needs for their organisation.

Figure 54: What is the most important training needs for your organisation?



Respondents that replied to the 'other' category were asked to specify and their comments included:

- Community practice – Aged Care
- Higher level skills that enable advisors to build skills to advise/mentor others
- Trade

Distance delivery models of training have become more prevalent over the past 10 years, however the model doesn't suit all learners or all employers. Respondents were asked about the training options that would suit their organisation. Almost 60% of respondents

reported face to face training as most suitable for their organisation whilst almost 50% required short courses.

A number of employers reported online and distance courses as OK in some circumstances, but most highlighted the slow speed and unreliability of internet access as a significant barrier to online learning.

Figure 55: What training options would suit your organisation?

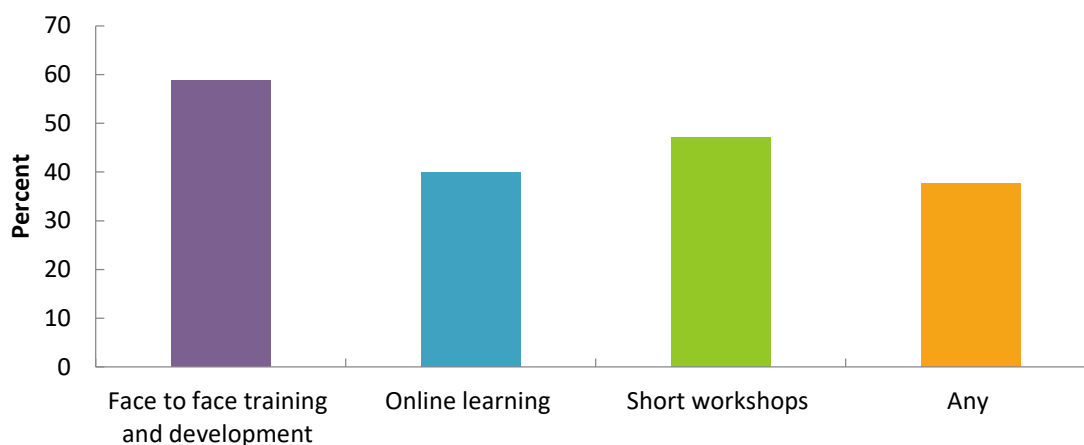
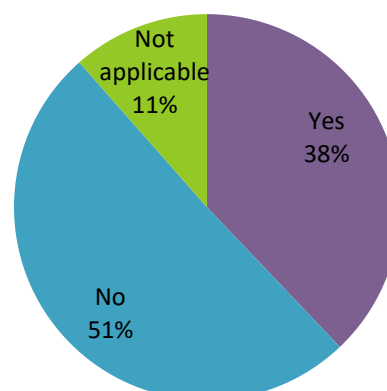


Figure 56: Does your organisation currently interact/negotiate/have a defined partnership with any training providers to develop suitable training programs for your staff?



Respondents were asked about their current relationship with local training providers, with only 38% reporting they have a current relationship with a training provider. Whilst 62% of respondents reported a willingness to pay for training and only 20% felt the training currently available aligned with the region's needs.

Figure 57: Are you prepared to pay for training and professional development for your staff?

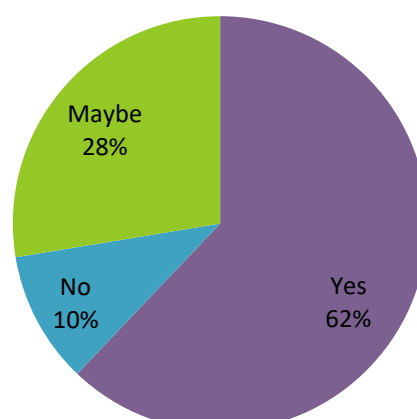
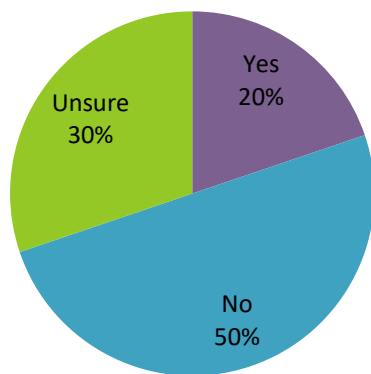


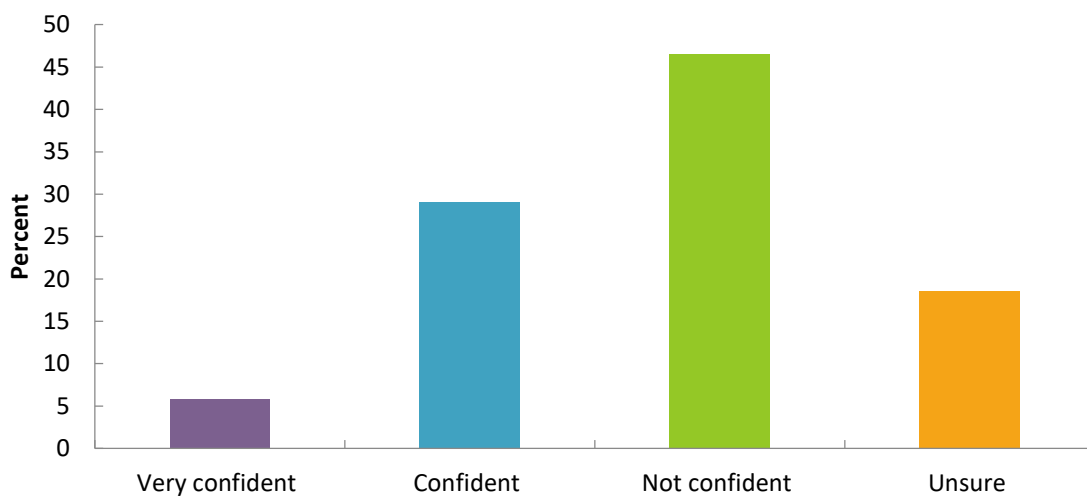


Figure 58: Thinking of the current education, training and professional development opportunities within the region do you feel the training/opportunities provided aligns with the required skills in the region?



