

A revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List

QTIC Submission

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QUEENSLAND
TOURISM INDUSTRY
COUNCIL

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Acknowledgement of Country

QTIC acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Queensland. We recognise those who shared stories, welcomed guests on Country, and were stewards of the earth for millennia before us, and their continued connection to land, waterways, and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The Queensland Tourism Industry Council (QTIC) is the peak industry body and leading advocate for Queensland's visitor economy, committed to the growth and sustainability of the state's tourism industry.

As a not-for-profit, membership-based organisation, we take pride in ensuring that the concerns and needs of our members and the broader tourism industry inform all relevant policy debates and that businesses have strong representation in decision-making processes.

Through delivery of workforce and skilling programs, and advocating for attraction and infrastructure investment, QTIC serves members and industry. We also provide expert advice and support, including workforce and business development opportunities and access to vital industry insights.

Queensland's visitor economy continues to expand and remains a cornerstone of the state's prosperity. In the year to June 2025, travellers spent \$40.3 billion in Queensland, \$25 billion by domestic overnight visitors, \$6.9 billion by international visitors, and \$8.3 billion by domestic day-trippers, averaging \$110.3 million per day.¹

In 2023–24, tourism generated \$37.6 billion in direct and indirect Gross State Product (GSP), or 7.4% of Queensland's total GSP. Of this, \$18.7 billion (3.7%) was contributed directly, with a further \$18.9 billion flowing through indirect activity.

The industry is powered by small business: over 90% of tourism enterprises employ fewer than 20 people. Queensland has over 65,000 tourism-related businesses, 53% of which are located outside the Brisbane region.²

Tourism is also a major employer. In 2023–24, it supported 156,000 direct filled jobs (5.0% of state employment) and 121,000 indirect jobs, totalling 8.8% of all employment, more than the agriculture, forestry and fishing (3.7%) and mining (1.8%) sectors combined. The largest sources of direct tourism employment were cafés, restaurants and takeaway food services (43,000 jobs), followed by retail trade (26,000) and accommodation (22,000).³

¹ Source: Tourism Research Australia - International Visitor Survey and Domestic Tourism Statistics. Overnight visitor expenditure only.

² Source: Tourism Research Australia - Tourism businesses in Australia, June 2019 to June 2024, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

³ Source: Tourism Research Australia - State Tourism Satellite Accounts 2023-24.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Queensland's tourism, hospitality, travel, and events industries are foundational to the state's economy, contributing over \$30 billion annually and employing a significant proportion of young people and regional workers. Chronic workforce shortages, particularly in chefs, travel services, guiding, and event operations, directly limit growth, service quality, and the visitor experience.

Recent industry consultation (QTIC CSOL survey, September 2025) confirms 89 employers across 13 regions reported severe shortages in senior chefs, catering managers, hospitality/tourism and venue managers, and accommodation service managers, with regional Queensland most affected (Tropical North, Whitsundays, Outback QLD).

This submission recommends that the Priority List be used to:

- Target incentives to the most critical shortages in Queensland.
- Balance apprenticeships and traineeships, with incentives for apprenticeships in advanced skill roles (e.g., cookery, patisserie, event management) and for traineeships only in shortage occupations (e.g., guiding, travel).
- Embed regional and event-readiness priorities, recognising the needs of remote tourism communities and the workforce pipeline required for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Maintain flexibility to respond to seasonal, economic, and disaster-related shocks while ensuring stability for those already in training.

Recommendations Table:

Theme	Recommendation
Core Purpose and Scope	Direct incentives to occupations critical to Queensland's visitor economy (chefs, cooks, hospitality managers, event staff, travel services). Expand scope to emerging pathways (eco-tourism, digital hospitality)
Flexibility	Adopt rules-based flex to adjust incentives in response to seasonal cycles and economic shocks. Review annually, with quarterly monitoring.
Updating the List	Annual full refresh with capacity for mid-year regional adjustments. Consultation with state peak and regional tourism organisations.
Non-Apprenticeship Pathways	Incentives for traineeships only in shortage areas (guiding, travel). Apprenticeship incentives reserved for high-skill roles (cookery, patisserie, event management). Other traineeships supported through NSA/VET funding.
Emerging Occupations	Introduce a "discovery tier" for pilots in eco-tourism operations, event logistics, and digital hospitality platforms.
Regional Element	Allow Queensland-specific overlays for regional shortages, with potential for state co-funding.
Narrower List	Focus incentives on a small number of high-need occupations to maximise impact.
Implementation	Tailor incentives to shortage type (attraction, completion, retention). Provide regional bonuses for remote areas. Align incentives with workforce needs for Brisbane 2032.

