

Skilling Queenslanders for Work

First Start

Guidelines for funding 2025–26

The *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* initiative continues to achieve on social, economic and fiscal fronts, with an ongoing annual investment of \$80 million to support up to 15,000 Queenslanders into work each year.

The initiative represents a commitment to increasing workforce participation, driving job growth and strengthening the performance of the Queensland economy by improving skills development and work opportunities for disadvantaged Queenslanders.

Ever evolving, *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* is flexible in design and delivery and has been revitalised to accommodate the changing labour market conditions as a result of COVID-19.

The initiative comprises the following suite of programs:

- Community Work Skills
- Work Skills Traineeships
- Get Set for Work
- Ready for Work
- Youth Skills
- Community Foundation Skills
- Skill Up
- First Start

Overview and objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of support for those in the community most vulnerable to reduced employment opportunities.

Skilling Queenslanders for Work is the proactive means for increasing Queensland's workforce participation and the overall performance of the Queensland economy by directly and positively engaging those outside of or disadvantaged in the labour market.

Skilling Queenslanders for Work represents the Queensland Government's commitment to support strategies that encourage equitable participation by a

broad range of marginalised groups that generally face barriers or challenges to their participation in skills development and the labour market.

In 2025-26, disadvantaged Queenslanders will benefit from targeted training pathways that help to ensure they gain the skills they need to find new jobs. The Queensland Government is working to identify current and future sustainable employment and skills needs, aligned to economic and social development and creating relevant training opportunities to meet those needs.

Training that improves an individual's skill level, employment prospects and social inclusion is a priority for the Queensland Government.

First Start

First Start is one of eight programs that make up the *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* initiative. The program aims to provide young people and disadvantaged job seekers with opportunities to gain a nationally recognised qualification and 12-24 months of paid employment by undertaking a subsidised traineeship or apprenticeship with an eligible local council or community-based organisation (CBO).

Funding under First Start is specifically targeted at new employees and will provide eligible organisations with a significant subsidy to boost their traineeship and apprenticeship commencements above their normal workforce levels.

Specifically, First Start will:

- provide immediate job opportunities
- encourage people to enter into skills-based training
- guarantee a pool of skilled workers to meet local workforce needs.

In 2025-26, up to \$6.0 million will be available for local councils across Queensland to create up to 300 new traineeships and support 100 second year apprenticeships.



Up to \$2.4 million will also be available for CBOs to create 120 new traineeships.

First Start is administered by the Department of Trade, Employment and Training (DTET).

Where will the program be delivered?

First Start will be available throughout Queensland, however, priority will be given to areas of high youth unemployment.

The focus for new apprenticeships funded for 24 months will be in regional and remote Queensland communities.

Who can apply for funding?

Organisations eligible for First Start funding include:

- Local councils, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, and statutory authorities
- Incorporated not-for-profit CBOs
- Not-for-profit industry and employer groups.

Eligible organisations must be community-based and must not operate in a commercially competitive environment.

Organisations must be registered for GST and also able to demonstrate a commitment to access and equity principles, as well as an ability to provide appropriate support services.

What level of funding is available for traineeships?

Funding available under First Start for traineeships is dependent on the organisation type, as follows:

Organisation Type	Funding
Local councils/statutory authorities	\$15,000
Not-for-profit CBOs/Industry groups	\$20,000

First Start provides a wage subsidy per trainee for 12 months of employment. While the funding level remains capped at the above levels for a maximum 12 months of employment, DTET will allow organisations the discretion to elect to employ a trainee in a traineeship that is longer than 12 months duration.

What level of funding is available for apprenticeships?

Funding under First Start for apprenticeships is available for local councils as follows:

Organisation Type	Funding
Local councils/statutory authorities	\$30,000

The funding available under First Start for an apprenticeship is for a maximum of 24 months, \$15,000 paid per 12-month period.

First Start provides a wage subsidy per apprentice for 24 months of employment.

What about other government funding?

Organisations may be eligible to apply for other incentives offered by the Queensland and Australian Governments.

Organisations cannot receive funding under First Start or the *Back to Work* program for the same person.

Who will the funds support?

First Start primarily targets young Queensland school leavers and disadvantaged job seekers considered at risk of enduring prolonged periods of unemployment.

