



SUNSHINE COAST REGIONAL JOBS COMMITTEE



SUNSHINE COAST

MANUFACTURING

SKILLS FORUM

RESULTS

12 February 2026, 7:30am to 9:30am

Innovation Centre, UniSC, Sippy Downs

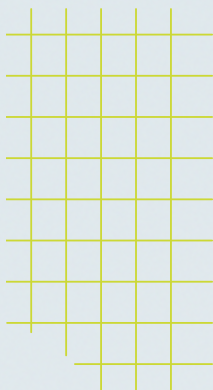
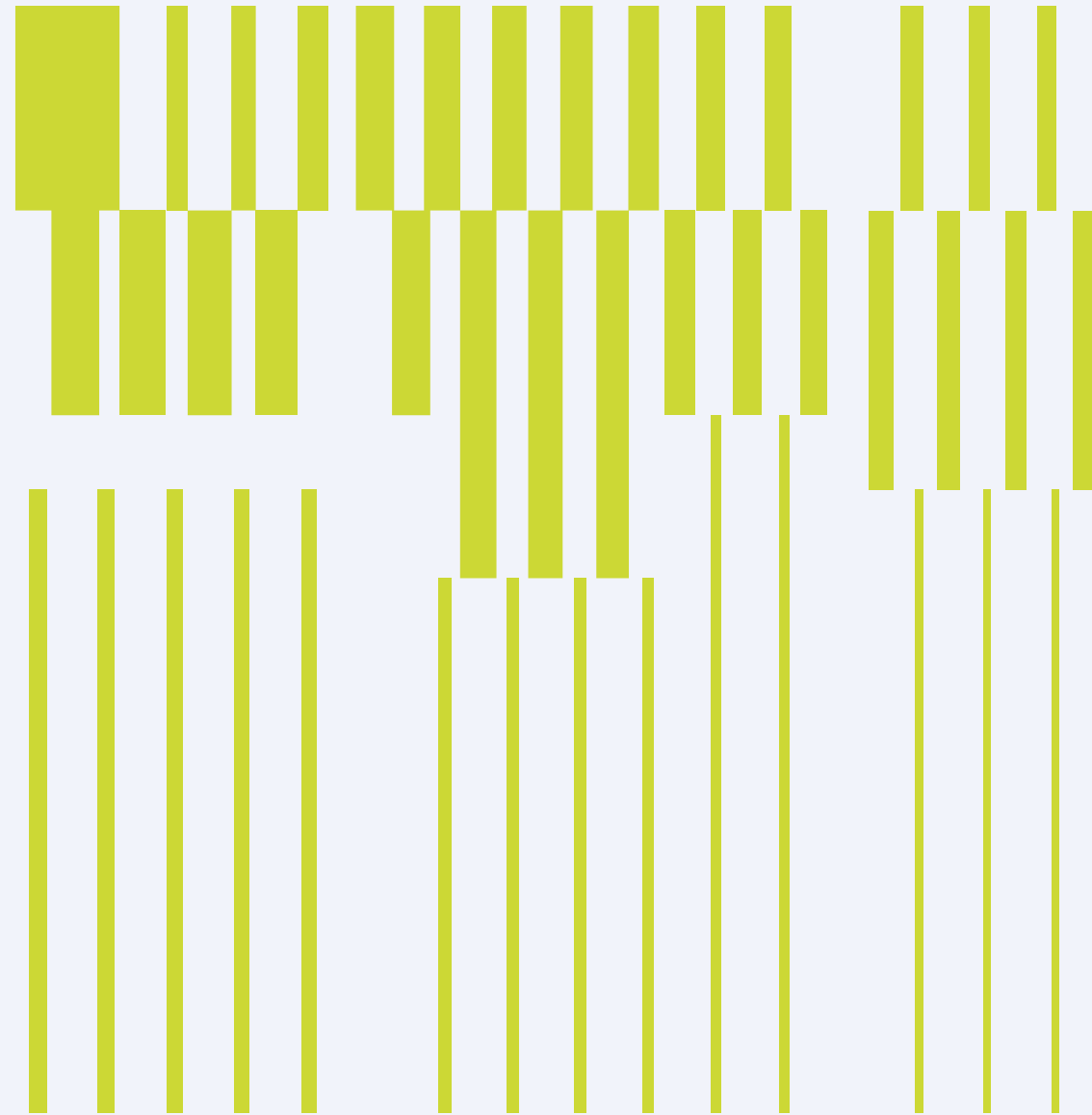




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Key Findings

Executive Summary

Workforce Attraction Challenges

Manufacturing faces a significant perception problem. The industry is widely misunderstood, often viewed as outdated and lacking visible career pathways. Low awareness among young people, limited experiential exposure, transport barriers, cost-of-living pressures, and migrant skills recognition issues further constrain workforce participation.

