talent accelerate™

White Paper

a new approach to skills based hiring, youth pathways and industry capability

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This project was supported by funding from the Australian Government through the Local Jobs Program.

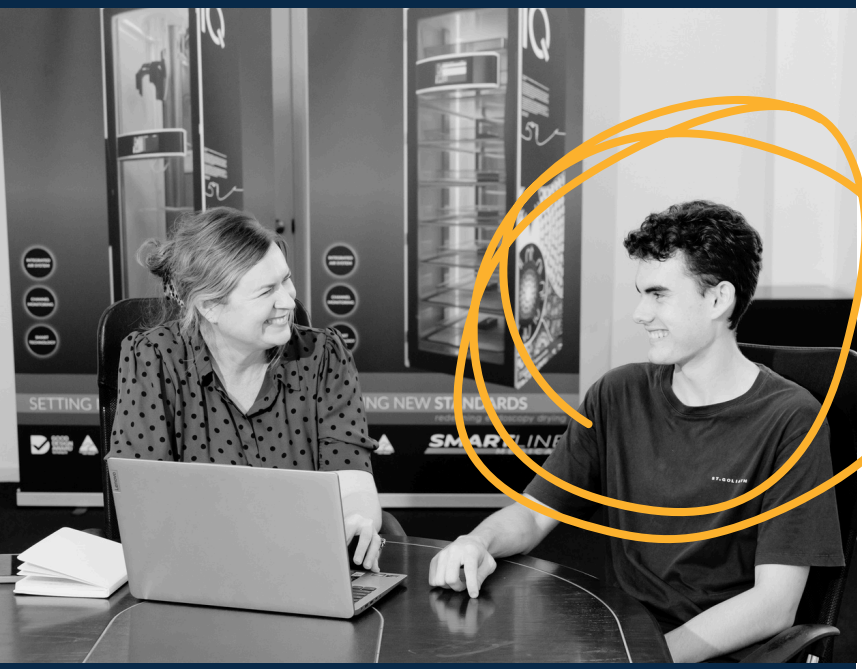
Australian Government
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

The Project

Talent Accelerate reimagines how young people and industry connect to shape the future workforce.

By combining job redesign, digital credentialing, and real-world experience, the program created a capability first approach to skills development.

Built through local collaboration and backed by national funding, it offers a scalable model for workforce transformation.



"This program empowered young people to discover themselves and gain confidence while exploring possible future pathways.
It was inspiring to see the students gain clarity and direction and become more confident at expressing themselves and communicating with others."

Joelle McCully
Program Facilitator

We achieved:

179 stakeholders, schools, industry, young people and businesses engaged

39 Businesses across Sunshine Coast and Bundaberg

72 young people aged 15 - 25 years

95% completed digital credentials

18 placements

7 job offers and counting

Executive Summary

The Talent Accelerate pilot was designed to test new frameworks for work integrated learning and job redesign in the Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay regions. Talent Accelerate, delivered through a partnership between Groei Education, MEFSC, Bundaberg HQ and local manufacturing businesses, was funded under the Australian Government's Local Jobs Program.

The initiative aimed to address critical skill gaps among regional youth and workforce entry barriers by combining job redesign with skills-based matching and real-world project placements. Through strong collaboration across industry, education and community, the program co-designed new traineeship pathways, reimagined entry-level roles, and empowered students with transferable capabilities, digital credentials, and workplace readiness.

Our Solution:
A Future-Fit Pathway

The Talent Accelerate program responded to these challenges through a design approach that combined:

1) job redesign support for businesses,
2) human capability-based skills development for young people, and
3) AI-enabled talent matching based on values, capability and interest.

Local collaboration enabled us to map out roles, create immersive learning journeys, and develop flexible placement models.

A Challenge on 3 levels

Employers

- Face growing difficulty attracting early-career talent with the right mix of soft and technical skills.
- Traditional hiring models miss emerging capabilities like adaptability and initiative.
- Needed new approaches to role design and entry level engagement.

