

# 2023/24 Annual Report

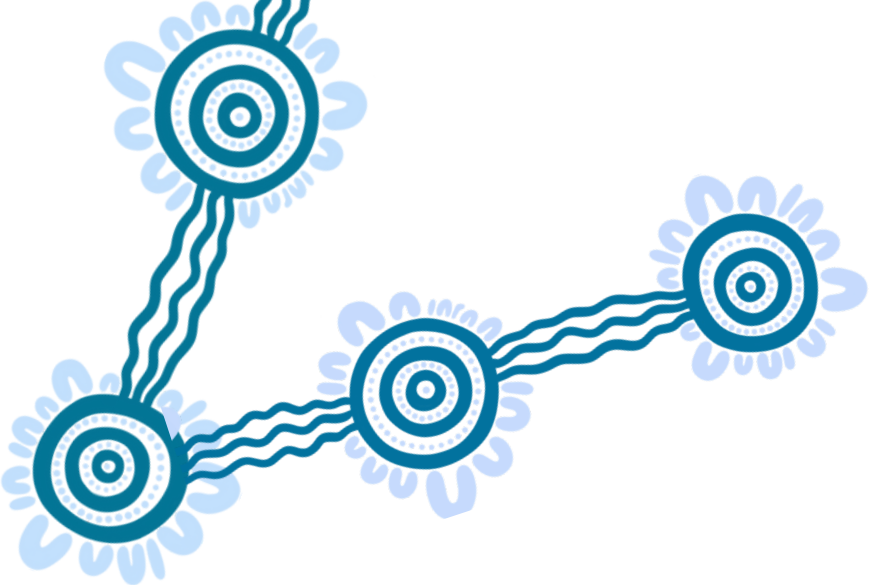
Creating *life-changing* opportunities for people and communities across regional NSW.





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## Acknowledgement of Country

Skillset would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Wiradjuri people of Bathurst, Dubbo, Mudgee, and Orange. We pay respect to the Elders past and present, and to the younger generations of the community who will be future leaders in years to come.



**Wahluu**  
Mount Panorama  
Bathurst



**Wambuul**  
Macquarie River  
Dubbo



**Gaanha-bula**  
Mount Canobolas  
Orange



**Gadjuri**  
Cudgegong River  
Mudgee





## About Skillset

Skillset was established in the Central West in 1982, originally known as Central West Group Apprentices (CWGA), to address the shortage of skilled tradespeople in the region.

Over four decades, Skillset has evolved into a leading regional not-for-profit organisation that supports the career journeys of local people through apprenticeship and traineeship services, skills development and mentoring programs, recruitment and labour hire services, and alternative education pathways via the Skillset Senior College.

**Skillset has enjoyed the invaluable membership of the following organisations since its inception:**



## Our Vision

To create life-changing opportunities for people and communities across regional NSW.

## Our Purpose

Creating and sustaining innovative and effective partnerships to generate employment opportunities through education and skills development for people across regional NSW.

## Our Values



Respect



Collaboration



Integrity



Helping Others



Professionalism



Community



### Rachael Evans

Completed a Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care with Warrumbungle Shire Council.





# Chairman's Message

David Cooke



Skillset Board Chairman, David Cooke, presenting Bathurst Regional Councillor, Robert Taylor, with the 2024 Skillset Partnership Award.

Skillset is such a great company with an important mission, and it's our mission that attracts all sorts of amazing people to it: whether they are government, customers, apprentices (and their parents), team members, senior leaders, or Board members. We are very fortunate to have a highly enthusiastic CEO and Senior Leadership Team that have truly transformed our workplace, and the seeds they've sown will bear much fruit in the years ahead.

From a governance perspective, the Board has driven a strategic shift in Director attainment. The Board, through the Corporate Governance Committee, is working closely with our Member Organisations, enabling nominations and appointments to be based on Board composition, diversity and skills, rather than representative entitlement. This enhanced governance framework aligns with the company's constitution and sets the foundation for excellence in Board succession for the future. This approach was extremely successful with the recruitment of four new Directors at last year's AGM that have fulfilled potential deficiencies in the Board's skills mix and will continue to play a pivotal role in the shape of Skillset's Boards in the future.