Retention & Leadership Maturity

Retention challenges are closely linked to leadership capability, culture, and unclear progression pathways. Poor communication, burnout, limited advancement opportunities, and competition for skilled workers are driving attrition. Leadership depth and succession planning emerged as critical systemic risks.



Upskilling & Capability Gaps

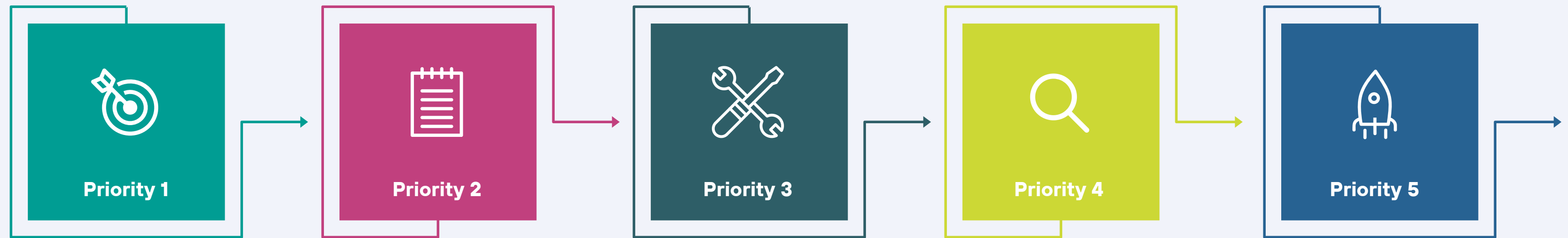
Time and cost pressures are the dominant constraints limiting workforce development. Businesses struggle to release staff for training, and workforce planning is often reactive rather than strategic. Immediate skill gaps include trade shortages, automation and AI capability, leadership depth, systems thinking, and essential soft skills.

Future Skills Imperative

The sector's transformation will depend on digital literacy, AI adoption, advanced technical integration (including mechatronics), and coaching-based leadership. However, the most significant risk is not purely technical capability – it is leadership maturity, adaptability, and cultural readiness across the workforce ecosystem.

Strategic Priorities Identified

Executive Summary



Rebrand Manufacturing

Shift perceptions through coordinated storytelling and youth engagement.

Align Education with Industry

Industry-led curriculum reform, stackable training models, and expanded work-integrated learning.

Strengthen Workforce Pipelines

Clear career pathways, improved employer engagement, sustainable apprenticeships.

Enable Collaboration & Advocacy

Position RJC as a connector, intelligence hub and strategic advocate.

Address Structural Barriers

Advocate on housing, transport and regional livability constraints impacting workforce participation.



PANEL

Mel Ireland Manager Sunshine Coast Manufacturing Hubs Manufacturing	Dr. Melissa Innes School of Business & Creative Industries UniSC Tertiary	Sue Sheppard Assistant Director Skills/Health TAFE Queensland VET	Tim Kelly Managing Director Manufacturing Excellence Forum (MEF) Industry Body	Melitta McDonald Chief People Officer Country Chief Industry

Attendee Feedback

Identification

How would you identify yourself?



