FORESTRY TRAINING AND EDUCATION FUTURE SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Queensland's forest and timber industry contributes over $4 billion annually to the economy and employs more than 7,800 people. Yet this vital industry faces significant workforce and training challenges that, if left unaddressed, will constrain future industry growth and regional economic development.

This fact sheet draws on the 2023 Forestry Training and Education Future Skills Assessment commissioned by the South East & Central Queensland Regional Forestry Hub to highlight urgent workforce challenges and recommend priority strategic policy development actions that should be implemented in the region.

Despite its economic importance, the industry faces pressing workforce issues.

Top 6 Critical Roles Facing Skills Shortages

- **Foresters** – essential for long-term productivity of forests by balancing timber harvesting with conservation and regeneration.
- **Harvester Operators** – critical for sustainable timber harvesting.
- **Saw Technicians** – critical for precision and throughput in timber processing.
- **Wood Machinists** – required for value-added manufacturing.
- **Truck Drivers** – essential for maintaining supply chain continuity.
- **Frame & Truss Estimators/Detailers** – specialised technical expertise.

Key Challenges

Retirement cliff
- More than 70 skilled workers are projected to retire in the next five years, representing about 5% of the workforce surveyed.

Training system constraints
- No dedicated higher education pathway for foresters.
- Very few Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) deliver forestry qualifications in Queensland.
- Insufficient training options for harvesting, haulage, and manufacturing.

Recruitment and retention pressures
- Competition from other industries.
- Public misperceptions of forestry and limited career awareness.
- Weak presence of school-based traineeships and structured entry pathways.

Barriers to training delivery
- Geographic dispersion of learners.
- High equipment costs.
- Shortage of qualified trainers.

Workforce Snapshot

Total Workforce	3,600 (47% of QLD industry total)
Female Participation	15% overall; 28% in support services
First Nations	3%
Workers under 40	43%
Workers over 60	11%
Projected retirements	>70 over 5 years

"Retiring workers not only leave behind their duties but also take with them valuable skills, knowledge, experience and relationships"

Policy Priorities for Action

Recognise forestry as a priority sector for regional workforce investment.

Invest in tailored VET programs for forestry operations and manufacturing

Strengthen RTO–industry partnerships for training delivery

Pilot forestry-specific workforce initiatives under Jobs and Skills Councils

Recommendations

Build a Long-Term Workforce and Skills Solution

- Prioritise regional skills needs with industry input and sector focus.
- Create regional hub to deliver skills and training initiatives.
- Coordinate training programs to address critical workforce gaps regionally.
- Share funding opportunities for workforce development with local businesses.
- Help businesses create workforce plans using data and analytics.

Explore Training Opportunities

- Partner to develop tailored training aligned with industry skill gaps.
- Expand access to webinars, events, and online learning platforms.
- Promote subsidised training and update priority skills lists regularly.

Foster Collaboration Between Employers and Training Organisations

- Build partnerships to train assessors from existing skilled workforce.
- Use national system to verify and track worker training.

Increase the Use of Apprenticeships and Traineeships

- Promote forestry careers through community outreach and success stories.
- Partner with schools for apprenticeships and curriculum integration.
- Develop recruitment plans and foster supportive workplace cultures.

Grow the Trainer Workforce

- Launch mentorship programs connecting retirees with new industry entrants.
- Support transition of skilled workers into certified training roles.

"If we invest in skills development now, we can create a more resilient, innovative, and sustainable industry."
— *Georgianna Daian, ForestWorks*

Policy Advancement

This report's recommendation to create a regional training hub led to the establishment of Canopy, Queensland's forest and timber industry training and careers hub for promoting and growing a sustainable workforce. Canopy has started to address training gaps via industry school tours, work experience, pre-employment and microcredentials programs. However it's reach must be expanded to meet growing demand.   Canopy has fostered collaboration within the sector has been pivotal in raising the industry profile with key stakeholders. This has translated to the delivery of additional programs and benefits including:

- Jobs Queensland's Wide Bay Regional Workforce Plan which references Canopy as a key delivery mechanism,
- a industry specific online jobs board,
- a national program delivery role in new training initiatives aligned with regional priorities,
- a proposed dedicated timber training facility at Manufacturing Skills Queensland's Maryborough Centre of Excellence and a new Registered Training Organisation.

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