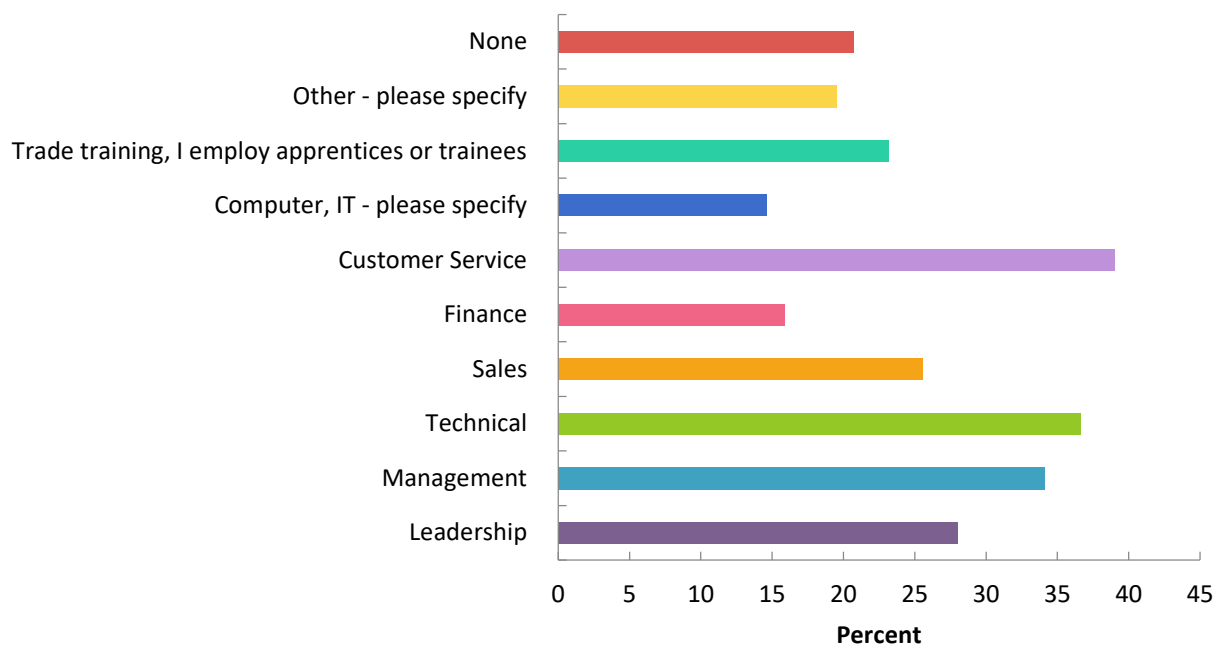
Whilst 70% of respondents reported being satisfied with the training available to their current workforce, only 35% were confident their organisations training needs over the next 5 years could be met within the region.

Figure 59: How confident do you feel that your organisations education and training needs over the next 5 years will be met within the Far West region?



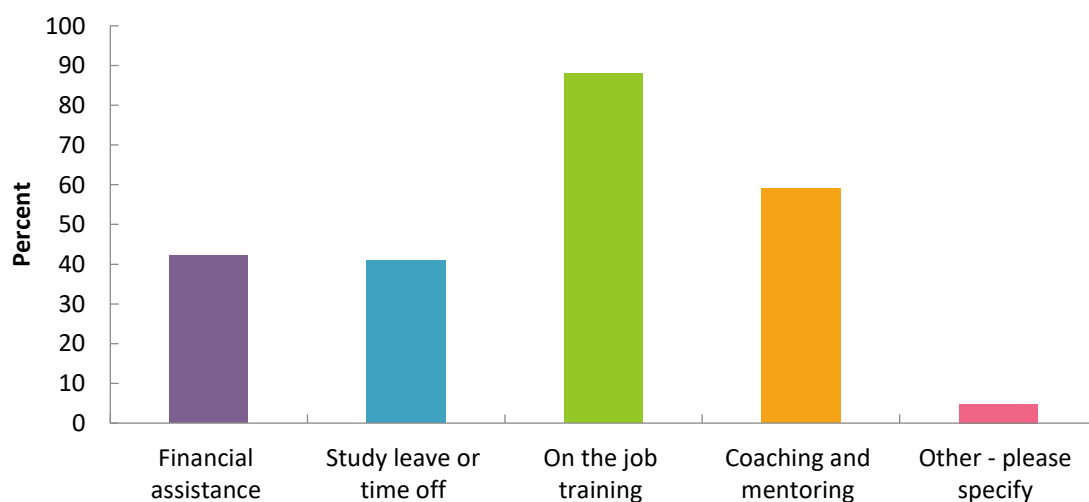
Respondents were asked about the type of training offered by their organisation to address training and professional development needs. Interestingly 20% of respondents offered no training/professional development at all to their staff.

Figure 60: What training is currently offered by your organisation? (tick all that are relevant)



80% of employers appear to offer a range of training and professional development to their staff, the survey sought to understand more about the assistance employers provided for their staff to access training and professional development, with almost 90% offering on the job training and 43% offering financial assistance or study leave.

Figure 61: What type of assistance does your organisation offer staff for professional development/training



Many employers have reported seeking additional options for training and professional development for their staff, when asked about their knowledge of local education support services 38% were unaware of Country Universities Centre Far West, interestingly when asked if they would like further information about the Country Universities Centre Far West only 56% said yes.

Figure 62: Are you aware of Country Universities Centre Far West ?

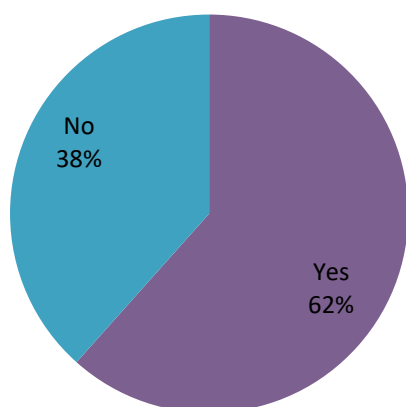
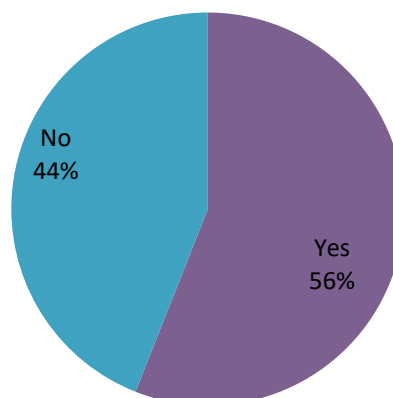


Figure 63: Would you like further information about how the Country Universities Centre Far West maybe able to support Professional Development within your organisation?



