



**Local Jobs
Program**

Local Jobs Plan

Great Southern Wheatbelt

Western Australia

June 2022

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The Department of Education, Skills and Employment acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country of the Great Southern Wheatbelt region, the Noongar Nation, and acknowledges their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the elders past, present and emerging.

The Local Jobs Program

As part of supporting Australia's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian Government's Local Jobs Program (LJP) brings together expertise, resources and access to funding at the local level to accelerate reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways in 51 Employment Regions.

Recognising the importance of local knowledge in getting people back into jobs quickly, the LJP includes the following key elements in each region:

- a local Employment Facilitator
- a Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce
- a Local Jobs Plan
- a Local Recovery Fund to support small scale activities
- access to the National Priority Funding Pool.

The Taskforces, each chaired by the respective region's Employment Facilitator, develop and update a Local Jobs Plan for their region that identifies key employment and training priorities and provides a framework for driving employment outcomes in the context of the local labour market.

This interim Local Jobs Plan for the Great Southern Wheatbelt Employment Region identifies the key LJP priorities with a focus on creating employment opportunities, actively upskilling or reskilling local job seekers and meeting local employer demands.

Key employment and training priorities

1. Work with stakeholders to identify and address the gaps in delivery and accessibility of existing Australian and Western Australian (WA) government programs, including training programs and employment services delivery, in different localities within the region. Recognise and advocate for the delivery issues that are relevant to varying cohorts of jobseekers and localities within the region. For example, work with existing community stakeholders to support jobseekers to access and navigate online government resources in smaller and/or more remote localities.
2. Work with stakeholders to identify and support the pre-employment needs of socially disadvantaged and priority jobseeker groups including mature age, young people, females, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD communities.

3. Make the regions' opportunities visible to jobseekers and their service providers, engaging with industry and employment services providers to identify and promote current and future industry workforce requirements and related local job pathways. Leverage existing national and WA government programs and Local Recovery fund Activities to ensure that businesses are supported to secure local employees for current and upcoming employment opportunities and projects.
4. Engage with industry, small business owners, local councils and other stakeholders to identify and address barriers to attracting new jobseekers to the region to meet areas of labour demand.

A full description of these key priorities, the strategies to address these and a list of key stakeholders can be found at Attachment A.

Employment Region overview

For the most recent labour market data for the region, visit:

<https://labourmarketinsights.gov.au/regions/employment-regions-jobactive/?region=Great+Southern+-+Wheatbelt>

The Great Southern Wheatbelt Employment region combines two distinct regions – the Great Southern and the Wheatbelt.

Great Southern

Key Statistics:

Geographical size	39,007sqm
Number of Local Government Areas	11
Population	39,007
Key commercial centre	Albany
Primary industries	Primary production (agriculture, livestock, timber, viticulture, wool and fishing), hospitality/tourism, health and care sector, education and training, small business
No. of jobs	25,042
Education and Training providers	Government and independent primary and secondary schools South Regional TAFE, private Registered Training Organisations University of WA Albany campus, Great Southern University Centre



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Data sources: REMPLAN 2021, ABS Census 2016, NSC Vacancy Index

Wheatbelt

Key statistics:

Geographical size	154,862sqm
Number of Local Government Areas	42
Population	73,690
Key commercial centres	Northam, Moora, Merredin
Primary industries	Agriculture, mining, manufacturing, health and care sector, education and training, small business
No. of jobs	29,594
Education and Training providers	Government and independent primary and secondary schools Central Regional TAFE, Muresk Institute, private Registered Training Organisations



Key challenges in Great Southern Wheatbelt Employment Region

Across the Great Southern and Wheatbelt regions, businesses are struggling to find enough qualified people to fill vacant positions. Despite the labour shortage, many participants on the Department's program caseloads remain disconnected from consistent employment outcomes.

Key challenges across the region include:

Training delivery and Jobseeker skill gaps

Despite recent increases in government funding to support discounted and free courses for jobseekers, challenges in providing locally informed, timely training remain, and regional business owners regularly report challenges with identifying how to gain traction from training providers towards local priorities.

This issue is particularly prevalent in smaller towns in the region. It can be challenging for employers and Employment Service Providers to line up participants to the quantity required to generate a course start in the desired timeframe. While online delivery or correspondence is a possible solution, it is not suitable for all courses and not all jobseekers are confident to learn in this manner.

Additionally, some cohorts of jobseekers require extra practical support to access training, such as childcare or transport, which are not always available within current training infrastructure.

Beyond technical training, employers regularly report that jobseekers lack the core personal skills (or “soft skills”) needed to perform the vacant roles available. While communication and empathy are required more often for customer/client facing roles (retail, hospitality, care sector), other attributes such as teamwork, reliability, ability to receive feedback and time management stretch across multiple roles.