Young People

- Encounter fragmented or outdated pathways into work.
- Lack confidence, context and work ready skills
- Are underprepared for the realities of work
- Are unaware of the opportunities available in growth sectors like manufacturing, robotics, health, defence and clean tech.

Schools & Universities

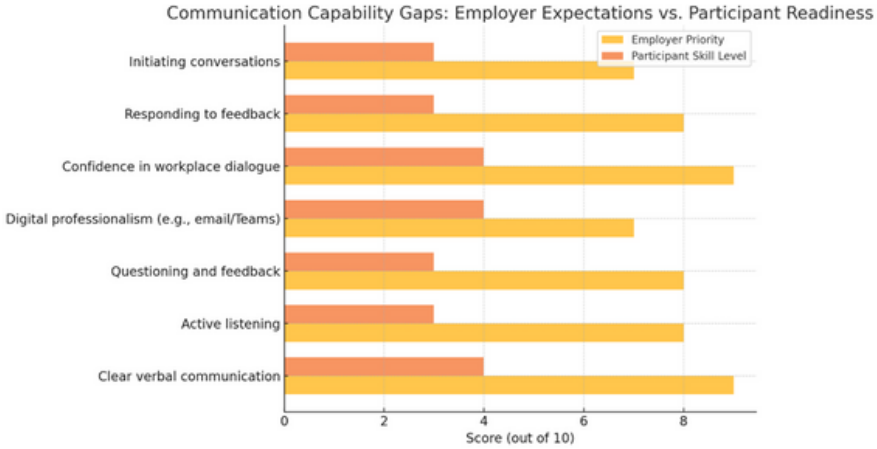
- Not fit for purpose - are increasingly misaligned with the needs of modern industries.
- Lack the frameworks, resources, and industry connections to provide real-world learning experiences. Students graduate with limited exposure to evolving career pathways.

Industry Engagement

The Talent Accelerate pilot engaged 39 advanced manufacturing businesses across the Sunshine Coast and Bundaberg, addressing a critical industry challenge: how to build a future-fit workforce while reducing the risks of early stage hiring. Rather than offering traditional placements or work experience, the program supported employers to co-design project based roles that allowed them to test and develop emerging talent in real work environments. This structured, work integrated model enabled businesses to trial unskilled but motivated young people before committing to long-term employment, while actively shaping the skills pipeline to meet evolving industry needs.

