

MANUFACTURING TRAINING, SKILLS AND WORKFORCE UPDATE

| MARCH QUARTER, 2026



HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. Queensland manufacturing workforce average is 169,350 across the last 12 months – 8,350 less than this time last year.**
- 2. Beverage and textile, clothing and footwear sub-industries had significant growth, increasing 76% and 59% respectively.**
- 3. Completion gaps persist across priority cohorts, with higher rates of commencement than completion.**
- 4. Enrolments in Laboratory Operations (MSL) and Sustainability (MSS) training packages have increased in the year to September 2025.**
- 5. Cairns and Central Queensland have the strongest apprenticeship completion rates across individuals who enrolled between 2012 and 2020.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Queensland manufacturing workforce has experienced a moderate contraction over the past 12 months, with an average workforce of 169,350. There continues to be uneven conditions across sub-industries, with strong growth in beverage and textiles offset by notable declines in primary metal and fabricated metal manufacturing.

Labour market conditions indicate a gradual rebalancing between labour supply and demand. Job vacancy rates remain elevated at approximately 2.3%, equating to an estimated 3,960 vacancies in Queensland, while the number of unemployed persons with manufacturing experience has declined. At the same time, the average duration of job search remains consistent with national benchmarks, suggesting that while labour is available, challenges persist in aligning workforce capability with industry needs.

The skills pipeline continues to show signs of pressure, with commencements declining more sharply than completions over the year to September 2025. Completion gaps remain evident across priority cohorts, reinforcing structural challenges in progressing learners through to qualification. Insights from NCVET highlight that 61.2% of apprentices who commenced between 2012 and 2020 completed their training, with stronger outcomes in regions such as Cairns and Central Queensland. Encouragingly, enrolments in emerging areas such as Laboratory Operations and Sustainability training packages have increased, reflecting a shift towards future-focused skill development.

While training activity and completion rates provide important indicators of system performance, they are not endpoints in themselves. The long-term strength of Queensland manufacturing will depend on how effectively skills are translated into productivity, innovation and resilience.

WORKFORCE SUMMARY



Jobs

- The average size of the workforce over the 12 months to February 2026, has been 169,350, a decrease of 8,350 compared to February 2025.
- Queensland's workforce is 19.6% of the total Australian manufacturing workforce, and 82.7% are full-time.
- In the last 12 months:
 - Strongest workforce growth has been in the Beverage (up 76%) and Textile, Clothing and Footwear (up 59%) sub-industries.
 - Primary Metal and Metal (down 42%) and Fabricated Metal (down 19%) sub-industries have experienced significant workforce decline.



Job vacancies

- In Queensland, there are approximately 4,770 unemployed persons in which their last job was in the manufacturing industry (value is a 12-month average). This value is 900 less than 12 months ago.
- Over the last 12 months, the average duration of job search for a Queenslanders who last worked in the manufacturing industry was 16.2 weeks, a value that is on par with the national average (17.4 weeks) across all industries.
- In November, manufacturing has 19,700 job vacancies across Australia. Based on indicative modelling, this means approximately 3,960 vacancies are in Queensland manufacturing, a job vacancy rate of 2.3%.



Value added to the economy

- In 2024/25, manufacturing added \$29 billion in value to the state's economy. This represents 5.8% of all value added from the 19 industries.

TRAINING AND SKILLS SUMMARY

Diversity

When a decrease in percentage is present between the percentage of a cohort during commencement compared to completion, it demonstrates a weakness in completion rates. For example, 8.6% of commencements in manufacturing training packages were Indigenous, but only 6.2% of completions were Indigenous. Closing the gap between these values is a challenge in all priority cohorts.

Cohort	Commencements		Completions	
	Manufacturing	Queensland	Manufacturing	Queensland
Females	20.3%	34.6%	18.6%	34.2%
First Nation people	8.6%	10.8%	6.2%	8.0%
People with a Disability	4.1%	5.2%	2.8%	3.9%

Completion rates

New data is available from the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) on the completion rates of apprentices and trainees. The following are insights regarding Queensland manufacturing apprentices who enrolled between 2012 and 2020:

- Of the 40,160 Queenslanders that commences an apprenticeship in a manufacturing business between 2012 and 2020, the completion rate was 61.2%.
- Cairns and Central Queensland are the areas within Queensland with the highest completion rates across 2012 to 2020.
- Completion rates in apprentices in manufacturing businesses are stronger than construction (58.2%) but are lower than mining (64.0%) and electricity, gas, water and waste services (67.0%).

Skills pipeline

Data below is based on apprenticeship and traineeship totals for the 12 months to 30 September 2025. Commencements are individuals started an apprenticeship/traineeship within the time period, and completions are individuals who completed a qualification within the time period.

Region of residence	Commencements (September 2025)	Difference to September 2024	Completions (September 2025)	Difference to September 2024
Brisbane – East	190	-45	180	+60
Brisbane – North	115	-20	100	-15
Brisbane – South	225	-55	150	+10
Brisbane – West	55	-35	45	+10
Brisbane – Inner City	100	+10	70	+15
Cairns	305	+20	175	-15
Central Queensland	615	-110	445	-105
Darling Downs-Maranoa	415	+25	230	-65
Gold Coast	455	-45	315	+25
Ipswich	450	-645	330	-75
Logan-Beaudesert	790	-25	425	+30
Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday	460	-75	375	+35
Moreton Bay – North	305	+40	160	-35
Moreton Bay – South	175	+25	135	+25
Queensland – Outback	105	-65	80	-15
Sunshine Coast	330	+5	180	+10
Toowoomba	380	-10	230	-70
Townsville	300	-130	225	-25
Wide Bay	415	+85	325	-20
Queensland Total	6,190	-1,215	4,175	-225

** 970 students commenced and completed in the 12-month period.

Training Package	Commencements (September 2025)	Difference to September 2024	Completions (September 2025)	Difference to September 2024
Aeroskills (MEA)	170	-10	115	+20
Australian Meat Processing (AMP)	1,455	-890	810	-575
Chemical, Hydrocarbons and Refining (PMA)	150	-5	105	+25
Food, Beverage and Pharmaceutical (FBP)	290	-60	245	-25
Furnishing (MSF)	630	-105	400	+80
Laboratory Operations (MSL)	495	+75	210	-60
Manufacturing (MSM)	45	-15	35	-35
Metal and Engineering (MEM)	2,475	-560	2,040	+305
Plastics, Rubber and Cablemaking (PMB)	75	-25	55	-5
Printing and Graphic Arts (ICP)	35	0	15	+5
Sustainability (MSS)	355	+160	125	+25
Textiles, Clothing and Footwear (MST)	15	+5	10	0
Queensland Total	6,190	-1,215	4,175	-225

** 970 students commenced and completed in the 12-month period.

Sources: ABS (Labour Force, Australia, detailed, Job Vacancies, Australian National Accounts: State Accounts) and NCVER (Apprentices & Trainees and Apprentice and trainee completion rates), released 10 April 2026 10:00am AEST. Notes: Workforce Summary data is based on February 2026 data, unless stated. Training and Skills Summary data is based on totals for the 12 months to 30 September 2025 and utilises the 12 manufacturing training packages and the usual residence of individuals, unless stated.