



Wheatbelt Futures Forum 2026

Jobs Expo Evaluation Report



1. Purpose & Method of Evaluation

1.1 Purpose

The Wheatbelt Futures Forum is an annual event that brings together businesses, local government representatives and government agencies from across the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia to discuss emerging opportunities, regional priorities and workforce challenges. The forum includes presentations, panel discussions, networking opportunities and a Jobs Expo, where businesses and service providers can share information about employment opportunities, training pathways and support services.

The 2026 Wheatbelt Futures Forum was held on Friday 1 May 2026.

This evaluation focuses specifically on the Jobs Expo component of the forum and is intended to:

- assess the effectiveness of the event in connecting students, job seekers and employers.
- identify key workforce insights and emerging regional trends.
- establish a benchmark for future events and workforce initiatives; and
- inform continuous improvement and future Local Initiatives Fund (LIF) activities.

1.2 Evaluation Audience

The primary audience and intended uses for this evaluation report are:

Primary Audience	Intended Use
Local Jobs Stakeholders	Assess program effectiveness and inform future workforce initiative
Workforce Australia Local Jobs	Identify regional workforce trends and opportunities
Other Wheatbelt organisations	Improve understanding of regional workforce conditions and collaboration opportunities

1.3 Approach to Evaluation

A mixed-method evaluation approach was used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data.

- Qualitative data was collected through surveys and participant interviews.
- Quantitative data was collected through attendance records, participation numbers and survey responses.

1.4 Target Groups for Evaluation

The evaluation focused on engagement with:

- students
- stallholders/exhibitors; and
- job seekers

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 Local Initiatives Fund

Job Coordinators across Australia's 51 employment regions have access to a flexible funding pool through the Local Initiatives Fund (LIF). The fund supports small-scale local activities that respond to community priorities and improve labour market functioning.

Funding may support activities that:

- strengthen skills development aligned to local employer demand;
- improve individuals' competitiveness in the labour market;
- support pathways into employment, training and community participation;
- engage employers;
- build capability within the local skills and employment ecosystem;
- support workers, employers and communities affected by labour market disruption; and
- contribute to broader local initiatives aligned with LIF principles.

2.2 Wheatbelt Futures Forum Project

The Wheatbelt Futures Forum was designed to strengthen regional workforce connections and increase awareness of local employment, training and career opportunities across the Wheatbelt region.

The Jobs Expo component provided an opportunity for students, job seekers, employers, training providers and support services to engage directly, share information and build connections. The initiative aimed to:

- increase awareness of regional career pathways
- improve connections between employers and potential workers
- strengthen collaboration across the regional workforce ecosystem; and
- provide insights into workforce challenges and opportunities within the Wheatbelt.



3. EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

An evaluation framework was established at the outset of the project. This framework was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Wheatbelt Futures Forum in:

- connecting students, job seekers and employers,
- improving awareness of regional career and training pathways,
- generating referrals and immediate actions,
- strengthening regional workforce intelligence, and
- supporting collaboration across the Wheatbelt workforce ecosystem.

The framework is structured across five domains that reflect a progression from immediate event outputs through to broader ecosystem outcomes.

Domain 1: Event Reach & Participation			
Alignment with LIF Priority(s)	Metrics	Measures	Measurement Method
Connecting Candidates to Employees	Attendance and participation	1) Total number of attendees by category (students, teachers, stallholders)	Registration data Event records
		2) Number of schools represented	Registration data
		3) Number of job seekers who interacted with stalls between 2–4pm on the day	Sign-in sheet
	Participant engagement	1) Percentage of students who engaged with 3 or more exhibitors	Student Survey
		2) Value of student engagements with exhibitors.	Student interviews

Domain 2: Student Career Awareness & Pathway Clarity

Alignment with LIF Priority(s)	Metrics	Measures	Measurement Method
Direct connection	Career pathway clarity	1) Percentage of students reporting improved clarity about career or study pathways after the event.	Student Survey
		2) Percentage of students indicating the forum influenced or changed their career thinking.	Student Survey
		3) Qualitative examples of how career thinking changed.	Student interviews
Uptake of pathways	Confidence to act	1) Percentage of students reporting confidence in understanding next steps toward their career goals.	Student Survey
	Preferred pathways	1) Distribution of preferred career pathways identified by students.	Student Survey
Real-time opportunities	Industry awareness	1) Number of industries students report increased awareness of following the forum.	Student Survey

Domain 3: Connections, Referrals & Immediate Actions

Alignment with LIF Priority(s)	Metrics	Measures	Measurement Method
Connecting Candidates to Employees	Referrals generated	1) Number of jobseekers referred to a program, vacancy or service on the day of the event.	Stall holder Survey Job seeker interviews
		2) Examples of referrals or follow-up conversations initiated.	Stall holder Survey
	Quality of engagement	1) Percentage of stallholder interactions rates as likely to result in employment, training or further engagement outcomes.	Stallholder survey
	Most impactful forum elements	1) Participant feedback on which forum elements were most valuable or impactful.	Student Survey Student interviews Teacher interviews
Uptake of pathways	Intended next steps	1) Percentage of students intending to take further action following the forum.	Student survey
		2) Qualitative feedback from job seekers regarding intended actions following the event.	Job seeker interviews
	Support needs identified	1) Qualitative feedback provided by students and stallholders on service needs/gaps	Student interviews Stallholder survey
Real-time opportunities	Registrations/enrolments initiated	1) Number of expressions of interest, registrations or enrolments initiated at the event.	Stallholder survey

