

WORK EXPERIENCE

IN MANUFACTURING

A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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FOREWORD

Helping a young person take their next step toward becoming a lifelong learner through formal work experience can be rewarding for everyone.

A work experience placement could be just what a student needs to get a taste of the real world, understand roles in the manufacturing sector, or even spark a new career interest.

When done right, well-planned work experience can help students build on their existing skills and develop new ones, while also preparing them for a future in our constantly evolving sector.

Participating in providing work experience also rewards employers and workplaces by helping to identify potential future employees, running a ruler over existing policies and procedures, and giving staff and managers the opportunity to explain to others how and why things are done.

When setting up a work experience placement, there are a few key things to keep in mind. A successful placement is all about preparation, so it's helpful to create a clear schedule, pick a mentor who's a good fit, find tasks that showcase what your business does, and make sure you understand any special skills or support needs the student may have.

To keep everyone safe and make the experience more rewarding, some paperwork is required – things like work experience agreements and evaluation forms, plus checklists to help ensure good health and safety, and privacy policies are in place.

This guide doesn't dive too deeply into those specifics (since they can change over time), but it will give you a high-level look at what you need to know for a successful placement. It also points you to additional resources if you need them.

Along with covering necessary legal and administrative tasks, this guide offers advice on how to work well with students, plus other helpful resources to make the experience more rewarding for all.

The good news is that schools and training organisations are actively looking for host employers and they will do the heavy lifting.

If you need more information or support, please reach out to us at Manufacturing Skills Queensland. Our contact details are at the end of this guide.

WHY TAKE ON A WORK EXPERIENCE STUDENT?

Like many other industry sectors, manufacturing is evolving rapidly, especially in Queensland where we are moving into an exciting and challenging future of advanced industry.

With increased competition for skilled employees, manufacturing employers need a steady stream of new, young, and enthusiastic staff to grow the workforce and take up the baton as “baby boomers” leave employment.

Taking on a work experience student can be a great opportunity for both you and the student.

Here’s why it’s worth considering:

- It’s a chance to actively participate in the learning journey of students interested in your sector and showcase your business as a potential employer.
- You’re investing in the future by helping develop the manufacturing workforce by letting students explore different career paths and options.
- You can share valuable knowledge about the skills needed to succeed in your manufacturing area.
- You get to educate students about the specific roles needed within your business.
- It helps create stronger connections between schools, workplaces, and the broader community.
- Your team can build new skills in supervising, mentoring, and training young people.
- Reviewing your workplace and processes to accommodate a student can help identify opportunities for enhancement.
- You show students how a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility will help when they start working.
- You teach students about the expectations employers have in the workplace and expand their employment networks to open up new opportunities.
- You gain a better understanding of how students view the world of work and identify the characteristics to look for when hiring junior staff – perhaps you may even meet a future team member.
- Developing links to schools and training organisations may make finding employees easier in the future.

HOW TO GET THE RIGHT WORK EXPERIENCE CANDIDATES

Work experience is usually offered to school students in Years 10, 11 or 12. Students are either participating in work placement provided by their school or a Vocational Education and Training (VET) course delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

The good news is that most schools and VET providers have dedicated career guidance staff or teachers who coordinate work experience placements. These staff members often encourage students to seek out employers where they would like to gain workplace experience.

Perhaps the best way to get involved with finding work experience candidates is to make contact with one or more local schools, reach out to a VET provider, or get involved in local employment expos. Many schools and RTOs are actively looking for host employers, and they may have already reached out to you.

You may be able to be involved with selecting and pre-qualifying students for work experience placements by helping schools or RTOs to better understand your operation and the sort of people you might be looking for. Getting involved can be a great opportunity to further connect with the local secondary and VET education community so they can better match students with your business.

Remember that students are generally very young, inexperienced, and may never have been in a workplace before. You are unlikely to receive work-ready people, and you should expect the process to be a learning experience all around – for many this would be their first experience of an environment outside school or home.

GETTING BETTER CANDIDATES

Spending a little time putting together some basic information on what your business does, the types of job opportunities you offer, and the sort of people you believe will fit well with your culture will pay dividends in helping schools and RTOs find students who are the best match for you.