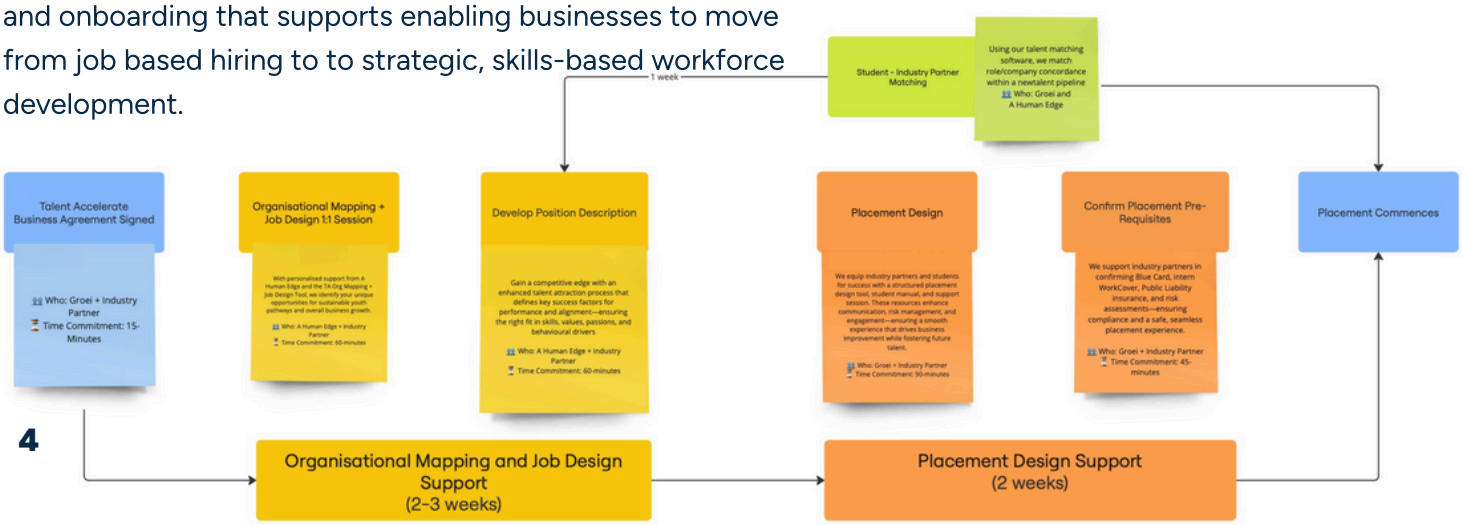
Building Capacity Through Co-Design

The most commonly identified skill gaps reported by participating businesses in the co-design process, with strong emphasis on foundational capabilities such as communication, initiative, emotional intelligence, and task ownership skills often referred to as “common sense” but rarely taught or explicitly assessed through traditional hiring methods.



Industry Engagement Roadmap

From job redesign approaches to concordance based matching and onboarding that supports enabling businesses to move from job based hiring to to strategic, skills-based workforce development.



Jobs Redesign Process

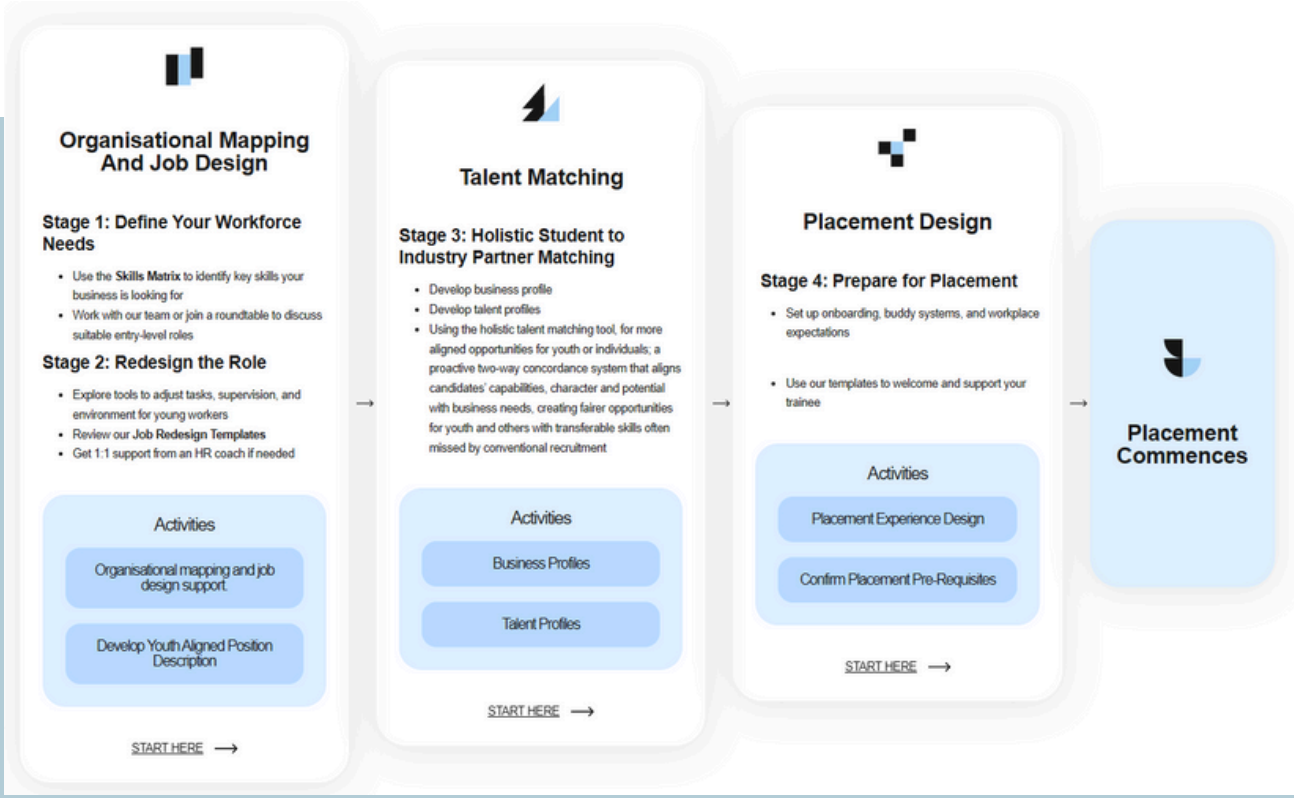
1 Toolkits & Onboarding
Custom organisational design tools were distributed, including a values alignment tool, placement design guide, and role mapping templates. Businesses were supported with tailored coaching to refine these tools in real-time.