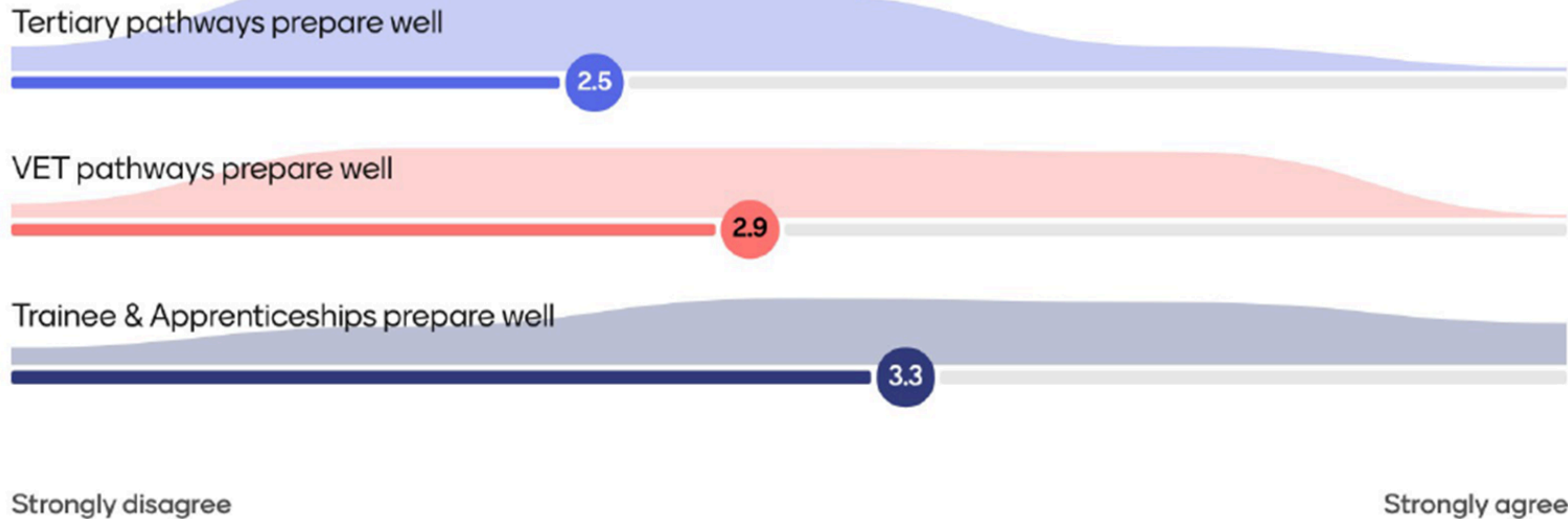
- 17 Work in the Industry
- 9 Industry Advocate
- 10 Government
- 8 Employment Support
- 16 Educator/Trainer
- 7 Other

Jobs & Careers

Guess how many businesses and employees make up our Sunshine Coast Manufacturing Industry ?



How would you rate the current education pathway system into manufacturing?



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

Industry Support Services or Programs Needed

01

Career Awareness & Promotion

Increase visibility of manufacturing careers

- Promote manufacturing careers in schools
- Public awareness campaigns
- Industry promotion and job awareness initiatives
- Showcase career benefits and opportunities
- Highlight global opportunities in manufacturing

02

Clear Career Pathways

Help people understand how to enter and progress

- Defined career pathways for manufacturing roles
- Career advice / guidance for students and employees
- Transparent progression opportunities
- Pathways designed to attract young people to sector

03

Funding, Training & Industry Groups

Reduce barriers to participation

- More support of industry groups
- Government grants and funding
- Financial support for apprenticeships
- Subsidised training programs
- Funding for skills acquisition

04

Education – Industry Connection

Stronger collaboration between training providers, educators and industry

- Integrated industry training programs
- Education aligned with employer needs
- Bridging formal education into employment

05

Youth Engagement & Entry Pathways

Expose young people to real manufacturing careers

- School-based industry programs
- Work experience and internships
- Workplace tours and industry exposure
- Graduate and entry-level pathways
- Encouraging apprenticeships

06

Workforce Skills & Upskilling

Build a future-ready workforce

- Industry-aligned training programs
- Upskilling opportunities for existing workers
- Leadership training for shop-floor employees
- Training to keep pace with automation and innovation

07

Employer Support & Workforce Development

Support businesses to build capability

- Employer support programs plus mentoring and succession coaching
- Workforce development, Innovation and automation support programs

08

Culture, Inclusion & Workforce Environment

Create attractive workplaces

- Positive workplace culture and behaviour plus cultural change programs
- Diversity and inclusion awareness plus employee wellbeing initiatives

What is the single biggest reason Manufacturing workers are currently leaving the industry?





Barriers to Workforce Participation



What is the single biggest barrier you see in attracting workforce to the Manufacturing Industry?



Barriers to Workforce Participation

Roundtable Summary for Attraction, Upskilling and Retention Barriers

Workforce Attraction

The sector faces a significant perception and awareness challenge. It's poorly understood, viewed as outdated, or not seen as an innovative or desirable career pathway. Limited storytelling about modern roles, progression opportunities and transferable skills.