Having a conversation in advance with careers guidance staff, even potentially offering them a site tour, will also help them to find the right fit for you.

Students will be matched to you based on their level of interest in the manufacturing area in which you work, the subjects they are studying (this is less important for Year 10 students who are yet to pick their final subjects), and their capabilities.

Increasingly, a primary source of information for schools and students is your corporate website and / or social media. Having an online presence which really sells your business well will be a great help in attracting the right candidates

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORK EXPERIENCE AND STRUCTURED WORK PLACEMENT?

Work experience is an unpaid, short-term placement where high school students get the chance to observe how things work in a particular workplace. It's more about getting a feel for the environment and learning about what people do in that field, rather than getting hands on. This guide only deals with work experience.

On the other hand, Structured Work Placements are more in-depth and involve combining on-the-job training with their studies, usually as part of a structured vocational program. So, it's more hands-on, where they actively participate in the work and gain practical skills they can use in their future careers. In Queensland, these often take the form of School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SATs). Depending on the industry sector and host employer type, these placements may be paid.

Broadly, work experience is more about observing and hands-off learning to find out what goes on at specific workplaces, while work placements are about diving in and actually getting involved in the work to gain skills for future employment.



HOST EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

As a host employer, you do take on some significant responsibilities.

Just like your staff, work experience students have a right to be safe and free from harm in the workplace.

As you will be dealing with young people who are inexperienced in how your workplace functions, you have an additional responsibility to look after them.

In general, you have a duty of care to provide adequate supervision, training, and a safe environment. Beyond this, creating an interesting and stimulating environment for work experience students helps to grow the manufacturing sector and attract the best new talent.

Here's a more detailed breakdown of employer responsibilities for work experience placements in Queensland. You must:

- Ensure the work environment and the way work is carried out is healthy and safe, regardless of the type or term of employment.
- Exercise a duty of care to ensure the work environment, systems of work, machinery, and equipment are safe and properly maintained.
- Identify and manage workplace hazards and regularly review control measures.
- Provide adequate information, training, instruction, and supervision to ensure the safety of work experience students.
- Ensure adequate workplace facilities are available for all on site, including work experience students.
- Establish clear policies and procedures as well as providing required equipment to ensure the safety and well-being of all workers, including work experience students.



INTRODUCING THE 5 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL WORK EXPERIENCE

Hosting a work experience student in your manufacturing business doesn't have to be complicated. By following a simple, structured approach, you can create a rewarding experience that benefits both your business and the student. These five steps provide a clear pathway to ensure your work experience program runs smoothly from start to finish.

Each step in the process builds on the previous one, starting with thoughtful preparation and ending with valuable reflection. The structured nature of this approach helps you avoid common pitfalls while ensuring that students receive a meaningful introduction to manufacturing careers. Best of all, schools and training organisations are ready to support you through each phase of the journey.

Remember that a successful work experience placement is an investment in the future of manufacturing. By taking the time to properly plan and execute these five steps, you're not only providing a young person with valuable workplace exposure but also potentially identifying future talent for your business. The effort you put in today may help develop the skilled workers your industry will need tomorrow.

STEP 1:



SETTING UP A PLACEMENT



STEP 2:



PREPARING STUDENTS



STEP 3:



DAY ONE INDUCTION



STEP 4:



DURING THE PLACEMENT



STEP 5:



AFTER THE PLACEMENT

STEP BY STEP

1. SETTING UP A PLACEMENT

Once you've decided to be involved in providing work experience and made contact with a school/s or other RTO, there are a few simple steps needed:

- Discuss with the school the culture and operation of your business as well as some of the tasks to which the student will be exposed. This can help them best match a student to you.
- With your team, discuss workplace procedures relating to the activities to be undertaken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the student. This is a good opportunity to take a look around and make any changes which might enhance safety or productivity. Consider which tasks might be categorised as 'observation tasks' or 'participation tasks' and try to offer a balance to keep it engaging.
- Identify and work with a mentoring supervisor from your team who will be primarily responsible for supervising the student while they are with you. Make sure they are aware of and accept what is going to happen. They do not need to hold a Working with Children Blue Card, but need to be competent, capable and with an appropriate temperament. You need to provide a safe and appropriate environment for a young person.
- Consider if there is a small project the student could be involved with or undertake independently during their time with you. Perhaps they could give a short presentation or dot point report at the end of the placement?
- Send the school a summary of any special requirements for placement (e.g. personal protective clothing or equipment, operating times, facility access, confidentiality agreements etc) so the school can include them in the work experience agreement.
- The school will send you a formal Work Experience Agreement form. Read and sign it, then return it to the school. The school, parents and the students will all sign it to confirm their agreement and acknowledge their rights and responsibilities around the work experience placement. This form should also identify insurances in place for the student (they are covered by either Queensland Government or school indemnity and Workcover insurance).
- Give your workplace supervisor the contact details of the work experience co-ordinator in case an issue arises or to notify the school of student absence.
- Work out how to induct the student on their first day (more on this below), and the types of work they will observe during their time with you. Make sure the work is interesting and suitable for young people.

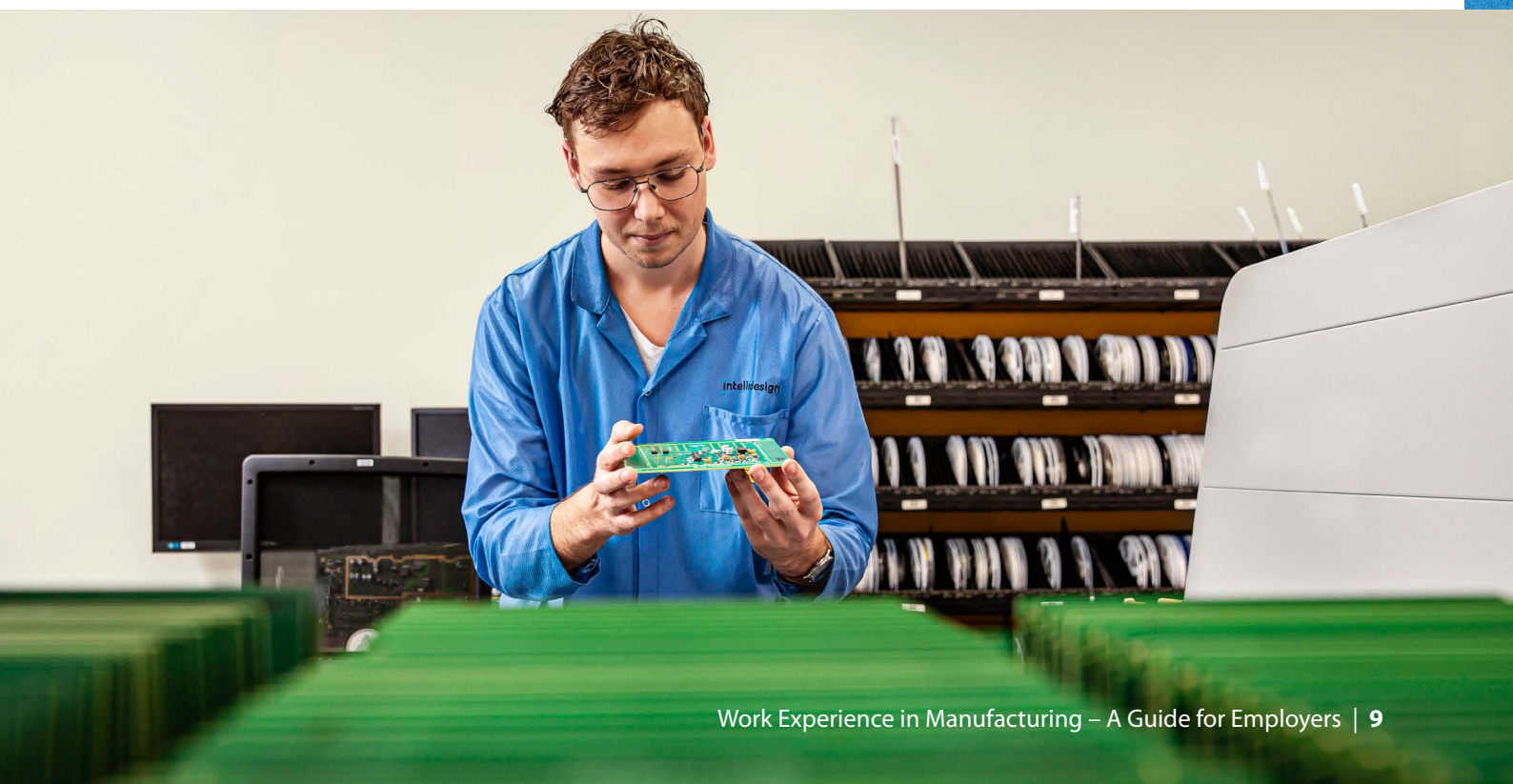
2. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR PLACEMENT