## 8.15 Customer Service

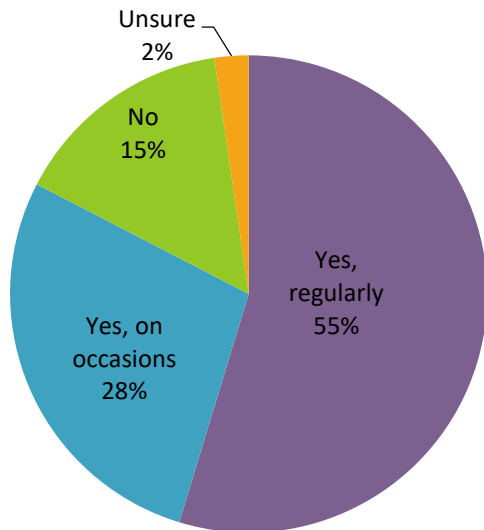
Customer service standards are raised as an area for improvement in almost every town and city in the world. The survey asked respondents whose role it is to set and monitor customer service within their organisations, 58% reported that everybody within the organisation is responsible for setting and maintaining standards. However, 34% reported the supervisor as responsible and 55% reported senior management.

Figure 64: In your organisation whose role is it to set and maintain customer service standards?



Measuring and monitoring standards within the organisation provides a bench mark for improvement and growth. Respondents were asked if Customer Service Standards were monitored and measured within their organisation with 55% stating customer service standards were monitored regularly.

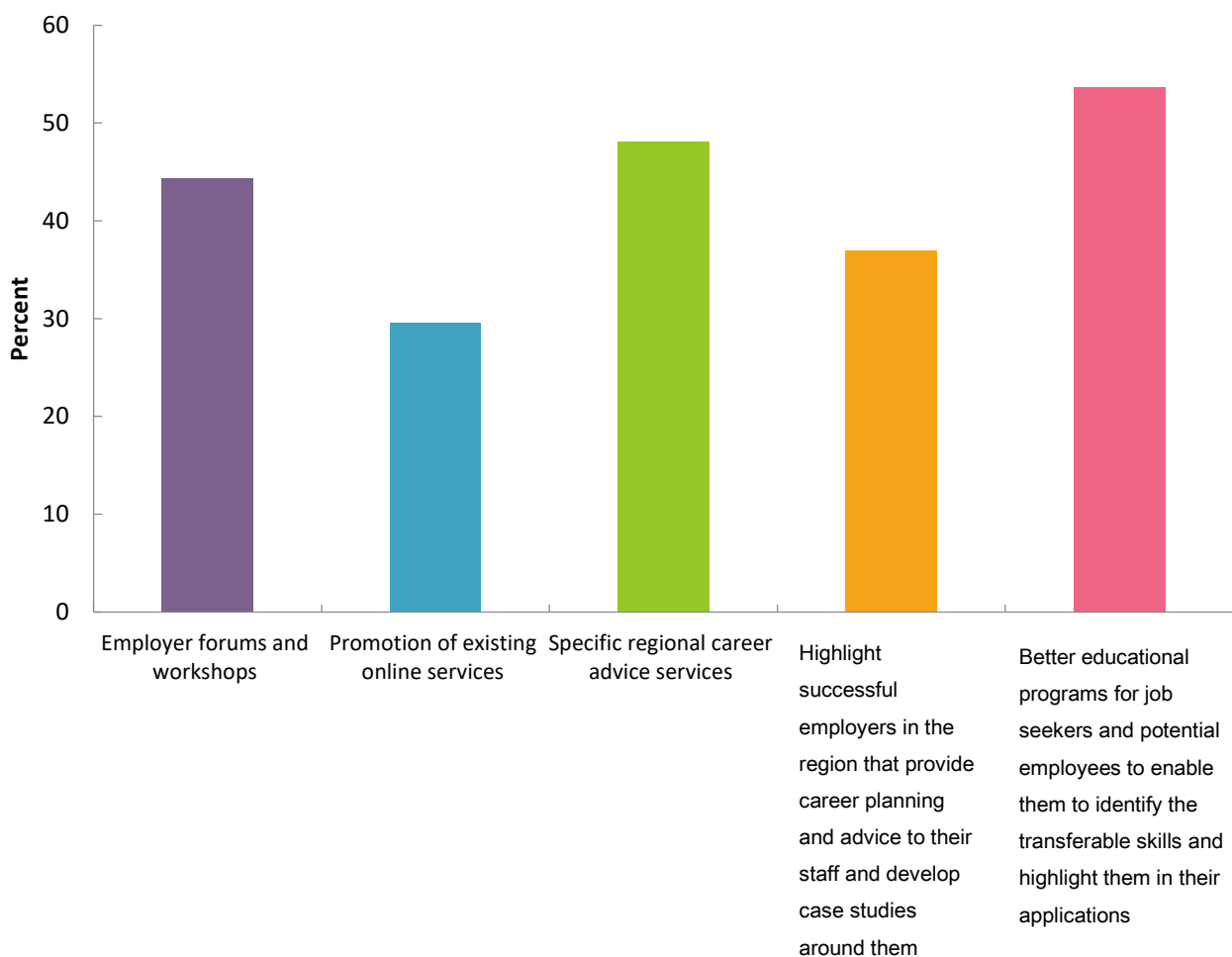
*Figure 65: In your organisation are customer service standards/ principles measured and monitored?*



## 8.16 Transferability of Skills

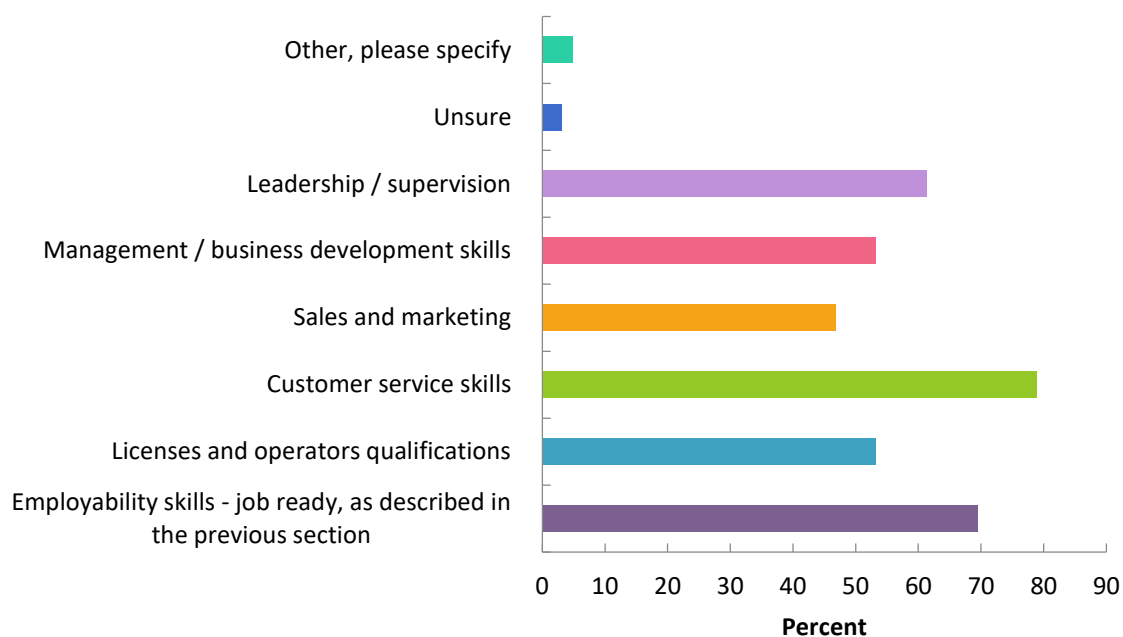
The region has a long history of diversity and innovation, many of the region's industries are cyclic, the region's population has declined and employers report difficulties in attracting and retaining suitable staff. Respondents were asked about how the region could best recognise and utilise transferable skills across industry sectors and what skills they believe were most transferable. Employers have responded with a variety of options to build capacity and understanding around transferability of skills within the region and their responses have demonstrated a dual approach of employer and employee education.