Attraction is further impacted by:

- Low awareness of career pathways and progression
- Limited experiential exposure (schools/workshops)
- Transport and site access barriers
- Cost of living pressures
- Language barriers and migrant skills recognition challenges
- Limited visibility of inclusive and diverse workplaces

Upskilling / Internal Mobility

The most prominent constraint is time and cost. Operational demands limit the ability to release staff for training, while the financial cost of training (including lost productivity) is a major deterrent.

Additional barriers include:

- Lack of structured succession planning
- Limited internal mobility pathways
- Capability gaps within businesses
- Training not embedded strategically
- Communication gaps around development opportunities
- Challenges balancing permanent and temporary workforce models

There is a need to better align workforce planning with long-term capability development.

Workforce Retention

Retention challenges are closely tied to leadership, culture and career progression. Participants identified poor communication, burnout, unclear development pathways and limited advancement opportunities as key drivers of attrition.

Other retention pressures include:

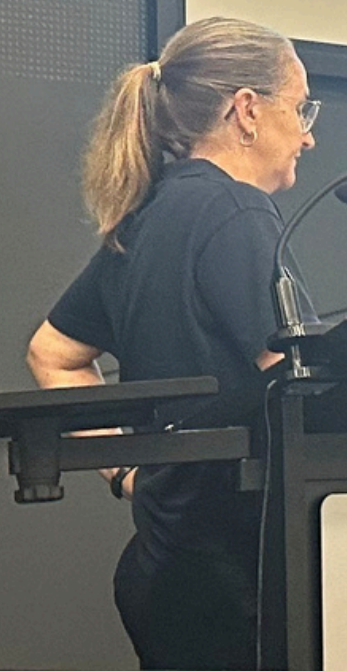
- Salary and employment conditions
- Competition from other employers for skilled workers
- Shift patterns and work-life balance concerns
- Unrealistic expectations on both employer and employee sides
- Absenteeism and engagement challenges

Across All 3 Areas

Cross-cutting themes across all three areas:

- Money (compensation, cost of living, training cost)
- Communication gaps
- Lack of clear career pathways
- Perception vs reality of manufacturing
- Time pressures (operational demands limiting strategy)
- Transport & accessibility
- Need for better industry storytelling
- Training nature & transferability of skills
- Competition for talent
- Workforce expectations vs reality
- The industry's employer brand, flexibility and engagement approach are key areas for improvement

				
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Manager Sunshine Coast Manufacturing Hub	School of Business & Creative Industries UniSC	Assistant Director SkillsTech TAFE Queensland	Managing Director Manufacturing Excellence Forum (MEF)	Chief People Officer Country Chief
Moderator	Tertiary	VET	Industry Body	Industry



Skills Gaps

What is the **number one skill** most needed in the manufacturing industry that you **don't see enough of** today?



Roundtable Responses to Skills Gaps

THEME	CURRENT SKILLS GAPS	FUTURE SKILLS GAPS
TECHNICAL & TRADE SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of automation knowledge• Limited AI Understanding• Shortage of specific trade skills (e.g. machinists)• Manual labour reliance• PAC/process knowledge gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AI adoption & generative AI capability• Advanced digital literacy• Mechatronics• Technology integration• Ongoing upskilling to keep pace with industry
DIGITAL & ANALYTICAL SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital skill gaps• Limited data/analytical skills• Poor understanding of how business works• Systems thinking gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong digital literacy across workforce• Data informed decision making• Practical intelligence• Tech adaption capability
LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership evolution needed• Managerial skills gaps• Lack of succession planning• Limited innovation capability• Poor people/team management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coaching capability• Leadership depth• Strategic planning• Succession planning maturity• Process improvement leadership
WORKFORCE & PIPELINE CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of pathways into industry• Lack of people to allow upskilling• Long-term focus on people & business lacking• Job readiness concerns• Heavy crisis management culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing aging workforce• Workforce resilience• Stronger industry-education alignment• Sustainable talent pipelines
SOFT SKILLS & HUMAN CAPABILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work ethic concerns• Limited resilience• Growth mindset gaps• Communication gaps• Respect & team collaboration issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coaching skills• Critical thinking• Problem solving• Communication & empathy• Customer service mindset• Curiosity & adaptability
CHANGE & INNOVATION CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Slow to update systems• Outdated processes• Resistance to change• Lack of openness to innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adaptability for change• Innovation & creativity• Continuous improvement mindset• Stronger process understanding
INDUSTRY AWARENESS & MINDSET	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limited awareness of job roles• Immediate demands vs long-term thinking• Unwillingness to “put in the hard work”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Broader business understanding• Future-focused mindset• Alignment between education & industry needs

RotaScope



Solutions

If you could wave a magic wand right now and fix one skill or workforce issue for Manufacturing, what would it be?