The school is responsible for preparing students for participation in work experience, and managing their health, safety and wellbeing, together with the educational value of the placements.

Schools will inform students of their responsibilities (behaviour, attendance, managing absences, OH&S, reporting incidents or accidents, role in the organisation, etc) their rights (not to experience harassment or discrimination, and what to do if it happens), explain the work being done at hosting businesses, confirm specific requirements and help students meet them, work through required documentation, discuss the opportunities work experience may open up as well as the school's expectations of them. Schools take this very seriously, as students are seen as ambassadors for their school, and reputations are at stake.

While the school will manage this, understanding the process will help you get inside the head of the student coming to your workplace.

While not strictly a part of the process, you can enhance the experience for everyone by making contact (initially through the school) with your student and giving them a heads-up about who you are and what you do. Don't forget to tell them the simple but critical details like when and where to turn up, who to ask for, whether they need to bring their own lunch (or get to experience the joy of a smoko van or staff canteen) and what time they will knock-off. This is also a great opportunity to ask them what they are studying at school and what skills they might like to build on that have been learnt in the classroom.



3. DAY ONE INDUCTION

Perhaps the most critical time in the work experience process is the start of the first day on site when students receive what is likely to be their first ever workplace induction.

This should include:

- Site safety, amenities, key personnel, and the physical layout of the facility.
- An OH&S induction, the same as any new worker would receive – this is critical to demonstrate your commitment to a safe workplace.
- Explaining workplace policies about bullying, harassment and discrimination and any other relevant codes of conduct.
- Explaining the tasks students will observe or complete.
- Explaining how to report concerns or problems to their workplace supervisor, or to escalate problems if necessary.
- Spending some time letting them get to know their workplace supervisor – often a one-on-one site tour is a good way to achieve this in a more relaxed way.

Streamline the onboarding process

Designed specifically for manufacturers, the online General Induction is a comprehensive training program that equips all new starters with essential industry knowledge and workplace safety fundamentals. The course is fully online and can be used as part of your work experience program.



Learn more > msq.org.au/programs/general-induction



4. DURING THE PLACEMENT

A few simple tips, and a couple of requirements, will help make the placement smooth for you and more rewarding for your student:

- Stick to the plan to give a varied and interesting overview of your operation.
- Provide your student with relevant and appropriate training, where required, and direct supervision at all times while undertaking work-related activities.
- Confirm that your supervisor is checking in with students at the end of each day. Many supervisors report that keeping some simple diary notes every day helps keep the placement on track – things like what their student did, what worked well, lessons learned, and general comments.
- Review how the placement is going part-way through and make any alterations necessary. If things are not working out, sort this out early by contacting the school's work experience co-ordinator.
- If possible, as the employer, take the time to check in personally and see how the placement is going for student and supervisor.
- A school or RTO representative may ask (or you may request them to) visit the student on site to check in, so make sure your supervisor is across this and available for the scheduled time.
- If an accident or incident occurs involving your student, manage the situation as you would for any of your staff (your organisation must provide first aid or call an ambulance if needed) then notify their parents and/or work experience co-ordinator immediately using the contact details on the Work Experience Agreement form. Work experience students are covered by Workcover through their school or RTO.
- Make sure you or the supervisor spend a moment with your student at the end of their time with you, to thank them and get any feedback they may have.