*Figure 66: Given the cyclic nature of many of the region's industries how could the region best ensure the recognition of transferable skills for employers?*



Respondents reported customer service skills, employability skills and leadership as the most transferable skills

*Figure 67: Thinking about the transferability of skills what do you believe are the valuable transferable skills that could cross over industry and economic sectors? (tick as many as relevant)*





What has changed between  
2016 and 2019?

# 9.0 What's Changed Since the 2016 Far West Workforce Development Study?

The format of the 2016 survey and the 2019 survey remained similar, to enable the region to better understand the success or otherwise of strategies developed to address issues raised in the 2016 Study. The methodology remained similar, similar numbers of employers participated, with a similar cross section of numbers from all areas of the Far West region.

The population of the region has slightly declined since the previous study, however unemployment figures are down. Plans for business growth have increased with a greater percentage of businesses planning for growth over the next 2 years.

Planned business growth may be hampered by difficulties in meeting workforce demand across the region, with the number employers reporting they have advertised a position they couldn't fill in the last 12 months raising from 35% to 46%.

Barriers raised by employers remain similar, however, the impacts appear to have been exacerbated over the past few years.

In 2019 employers report:

- Significant increases in delays for production of service of goods
- Greater missed opportunities
- Additional operating expenses
- Increase failures to meet deadlines
- Increased negative impacts on credibility and viability

The 2019 study reports a slight increase in staff retention difficulties culminating with increased staff turnover for many regional businesses.

Predicated skill requirements for the future have increased, with respondents reporting an increase in demand for trades, mechanical and engineering, process and production workers and labourers, with business administration remaining steady.

Employers have placed a greater importance on managing skill shortages with responses regarding skill shortage management as a top priority, up from 4% of respondents in 2016 to 36% in 2019, likewise the number of employers whom previously considered managing skill shortages not relevant has significantly decreased from 32% to 15%.

Employers in the region have increased their marketing around vacancies, with respondents reporting considerable growth in all aspects of their marketing including greater utilisation of:



- Word of mouth
- Social media
- Job seeker websites
- Local employment agencies, and
- Head hunting suitable employees

Interestingly, employers report reduced marketing of vacancies through traditional local media outlets.

Employers in the Far West are considering all options to overcome their ongoing skill shortages with the percentage of employers reporting an increase in the value they place on being considered an 'Employer of Choice', with 49% of respondents now rating being an 'Employer of Choice' as very important.

Continuing the trend of considering all options to address their needs employers report a greater willingness to employ across the board, including people with limited work experience, up from 15% to 40%, unskilled people up from 8% to 23% and skilled migrants up from 38% to 56%.

Respondents generally feel more comfortable about the training options provided across the region with 67% reporting they are satisfied with training and professional development options available to their staff, an increase from 55% in 2016.

The need for accredited training has grown but the number of respondents that report an existing relationship with a training provider has decreased from 55% to 38%, yet a greater percentage of employers, 62% in 2019 are willing to pay for training.

Whilst employers may feel the training and professional development opportunities for their staff are satisfactory, only 32% felt the current training options aligned to the future needs of the region, down from 50% in 2016 and more than half (52%) were not confident their training needs could be met in the region over the next 5 years.

In-house delivery of training has increased with respondents reporting an increase in leadership, management and technical training delivered in-house. Likewise the assistance provided to employees to meet their training needs has increased with employers reporting increases in the type of assistance they provide their staff, including financial assistance, study leave and on the job training.

The region's employers value their reputations and report an increase in the measurement of customer service standards, with 55% reporting customer service standards are monitored regularly, an increase of 8% since 2016.

The barriers to growth reported by employers remain steady, although respondents to the survey reported an increase in both categories of, 'can't attract suitable young people' and 'can't attract suitable mature employees'.

Across the board employers report growth in the value they place on employability skills and on the whole appear more satisfied with the employability skills demonstrated by both current and potential staff.

The results of the study clearly demonstrate the majority of local employers are trying to overcome skill shortages, however their satisfaction with the quality of resumes and job applications they receive has only marginally improved. Employers report the percentage of 'acceptable' resumes and job applications has increased, addressing criteria has slightly increased but the level of satisfaction with the overall resumes and applications they receive has decreased.

Drug, alcohol and pre-employment testing appears not to be a major issues for local employers with 5% of employers reporting major problems and 34% reporting no problems at all.

Employers appear to see great value in the transferability of skills and report an increase in the transferability of employability skills and have provided suggestions around how the region capitalises on the skills available across industry sectors, suggesting strategies for both employers and employees to build their understanding of the skills that are transferable.

Employers in the region recognise they sometimes need assistance and have clearly requested that assistance across a number of areas including:

- The retention of staff, up from 17% to 44% of respondents
- Recruitment strategies, up from 23% to 43%
- Working with employment agencies, up from 12% to 34%
- Advertising and promotion of vacancies, up from 17% to 39%, and
- Workforce skills management up from 24% to 41%

From the responses it appears obvious the region's employers are confident of their growth potential, many are actively planning for growth, but many have expressed their concerns about the region's ability to attract, retain and develop a workforce that meets their needs.

As with the 2016 Study, the region faces challenges in attracting and retaining staff, employers are confident of growth and are utilising additional strategies to overcome the barriers they face.

The Far West has jobs, the challenge for the region now is to develop holistic strategies to address the ongoing issues of attracting and retaining staff. Some aspects have improved since the 2016 study, others have exacerbated.



# Moving Forward

# 10.0 Moving Forward

The Far West Workforce Development Study has provided significant insights into the aspirations and needs of the region's employers, to fully explore potential strategies in a holistic approach, further consultation and collaboration of service provision is essential.