OVERVIEW:

The Australian Apprenticeship Priority List (Priority List) identifies occupations that are eligible for apprenticeship incentives provided by the Australian Government. These incentives are designed to strengthen Australia's workforce by encouraging training in areas of national need.

In January 2025, the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System (the Strategic Review) recommended changes to the "gateway" into the Incentive System, specifically, revising the methodology used to determine the Priority List. This recommendation reflects the need for a more flexible, transparent, and forward-looking approach that better aligns with Australia's economic and social objectives, including addressing critical skill shortages and supporting industry transformation.

Consultation Process

The Department is now seeking public input to inform the development of a new methodology for the Priority List. Consultation activities are being undertaken to gather views from apprentices, employers, industry, educators, and the broader community.

A discussion paper has been prepared to guide consultation, outlining:

- Proposed guiding principles for a revised Priority List.
- Options for a new methodology that is more robust, transparent, and responsive.
- Consultation questions to help structure stakeholder feedback.

The outcomes of this consultation will directly contribute to shaping a Priority List that:

- Supports critical skills needs across key sectors.
- Delivers better outcomes for apprentices, employers, and communities.
- Strengthens the alignment of apprenticeship incentives with national workforce priorities.

The discussion paper is available [here](#), and stakeholders are invited to provide submissions addressing the proposed approach.

The QTIC Industry Skills and Jobs Advisor (ISJA) is seeking input and/or endorsement from the QTIC ISJA Industry Reference Groups on the responses to the discussion paper outlined in this document.

Core Purpose and Scope of the Priority List

The core purpose of the Priority List should be to ensure that incentive funding is directed toward occupations that are critical to sustaining Queensland's tourism, hospitality, travel, and events industries. These industries contribute over \$30 billion annually to Queensland's economy and are central to regional development, youth employment, and the state's international reputation as a leading visitor destination.

The scope of the Priority List should:

- Prioritise occupations in persistent shortage across Queensland, including chefs, cooks, hospitality supervisors, accommodation managers, event operations staff, and travel services.
- Recognise the regional concentration of workforce shortages, particularly in key tourism destinations such as Cairns, the Whitsundays, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Outback Queensland, Queensland Country, and Capricorn, with acute shortages, as identified in the CSOL consultation, especially in leadership and supervisory roles critical to maintaining service quality.
- Expand to cover emerging roles in sustainability, digital platforms, and event logistics that are essential to the state's evolving tourism model.

Economic and Social Equity Objectives

Economic Objectives

Incentives must support the development of a skilled workforce that sustains the growth and competitiveness of Queensland's visitor economy. This includes addressing shortages that directly impact service delivery, visitor satisfaction, and the capacity to host large-scale events such as the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Employer feedback collected for CSOL shows strong expected growth over the next five years in core hospitality and accommodation roles (senior chefs, supervisors, managers). Without expanded apprenticeships, Queensland will not meet projected demand leading into Brisbane 2032.

Social Equity Objectives

Incentives should advance equity outcomes by:

- Expanding First Nations employment opportunities, particularly in cultural tourism.
- Creating structured career pathways for youth, who make up a large proportion of the sector's workforce.
- Supporting participation in regional and remote areas where access to training and skilled staff is limited.

Articulation of Objectives

The National Skills Agreement (NSA) should serve as the overarching framework, complemented by national, state, and regional priorities including Queensland's preparations for Brisbane 2032. This approach will ensure the Priority List remains aligned with national policy directions while also responding to Queensland's specific economic and workforce needs.

Consideration of Macro-Economic Conditions

Queensland's tourism and hospitality industries are highly sensitive to economic shocks and seasonality. Incentives should be designed to flex upward in times of downturn or recovery (e.g., after natural disasters or international disruptions) and normalise when demand stabilises.

Addressing Low Wage Premiums and Non-Compliance

Low wages are a structural feature of parts of the sector. Removing eligibility on this basis would risk worsening shortages in roles critical to visitor experience. Instead, non-compliance with workplace laws should be treated as a risk flag, with stronger monitoring and enforcement, while incentives should be calibrated toward apprentices and trainees to improve attraction and retention.

Flexibility of the Incentive System

The incentive system should allow for rules-based flexibility to respond to economic and industry conditions, while maintaining objectivity and certainty.

- Employer incentives should be higher in regional and off-season contexts, where attraction and retention are most difficult.
- Apprentice supports (such as living and relocation allowances) should be used to address cost-of-living pressures in regional centres.

Review frequency:

- Quarterly monitoring to identify rapid changes in demand. For example, sudden regional disruptions such as cyclones in Far North Queensland can trigger targeted increases to attraction incentives for guiding and hospitality roles to speed recovery.
- Annual reviews to adjust settings, with stability guaranteed for those already undertaking training.