Business is complex and challenging, and Skillset is not immune. We must adapt and respond to the myriads of changes that are in play: whether it's government programs ceasing; changes to subsidies or incentives; economic pressures on host employers; cost of living pressures for apprentices; whatever the change, we need to observe, assess and respond. We must ensure our people are equipped and empowered to re-shape our business and strategy to meet the needs of our stakeholders and our regional communities. These principles apply equally to the Board - we need talented and passionate Directors that add value to the company with robust strategy development and risk management.

I would like to thank my fellow Directors for their service over the last year. I welcome the new Directors: Anna Fryer, Michelle Pryse Jones, Simon Quintner, and Darren Budworth, and express our appreciation for your new perspective and energy. I'd like to thank Graeme Hanger, Maree Statham, Craig Hort and Ian Tooke who all retired from the Board in 2023 and who have each served many years on the Skillset Board.

I would also like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of CEO Narelle Stocks, the Senior Leadership Team, and the entire Skillset team over the past year. I am proud to see our team's personal and organisational growth and resilience; working together to create the environment for all to be the best they can be.

**Whilst we might not have all the answers, our role is clear: to support our host employers, apprentices, and trainees as they navigate today's challenges. Creating life-changing opportunities for people and communities across regional NSW - that's what we're about.**

# Board of Directors



David Cooke



Jacqueline Woods



Reg Kidd



Alan Ward



Simone Corby



Michelle Pryse Jones



Simon Quintner



Darren Budworth



Anna Fryer





## CEO's Message

Narelle Stocks



It has been an incredibly rewarding first year as Skillset CEO. We concentrated on fostering a culture of growth and well-being within our organisation through the introduction of new People and Culture systems and a strategic restructure, which successfully reduced staff turnover by 11%.

Our focus on professional development, leadership training and upskilling opportunities has enhanced the workplace environment, reflecting our commitment to building a positive and supportive organisational culture to strengthen Skillset's ability to meet the evolving needs of the communities we support.

As a significant employer in the region, we currently employ 409 apprentices and trainees in our group apprenticeship program, 72 labour hire participants, and 21 permanent recruitment placements across Western NSW. Additionally, we engaged with 11,710 individuals across our various programs throughout the year. Our commitment to providing meaningful job opportunities and career growth for people in our region could not be achieved without the local businesses who place their trust in us each year - to these partners, I say a huge thank you for your confidence in Skillset and for sharing our vision.

I am grateful to our Board who give their time generously and whose expertise and support has been instrumental in guiding Skillset over the past year. Special thanks also to the new Senior Leadership team, who have forged strong bonds in a short time of working together, fuelled by a shared commitment to the organisation's vision and to authentic leadership. And of course, the entire Skillset team for their hard work and adaptability despite the challenging economic landscape, which resulted in program outcomes that have exceeded the expectations of our business and government partners; Awards and accolades recognising our innovation and industry best practice; and an exceptional financial performance - all of which demonstrated the strength, resilience, and adaptability of our organisation and its people.

**Moving into 2025, we are looking ahead with excitement to our relocation to our new head office in the Bathurst CBD. We want every employer and every person in the region seeking education, skills and employment to know who Skillset is, what we do and how we can help and we believe our new home and the associated expansion of the Skillset Senior College Campus will further enhance our ability to transform lives.**

## 2023/24 Highlights



The Skillset Management Team successfully completed the Authentic Leadership Program from Mills-Eaton Training

67%

of management roles are held by women



Skillset staff, Tyler Buckley and Amanda Heeley, with Paul Toole MP at the Bathurst Jobs Expo

128% ↑

increase in enquiries received

Winner!