This section will draw together the key findings from the study and identify key action areas that should be considered in the development of any Far West Workforce Development Plan.

This research demonstrates a range of opportunities for the region, businesses have clearly demonstrated their aspiration to grow, however this study requested no evidence of their capacity to enact that aspiration and anecdotal evidence suggests a lack of support across the Far West in most business development aspects.

Of serious concern is the confidence employers have in the region's ability to meet their needs through training and professional development and the availability of skilled employees. The fact that almost half of the respondents (46%) report having advertised vacancies over the past 12 months they were unable to fill and almost the same percentage (45%) have employed a person that didn't really meet their expectations at the interview, demonstrates a serious issue facing business growth and sustainability across the region, thus the sustainability of the region itself.

It appears from the responses that employers across the region are almost at crisis point, they have clearly asked for additional support with a number of aspects related to marketing vacancies, recruitment, retention and workforce skill management. Their responses demonstrate a commitment to change, a commitment to growth and a commitment to enhancing the training and professional development of their existing and future workforce.

The survey indicated a number of characteristics of the region which have the potential to impact the labour market. Some of these characteristics cannot be changed, notwithstanding this, these characteristics provide important context for any regional Workforce Development Strategies. These characteristics are summarised as;

- Isolation and location. Raised in 2016 and again in 2019, the region is large, sparsely populated and covers a significant percentage of the State's landmass but accounts for only a small percentage of the State's population. However, strong and very successful strategies have been developed to market the region as an alternate destination to live, work and invest. These strategies are gaining momentum, however to fully realise their value and ensure their success they should be more widely adopted by regional stakeholders.
- Education and Training.
  - The Far West boasts outstanding public education facilities for our children and options for higher education are certainly growing. The region currently supports two major vocational education providers, including TAFE NSW,

which has two campuses in Broken Hill and smaller regional delivery facilities in Menindee and Wilcannia

- Robinson College is a community college providing vocational training across a number of industry sectors
- High and Central schools in the region offer extensive vocational pathways and high quality educational outcomes.
- The Country Universities Centre Far West provides outstanding facilities and caters for local students undertaking tertiary education qualifications. The Centre is building partnerships with tertiary providers and has begun face to face delivery of some qualifications locally. The establishment of CUC Far West provides opportunities for local students to participate in supported Higher Education and achieve their educational aspirations from their home town. Local students now have access to a high tech supervised facility, tutorial and mentoring support and access to a network of like-minded students in a campus like environment.
- The Broken Hill University Department of Rural Health (BH UDRH) aims to improve health care in Far West NSW by providing high quality support, education and training for rural and remote health workers. Its focus is to establish relevant teaching and support environments, promote opportunities for student placements in the region, and deliver a successful rural attachment program for medical, nursing and allied health students.

By far one of the most significant issues for the region moving forward is population decline. The population of the region has been in steady decline for a number of years, whilst the decline has slowed over recent times it remains a significant issue. As demonstrated by the region's employers they are clearly seeking quality suitable employees and the lack of suitable applicants is seriously impacting their businesses and the sustainability of the region.

This research has not included a number of potential opportunities across the region. Carpentaria Resources' flagship project, the Hawsons Iron project near Broken Hill which has been identified by independent analysts as the world's leading undeveloped high quality iron ore concentrate and pellet feed project. Carpentaria's fact sheet discusses the potential for 1200 jobs during construction and 500 jobs in steady state production.

An acknowledged leader in mining and the birthplace of BHP the Far West still offers significant potential for new mining development. Modern mining and processing techniques have enabled previously abandoned mines a new life, producing minerals and creating employment and wealth for the region. A number of potential new mining opportunities are being investigated and the region offers substantial opportunities in minerals not previously mined across the Far West, including cobalt.

New opportunities are important to the region, they create jobs, career pathways, inspiration and help develop the career aspirations of many of the region's young people with modern engineering and processing technology. However, without a robust and inclusive workforce development plan and indeed a regional growth strategy the region will not be well placed to meet the workforce needs of any new opportunities, impacting investment, growth and the future of the region.

# 11.0 Key Focus Areas

This research has identified a number of areas where practical and achievable action may be taken to increase the region's skill base and position the region to take advantage of the current and emerging growth opportunities.

A holistic and coordinated approach to driving enhanced regional outcomes in workforce development will enable strategies to reach across a number of key focus areas.

To drive real and meaningful change in workforce planning and development across the region it is critical that all regional stakeholders are engaged and actively working towards agreed outcomes, however to develop a Regional Workforce Development Plan and facilitate collaboration and change will require resources and widespread consultation.

## 11.1 Training and Employment Coordination

**Astute and meaningful brokerage requires working with individual young people to inspire, manage and match their career aspirations, while working simultaneously with employers and schools.**

Enabling the region to develop and implement a plan that addresses the issues raised will require support and a commitment from all stakeholders to 'think outside of the box' and develop innovative and holistic strategies.

The region's aspirations to develop a highly skilled workforce and provide greater support to enhance processes associated with workforce development supports existing broader outcomes, supports population growth and retention, enhances productivity and encourages an entrepreneurial attitude.

Anecdotal evidence suggests significant outcomes through the creation of vocational pathways, marketing, job applications, training and assessment options have greatly increased across the Far West region during the period when the region has engaged support/broker type positions.

### Strategies for Consideration

1. **Stronger training and employment coordination will create further opportunities to;**
  - **Encourage, facilitate and coordinate business and industry representatives to work with education and training providers and employment service providers to enhance understanding and build capacity across employability skills.**
  - **Provide opportunity for Careers Advisors and those working within the career support services to build a deeper understanding of employability skills and the value employers place on them.**

- Support schools and other training providers to develop and implement strategies that enable students to better understand the importance of employability skills
- Support schools, other training providers and job service providers to develop and implement strategies to better articulate their employability skills in job applications and interviews
- Encourage regional employers to develop or enhance cadetship programs that provide outcomes in areas of specific skill shortages, address workforce needs to enhance the sustainability of education and training providers locally.
- Encourage regional employers to develop traineeship and apprenticeship pathways and work with local training providers to enhance sustainability and delivery outcomes.

## *11.2 Job Readiness and Generic Employability Skills*

**For employers, getting the right people means identifying people with the right skills and qualities to fulfil the role and contribute to the organisation's success.**

As with the 2016 Study, work readiness and generic employability skills have again been raised by respondents as critically important.

Employability skills (sometimes called 'soft skills') refer to a set of transferable skills and key personal attributes which are highly valued by employers and essential for effective performance in the workplace. Unlike professional or technical skills, these employability skills are generic in nature, rather than job-specific, and are common to all work roles and workplaces across all industry types, for example, communication and teamwork.