Roundtable Responses to Solutions

Solution Themes	Solution Identified	Purpose / Intended Impact	Primary Stakeholders
Rebranding & Awareness	Coordinated industry storytelling campaign	Shift perception from "outdated" to modern, innovative sector	RJC, Industry, Schools
	Targeted youth engagement initiatives	Increase early interest and pipeline development	Schools, Industry
	Showcase modern manufacturing environments	Improve experiential exposure	Employers, Educators
	Promote transferable skills & career progression	Improve career visibility	Industry Associations
	Employer brand improvement support	Strengthen attraction capability of SMEs	RJC, Employers
Education & Industry Alignment	Industry-led curriculum reform	Align training with real business needs	TAFE, RTOs, Industry
	Stackable & competency-based training models	Flexible, modular skill development	Training Providers
	Expand work-integrated learning (WIL)	Improve job readiness	Industry, Education
	Stronger employer engagement in training design	Close education–industry gap	Employers, RTOs
	Clear mapping of skills pathways	Improve transparency & mobility	RJC, Education
Workforce Pipeline Development	Clear, visible career pathways	Improve attraction & retention	Industry, Schools
	Sustainable apprenticeship growth strategy	Strengthen long-term pipeline	Employers, Govt
	Strengthen education–industry partnerships	Improve transition to employment	RJC, Schools
	Industry exposure programs (site visits/workshops)	Increase awareness & experiential learning	Employers
Leadership & Capability Development	Coaching-based leadership development	Build bench strength & succession depth	Employers
	Structured succession planning	Reduce workforce vulnerability	SMEs
	Leadership maturity uplift programs	Improve culture, retention & performance	RJC, Industry
	Systems thinking & business capability training	Improve strategic capability	Employers
	Digital & AI literacy uplift programs	Support sector transformation	Industry, Training Providers
Digital & Technical Capability	AI adoption & digital literacy at scale	Improve productivity & competitiveness	Industry
	Mechatronics & advanced tech integration training	Future-proof technical capability	Education, Industry
	Automation & digital transformation support	Accelerate sector modernisation	Govt, Industry
Collaboration & Coordination	Position RJC as connector & umbrella body	Coordinate cross-sector action	RJC
	Intelligence sharing across ecosystem	Reduce duplication & improve alignment	Industry, Education
	Cross-sector partnerships	Collective impact model	Govt, Industry
	Centralised communication platform	Improve visibility of opportunities	RJC
Structural Workforce Advocacy	Advocacy on housing affordability	Address workforce participation constraints	Govt
	Transport accessibility advocacy	Improve site access	Govt
	Regional liveability positioning	Improve talent attraction	Industry, Govt
Cultural & Retention Strategies	Improve internal communication practices	Reduce disengagement & attrition	Employers
	Career progression clarity within firms	Improve retention	Industry, Employers
	Flexible work & expectation alignment	Improve workforce satisfaction	Employers
	Embed resilience & adaptability capability	Future workforce readiness	Industry

Manufacturing Workforce Transformation Map

Stabilise Year 1

Build Foundations & Reduce Immediate Risk

- Workforce capability baseline
- Succession risk mapping
- Trade shortage response
- Industry–education alignment
- Digital & AI readiness assessment

Focus: Risk exposure + capability baseline

KPI Framework

- % workforce digitally competent, AI pilot adoption rate
- % businesses with formal succession planning
- Apprenticeship intake growth rate
- Employee engagement & retention metrics
- Time to implement new tech & processes

Accelerate Years 2-3

Scale Leadership & Digital Capability

- Structured leadership development
- Coaching culture introduction
- AI & digital capability expansion
- Apprenticeship & pipeline growth
- Change & innovation training