2 Placement Design & Support
12 businesses hosted 18 young people in structured, scoped placements. Talent Accelerate facilitators worked closely with business mentors to guide onboarding, address real-time concerns, and help host teams apply the tools developed during workshops.

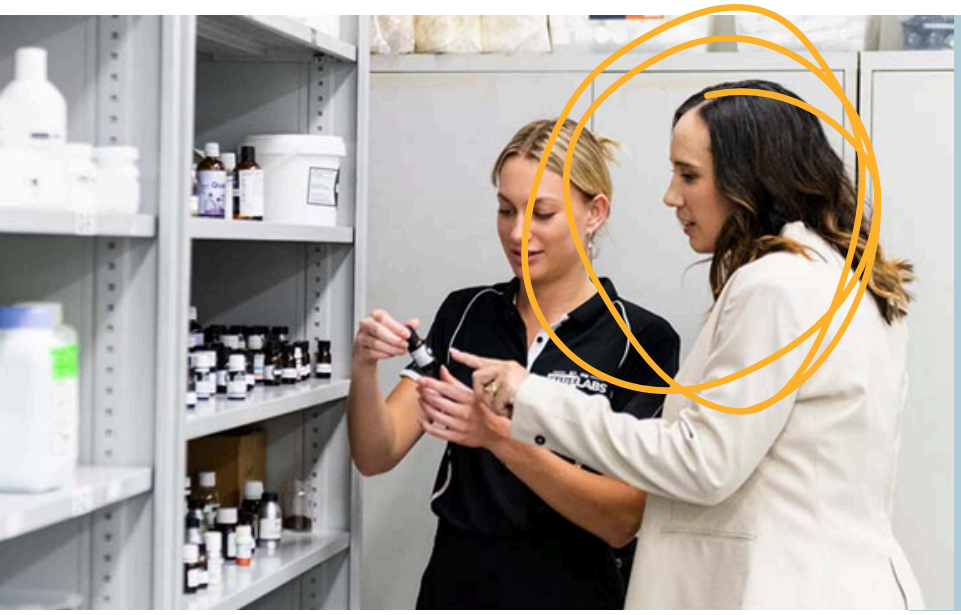
3 Refinement & Feedback
Post-placement reviews allowed businesses to assess the value of their redesigned roles and reflect on their readiness for youth integration. Key feedback centred around the need for long-term mentoring pathways and better narrative alignment between business objectives and young people engagement.

4 Discovery & Alignment
Initial 1:1 sessions were conducted with each business to map operational challenges, talent needs, the types of skills needed for traineeships and potential role gaps. Early-stage discovery involved conversations about long-term workforce goals and cultural competency with young people internally in the businesses.

5 Job Design Workshops
Businesses attended learning sessions focused on HR tactical tools, using the SCARF model for culture and job redesign, function mapping, and concordance-based recruitment practices. These sessions helped employers rethink traditional job descriptions and identify human capabilities beyond technical skills, such as initiative, communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.



Case Study



"The Talent Accelerate program brought a fresh energy into our business.