For employers, getting the right people means identifying people with the right skills and qualities to fulfil the role and contribute to the organisation's success. Candidates may have the qualifications and 'hard skills' needed to be able to manage the job role but, without a well-honed set of 'soft skills', employers are less inclined to hire.

Despite concerns about job readiness the 2019 study results suggest if the unemployed, or those wishing to change careers can become work ready with appropriate skills, employers are very willing to take them on.

### *11.2.1 Strategies for Consideration*

Employers clearly value these skills, but do our students, unemployed and employed looking to change careers understand employability skills and the importance employers place on these skills?

- 1. Given the responses regarding employability skills and job readiness, a renewed focus on work experience programs in High and Central schools within the region could be considered. Additionally, strategies to enhance outcomes through coaching should be developed.**
  - Work experience is a critical pathway for young people to connect with people in the industry they are interested in and to make the contacts that they would otherwise have no chance of developing.
  - Work experience often provides the only real work opportunity young people have to build their understanding of the different types of careers available within industry sectors and the variety of pathways available to achieve them.
  - Additionally, the region should consider the options available to introduce career education programs earlier. The importance of appropriate exposure to the world of work at primary school level cannot be understated. Children form stereotypical views of the world from an early age. Biased assumptions lead to a narrowing of career aspirations and an inability to relate learning to a world beyond school. (What works? Career-related learning in primary schools, Dr Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Jordan Rehill, Dr Deirdre Hughes, December 2008).
  - Strategies should be considered that highlight to employers the benefits to their business in actively participating in work experience and work readiness programs
- 2. As outlined within these recommendations, these services and opportunities, work experience, work readiness and coaching should be extended to include the unemployed of all age groups and must be supported by industry sectors within the region.**

### *11.3 Training and Professional Development*

**Professional development training is often overlooked and underappreciated as an employee retention and recruitment tool.**



Offering professional development programs, allows employees to perform better and prepares them for positions of greater responsibility. But it can also help employers attract top job candidates, retain their best workers and identify future leaders. Moreover, ongoing professional development is very appealing to many employees today who are looking to keep their skills relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The fact that 67% of respondents report being satisfied with current training and professional development opportunities for their current workforce is very positive, however, the fact that 33% are not is alarming.

It should be noted that in 2016, 55% of respondents reported being satisfied with the current training options. A 12% increase in satisfaction over the past 3 years indicates the success of strategies developed across the region to close the gap between training options and the region's needs.

Additionally, an increase in employer requirements for accredited training over the past 3 years indicates employers have a good understanding of the type of training they require, if not, how to access and manage it.

Interestingly, in 2016, 55% of respondents reported a relationship with a training provider, in comparison in 2019 that has reduced to 38%. An increase in employers willing to pay for training (up by 5%) and a reduction in relationships with training providers potentially indicates employers across the region place a greater emphasis on training but either the employers haven't prioritised developing a relationship with training providers or the providers haven't proactively developed that relationship with employers.

More than 60% of employer's prefer face to face training options, 50% are interested in short workshops and almost 40% willing to look at "anything". The region's employer's value training, many are willing to pay for that training and at least 40% are willing to take relevant training in any format.

### *11.3.1 Recommended Strategies for Consideration*

Training and professional development are key to business success, but they are also key to individual success and enable the region's employed, underemployed and unemployed to strive towards their individual career aspirations.

It appears the region's training providers have realigned the current training options however, there appears to be scope to make employers more aware of the training available locally and broader consultation to ensure training providers are aware of the requirements of local employers.

- 1. Disseminate this research to education and training providers so they are aware of the occupations that are difficult to fill and the requirements of employers.**

2. Encourage training organisations to undertake research with, and track former students to assess the extent to which specialised skills training has led to employment outcomes in the region.
3. Encourage training providers to consider how training might become more accessible in the region, including through mixed mode delivery while recognising that the majority of employers prefer face to face training.
  - Enhanced opportunity for training delivered locally to reduce (or eliminate) the need for young people to travel long distances and stay extended periods of time in other locations to attend training.
4. Explore collaborative models that provide additional training that suits a number of employers at a reduced cost and with reduced travel requirements.
5. Career pathways between vocational and tertiary education should be developed and promoted to enhance outcomes with retention, professional development, personal aspirations and industry growth

## *11.4 Aligning Training to the Region's Needs*

**A training program that results in wiser, happier, more loyal employees might be considered successful, right?**

**But what if those employees successfully learned a bunch of skills that contribute nothing toward their productivity or the organisation's strategic goals?**

**What if they're wiser and happier, but not any better equipped to move the organisation closer to its vision?**

**The perfect training is not just about the employee. It's about the organisation's needs as well. Perfect training is where training goals meet business objectives in a win-win kind of situation.**

Current and future strategies to grow the economy and population of the Far West will need to be underpinned by affordable and accessible high quality training that is aligned with the needs of the region.

As noted 33% of respondents were not satisfied with the current training options available to them, which considering 38% reported having an existing relationship with a training provider suggests that communication is not effective or not understood.

With only 20% of respondents believing the region's current training requirements align with the region's needs over the coming 5 years it is evident significant work remains to either meet their training needs or build their knowledge of the current training options in the region. Additionally, 45% report they are not confident their training needs will be met over the coming 5 years.

Respondents have reported an increase in, in-house professional development and training to meet their workforce needs with management up from 18% to 35% and leadership up from 15% to 27%. Employers have reported an increase across the board in, in-house delivery of professional development and further research will be required to determine the quality, capacity and outcomes from that delivery.

### *11.4.1 Recommended Strategies for Consideration*

Alignment of the regions training needs with delivery is critical to addressing regional skill shortages. The region must develop a long term strategic plan and comprehensive strategies to enhance communication between the regions industries and training providers.

- 1. Develop regional strategies to help education and training providers to:**
  - **Develop an understanding of the regions industry's growth potential and growth opportunities**
  - **Develop and promote processes to better understand the specific requirements of individual industry and businesses**
  - **Map the region's training and professional development requirements to enable long term planning**
  - **Identify gaps in training and assessment needs**
  - **Facilitate opportunities for networking and enhanced collaboration to maximise the sustainability of training pathways**
- 2. Encourage training providers to consider how training might become more accessible, including mixed mode delivery while recognising that the majority of employers prefer face to face training.**
  - **Enhanced opportunity for training delivered locally to reduce (or eliminate) the need for young people to travel long distances and stay extended periods of time in other locations to attend training.**

## 11.5 Support Services

**The region's employers are willing and confident, but they require additional support. Supporting our employers translates to jobs and economic prosperity for the region and its residents.**

Respondents have been very clear about the type of support they seek to enhance their capacity across a number of areas related to recruitment and retention of staff, thus providing the region's service providers with an insight into the needs of employers. Training and education strategies for employers should be considered separately to the alignment of training with the region's skills needs, however the development of a Strategic Plan to enhance recruitment and workforce development in the region should be inclusive and comprehensive.