Excellence in Group Training at the 2023 NSW/ACT Apprenticeship Employment Network Awards



82%

completion rate for apprenticeships and traineeships compared to an industry average of 52%

173% ↑

in enquiries from 15-21 year olds looking for career support

155% 

increase in revenue year on year of Land Works Projects



32% ↑

in enquiries from businesses looking to employ permanent employees

11% ↓

reduced staff turn over

11,710

individuals engaged





## Our Programs

Creating life-changing opportunities, one career step at a time.

Skillset services have been developed to support all stages of the career lifecycle.

# 193

enrolments in Youth Connect

# 169

commencements into  
Skillset Senior College in 2023

# 5035

females engaged through  
Connecting Women to Trades

# 493

individuals recruited



Youth Connect\* helps young people aged 15 - 21 who have disengaged from school or finished school to take the next step in employment or education.



Skillset offers alternative secondary education through its special assistance school, Skillset Senior College, catering to students who have faced barriers to their education.



The Connecting Women to Trades\* program encourages women to consider and explore trade careers, as well as gain practical experience via a work placement, apprenticeship or traineeship in a non-traditional trade.



Land Works gives young people the opportunity to gain experience and training, as well as develop employability skills whilst providing professional natural environment maintenance and project management services to local organisations and businesses.



Work Ready Workshops support High School students in understanding vocational education and training (VET) pathways.



### skillset APPRENTICE AND TRAINEE SERVICES

Skillset recruits, employs, mentors and manages apprentices and trainees on behalf of host organisations who provide important 'on the job' training across a range of trades and industries.



### skillset RECRUITMENT

Skillset offers end-to-end recruitment services which are tailored to the workforce requirements and goals of each client. Our services include permanent recruitment, labour hire and apprentices and trainees.



### skillset SCHOOL2TRADE

The School-Based Apprenticeship and Traineeships (SBATs) program places Year 10, 11 and 12 students with a host employer to complete an apprenticeship or traineeship whilst at school.



Skillset's UpSkill program aims to maximise the value of an organisation's workforce. UpSkill assists existing qualified workers to obtain additional skills and qualifications which gives them the opportunity to work across multiple trade competencies.



As the Employment Facilitator for Workforce Australia's Local Jobs Program\*, Skillset leads the Central West Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce to foster collaboration among stakeholders and providers, aiming to achieve skills and employment outcomes that align with local business needs.

### \*Funding Acknowledgements

- Connecting Women to Trades project is funded under the grant program by Trade Pathways Program - Training Services NSW.
- Youth Connect is a Get Back in the Game program funded by the NSW Department of Education.
- Workforce Australia Local Jobs is funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.





## Program Highlights

# Joubert's Skillset Journey

Imagine the challenges a teenager would face when moving from South Africa to Bathurst. Now imagine they found a nurturing school that offered alternative secondary education that could support them and set them on a life-changing journey of learning and employment.

That story is the story of Joubert Du Plessis.

He arrived at **Skillset Senior College's** Bathurst Campus in 2018 and quickly earned the respect of his peers and teachers.

He finished his HSC in 2020 and reached out to **Skillset's Youth Connect** team to explore options for further education and employment.

The team helped Joubert secure an apprenticeship with Scott Camery Welding and Fabrication in Orange. The long commute soon became difficult to maintain and Joubert reconnected with the **Skillset Career Development** team and discovered an apprenticeship opportunity at Midstate Freight where he is currently pursuing a **Certificate III in Heavy Commercial Vehicle Mechanical Technology**.

Joubert's career progression is a celebrated 'full circle moment' for Skillset and a credit to Joubert's dedication to his career journey, a fact recognised in his receipt of the **2024 Skillset Senior College Achievement Award**.



Head of Skillset Senior College, Abbey Barrett with Joubert Du Plessis and Host Employer Michael Winwood-Smith of Midstate Freight.

*"From the very beginning Joubert earned respect and admiration from both students and staff. Joubert is the type of student whose name, when mentioned, prompts fond memories from the staff."*

Abbey Barrett  
Head of Skillset Senior College



## New Program

### Work Ready Workshops

Skillset had an amazing opportunity to connect with hundreds of high school students this financial year after launching Work Ready Workshops in April 2024.