Domain 4: Wheatbelt Workforce Intelligence

LIF Priority(s)	Metrics	Measures	Measurement Method
Strengthening the regional workforce ecosystem	Industries and occupations in demand	1) Industries and occupations students are most interested in pursuing.	Student interviews
	Awareness of local opportunities	1) Percentage of students reporting increased awareness of local career, training and employment opportunities.	Student survey
	Alignment between student interests and workforce demand	1) Comparison between student career interests and sectors experiencing workforce shortages.	Student survey Stallholder survey
	Workforce gaps identified	1) Hard-to-fill roles and workforce shortages identified by employers and service providers.	Stallholder survey
	Regional retention intention	1) Percentage of students indicating an intention to work, train or study within the Wheatbelt region.	Student Survey
		2) Employer observations regarding local retention interest among students and job seekers.	Stallholder survey
	Recruitment challenges	1) Key recruitment barriers identified by employers and service providers.	Stallholder survey

Domain 5: Ecosystem and Stakeholder Collaboration

LIF Priority(s)	Metrics	Measures	Measurement Method
Strengthening the regional workforce ecosystem	New Cross-Organisation Connections	1) Number of new referral relationships or follow-up commitments made between stallholders at the event	Stallholder survey
		2) Number of stakeholders identifying opportunities for future collaboration or joint initiatives	Stallholder survey
	Stallholder Satisfaction with Format	1) Satisfaction of stallholders and partners with forum structure, coordination and participant engagement.	Stallholder survey
	Alignment of Services to Student Needs	1) Stakeholder feedback regarding how well the event aligned with student needs.	Stallholder survey and teacher interviews
Visibility of Local Jobs services.	Program Awareness Uplift	1) Percentage of attendees unaware of a stallholder's service or organisation prior to the event.	Student survey
	Scalability / Replication Intent	1) Stakeholder feedback regarding improvements, expansion opportunities and elements to retain for future events.	Stallholder survey and teacher interviews

4. EVALUATION OUTCOMES

4.1 Domain 1: Event Reach and Participation

4.1.1 Attendance & Participation

Event reach and participation was measured through attendance records and student surveys and interviews.

Participation Measure	Result
Number of students in attendance	6
Number of teachers in attendance	3 (2 x School Principals; 1 x Career Practitioner)
Schools represented	3
Stallholders in attendance	12
Number of job seekers who interacted with stalls	31(between 2 -4pm) 25 (outside of allocated time)
Students who engaged with 3 or more exhibitors	100%

The schools represented were:

- St Joseph's School (Northam)
- Northam Senior High School
- Western Australian College of Agriculture – Cunderdin

Student attendance and the number of schools represented were lower than anticipated due to pupil-free days coinciding with the forum date.

4.1.2 Participant Engagement

Student interviews demonstrated that direct engagement with exhibitors was highly valued. Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity to connect with organisations and services they may not otherwise have encountered.

Sample participant feedback included:

"The Wheatbelt Beyond Youth Mentoring program was great to hear about and connect with at the Expo."

"I connected with the apprenticeship support team and it's great that they have a presence here so we can understand what they do."

Overall, participation outcomes indicate that the event successfully facilitated meaningful engagement between students, job seekers and exhibitors, despite relatively modest attendance numbers.

4.2 Domain 2: Student Career Awareness & Pathway Clarity

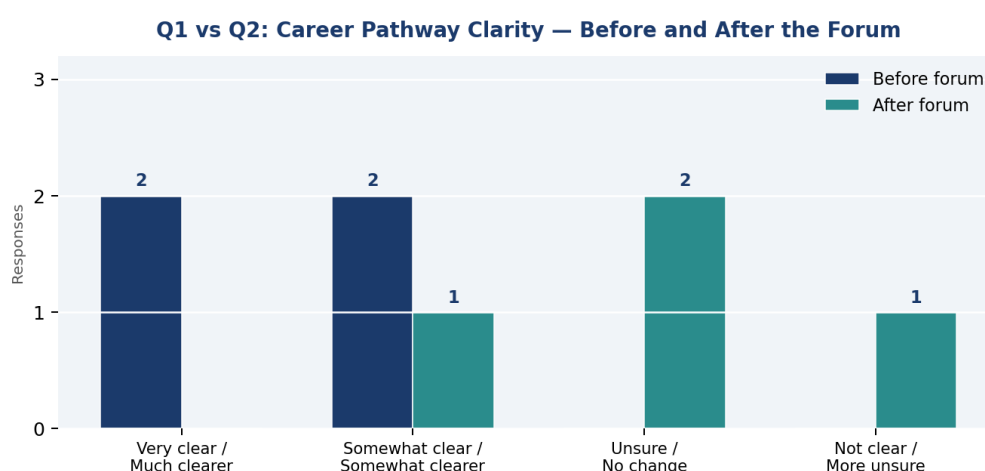
4.2.1 Career Pathway Clarity

Career pathway clarity was assessed through survey questions exploring changes in career pathway clarity before and after the forum and the extent to which the forum influenced future career or study plans.

Four students completed the survey and six students participated in interviews during the event.

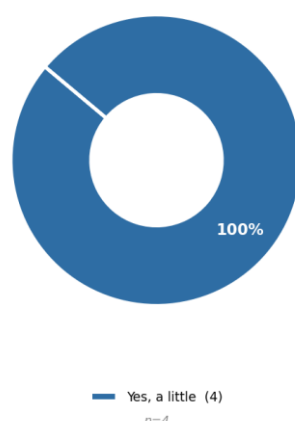
All surveyed students indicated that, prior to attending the forum, they were either “very clear” or “somewhat clear” about their intended career pathway. Following the forum:

- one student (25%) reported greater clarity regarding their future pathway;
- two students (50%) reported no significant change; and
- one student (25%) reported increased uncertainty.



Importantly, all surveyed students indicated that the forum had influenced their thinking about future career or study plans “a little”, suggesting that the event prompted reflection and consideration of alternative opportunities, even among students with pre-existing career goals.

Q5: Did Anything Change Your Thinking About Future Career or Study Plans?