It helped us rethink how we support early talent and gave our team practical tools to structure mentoring in a way that built both confidence and capability in the young people we hosted.. "

Naomi Elliot
Managing Director Concept Labs

EST. 1998
conceptLABS
Trusted Partner in Sustainable Manufacturing

Concept Labs, a cosmetic manufacturing company on the Sunshine Coast, hosted three young people with placements across lab research, production, and administration. Led by Naomi and her all-female leadership team, the business used Talent Accelerate's job redesign and onboarding tools to rethink how early talent is introduced and supported.

The team created clear, structured roles for each placement:

- A gap-year student joined the production team, quickly adapting to fast-paced operations and contributing to packaging workflows.
- A homeschooled senior student worked in administration and marketing, building confidence and professional awareness in a live office environment.
- A biomedical science university student was embedded in the lab, formulating skincare products and assisting with quality control leading to an ongoing part-time job offer while she continues her studies.

By integrating mentoring, structured tools, and values-based matching, the placements became more than work experience—they became long-term talent strategies.

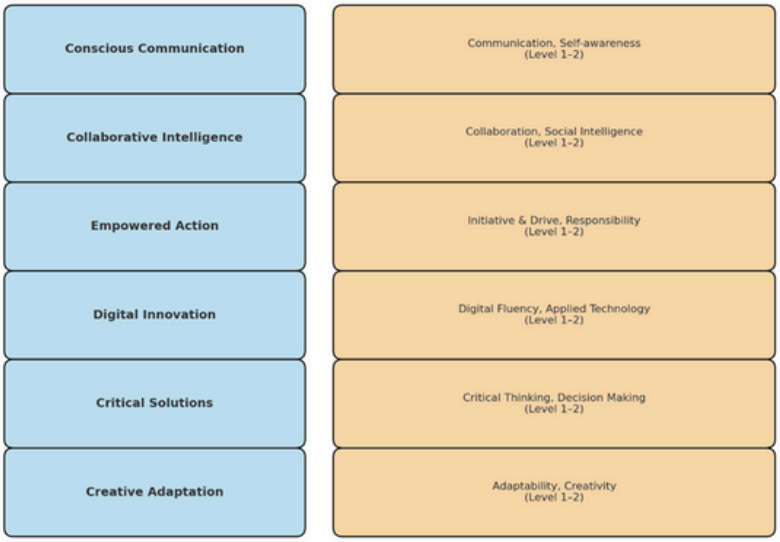
The pilot helped Concept Labs improve onboarding processes, strengthen internal coaching, and lay the groundwork for future internships and traineeships. Most importantly, it helped reframe early-stage talent as an opportunity not a risk.

Youth Engagement

A Structured Talent Journey

Talent Accelerate engaged 72 young people through multiple intakes, including school students, university students, and early career entrants. A strengths-based, immersive approach was used to foster clarity, capability, and confidence.

Talent Accelerate: Digital Badges Mapped to Human Capability Standards



Recruitment & Onboarding

Participants were sourced through schools, employment services, social media, and referrals. Each completed an onboarding assessment and participated in career construction interviews (CCI) to explore goals, values, and transferable skills.

Pre Placement Skills Learning

Before commencing placement, students undertook either a 4 or 8 week week skilling program that combined virtual and in person modules, resulting in a stackable suite of digital credentials. These credentials recognised by industry and aligned to core human capability standards covered areas such as professional communication, workplace behaviour, teamwork, initiative, and values exploration. This foundation enabled young people to apply their learning in real world settings and scale their skills with confidence and clarity.

Digital Badge Pathways

Digital Badge Credentials

Students earned up to 6 Human Capability Standard aligned digital credentials through project based learning. These badges measured real world capabilities such as collaboration, self-awareness, and reliability, mapped to national frameworks and backed by portfolio evidence.

Placement Matching

A hybrid system of human led and tool supported matching ensured students were placed in businesses where shared values and interest areas aligned with real business needs.