Designed to support students in understanding vocational education and training (VET) pathways, the workshops focused on building essential skills such as resume writing, interview techniques and applying for jobs.

The workshops also provided Skillset with the opportunity to partner with the Office for Regional Youth (ORY), and Training Services NSW (TSNSW) Regional Industry and Educational Partnership (RIEP) officers to address this career development need.

Work Ready Workshops were very well received by both students and school staff with additional sessions requested by multiple schools.

*"It was very good, and a good way to learn how to get a job or start a resume."*

*"Very good at building my confidence."*

*"Was very helpful and learnt a lot and will use Skillset later in life."*



# 32

workshops delivered

# 667

student participants

# 95%

of students would recommend the workshop to their peers!





## Program Highlights

### Apprentice and Trainee Services

The heartbeat of Skillset remains to support businesses to meet their skills needs in a cost-effective way. The delivery of apprentice and trainee services as a Group Training Organisation (GTO) remain core to that mission.

Whilst maintaining and building partnerships with key companies in the region, 2023-24 saw Skillset focus efforts to reconnect with **small business** to help them find the right people they need to address their skills shortages.

Our **'Pledge an Apprentice'** marketing campaign raised the profile of Skillset services across the region and was instrumental in leading to a 128% increase in enquiries during the financial year.

In addition, our **government-funded programs**, like Youth Connect, Connecting Women to Trades and Work Ready Workshops played a critical role in connecting job seekers to the apprenticeship and traineeships being offered by our host employers.

High completion rates of apprenticeships and traineeships continue to be a feature of Skillset's success, a fact recognised at an industry level in the remarkable receipt of the NSW/ACT peak award in the sector, the Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN)'s Excellence in Group Training Award.

The business is working hard to navigate changes to NSW GTO funding models and business uncertainty within the region, with plans for growth in certain areas within our geographical footprint and a redesign of the services Skillset offers to meet the changing needs of our business.



2023 AEN Apprentice of the Year and Skillset apprentice, Joshua Winter, with Manager - Workforce Programs, Ben Ruddy, and Host Employer, David Forbes, Thales Business Improvement Manager.

## Joshua's Skillset Journey

Driven by a passion for rifle design and defence equipment, Joshua Winter convinced his parents that his youth was no barrier to moving over 800km from their Melbourne home to undertake a Certificate IV in Engineering with Lithgow-based defence contractor Thales Australia.

After viewing Joshua's school academic report and encountering his persistence and enthusiasm, Thales supervisor, David Forbes, agreed to take him on in 2019, later saying; *"Josh has not disappointed, his accolades and achievements over the past 4 years are to a standard that very few apprentices achieve."*

Despite COVID restrictions limiting his visits to family, Joshua was determined to succeed in his apprenticeship, workplace and making meaningful connections in his new community.

The youngster demonstrated a dedication to skill development, keeping on top of industry trends, and advocating for safe work practices in a manner defying his years.

Skillset, in partnership with Thales, has been exceptionally proud to be able to offer this life-changing opportunity to Joshua and the recognition he received as the 2023 NSW/ACT Apprentice of the Year for the Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN).

**THALES** ← **skillset** APPRENTICE AND TRAINEE SERVICES

*"The quality of my training has been exceptional, with a focus on hands-on learning, practical applications, and a positive environment that encourages open collaboration from all parties involved including Skillset, TAFE and Thales."*

Joshua Winter

130

commencements

84

completions

12%

new business

88%

repeat business

40%

long-standing relationships





## Our Partnerships

Founded through partnerships of local Councils and business chambers, ***Skillset exists to generate life-changing opportunities through innovative and effective partnerships***, something the business has only deepened and expanded in 2023/24.

We've seen these partnerships strengthened with local government partners, such as Bathurst Regional Council who, through a shared commitment to skills development and employment opportunities, expanded its engagement of Skillset services beyond apprenticeships and traineeships, contracting Land Works to undertake significant projects across the region.

Our career development partnerships with representatives from Training Services NSW, MEGT and TAFE NSW continue to be key **collaborative relationships** for the company, as our shared commitment to encouraging young people in particular to explore trade pathways is critical to the region's skills needs of the future.

