

**Submission  
No 41**

## **SKILL SHORTAGES IN NSW**

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# **Submission to the Legislative Assembly Enquiry into skill shortages in NSW**

Coffs Harbour City Council Economic Development Unit (EDU) appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the enquiry.

## **Skill shortages**

Some occupations in our LGA where skill demands are high or where EDU is aware of shortages at present are :

### Healthcare

Staff turnover in the Aged Care industry is reported as high because even though there are considerable resources trained and skilled in this field a significant number of these people are not actively working in the industry. The physical nature of this work combined with mental demands may be contributing factors but further research would be needed to draw any conclusions.

The Rehabilitation industry appears to be regularly seeking staff with physiotherapy, psychology, occupational therapy or other qualifications pertinent to that sector.

### Automotive

There seems to be a regular demand for qualified motor mechanics and truck drivers with heavy vehicle licences.

### Agriculture

The local blueberry growing industry has a seasonal demand for certain skilled positions that can be difficult to fill.

## **Identified Risks**

Some risks EDU has become aware of in recent times are:

### Telecommunications workforce

Council and NSW TAFE have been researching demand for fibre splicing skills to cater for the NBN rollout but it appears that accredited Fibre Splicing Training is only available from one organisation and that the demand for personnel trained in this skill during the rollout will be low.

### Casualisation of the workforce

Increasing utilisation of casual work in some sectors, for example in the technical training area itself where NSW TAFE is undergoing change, presents a risk that workers' skill training may be shortcut or that their skills may not be able to remain current.

### Offshoring of Employment

Availability of on-the-job training is usually part of ongoing employment. The trend of offshoring jobs would seem to reduce the opportunities for low-skilled employees to avail themselves of advancement opportunities within a workplace.

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## Basic skills

A recurring theme we hear from local employers is that graduating students are not work-ready and what used to be known as the “Three Rs” is lacking from a number of job applicants’ skillsets. Council expressed its disappointment in the closure of the Young Achievement Australia programme in 2009.

## **Opportunities**

Some opportunities EDU has been alerted to are:

### Teleworking

For a variety of reasons (including family responsibilities, transport and housing affordability) a proportion of Australia’s skilled workforce is not engaged in a workplace. Teleworking and co-working spaces provide an opportunity to re-engage those people to utilise their skills remotely from the structured worksite.

### Emerging Industries

Identification of the skills needed in the industries of the future is an inexact science however there are resources available that could be tapped to provide some direction eg: CSIRO, universities, recognised futurists, ICT companies.

## **Initiatives**

Local government resources are limited so our involvement in skills enhancement is mainly in development of our own workforce but there are some endeavours we have engaged in:

### Tell Us Your Skills website

The Coffs Coast Jobs website provided by the councils of Bellingen, Coffs Harbour and Nambucca is designed to put people with skills in touch with employers that are suffering skills shortages. Individuals register their details and skills into the database. Businesses that are looking for specific skills can then browse the list of skilled people and request that the skilled person contact them. Several other councils in NSW, such as Taree and Kempsey, offer a similar service.

### High School Commerce Class

For a pilot programme at Coffs Harbour High School, the Year 10 commerce class has taken on an initiative in business. Groups of students have been given real-world problems to solve utilising mentoring and other resources available from the local business community.

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## Related Issue

### FIFO/DIDO

To meet skill shortages on projects, the practices of Fly In Fly Out and Drive In Drive Out have been adopted by some employers and project principals.

In our region these resourcing methods have been used for the Pacific Highway Upgrade and the NBN Broadband rollout.

Whilst the methods are effective and sometimes necessary to complete time-critical projects there is generally less upskilling of any local workforce as the skill needs for the project are mainly met by the mobile workforce.

There probably needs to be more research conducted into the negative effects on both the communities supplying the workers and the places where the work is being conducted to gauge the long-term effects on the social fabric and community-building aspects of this type of paid work.

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