Coaching & Feedback

Students received ongoing coaching, 360° peer and self-assessment, and structured reflections before and during the placements. These touch points were critical in building personal agency and understanding how to articulate and apply their skills.

Case Study

"Having a young person in the program gave us the chance to see how they work in a real environment, a genuine 'try before you buy' opportunity.

At the same time, they weren't just observing they were building real skills, and could show evidence of what they were learning. It's a smart way to connect with emerging talent who are learning what's relevant, not just what's theoretical."

Lachie Smart
Smartline Medical

Smartline Medical, a local medical equipment manufacturer, hosted a first-year industrial design university student through the Talent Accelerate program. The student was embedded in the design and production team, where he worked closely with mentors to understand the full product lifecycle—from initial concept to fabrication and international distribution.

With structured mentoring and support, Declan progressed from observation to contribution, ultimately designing a custom part that was prototyped and approved for production. That component is now being shipped to medical facilities in China, demonstrating the real-world value and agency young people can bring when placed in purposeful roles.

Although Smartline was not in a position to offer employment at the time, Declan has since been exploring other opportunities within the Talent Accelerate network. The experience highlighted the importance of practical experience for emerging designers and the value of structured placements for businesses seeking innovative talent.

Smartline reflected that even short-term placements, when well-supported, can deliver meaningful outcomes for both the business and the young person—especially in sectors where fresh ideas and hands-on capability matter.

Key Learnings

The Talent Accelerate pilot created a testbed for how early stage talent development can succeed when it is truly co-designed.

The results revealed shared barriers, complementary motivations, and actionable strategies for both youth and employers.

Businesses

- Workforce capability challenges - Businesses reported ongoing difficulty in attracting early career talent with strong soft skills such as communication, initiative, and reliability. Many of the businesses expressed that traditional recruitment and university and apprentice pathways weren't delivering job ready candidates.
- Cultural readiness varied - Some businesses were new to taking on young people or had previously viewed placements as a compliance obligation. The program helped shift this mindset by framing placements as strategic workforce capability-building.
- Support was key: 1:1 coaching for the businesses, organisational tools and facilitated onboarding supported businesses to take practical steps toward long-term change. Feedback highlighted the importance of creating shared language and clarity around expectations.
- Emerging capability to host traineeships- For several businesses, participation in the pilot gave them the confidence to create structured internal pathways, including school-based or part-time traineeships, a shift from reactive hiring to proactive talent development.

Young People

- Diverse and motivated cohort - Included gap-year youth, neurodivergent participants, disengaged high schoolers, home-schoolers, and university students (many in their first or second year) looking for real-world experience not embedded in their education. Many participants were highly self-motivated, organised, and career-focused, contradicting common assumptions about young jobseekers.
- Barriers in traditional systems - School systems lacked flexibility for structured placements; educators unfamiliar with how to support offsite work-based learning. Young people did not find that in some cases university did not offer sufficient hands-on experience, leaving young people to seek external pathways.
- Program design resonance - Digital credentials, structured coaching, and job immersion experiences helped participants build self-belief, gain clarity on strengths, and see viable paths forward. Real-world tasks and feedback loops made learning more meaningful than abstract classroom content.

Recommendations

For Industry

- Adopt a skills capability first hiring model supported by job design tools and values-matching frameworks.
- Invest in early stage talent by offering micro-projects, short-term immersions, or shared placements with other businesses.
- Use SCARF, Function Mapping, and Matching Tools to integrate role flexibility and values into hiring pipelines.

For Education

- Introduce capability-based digital-credentials aligned to national frameworks and industry relevance.
- Partner with industry to co-create pathways beyond "traditional" jobs, using storytelling, projects, and reflective practice as a new way of offering work experience.
- Increase educator and parent awareness of evolving careers and talent development approaches.