Focus: Capability uplift + measurable adoption

Transform Years 4-5

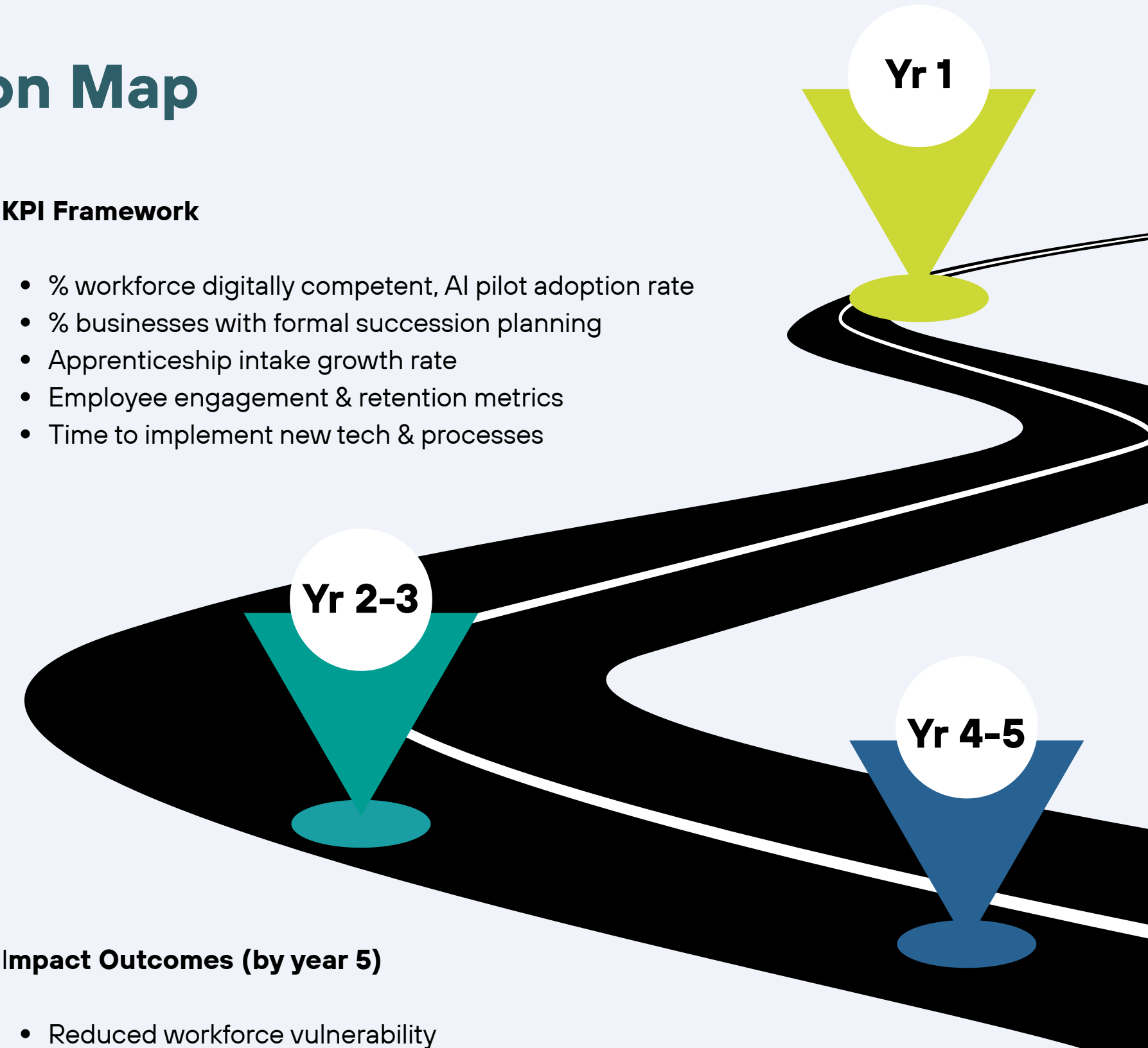
Embed Competitive Advantage

- AI embedded operationally
- Data-driven performance culture
- Succession depth across sector
- Sustainable talent pathways
- Continuous improvement maturity

Focus: Long-term resilience + sector competitiveness

Impact Outcomes (by year 5)

- Reduced workforce vulnerability
- Strong leadership bench strength
- AI-enabled productivity gains
- Sustainable apprenticeship growth
- Embedded innovation culture
- Improved retention & engagement



01

Sunshine Coast RJC Action Plan

Using the results of all Skills Forums to develop a State Govt approved Action Plan of the year's activities that aligns with industry needs



NEXT STEPS



02

Industry Discovery Sessions

Work with MEF, MSQ & SC Manufacturing Hub to assess current programs & identify gaps or areas of support, then create repository of resources



03

Manufacturing Skills Advisory Group

Sense-checking all activities with local leaders to show value add of actions undertaken and ensure measurement of outcomes possible

THANK YOU FROM SCRJC

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