Updating the Priority List

Process

Updates to the Priority List should integrate national labour market data with robust input from Queensland's tourism and hospitality industries. This should include consultation with:

- Industry peak bodies
- Regional and remote organisations
- Businesses of all sizes; large, medium, small, and micro

The consultation process must be transparent, with evidence and clear justifications published for all inclusions and exclusions.

Frequency

A full refresh should occur annually, with capacity for mid-year adjustments to capture new shortages (e.g., in eco-tourism guides or events logistics) that emerge quickly.

Non-Apprenticeship Pathways

While traineeships are essential, incentives should be limited to those directly linked to identified shortages, such as:

- Tour guiding
- Travel services
- Specialist tourism operations
- Higher level traineeships

CSOL findings show many supervisory roles (front office, café/restaurant, bar supervisors) can be reached via experience and VET pathways; aligning traineeship incentives with these pathways will support upward mobility and retention.

These areas are critical to visitor experience and are subject to persistent workforce gaps in Queensland.

Apprenticeship Pathways

Incentive support for apprenticeships should remain concentrated on occupations where formal, longer-duration training is essential, including:

- Commercial cookery
- Patisserie
- Event management

These apprenticeships deliver advanced technical skills and leadership capacity that are vital to service quality and workforce retention.

Alignment with Broader VET Investment

Outside of these shortage areas, traineeships should continue to be supported through standard VET funding under the NSA, ensuring a balanced system that recognises their importance while focusing incentive payments on priority shortages.

Jurisdictional and Regional Considerations

Queensland's tourism and events industries are evolving, particularly in the areas of sustainability, technology, and mega-event delivery. The Priority List should include a "discovery tier" for emerging apprenticeships and traineeships, with pilots in:

- Eco-tourism operations (reef, outback, and nature-based tourism).
- Events logistics and production (aligned to Brisbane 2032).

Queensland's reliance on tourism makes a regional overlay essential. Shortages in chefs, managers, and frontline staff are particularly acute in regional and remote destinations such as Cape York, Outback Queensland, and island resorts. According to the CSOL consultation, regional businesses report vacancy fill times for senior chefs and supervisors often exceeding six months, causing service reduction and lost revenue.

The Priority List should allow for state-specific priorities to be nominated and supported, with potential for Queensland Government co-investment to strengthen impact in critical regional hubs.

Narrowing the Priority List

A sharper and more targeted list is preferable for Queensland. Incentives should be concentrated on:

- Chefs and cooks
- Accommodation and hospitality managers
- Event operations and logistics
- Travel and guiding services

This approach ensures finite resources are directed to areas of greatest need, delivering maximum impact for the visitor economy.

Implementation Considerations

- **Event readiness:** Incentives should prepare the workforce for the Brisbane 2032 Games, building capability in hospitality, events, and travel services that will leave a lasting legacy.
- **Regional attraction and retention:** A regional bonus could be offered to support apprentices and trainees to live and work in remote tourism destinations, with relocation or accommodation support to offset costs.
- **Shortage-type alignment:** Incentives should be tailored to the nature of the shortage, sign-on bonuses for attraction, milestone payments for completion, and leadership training for retention.

Conclusion

This submission complements QTIC's Core Skills Occupation List advice (September 2025), reinforcing the same critical occupations and regional needs. Aligning apprenticeship incentives with migration pathways will build a stronger pipeline into leadership and specialist roles, safeguard service quality, and prepare Queensland's workforce for Brisbane 2032 and beyond. Without these adjustments, shortages will persist, limiting tourism growth and damaging Queensland's visitor experience.

APPENDIX A: STAKEHOLDER ENDORSEMENT

- Accor Group
- ALH Hotels
- Artefact Group
- Australian Centre for Regional Events (and Tilma Group)
- Australian Restaurant & Cafe Association
- BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park
- Boating Industry Association
- Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre
- Cairns Adventure Group
- Caravan Parks Association of Queensland
- Chefs on the Run
- Clean Cruising
- Clubs Queensland
- Coast Entertainment Group
- Crystalbrook Collection
- Culgoa Point Beach Resort
- Dark Arts Global
- Flight Centre
- Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre
- Gold Coast Turf Club
- Mantle Group Hospitality
- NRMA Parks & Resorts
- Outdoors Queensland
- Paradise Resort Gold Coast
- Queensland Country
- Queensland Country Tourism
- Queensland Hotels Association
- Queensland Performing Arts Centre
- Royal Carrangarra Hotel
- Sandstone Park
- SeaLink
- The Balloon Emporium
- The Star Entertainment Group
- Tourism Noosa
- Wonderment
- Zenith Hospitality
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Emporium Hotel	Queensland Airports Limited	University of Queensland
Ernst and Young	Queensland Government	Westpac
	Queensland Performing Arts Centre	