5. FOLLOWING THE PLACEMENT

Be prepared to provide frank feedback to your student (remembering that they are still young people and may not be used to robust feedback) and the school about how the process went for you. It will help them frame future placements and improve the process for next time.

You / your placement supervisor may be asked by the school to complete a simple post placement student report or evaluation. Being constructive in your comments is important to help your student to grow as an individual and help the school match future students to you.

Consider what could be improved with your internal workplace processes and placement management to make your next work experience student get even more from their time with you.



NUTS AND BOLTS (ADVICE AND CHECKLISTS)

DOCUMENTATION

Two key documents have been mentioned earlier in this document. Both will be provided to you in some form by the school or RTO:



Education Queensland Work Experience Agreement



Post Work Experience Student Report
(page 15)

Independent schools and RTOs may use these forms or provide you with something similar, but these give you an idea what to expect.

CONSIDERATIONS

Getting help – remember that the careers advisors at schools and RTOs are doing this all the time and they probably have the answer to any question you might have. Don't be afraid to reach out and ask.

Child safety – staff may not be used to having people under 18 years in their workplace, and a higher standard of behaviour and conduct is legally required beyond what might be usual in an adult workplace

Differentially abled students – manufacturing sites may bring added complexity for students living with a disability and it is important to discuss how best to support these students if you are able to support them. Standard Work Experience Agreement forms have a "Medical Information" section which should detail any conditions you need to be aware of. Speak to the school about how best to manage any concerns.



Legal and liability

Under the Child Employment Act 2006, work experience students are not considered employees and host providers are not considered employers. Students are considered to be there as part of their education, however you do have the normal responsibility for maintaining a safe and healthy environment for all within it.

Paying work experience students – students may not be paid for their time with you. Paying a student changes the relationship and they may be considered an employee if you pay them.

Worksite licences or certification – because work experience students are generally not involved in actually undertaking work, they are not required to obtain any specific certification. A notable exception to this is that students doing a placement including construction site access will need a white card.



White Card

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Queensland Education Department has compiled a useful list of questions often asked about work experience:



Work experience frequently asked questions

While this is focussed on a school perspective, it points to current Queensland legislation and regulation as well as giving a solid overview of key advice.

HOST EMPLOYER CHECKLIST

ARE YOU READY?

- Is your manufacturing facility suitable and safe?
- Is your placement supervisor ready, willing and able?
- Do you have tasks that your student can observe and understand?
- Do you understand the commitment and process?
- Have you contacted school/RTO careers advisors to express interest?

PREPARATION

- Have you provided the school/RTO careers advisors with details on your organisation?
- Have you reviewed and signed the Work Experience Agreement from the school/RTO?
- Are there any other documents you or the school/RTO need to finalise?
- Have you and your placement supervisor mapped out a broad structure for the placement?
- Did you let other staff know what is happening and what is expected of them?
- Did you review your business and facility induction?
- Did you check in with your student to break the ice and confirm instructions on where to go, when to be there and what to wear/bring?

DURING THE PLACEMENT

- Have you got PPE and any specialist equipment ready for the student, and provided how to use it?
- Have induction/s been given and understood?
- Are the placement supervisor and your student working well together?
- Is your student showing they understand what is going on, and are they enjoying their time?
- Is your placement supervisor keeping some notes on progress and lessons learned (remember there are diary prompts available)?
- Remember to immediately contact the school/RTO and parents if your student is injured, ill, or does not attend.
- Check in with your student on their last day and support them with any close-out paperwork they need to complete.

AFTER THE PLACEMENT

- Have you completed and sent back to the school/RTO any required paperwork?
- Did you get feedback from your student about their experience, the skills and knowledge they developed?
- Have you taken a moment to review the placement, and enhance program and processes before hosting your next student?
- Did you hold a close-out debrief with involved team members to identify lessons learned and opportunities for improvements?
- Did you make contact with the school/RTO to give feedback on the placement and discuss any changes you think might make future placements more successful?