Recruitment and retention issues are presenting significant barriers for the region's employers. The development of a series of workshops/training sessions to support employers across the identified areas should be developed.

Marketing and promotion of vacancies has diversified since the 2016 study. Employers are more engaged with social media when recruiting new staff up from 27% to 56% and word of mouth up from 42% to 63%.

Employers report broadening their recruitment marketing from a reliance on traditional media only, down from 62% to 50% for local media and down from 35% to 21% for national media.

Internet employment sites and headhunting of potential staff have increased over the past 3 years indicating employers are experimenting with a range of contemporary marketing methods to attract and recruit potential staff members.

### 11.5.1 Recommended Strategies for Consideration

With regard to the fact that employers have informed the study of the type of support and training opportunities they require to enhance their own recruitment and retention the development and delivery of those opportunities should be relevant to their needs and highly valued.

The region's employers appear to be developing their own businesses to overcome their ongoing recruitment issues. In 2016, 34% of respondents reported that being an 'Employer of Choice' was very important, in 2019 40% of respondents report being an 'Employer of Choice' as very important. However, in 2019 7% of employers reported they were not certain what being an 'Employer of Choice' meant and still 15% responded that it was not really considered.

Given the rise in reported expectations from employees for a work/life balance enhancing the region's employers understanding and skills in becoming an 'Employer of Choice' could offer significant outcomes in both recruitment and retention.

- 1. The development of training opportunities for employers regarding;**
  - **Dynamic recruitment strategies to attract and engage potential employees outside of the region.**
    - **An opportunity exists for the region's employers, considering their responses to current marketing strategies and their ongoing difficulties in attracting suitable staff.**
    - **Training should be developed that demonstrates the value of promoting the region as an ideal destination to live and work (through existing marketing material and platforms), the employer as an 'Employer of Choice' within a dynamic, sustainable and exciting region and the job as an opportunity in a dynamic location with an 'Employer of Choice'.**
  - **Marketing with social media, best practice strategies**
  - **Incorporate relevant and quality existing resources as a tool to promote the region to potential employees, for example Far West Proud**
  - **Best practice, relevant and contemporary retention strategies**
  - **Short workshops/information sessions to inform and engage employers in regards to working with employment agencies**
  - **Workforce skill management**
    - **Succession planning**
    - **A regional collaborative perspective**
    - **Individual businesses**
  - **Change Management**
- 2. Explore opportunities to create relevant and meaningful networks or networking opportunities across the region where employers can share experiences and learn from each other.**
- 3. Engage suitable professionals to develop workshops and other training opportunities for employers to enhance their understanding and build practices in regards to becoming an 'Employer of Choice'.**
- 4. Encourage regional employers to enhance participation in the annual Career Expo to demonstrate career pathways, skill requirements and potential skill shortages to regional secondary students**

## 11.6 Workforce Attraction and Retention

**Our people are our greatest asset, yet if we don't take purposeful actions to position our communities for the future of work, we may be unable to take advantage of all the potential that we are capable of creating.**

Almost half (46%) of the respondents that have tried to recruit over the past 12 months have experienced difficulties and 45% have recruited and settled for an employee that didn't really meet their expectations during the interview.

In comparison the 2016 survey indicated more than 33% of employers that had tried to recruit had experienced difficulties and 42% had settled for an employee that didn't really meet their expectations.

This rise in recruitment difficulties over the past few years has enhanced the already significant barriers for employers and diversification and economic growth within the region, yet 86% of respondents are still planning for growth over the next 2 years.

A declining population coupled with a desire for business growth and difficulties in attracting suitable staff for many employers, suggests the region must focus on both upskilling, or reskilling the existing workforce and attracting new workers to the region.

Employers are open to employing people of all age groups with 84% willing to employ people aged between 25-45 years of age and 68% willing to employ people aged in the 45-60 age bracket. Almost 32% are willing to employ School Based Trainees and almost 35% would employ apprentices. Employers across the region have demonstrated a commitment to employing people from school (School Based Trainees), aged 17-18 years to more mature employees aged up to 60.

Similarly, almost 40% would employ people with limited work experience and almost 57% would employ skilled migrants, suggesting the region's employers are very willing to employ people with the appropriate level of skill and commitment, yet they are still experiencing recruitment difficulties.

Nothing can be done to relocate the Far West to address the concerns of 60% of respondents who believe the region's location/isolation is a barrier to recruitment from outside the region. However, almost 50% stated they believed the perception of the region an issue, this can be addressed and existing programs within the region utilised and enhanced.

Critical questions for the region to consider are, who to target from outside the region and how to attract them to the region.

The first question largely depends on the skill shortages and gaps at any given time, this research suggests a range of occupations that may be difficult to fill over the next 5 years. It would therefore make sense to consider which of these occupations are unlikely to be filled in the short to medium term by upskilling the local workforce and then focus on attracting people from outside the region to fill these roles, however if perception of the region is a

barrier as reported, developing strategies to change that perception and utilise existing resources would be a critical first step in attracting the required workforce.

When asked if respondents would be interested in receiving information about recruitment and retention of young people, people with disabilities and Aboriginal people, over 80% of respondents stated they were interested in receiving information and advice about employing young people straight from school and Aboriginal people, 40% were interested in information about employing people with disabilities.

With reported difficulties in attracting and retaining employees and the interest in information and advice it would suggest a greater commitment to developing training and employment pathways for people already living in the region is being considered.

The regions low unemployment may also be impacting on businesses to find appropriately skilled staff. When considered with a declining population the region should consider all options to attract skilled workers from elsewhere.

### *11.6.1 Recommended Strategies for Consideration*

The following recommendations should be considered with a whole of community approach and could be implemented by service providers as part of a holistic regional strategy to address recognised workforce development issues.