Interviews highlighted that several students attending were already highly career-focused, particularly ATAR students with defined university aspirations. For these students, the value of the forum was less about changing direction and more about increasing exposure to regional opportunities and broader workforce issues.

4.2.2 Confidence to Act

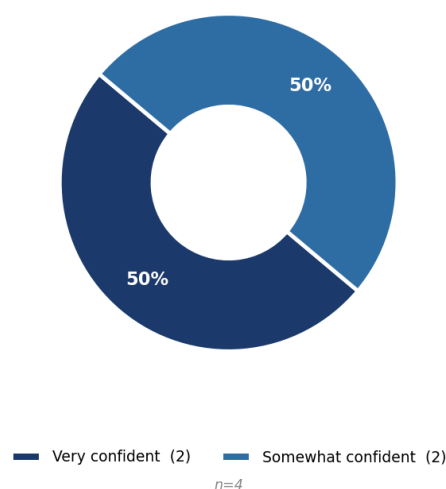
All surveyed students reported that they were either “somewhat confident” or “very confident” in understanding the steps required to achieve their career goals.

Student interviews further demonstrated a strong understanding of future study and training pathways. Responses reflected detailed planning regarding qualifications, university pathways and career progression.

“I intend to complete my Certificate III in agriculture and wool as well as engineering, construction and agriculture. I will prepare a portfolio for university to complete a bridging course so that I can study in Agriscience”

“I will move to Perth to go to university to study engineering”.

Q8: Confidence in Knowing the Steps to Reach Your Career Goals



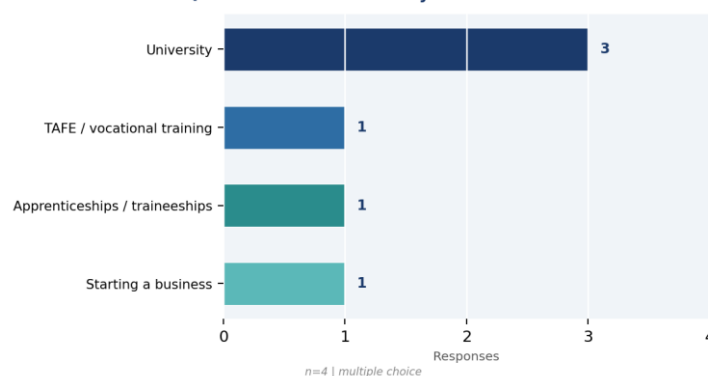
4.2.3 Preferred Pathways

Students identified a strong preference for post-secondary education pathways:

- university study was the most commonly identified pathway;
- one student expressed interest in both university and vocational training pathways; and
- one student expressed interest in apprenticeships or self-employment.

No students indicated uncertainty regarding future pathways, suggesting relatively high levels of career confidence among participants.

Q7: Which Career Pathways Are You Now More Interested In?



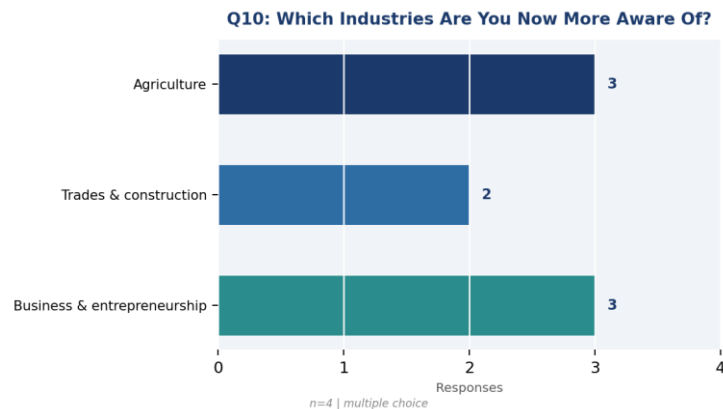
4.2.4 Industry Awareness

Students reported increased awareness across a range of industries following the forum. Agriculture, business and entrepreneurship were identified most frequently, followed by trades and construction.

Student feedback indicates that the forum broadened students' understanding of employment opportunities available within the region:

"Today opened my eyes to the opportunities available in the Wheatbelt"

"By hearing and knowing about all the paths offered here, it has grown my knowledge"



4.3 Domain 3: Connections, Referrals & Immediate Actions

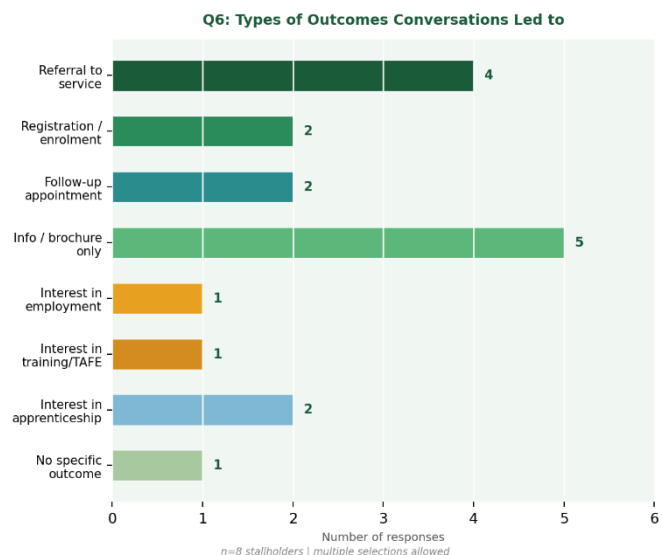
4.3.1 Referrals generated

Across 76 recorded engagements, stallholders generated approximately 21 referrals or follow-up actions.