Relationships also play a key role in increasing Skillset's presence in the community and provide valuable connections for the individuals and businesses we support. **Sponsoring** the Orange, Bathurst and Western NSW Business Awards served to strengthen our partnerships with local business chambers and at the same time highlighted the achievements of host employers, apprentices and trainees.

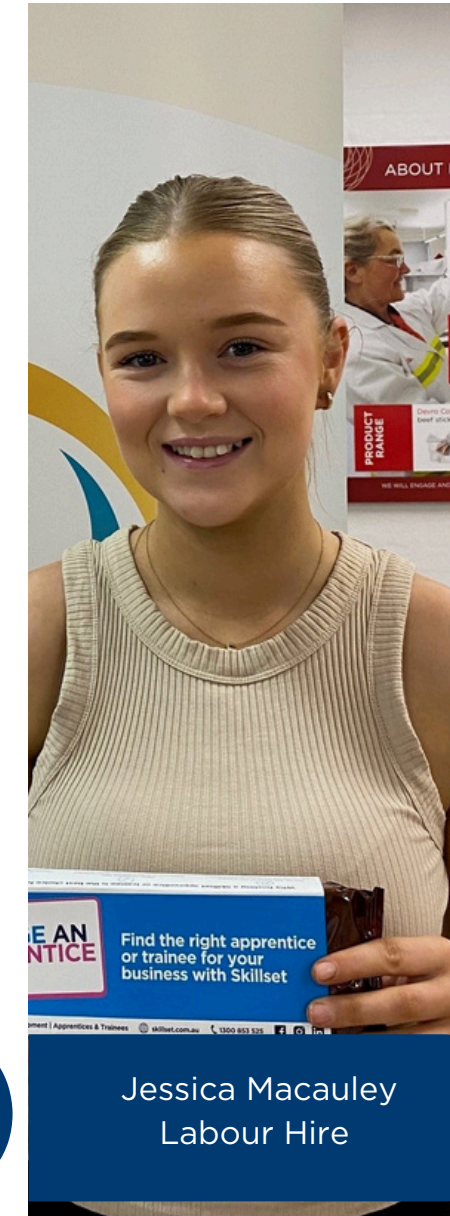
Connections developed through **our programs**, including Workforce Australia's Local Jobs program, Youth Connect and our Apprentice and Trainee Services have also seen a growth in demand for a range of Skillset services from large employers, as showcased by our 'Partnership Highlights' with Devro, Newmont Cadia Valley Operations and Bathurst Regional Council.



Monique Wright  
Electrical Apprentice



Byron Waldron  
Labour Hire



Jessica Macauley  
Labour Hire

## Partnership Highlights



Skillset has developed a strong, long-standing partnership with Devro, supporting their workforce needs through apprenticeships, traineeships, and labour hire services. Over the years, this collaboration has grown to include hosting apprentices in electrical and mechanical engineering, as well as providing IT, packing, process workers, and administration staff via our labour hire services. This partnership has been instrumental in developing skilled tradespeople while fulfilling Devro's production needs.



Neville Blandford, receiving the  
2024 Skillset Large Host  
Employer of the Year Award on behalf of Devro.

***"We are proud of our close working relationship with Skillset, which allows us to support apprentices in achieving their long-term career goals, as well as providing production staff for manufacturing areas of the plant. Our apprentice programme involves mentorship, structured training, clear communications, and continuous feedback. By supporting the young trades people in the plant, from apprenticeship to fully qualified trades people, Devro is able to meet the needs in our production facility as well as support future generations to develop their skills and grow within the company."***

Neville Blandford, Devro Human Resources Business Partner - ANZ & APAC





## Partnership Highlights

### Newmont Cadia Valley Operations

Skillset Land Works has developed a **strong partnership with Newmont Cadia Valley Operations** over the past year, supporting their environmental management projects at the Cadia Valley site. Our collaboration has evolved from small landscaping projects around office buildings to large-scale tree planting initiatives.