Some longer-term jobseekers struggle to demonstrate these attributes through lack of recent work experience – for others the issue may be linked to longer term issues which require a higher level of wrap around support and training/mentoring. There are strong examples of the success of pre-employment programs and wrap around support in the employment services sector. There is a need to connect and resource these programs and models to support the specific caseload and employment opportunities within the Great Southern Wheatbelt region.

Transport and mobility within the region

Lack of transport is a key barrier for a number of jobseekers. With many jobseekers having faced barriers to gaining a drivers' license in their teen years, their lack of driving skills prevents them from accessing both training and employment locations. Not only this, but a large number of jobs in the Agricultural industry, a key employer for the region, require a driver's license and/or a higher level of licensing to operate work vehicles.

With a large portion of the region's work opportunities seasonal, lack of transport and mobility within the region can also hinder entry-level workers.

Visibility of employment and job pathways

Navigating the job market to identify available and relevant job opportunities is challenging not only for jobseekers, but also for school leavers, the general (employed) labour force and even for the Employment Service Providers that support them.

This is partly contributed to by the high percentage of jobs which are filled “off market”, by word of mouth or employee poaching. Other contributing factors include the geographical distance between employment centres, the large properties and lack of “shop front” for many primary industry employers, and the method of regional grouping used by the larger employment websites.

At the same time, employers also comment that their target workforce is “hidden” from them and is hard to identify and connect with. With a participation rate well below the WA average (62.3% vs WA 70% - ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) Labour market survey, April 2022), the labour market is under significant pressure as employers struggle to connect with potential employees, both within the government services caseload and in the broader community.

Other barriers

Access to housing is a significant issue which hinders employment throughout the Great Southern Wheatbelt region, with both smaller and larger employment centres affected. Not only does it restrict jobseekers willing to relocate for work, it also acts as a deterrent to jobseekers who do not want to jeopardize their public housing entitlements when they increase their earnings. Workers in lower-paid sectors are particularly affected by the recent rise in rental costs, with reports of tenants seeking housing with caravan parks and family/friends when rental market stock is unavailable. Beyond the impact of WA’s current rental shortage, the region also faces additional burdens in the extra cost and time delay associated with building new housing. This, combined with the lower investor appetite compared to the metropolitan area, and higher financing barriers (e.g., higher deposits required for regional postcodes), all contribute to an ongoing undersupply of housing.

The region’s diversity and its spatial variability in terms of population, employment and economic activity means that bespoke solutions are required. There is no one-size-fits-all for the region. In some parts of the region there are shortages of doctors, nurses, teachers and skilled tradesmen, in other parts there is a need for farm hands and tourism casuals. For both regions, the challenge of importing and housing labour is significant. Consideration needs to be given to labour mobility, with the assistance of available relocation assistance grants.

Local stakeholders and opportunities

Stakeholder category	Comments
Local Government Areas	Great Southern – 11 LGA's Wheatbelt – 42 LGA's
Business associations	RCCI WA Local CCI chapters and independent business associations
Community Resource Centre Network (CRC)	Funded by DPIRD (Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development), these centres are located in smaller regional towns and offer jobs boards and resume advice, host training courses and provide internet/computer access
WA Jobs & Skills Centres	Located Northam, Moora, Merredin, Albany Serviced visits to Narrogin, Katanning, Mt Barker, Denmark
Australian Government Employment Service Providers	Jobactive, Parents Next, Transition to Work providers
Australian and State Government services and agencies – other	NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) Job Matching service, AASN (Australian Apprenticeship Support Network) providers, NIAA (National Indigenous Australian Agency), AusIndustry, DPIRD

A note on stakeholders and service delivery

Whilst these and a range of other government programs are available, many regional offices are only staffed part time, and some are only serviced as outreach services from offices in Perth or Bunbury. Access to these services can be sporadic for residents of smaller towns, with a number of programs and resources not well known among community stakeholders. The move to an online – first model for many government services will further disadvantage some jobseekers who have limited access to internet and IT equipment, inferior digital literacy skills, and/or lower literacy skills, and for CALD communities who may have lower English language proficiency.

Attachment A – Key employment and training priorities: strategies and stakeholders

Priority One: Work with stakeholders to identify and address the gaps in delivery and accessibility of existing Australian and Western Australian (WA) government programs, including training programs and employment services delivery, in different localities within the region. Recognise and advocate for the delivery issues that are relevant to varying cohorts of jobseekers and localities within the region. For example, work with existing community stakeholders to support jobseekers to access and navigate online government resources in smaller and/or more remote localities.