These included:

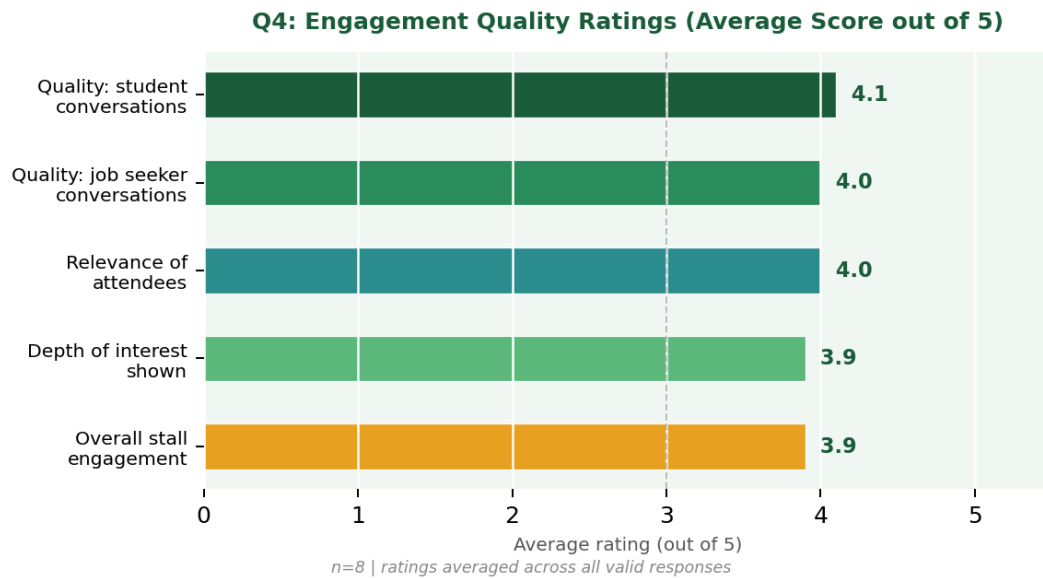
- referrals to services;
- provision of information and resources;
- registrations or enrolments; and
- follow-up appointments or contact arrangements.

This demonstrates that the forum generated tangible outcomes beyond initial conversations and facilitated direct pathways into further support and engagement.



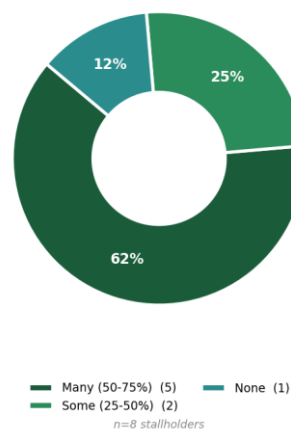
4.3.2 Quality of engagement

The stallholder survey asked for stallholders to rate the quality of engagement with students and jobseekers on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Stallholders rated engagement quality highly, particularly interactions with students.



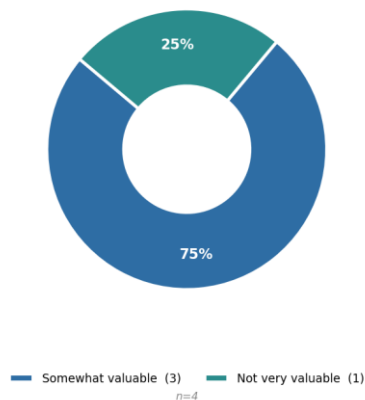
Stallholders were also asked to indicate how many conversations they felt would likely lead to a meaningful outcome. Most exhibitors indicated that a substantial proportion of conversations were likely to lead to meaningful outcomes.

Q5: Conversations Likely to Lead to a Meaningful Outcome



Students reported that the expo component was valuable, with Workforce Australia identified as one of the most impactful exhibitors.

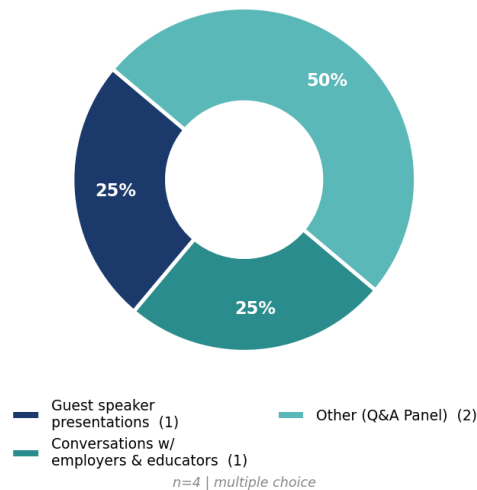
Q11: How Valuable Did You Find the Career Expo / Stalls?



4.3.3 Most Impactful Forum Elements

The panel discussion and question-and-answer session involving local Members of Parliament and a state minister was consistently identified as one of the most valuable components of the event.

Q3: Which Part of the Forum Had the Biggest Impact?



Students appreciated hearing positive discussions about the future of the Wheatbelt and regional development opportunities. Interviews suggested that exposure to broader economic and workforce discussions was particularly valuable for young people who may not typically engage with these conversations.

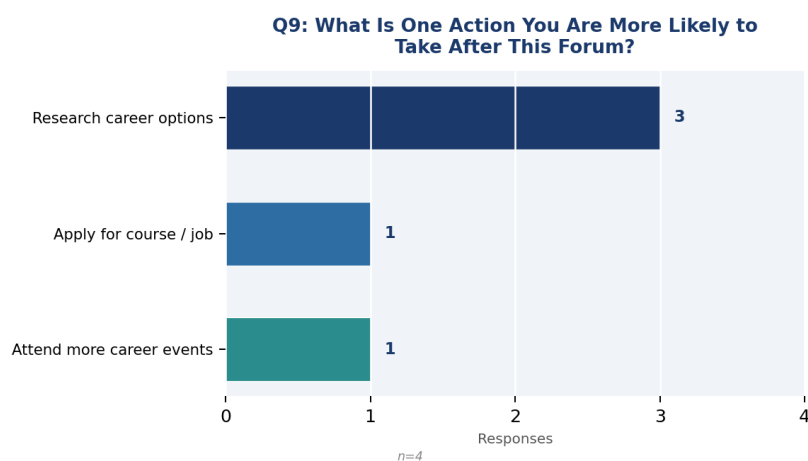
“We always hear the negative about the Wheatbelt it's great to hear these guys are on it and doing something”

“Sometimes I feel we are left behind by the government but it's good that these people are looking at the bigger picture”

Teachers also noted that the forum provided students with exposure to information, perspectives and discussions that would not ordinarily be accessible within the school environment.