Our Land Works Crew has contributed to various efforts, including revegetation, landscaping the Cadia site entrance, and harvesting native seed for propagation at regional offset sites. **This partnership** has provided valuable opportunities for our crew to enhance their skills, especially for two Conservation & Ecosystem Management trainees gaining hands-on experience in a live mine environment.

One trainee expressed his enthusiasm for the work, stating he is **"having an absolute blast"** during his traineeship.

We appreciate Newmont's **support** in providing these invaluable experiences and look forward to continuing to grow our partnership in the future.



# 74

Land Works  
projects  
completed

### Bathurst Regional Council



Skillset Land Works has **partnered with Bathurst Regional Council** to support community development and environmental projects. Over the past year, this partnership has led to the completion of **68 projects** for Bathurst Regional Council that positively impact our local area.

Projects Include:

- Planting and construction of walking tracks, picnic shelters and 1.9 kilometres of log barriers at Windy 1100 Residential Estate.
- Kelso Highway mowing and landscape maintenance.
- Landscaping Bathurst Animal Rehoming Centre.

Skillset also supports Bathurst Regional Council with labour hire services, **helping individuals** transition from temporary roles to permanent positions and apprenticeships.

**This partnership**, established since Bathurst Regional Council's founding membership in 1982, reflects our ongoing collaboration to achieve shared community goals.







## Partnership Highlights

### Workforce Australia

Local Jobs

Workforce Australia, Local Jobs Central West works with local communities, training providers, businesses, industry, and jobseekers to implement tailored solutions. Collaboration is key to delivering place-based initiatives that meet local needs, such as pre-employment programs, careers expos, and digital literacy training.

#### Nu-Rock Pre-employment Program

Through a close collaboration with Nu-Rock, eight participants were trained, with five gaining employment at their new Lithgow facility, which produces emission-free construction bricks from fly ash.



#### Cox's River Road Pre-employment Program

This partnership with Ertech and Ineco facilitated a pre-employment program, achieving a 100% completion rate. All five participants secured labouring roles.



#### Essentials Days

In partnership with Legal Aid, Service NSW, and local health and employment services, three Essentials Days in Orange, Mudgee, and Condobolin provided critical support to participants, enhancing access to vital community resources.

These initiatives help communities tackle workforce challenges and create clear pathways to employment.

#### Health Care and Social Assistance Video Project

Working with aged care, disability, homecare, and youth service providers, this project produced videos showcasing why regional NSW is a great place to work in the care sector. The videos help local organisations attract talent and promote vacancies.



#### Bathurst Careers Expo and Orange Careers and Trades Experience

Local Jobs, in partnership with Bathurst Regional Council and Training Services NSW, ran the Jobs Board to connect attendees with current vacancies, creating direct pathways to employment.



#### Skills for Life Local Recovery Fund Program

Equips First Nations participants with essential employability skills and specialised training. The program creates clear pathways to employment while fostering confidence, self-worth, and a sense of belonging through cultural connection and inclusivity.

#### Bathurst

- Total Referrals: 35
- Total Commencements: 18
- 100% Completion rate
- 52% Securing employment



#### Digital Ready Program

The Digital Ready program empowers long-term unemployed job seekers by enhancing their digital literacy and confidence.

#### Forbes, Mudgee, Cowra, Parkes

- Total Referrals: 104
- Total Commencements: 57
- 94% Completion rate
- 60% Securing employment



#### Digital Walkabout Program

The Digital Walkabout program combines cultural immersion with digital skills training, fostering community and belonging.

#### Peak Hill, Condobolin

- Total Referrals: 54
- Total Commencements: 31
- 74% Completion rate
- 32% Securing employment





## Our Performance

When it comes to changing lives, our 2023/24 performance has once again been solid. With a 16% increase in the number of apprentices and trainees employed, countless students equipped through Work Ready Workshops and Jobs Expos, and many more impacted through our other programs.