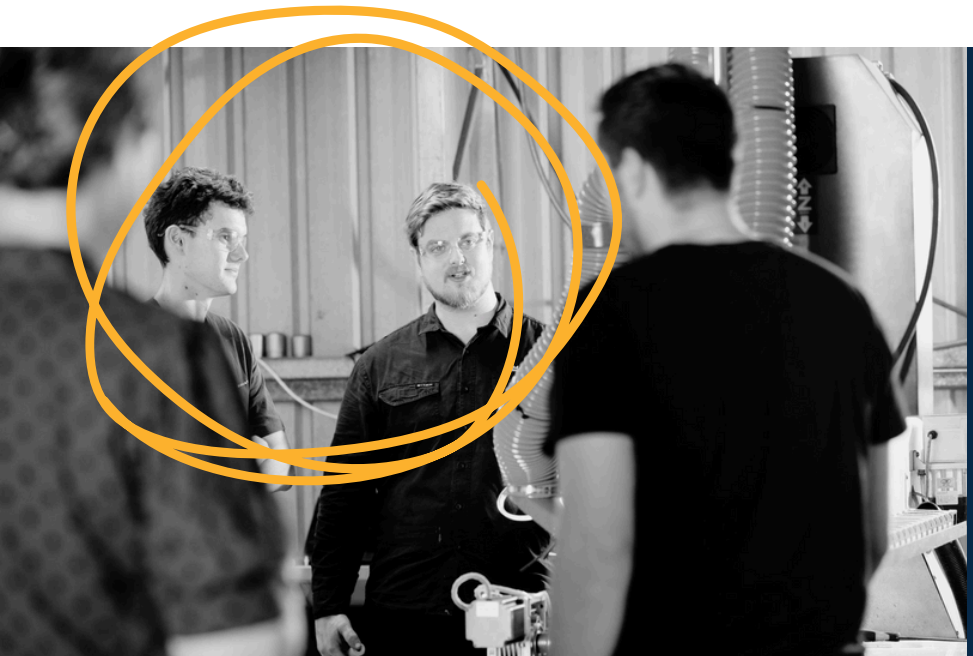
For Government

- Scale concordance-based matching platforms to regions via Local Jobs Programs.
- Invest in regional job redesign toolkits and industry upskilling initiatives.
- Fund dual capability-building programs (for businesses and young people) that enable future-ready workforce development.

"The pilot gave our members and industry a practical way to engage with emerging talent while helping shape the skills we know are critical in the workplace. It's rare to see a program that listens so closely to industry needs and delivers. This is the kind of partnership that helps build a stronger, more future-ready workforce."

Tim Kelly
MEFS

talent accelerate™



About Groei

Groei is an innovative education provider that builds future ready talent pathways by bringing education, industry, and community closer together. We specialise in co designing capability frameworks, creating digital credential ecosystems, and developing scalable, human centred tools that align people to purpose.

Through the Talent Accelerate pilot, we tested what's possible when early talent development is reframed as a collaborative opportunity one where young people are seen as capable contributors, and businesses are equipped with the tools to design meaningful roles.

Explore More: Tools & Talent Pathways
Businesses and industry can continue to access the full suite of:

- Job redesign templates
- Matching matrices
- Capability-aligned onboarding tools

via the Job Skills Connect site

If you'd like to explore:

- How to implement soft skill digital credentials in your industry sector, organisation or school
- Build a talent pipeline using soft skill frameworks
- Or co-create new pathways into work for young people

Please get in touch at tara@groei.com.au or your can find our more Talent Accelerate & groei below.

www.jobskillsconnect.com.au

www.groei.com.au

With Thanks to Our Partners

This pilot would not have been possible without the commitment of our funders, project team, young people, businesses, educators, and community leaders of the Sunshine Coast and Bundaberg regions who placed their trust in this pilot..

We extend our gratitude to all collaborators, including the businesses:

Concept Labs
Seajay Boats
Sugarland Animal Hospital
Queensland Computers
Haines Industries
Blackflag Brewing
Country Chef Bakery
Raider Targetry
Smartline Medical
Sunshine Coast Makerspace
The Fermentier
Electronic and Electrical Solutions
Your Mates Brewing
Zone RV

Education Partners

Government Support

Australian Government
Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Collaborators