4.3.4 Intended Next Steps

All surveyed students identified at least one action they intended to take following the forum. The most common intended action was further research into career and study pathways.



Job seekers attending the expo also identified intended follow-up actions, including pursuing training opportunities and contacting providers following the event.

“I learnt about a TAFE course that I am interested in and I will be following up on it after this event”

4.3.5 Support Needs Identified

Stallholders identified housing availability and mental health support as key service gaps.

Student interviews highlighted several broader barriers and support needs associated with future education and employment pathways, particularly:

- financial literacy and personal finance skills;
- housing and accommodation challenges; and
- concerns associated with relocating for study.

“We would love some help with personal finances and understanding how we manage our finances when we leave school and go into work”

“Housing will be a challenge if I was to go and study in Perth as I don't have any family there”

4.3.6 Registrations/Enrolments Initiated

One exhibitor reported initiating approximately 10–12 registrations during the event, while several other stallholders indicated that enrolment and registration outcomes would occur through post-event follow-up.

While immediate enrolment outcomes were relatively limited, the forum successfully facilitated connections between attendees and service providers, creating valuable opportunities for ongoing engagement and future registrations.

The event also featured a jobs board showcasing 39 local employment opportunities. The simplified job advertisements, incorporating QR codes and developed by Great Southern Wheatbelt Local Jobs, received strong positive feedback from attendees. Observations during the event confirmed that participants were scanning QR codes and applying for positions on the spot. The format proved highly effective, with several stakeholders expressing interest in replicating the jobs board and advertisement model for their own events.



4.4 Domain 4: Wheatbelt Workforce Intelligence

4.4.1 Industries & Occupations in Demand

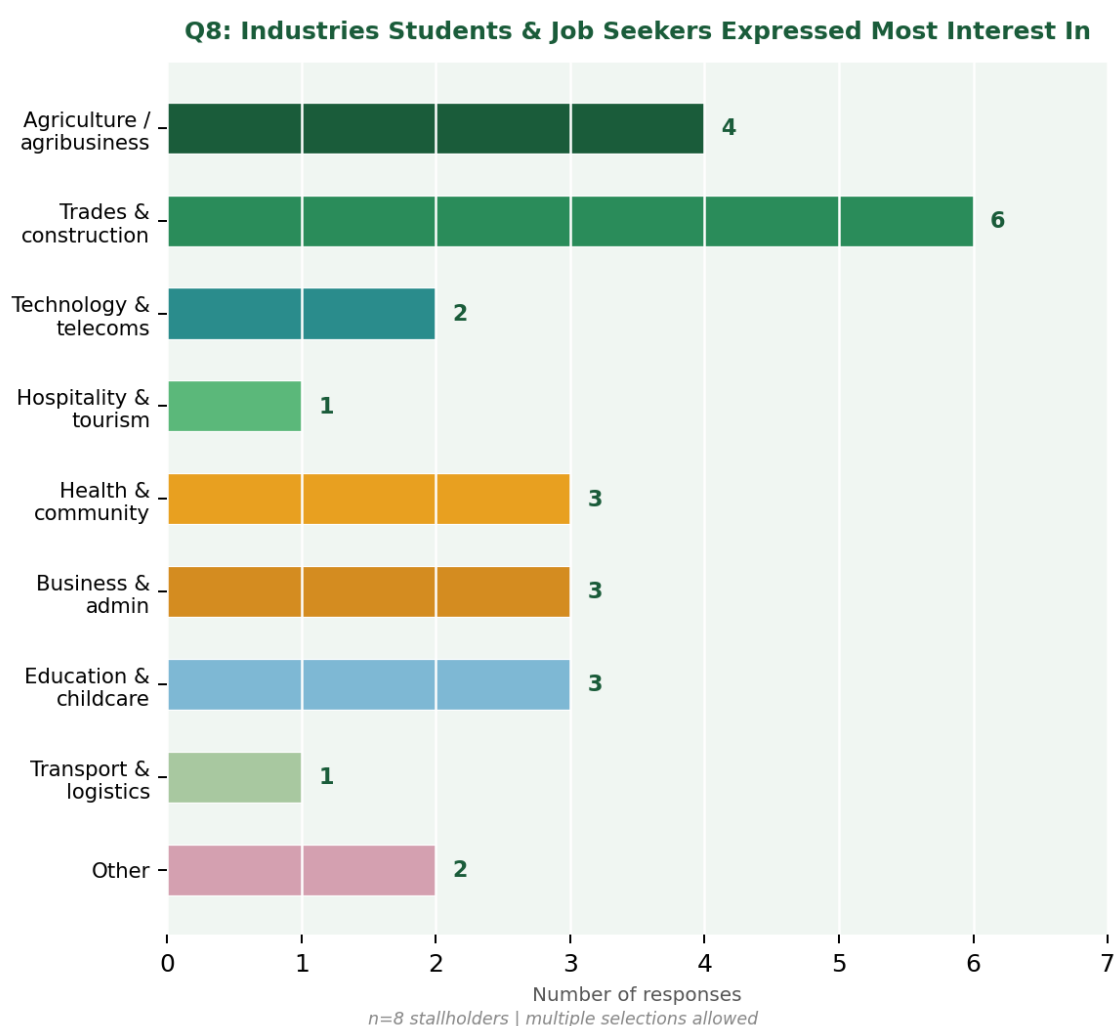
The stallholder survey asked which industries students and job seekers expressed most interest in. Trades and construction emerged as the strongest area of interest followed by agriculture and agribusiness. Other industries of interest not provided as a form option were drone technology and business support.