WORK EXPERIENCE: EMPLOYER EVALUATION

Student name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

School name: _____ School contact name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Date work experience commenced: _____ Date work experience concluded: _____

Business name: _____ Supervisor name: _____

Position: _____ Supervisor signature: _____ Date: _____

When making your assessment, choose the point on the scale that most closely describes the student you are assessing and mark it with a tick in the relevant box.

1	2	3	4	5
ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY (Did the student arrive on time each day and adhere to break times?)				
Comes in late and leaves early. Late back from breaks. Sometimes absent without reason.	Attendance and punctuality were not consistently up to workplace expectation.	Attendance and punctuality were satisfactory.	Rarely absent, always punctual.	No absences, always punctual. Often arrives early, prepared to stay back to complete tasks.
SAFETY AWARENESS AND COMPLIANCE (How well did the student follow and maintain safety instructions and rules)				
Disregarded safety rules and protocols. Required constant reminders about PPE and safe practices.	Inconsistent in following safety procedures. Occasionally needed reminders about safety practices.	Generally followed safety protocols. Used required PPE and maintained a safe work area.	Good safety awareness. Followed all protocols without prompting and identified potential hazards.	Excellent safety mindset. Proactively maintained safety standards, suggested improvements.
APPEARANCE AND PRESENTATION (Did the student wear appropriate clothing and present well each day?)				
Poor personal hygiene and grooming. Required dress standards and PPE requirements were not met.	Appearance, personal presentation and adherence to uniform/ PPE standards could be improved.	Dress standard, PPE usage, and personal presentation acceptable for the manufacturing environment.	Above average appearance and presentation. Consistently proper use of required PPE and uniforms.	Takes pride in appearance and presentation; sets an example.
TECHNICAL APTITUDE (Ability to understand and work with manufacturing equipment and processes)				
Struggled to understand basic equipment functions or manufacturing processes.	Grasped simple operations but needed significant assistance with technical aspects.	Demonstrated adequate understanding of standard equipment and basic manufacturing processes.	Showed good aptitude for technical operations; quickly learned multiple equipment functions and process steps.	Excellent technical understanding; mastered equipment operations, showed interest in processes.
ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION (Was the student focused and driven to complete tasks and learn?)				
Seems uninterested and lacking in motivation. Constantly distracted.	Works with inconsistent commitment; encouraged at times.	Generally a steady worker who meets standards expected in the production environment.	Did what was required well. Prepared to make an extra effort when asked.	Highly motivated and keen to take on tasks assigned. Showed genuine interest in manufacturing.
QUALITY AWARENESS (Attention to detail and understanding of quality standards)				
Showed little concern for product quality or specifications. Frequent quality issues in work.	Inconsistent attention to quality standards. Required reminders about quality requirements.	Generally maintained acceptable quality standards. Basic understanding of quality requirements.	Good attention to detail. Regularly checked own work against quality standards and identified problems.	Excellent quality mindset. Demonstrated thorough understanding of quality.
ABILITY TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (Student followed directions accurately)				
Failed to or has failed to understand work instructions or follow standard procedures.	Too often needs instructions or directions to be repeated, suggesting lack of attention to procedures.	Generally follows work instructions and procedures as required but needs occasional supervision.	Capable of working independently after initial instruction. Reliably follows procedures.	Absorbs instruction well. Follows procedures meticulously while also understanding the reasoning behind them.
PROBLEM-SOLVING AND TROUBLESHOOTING				
Unable to identify or resolve basic problems in workflow or equipment operation. Always needed assistance.	Could identify simple problems but struggled to resolve them independently.	Could identify standard problems and apply basic troubleshooting steps.	Good at identifying issues and implementing effective solutions with minimal guidance.	Excellent problem-solving skills. Could diagnose complex issues, suggest innovative solutions, and implement effective fixes within scope of authority.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (Strengths, areas for improvement, specific skills demonstrated):

Please return directly to school/college placement coordinator.

CONTACT US

Manufacturing Skills Queensland (MSQ) is building a sustainably skilled workforce for a future-proofed manufacturing industry.

For more information on work experience programs in manufacturing or any other query on manufacturing skills, please contact us at:

P: 1800 677 000

E: msq.org.au/contact

W: msq.org.au



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