The economic climate in which we achieved these results, however, has been nothing less than challenging. Businesses have been under pressure feeling the effects of rising prices, higher interest rates, and low unemployment. There have also been changes to incentive programs, with a reduction in overall funding for employing apprentices and trainees and a shift in focus to priority wage areas within the clean energy sector.

Despite these challenges, Skillset has delivered a surplus after focusing on operational cost savings and a review of investment strategies, a fantastic testament to the team's adaptability and resilience.

### People

This year we prioritised workforce development, collaboration, and personal growth for our staff, doubling our expenditure on professional development year-on-year. A strategic restructure not only reintroduced the critical People & Culture and Business Services functions but also integrated the recruitment team within our GTO team to create process synergies and ultimately improve services for our clients.

Through learning initiatives and leadership opportunities, we've built a strong foundation for sustainable growth and the well-being of the regional communities we serve.

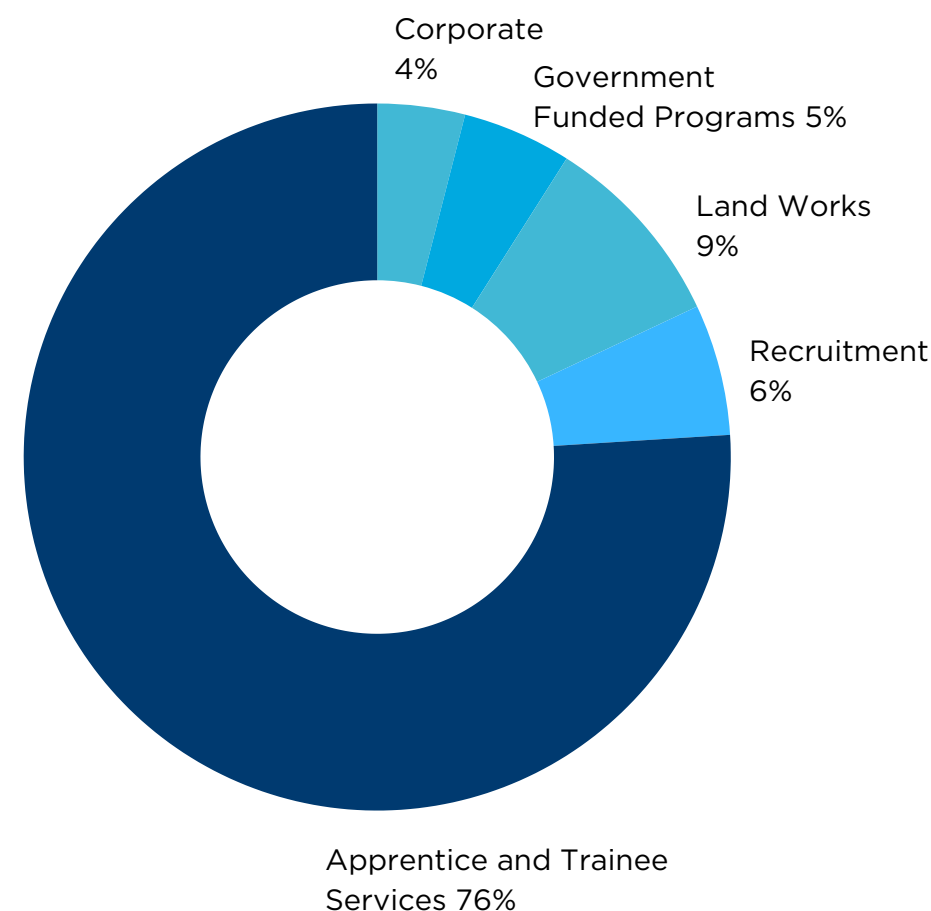
### Technology

**Right Fit for Risk Cyber Security Accreditation**



We have made significant investments in upgrading our technology infrastructure this year, including achieving accreditation for the Australian Government's Right Fit for Risk (RFFR) framework, demonstrating our commitment to data security and operational excellence. These improvements ensure secure, integrated and efficient systems that better support our operations.