Students were also asked which industries and/or occupations they were interested in working in. Responses were very mixed and included interest in engineering, medicine, music, mining and agriculture.

“I want to get into live music in the pub scene. There are no formal qualifications needed for this, but I would like to do a Diploma of Music at TAFE in Perth”

“I am interested in mining as my family is in the industry, it was good to hear the statistics about mining growing in the region”

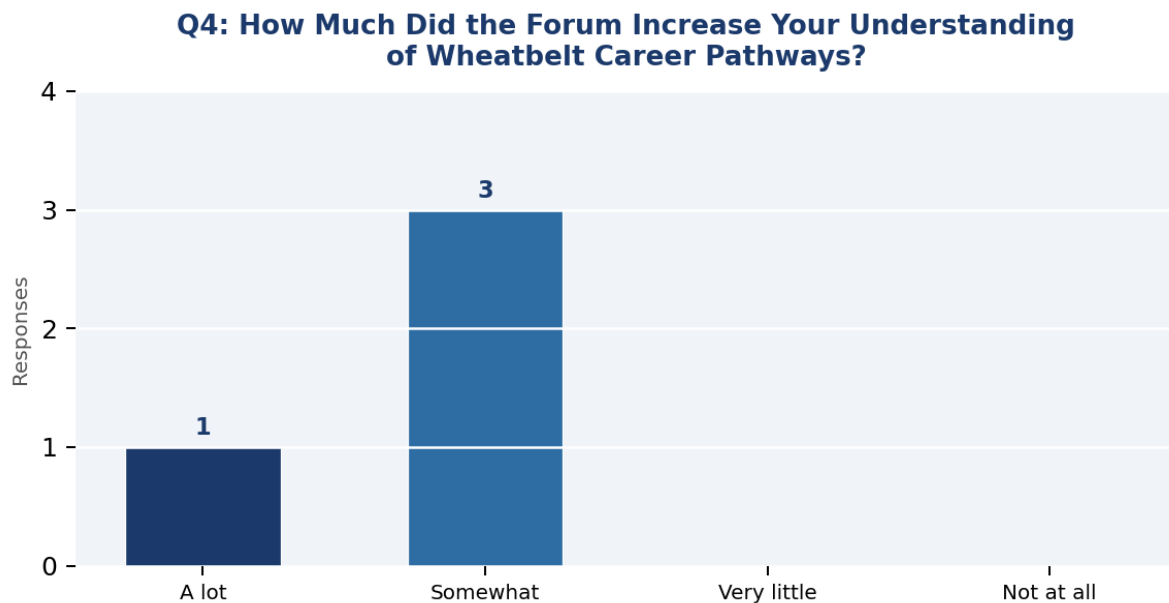
This diversity of interests reflects both traditional regional industries and emerging employment aspirations among young people.



4.4.2 Awareness of Local Opportunities

All surveyed students reported increased awareness of local training, employment and career opportunities within the Wheatbelt following the forum.

This suggests that the event successfully increased visibility of regional pathways and strengthened understanding of local opportunities.



4.4.3 Workforce Gaps

Stall holders were asked to comment on hard-to-fill roles and skills most lacking in candidates.

Skills and experience gaps observed in students and job seekers included confidence, lack of experience (i.e., newly out of school), and lack of requisite skills sets.

Employers and service providers identified several persistent workforce shortages including:

- Boiler making
- Carpentry
- Skilled roles generally
- Bricklayers; and
- Construction jobs.

4.4.4 Alignment Between Student Interests & Workforce Demand

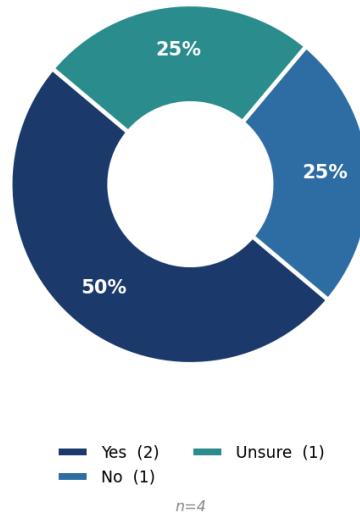
There was strong alignment between student interests and identified workforce shortages, particularly within trades and construction sectors.

This suggests that the forum has potential to support stronger workforce alignment outcomes over time by connecting students with industries experiencing workforce demand.

4.4.5 Regional Retention

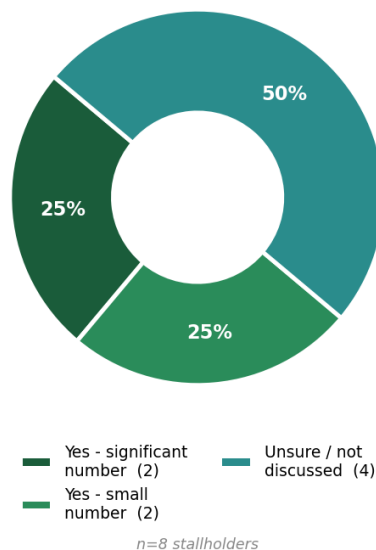
Half of surveyed students indicated an intention to remain in the Wheatbelt region for future work or study, while others were either unsure or intended to relocate.

Q13: Do You Plan to Study or Work in the Wheatbelt After Leaving School?



Stallholder feedback suggested that some students and job seekers demonstrated a clear interest in remaining in the region, although this was not consistently discussed across all engagements.