To be eligible, disadvantaged Queenslanders must also be:

- aged 15 years or older and no longer at school
- able to meet citizen, residency and visa requirements to undertake a traineeship

Identified disadvantaged groups

Disadvantaged groups to be targeted include:

- young people (aged 15–24 years), including those in and transitioned from out-of-home care
- long-term unemployed job seekers
- mature-age job seekers (aged 45 years or older)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- migrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- people with disability
- displaced workers
- women re-entering the workforce
- veterans, ex-ADF personnel and their families.

Organisations are encouraged to consider individuals for traineeships who have participated in a *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* community program as they will have transferable vocational and employability skills, work experience and self-confidence.

What assistance can be funded?

First Start will provide 12-24 months paid employment and the opportunity to gain a nationally recognised qualification via a traineeship or apprenticeship. The trainee or apprentice must enter into a training contract for a qualification that is funded by DTET.

Upon completion, the trainees and apprentices will have learnt new and transferable skills and gained experience and confidence by working in a real job.

What are the work conditions?

Organisations offering traineeships or apprenticeships are the employer. Traineeships and apprenticeships combine paid work with structured training. Trainees and apprentices complete a nationally recognised qualification while learning valuable skills at work and under the guidance of a training organisation.

Wages and conditions for trainees and apprentices in Queensland vary, however, as a minimum they must be paid a training wage as outlined in the award or agreement for their occupation or industry and the National Employment Standards.

For more information on wages and entitlements, contact the Fair Work Ombudsman on 13 13 94.

What training is involved?

As well as being employed, trainees and apprentices are training in vocational areas and upon successful completion will receive a qualification.

A registered training organisation (RTO) is a training provider registered to deliver vocational education and training and assessment services. A supervising registered training organisation (SRTO) is an RTO who accepts the role to deliver specified services in regard to a traineeship or an apprenticeship and to monitor delivery of training and assessment services required under a training plan. The SRTO must be approved as a Skills Assure Supplier (SAS) by DTET under the Career Start or Career Boost subsidy programs.

The local council or CBO and their First Start trainee or apprentice will select their SRTO, as part of the signing and registration of the training contract. The SRTO will work with the local council or CBO and the trainee or apprentice to develop a training plan, deliver training, assess the achievement of skills, and issue the qualification stated in the training plan upon completion.

As RTOs offer different ways of training, local councils and CBOs and their First Start trainees or apprentices should 'shop around' for the appropriate SRTO that best suits their needs.

Funding applies to Certificate levels II, III and IV of the Australian Qualifications Framework and should be subsidised qualifications available under the Career Start or Career Boost subsidy programs. There is a preference to provide generic training opportunities, leading to ongoing employment. To clarify eligibility for Career Start or Career Boost and the level of funding available and other financial incentives, contact your DTET regional office and local Apprentice Connect Australia Provider.

Are there any special requirements?

First Start trainees and apprentices must be additional to the existing workforce. The priority is for new employees, however, an existing worker identified as being able to benefit from the traineeship or

apprenticeship opportunity can be employed. It is expected that the existing worker's position would be backfilled.

First Start trainees and apprentices should be employed on a full-time basis, however a more flexible work pattern may be available to people whose personal circumstances impact on their employment arrangements. Approval for part-time work arrangements must be sought from DTET prior to any amendments to the training contract.

Funding will only be provided once for each individual undertaking a First Start traineeship or apprenticeship and is not available for existing trainees and apprentices.

Local councils are able to sub-contract group training organisations for the employment of their First Start trainees and apprentices and act as host employers.

CBOs are **not** able to enter into sub-contract arrangements for the employment of their First Start trainees. Applications proposing host employer models will not be supported by DTET.

Local councils are encouraged to employ out-of-trade apprentices registered on the official out-of-trade register for Queensland apprentices.

CBOs who also deliver other *Skilling Queenslanders for Work* community programs should be aware that the repeated recruitment of multiple participants across their various funded projects or programs, may not be supported by DTET.

Post-participation support

Post-participation support refers to assistance or support that the trainee or apprentice may require either nearing or following the completion of the traineeship or apprenticeship to retain employment or obtain further employment.

The level of support will vary for each individual and may include:

- assistance with resume, job application writing and interview techniques
- allowing time for job search activities.

It is expected that all organisations funded under First Start will provide post-participation support to trainees and apprentices employed under the program.

What outcomes are expected?