#### **1. Stronger training and employment coordination, to;**

- **Enhance regional awareness of the process of employing young people.**
- **Enhance regional awareness of the benefits of employing apprentices, trainees and school based trainees to develop pathways for local people and retain the youth of the region.**
- **Enhance awareness of workforce development planning.**
- **Enhance regional awareness of the financial incentives and support services available to employ young people in vocational pathways.**
- **Support the provision of information and support requested by employers during this study.**
- **Establish a 'one stop shop' to;**
  - **Provide relevant information to regional stakeholders.**
  - **Provide relevant support during recruitment and establishment.**
  - **Individual consultation with employers to create pathways.**
  - **Consultation with schools to better understand the aspirations of cohorts of students to establish and support suitable pathways.**
  - **Develop promotional material to highlight the value of vocational pathways and the opportunities they create.**
  - **Negotiate with Registered Training Organisations to ensure relevant delivery and assessment models are developed.**
  - **Monitor and support completion of vocational pathways.**
  - **Enhance communication between employers to increase opportunities for critical mass to support the sustainability of training models.**

- 2. Enhance the marketing and content development of Far West Proud as a vehicle to alter perception and enhance positive marketing of the region.**
  - Underpin the existing resource with sufficient funds and support.
  - Ensure the financial sustainability of the campaign as a regional resource
- 3. Ensure employers are aware of the options for employing the specific groups mentioned in this report, including people with disabilities, Aboriginal people and people straight from school.**
  - Develop a coordinated approach to inform employers through collaboration with service providers already servicing the region.
- 4. Develop training opportunities for employers regarding;**
  - Dynamic recruitment strategies to attract and engage potential employees outside of the region.
  - Marketing with social media.
  - Incorporate relevant and quality existing resources as a tool to promote the region to potential employees, for example Far West Proud.
  - Best practice, relevant contemporary retention strategies.
  - Short workshops to inform and engage employers in regards to working with employment agencies.
- 5. Enhance current strategies to ensure employers are aware of current rebates/incentives associated with employing specific groups. For example apprentices and trainees, and any available relocation grants that may be available to support the costs associated with relocation.**

The decision to move to a new town is significant and impacts whole families. In consideration of moving families need to be assured of strong education and employment outcomes for the whole family, entertainment, social networks, an attractive shopping precinct and outstanding sport and recreation opportunities.

- 6. The region could undertake an audit of activities and opportunities and ensure marketing and promotional materials are relevant and highlight points of difference from other regional communities.**
- 7. The region should consider strategies to ensure new residents are welcomed to the community and are aware of the social, sporting and cultural activities available to them, and how to access them.**



## *11.7 Transferability of Skills*

**The continuous use of acquired knowledge and abilities when moving from one job to another could provide significant opportunity for job seekers and employers.**

The Far West has flourished for more than 130 years and given the cyclical nature of some of the region's key industries; mining and agriculture, the transferability of skills has obviously been recognised and utilised in the past, however given the declining population and reported difficulties in attracting and retaining staff, it appears more critical now than ever that individuals and industry in the region recognise and maximise the use of transferable skills.

Recognition is growing of the value of sound career advice and guidance at every stage of an individual's working life. It has been suggested that individuals that are retrenched or leave employment may not be aware of the skills they have obtained that are transferable to other industries.

Career advice and guidance is particularly helpful to support individuals to identify their skillsets and the transferability of skills. The same advice could also be helpful for employers that may not have a full understanding of the transferable skills that may be useful in their own industries.

Whilst career advice for people in schools and TAFE may be available the same level of guidance is not readily available for the rest of the community. Some guidance is available from various institutions and providers, however, the level of resources required to ensure comprehensive support for all people at all stages of life is extensive, thus not readily available in all communities of the region. The only other option is for individuals to seek and pay for advice from private career practitioners, this option may be unaffordable for many, particularly the most disadvantaged. This option also doesn't address the question of ensuring employers are also aware of and understand the transferability of skills and how they could best employ these skills.

Employers have highlighted the need for training to enhance their understanding of transferability of skills as much as the unemployed, school leavers and those wishing to change careers.

### *11.7.1 Recommended Strategies for Consideration*

- 1. Conduct an audit of the services currently available in the region to support transferability of skills and career advice and guidance.**
- 2. Publish the findings of the audit to inform employees and employers of the support available.**

- 3. Establish a steering group to develop strategies to address gaps between the audit outcomes and the needs of the region.**
- 4. Develop short training opportunities for employers regarding transferability of skills.**
- 5. Develop strategies to provide individual assistance with job applications to highlight existing skill sets v's the job requirements of the position being applied for.**

## *11.8 Other Considerations to Support Success*

In addition to the key focus areas outlined in this report respondents have identified other barriers to grow and diversification. Over 75% of respondent's report their business as having a website and only 1% suggest that their business doesn't rely on electronic communication.

The inadequate access, unreliability and slow speed of internet connectivity and poor mobile communication in the region has been widely reported.

For the region to achieve its aspirations and realise many of the existing strategies including: workforce development, population growth, retention, enhanced training and professional development, liveability, the visitor economy and new mining and economic diversification, the region must be provided with the same opportunities and a level playing field with internet access and mobile communication.

Additionally, a commitment from regional stakeholders to provide support for existing programmes across the region to; enhance population growth, strong marketing to alter perception and promote the region, accessibility, service provision and strategies developed from this report is critical.

Highlighted throughout this report and identified through existing campaigns in the region is the need to enhance opportunities and the promotion of opportunities for employment and engagement of spouses/partners of people recruited into the region.

Identified by 40% of respondents in this report as a barrier to attracting suitable employees from outside the region, opportunities for spouses is a significant consideration for potential employees and residents.

Whilst many job opportunities are marketed in a variety of methods across the region, as evidenced in this report, many are still marketed through word of mouth. To ensure employers are presented with quality applicants and those considering the region or new to the region are provided with opportunity for employment and engagement, additional strategies should be developed to capture all opportunities and match those opportunities to the aspirations and skillsets of new, potential and current residents.

Anecdotal evidence suggest the region fails residents and valuable employees in many cases because one partner is engaged in the community and happily employed whilst the other partner hasn't found suitable employment and may not have become engaged with the community.

Given many of the issues raised by employers in this study relate to recruitment and retention of suitable employees, and attracting suitable employees into the region it makes sense to ensure new residents are supported and provided with every opportunity to become part of the community and stay within the region.

Regardless of the strategies that are developed or enhanced from the outcomes of this report it is critical that the region develop a collaborative and holistic approach. Submissions developed from this study must be holistic and demonstrate commitment from key stakeholders.

Critically, the region must focus on addressing identified gaps other than duplication of service.

Likewise, all strategies implemented to address workforce attraction and retention must be monitored and evaluated to build an in-depth understanding of the success of individual strategies and the impact on employers and residents of the region.

Furthermore, stronger linkages with industry and further consultation is needed to inform planning and enhance outcomes of any strategies developed by the region to address workforce development.

A significantly greater emphasis must be placed on the needs of employers and their employees other than a focus of cost of service delivery and short term outcomes.







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