Q12: Job Seekers/Students Who Expressed Intent to Remain and Work in the Wheatbelt



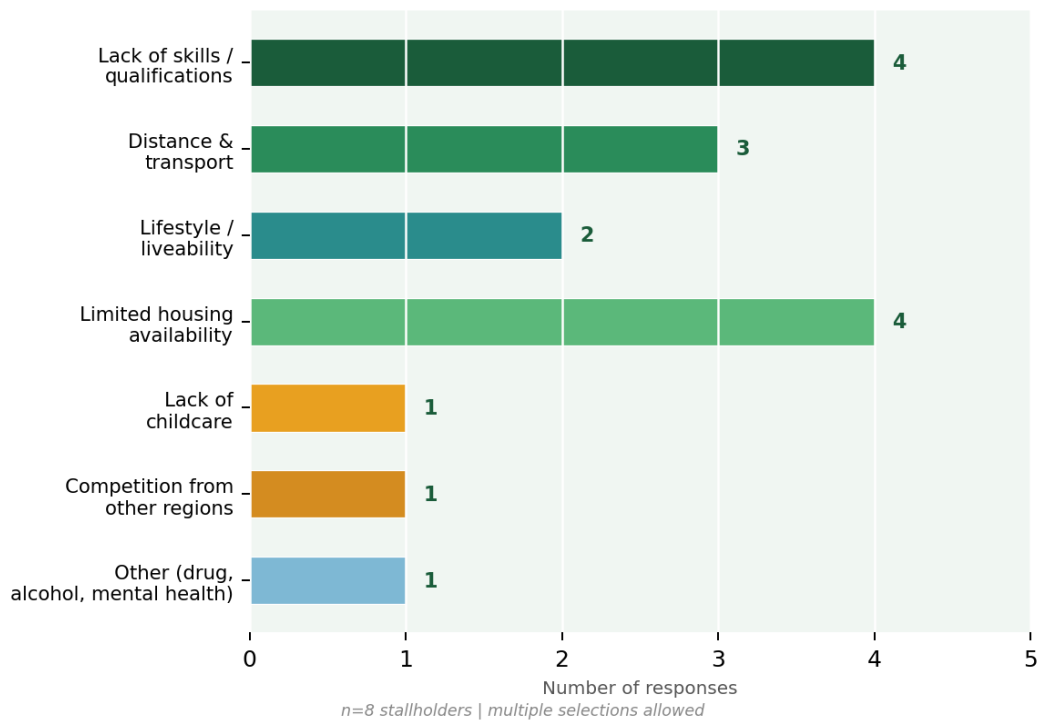
The findings reinforce the importance of continuing to strengthen local career pathways and addressing barriers to regional retention.

4.4.6 Recruitment Challenges

Housing availability and skills shortages were identified as the most significant barriers to attracting and retaining workers within the Wheatbelt workforce.

These findings align with broader regional workforce trends and reinforce the interconnected relationship between workforce development, housing availability and regional liveability.

Q11: Biggest Barriers to Entering/Staying in the Wheatbelt Workforce



4.5 Domain 5: Ecosystem & Stakeholder Collaboration

4.5.1 New Cross-Organisational Connections

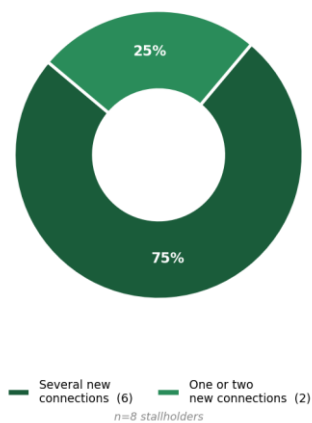
All stallholders reported establishing new connections with other organisations during the event.

Most exhibitors indicated that these connections either resulted in, or were likely to result in:

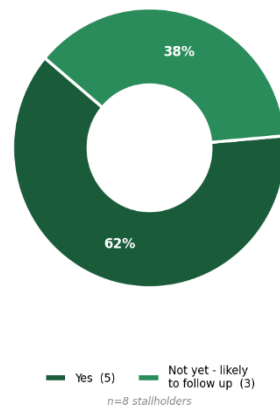
- referral arrangements;
- future collaboration opportunities; or
- ongoing communication and partnership development.

This demonstrates that the forum supported broader ecosystem-building outcomes beyond direct participant engagement.

Q14: New Connections Made with Other Stallholder Organisations



Q15: Connections Led to Referral Arrangement or Follow-Up Commitment



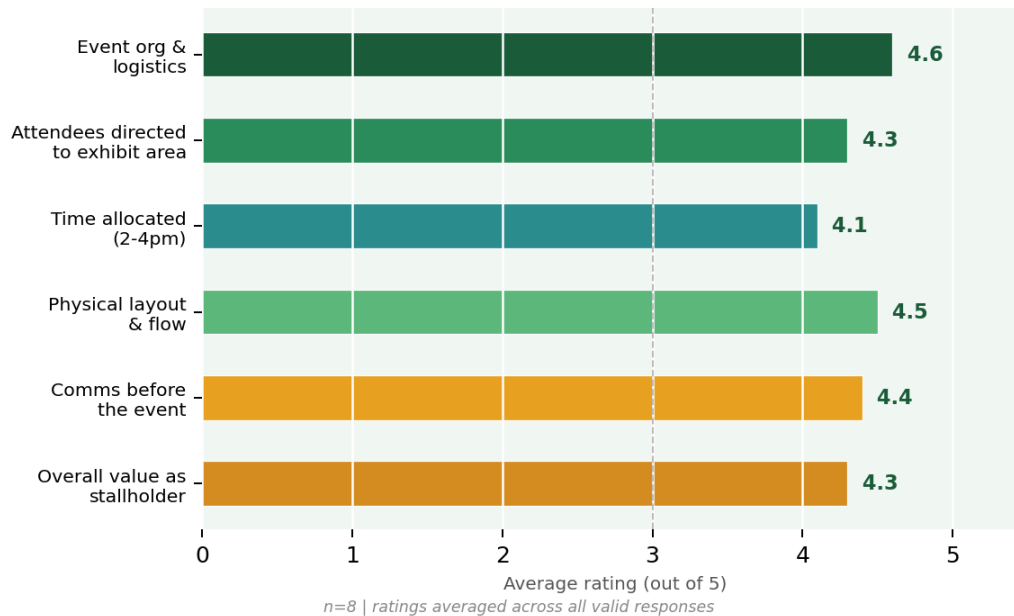
4.5.2 Stallholder Satisfaction with Format

Overall satisfaction with the event structure, logistics and participant engagement was high.