Strategies	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and map delivery of Australian and State government services, to identify gaps in delivery • Identify existing community connection points • Encourage collaboration, promotion and referral processes between these connection points and government agencies for the delivery of services • Support government agencies and employment service providers to strengthen their local stakeholder networks within regional localities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government Authorities • Community Resource Centres • Education and Training providers • Local business associations • Community service organisations • Workforce Australia, Transition to Work and Parents Next providers

Priority Two: Work with stakeholders to identify and support the pre-employment needs of socially disadvantaged and priority jobseeker groups including mature age, young people, females, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and CALD communities.

Strategies	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with existing employers and service providers to identify support required • Promote Government pre-employment resources such as PaTH, Launch into Work and VTEC (Vocational Training and Employment Centre) resources • Encourage the expansion of support networks and programs to address the practical and social support needs of jobseekers, including access to drivers' license/transport, mental health support, literacy/numeracy/digital literacy training, practical work experience opportunities and social and cultural support, relevant to the locality and the jobseeker cohort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local employers and social enterprises, particularly those with a focus on a disadvantaged cohort e.g., Indigenous, Youth • Local business associations • Government programs including SEE (Skills for Education and Employment), PaTH, Launch into Work • Other Government departments including NIAA • Local community support organisations

Priority Three: Make the regions' opportunities visible to jobseekers and their service providers, engaging with industry and employment services providers to identify and promote current and future industry workforce requirements and related local job pathways. Leverage existing national and WA government programs and Local Recovery fund Activities to ensure that businesses are supported to secure local employees for current and upcoming employment opportunities and projects.

Strategies	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map job vacancies to local workforce demographics and availability of related resources, programs and training. • Engage with employers and industry representatives to understand the current and expected future skills needed in the local workforce • Connect Employment Service Providers with local employers in specific industries • Share local labour market data and employer workforce needs and trends with stakeholders • Promote Government programs and resources which support business owners to recruit from the caseload • Support local job events • Support and connect stakeholders who maintain jobs boards, employment advertising etc. within the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Service Providers • Employers • Business associations • Community organisations • Community resource centres • Jobs & Skills Centres • TAFE

Priority Four: Engage with industry, small business owners, local councils and other stakeholders to identify and address barriers to attracting new jobseekers to the region to meet areas of labour demand.

Strategies	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in inter-regional job events • Engage with Jobs & Skills Centres and Employment Service Providers in regions adjacent to the Great Southern Wheatbelt for the promotion of job pathways • Provide labour market data to stakeholders to help inform discussions on related issues such as housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jobs & Skills Centres • Employment Facilitators (Perth and South West WA) • Employment Service Providers (Perth and regional) • Local Government • Larger employers and key projects • Business associations / Chambers of Commerce

Attachment B: Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected people, businesses, local economies and communities in most States. Western Australia has been fortunate not to experience high numbers of COVID-19 cases and/or lockdowns, aside from initial impacts from the initiation of the virus and a number of limited lockdowns thereafter.

On an industry basis, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a widespread impact on most regional industries:

Tourism based **hospitality and accommodation businesses** have experienced rising demand; with the initial decline in international and interstate visitors offset by a steep rise in intrastate visitors, many hospitality providers are finding it difficult to find enough staff to address demand and are responding by limiting hours of operation. Both the Great Southern and Wheatbelt regions have lost staff to higher wage industries such as mining, construction and infrastructure.

The **health, aged care and disability support** sector has seen a decrease in the number of employees working in the sector over the past 5 years, despite rising demand for services. The worker shortage has been heightened by COVID concerns with comments of client anxiety and carer burnout widespread. The sector faces a number of barriers to recruitment, including the lengthy time to complete police/legal checks, the process of matching support workers to the specific needs and locations of clients, and the sometimes negative (and limited) perception of care work in the community.

Primary producers, who have previously relied on travellers and seasonal workers for key times of year, have been significantly impacted by border closures and movement bans, along with the competitive job market. Some businesses have reduced their output 30% or more to manage with smaller staffing numbers.

Retail Trade has also experienced heavy job losses felt highest in travel, clothing and hair and beauty services. Increases in staffing in the major supermarket chains has helped offset some of these losses, however, a number of small local traders are unlikely to reopen. The significant advances in online retail triggered by COVID-19 have also impacted local traders and placed greater demand on limited local transport and logistics capabilities.

The Construction industry has also been affected by COVID-19. Following the introduction of economic stimulus measures, there has been a strong increase in building approvals for dwellings across Western Australia, which has already seen demand for labour outstrip supply – the key challenge being the availability of skilled tradesmen. For instance, Albany is expected to have delays of up to three years for dwelling completion.