Funded organisations will be required to identify what employment, further education and/or training targets will be achieved throughout the First Start.

First Start has standard key performance indicators (KPIs) that organisations are expected to meet or exceed.

KPIs:

- Completion outcome – 65 per cent of trainees or apprentices successfully gain the required outcome of a qualification or statement of attainment
- Progression outcome (where applicable) – 65 per cent of apprentices are retained in the apprenticeship when a training contract exceeds the 24-month term
- Employment outcome – 70 per cent of trainees or apprentices successfully gain ongoing employment.

What is the application process?

Local councils

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. Funding under First Start is via a bidding process conducted by LGAQ. Local councils submit an annual bid for traineeship and apprenticeship positions. This process involves councils requesting the number of positions required for the following financial year.

These bids are assessed by DTET, based on government priorities and past performance including:

- ability of the council to employ, train and supervise trainees and apprentices
- ability of the council to fulfil their allocations
- commitment to securing ongoing employment and/or training/further education opportunities
- meeting all contractual and reporting obligations of the funding agreement
- commitment to the provision of post participation support.

DTET will allocate traineeship and apprenticeship positions on a financial year basis and notify local councils of their successful bids.

Community-based organisations/industry groups

CBOs can request a First Start Application Form via sqwapps@desbt.qld.gov.au. Completed applications will be evaluated on a number of criteria including:

- experience in managing government funding to deliver training, skills development or other services in a community setting to disadvantaged target groups.
- ability to employ, train and supervise trainees
- the organisation's ability to either retain the individual on completion of the traineeship, or provide assistance into further employment
- the suitability of the proposed work location

- preference for funding will be given to organisations that have an expertise in working with and training disadvantaged job seekers
- ability to manage any shortfall in funding for wages and oncosts of trainees
- where the organisation has received funding from DTET previously, past performance will also be taken into account.

The allocation, application and selection process, and assessment criteria, may be varied or discontinued by DTET as required at any time and for any reason, in its sole discretion.

DTET may also fund other appropriate organisations based on identified need under the First Start program, to address emerging departmental or Queensland government priorities.

What are the funding conditions?

Successful organisations must enter into a formal Services Agreement with DTET, which will include standard key performance indicators.

Organisations are also required to have appropriate insurance prior to the commencement of the trainee or apprentice and during their period of employment, including:

- public liability insurance in the amount of \$10 million in respect of each claim
- workers' compensation insurance in accordance with the *Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003*.

Organisations are required to supply certification from the insurers confirming coverage.

A first payment will be paid once the Services Agreement has been executed. Trainees and apprentices must have commenced by 30 June 2026. Funding under First Start will be provided on the basis that the training contract for each trainee or apprentice under the program is successfully registered with DTET.

Second payments for local councils (if required) will be made after 12 months following a reconciliation process to confirm all trainee and apprenticeship commencements, completions, and cancellations and periods of employment for previous contracts.

Second payments for CBOs will generally occur after the trainee has been employed for six months full-time or 12 months part-time; however these may be paid earlier at the discretion of DTET.

Monthly reports are required throughout the life of the Services Agreement.

All Services Agreement funding must be fully acquitted by the funded organisation after completion and any unexpended or surplus funds returned to DTET for any trainees or apprentices who terminate

their employment prior to completion of the training contract and 12 months of employment.

Appeals process

Organisations may request a review of a decision made by DTET in relation to the provision of funding under First Start. The appeals process has been established to help identify any problems in the application process, ensuring these processes continue to improve, and to assist with future applications.

Appeals must be lodged in writing to:

Appeals Officer
Investment Division
Department of Trade, Employment and Training
PO Box 15483
CITY EAST QLD 4002

Organisations will be notified in writing of the appeal outcome within 21 business days from receipt of the appeal.

More information

For more information about First Start, contact DTET on 1300 369 935 or councils can contact LGAQ on 1300 542 700.

Alternatively, please visit desbt.qld.gov.au/training/community-orgs/funded/sqw.

Visit www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au to find your local Apprentice Connect Australia Provider or call the referral line on 13 38 73.

Policy Owner:	Investment Division
Approval Date:	30 June 2025
Effective Date:	1 July 2025
Related Documents:	1. Career Start Program Policy 2. Career Boost Program Policy 3. Queensland Subsidised Training List 2025-26
Version Control:	13.0