Exhibitors particularly valued:

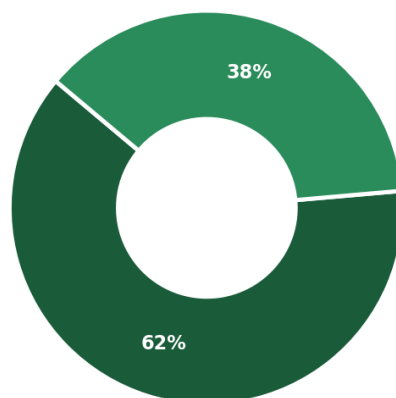
- the physical layout and accessibility of stalls;
- opportunities for networking;
- the informal and open environment; and
- the inclusion of short exhibitor introductions.

Q13: Event Format & Collaboration Ratings (Average Score out of 5)



All stallholders indicated that they would either “definitely” or “likely” participate in future forums.

Q16: Would Participate as a Stallholder at a Future Forum



Yes, definitely (5) Yes, likely (3)
n=8 stallholders

4.5.3 Alignment of Services to Student Needs

The range of exhibitors present at the forum aligned well with the support needs identified by students and stallholders (refer to section 4.3.5).

Represented services included:

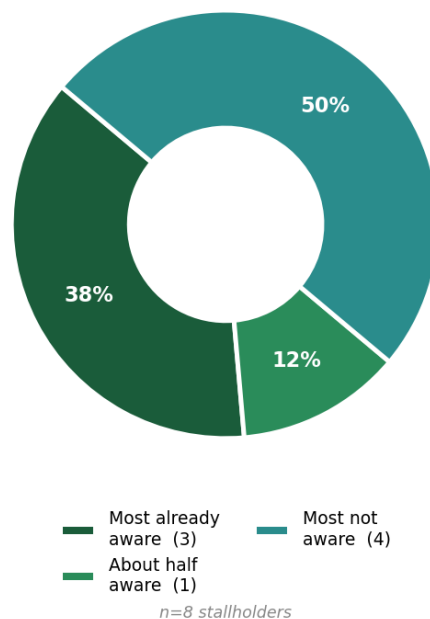
- employment services;
- apprenticeships and training providers;
- tertiary education pathways;
- community and support services; and
- financial services.

4.5.4 Program Awareness Uplift

Exhibitors reported that many (50%) participants were unaware of their organisation or services prior to attending the forum.

This suggests the event played a significant role in increasing awareness of local workforce, training and support services across the region.

Q3: Prior Awareness of Organisation/Services



4.5.5 Scalability/Replication Intent

Feedback from exhibitors and teachers highlighted several opportunities to strengthen future events, including:

- increased promotion and advertising;
- greater participation from job seekers and schools;
- additional preparation time for exhibitors;
- targeted engagement with general pathway students; and
- breakout sessions focused on local study and training pathways.

Teachers also suggested preparing students in advance to engage more actively with panel discussions and exhibitors.

Example stallholder comments:

“More time to prepare and refer clients to attend”

“More advertising for general public engagement/attendance”

Example teacher comments:

“General pathway students might have benefited from attending to get exposure to local opportunities as the two (ATAR students) who attended already had a very clear idea about what they want to do, and it does not involve the Wheatbelt for either of them”.

“A breakout session at the end of the morning session would be valuable. Maybe have Lumen and TAFE talk to the students about study pathways if students stay in the Wheatbelt”.

“I would suggest in future years, Principals be prompted to prepare the students to ask questions of the panels”.

5. EVALUATION SUMMARY

The 2026 Wheatbelt Futures Forum Jobs Expo achieved positive outcomes across all five evaluation domains and demonstrated clear value as a regional workforce engagement initiative.

The event successfully facilitated connections between students, job seekers, employers, training providers and support services. While student attendance numbers were modest, engagement quality was consistently strong, with students actively participating in discussions, interacting with exhibitors and identifying future actions following the event.

The forum was particularly effective in:

- increasing awareness of regional career and training pathways;
- strengthening understanding of local employment opportunities;
- generating referrals and follow-up actions;
- fostering collaboration between workforce stakeholders; and
- identifying key workforce challenges and regional support needs.

The evaluation also highlighted broader regional workforce issues, particularly housing availability, workforce retention, mental health support and skills shortages in trades and construction sectors. These findings reinforce the importance of integrated workforce and regional development approaches across the Wheatbelt.

Importantly, the event created value not only for students and job seekers, but also for participating organisations through strengthened cross-sector relationships, increased service visibility and opportunities for future collaboration.

Several opportunities for improvement were identified for future forums, including:

- increasing participation from a broader range of students and job seekers
- strengthening pre-event promotion and preparation
- incorporating targeted breakout sessions and pathway discussions; and
- increasing engagement with students who may benefit most from exposure to regional career opportunities.

Overall, the Wheatbelt Futures Forum Jobs Expo demonstrated strong alignment with the objectives of the Local Initiatives Fund and contributed positively to strengthening the regional workforce ecosystem. The findings from this evaluation provide a valuable benchmark to inform future workforce engagement initiatives across the Wheatbelt region.



Workforce Australia

Local Jobs

Great Southern – Wheatbelt

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