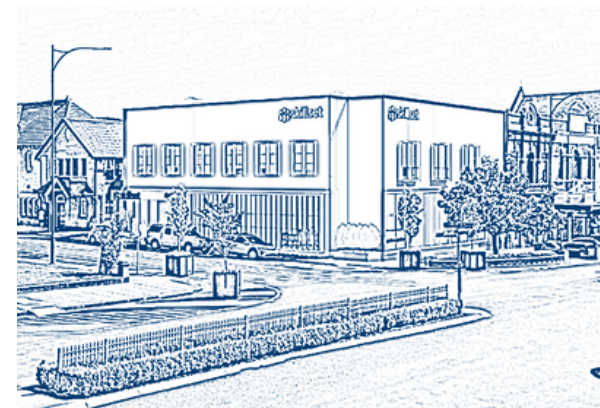
### Revenue



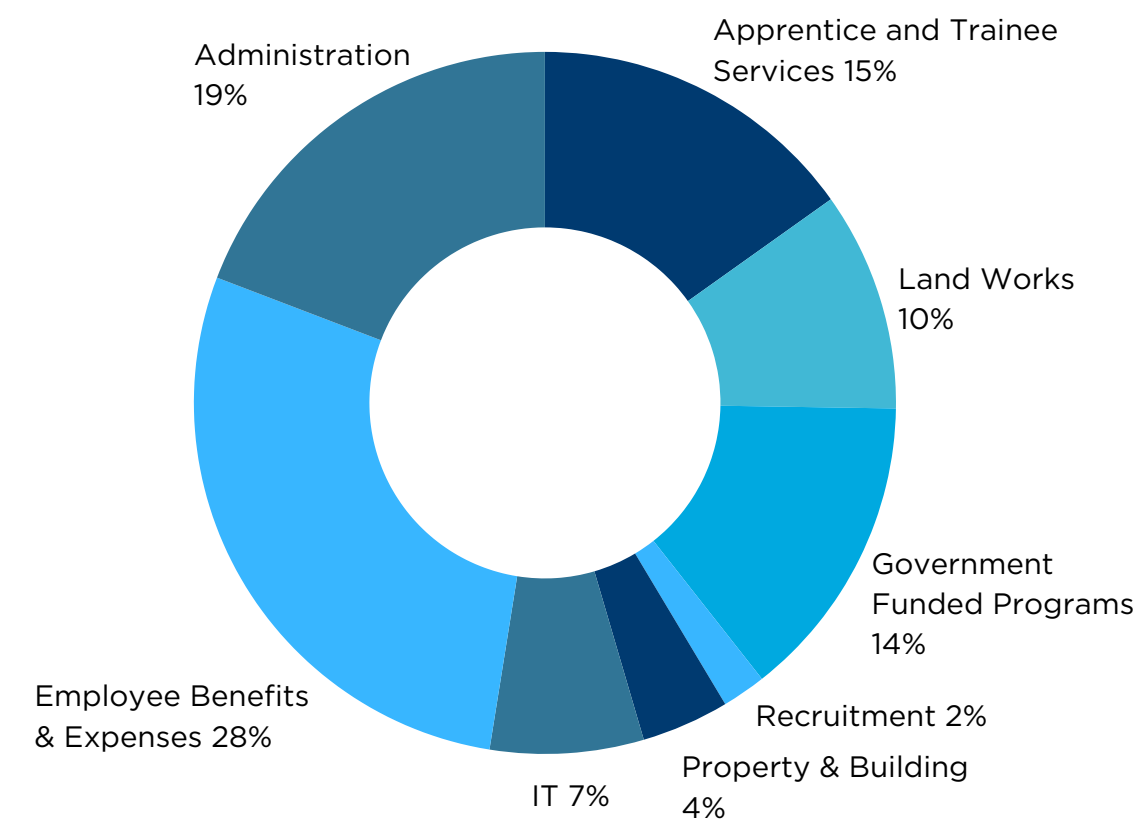
### Infrastructure

Having invested significantly in a new head office in the Bathurst CBD, this year has been focused on planning, and we are excited to create a remarkable workplace and lift our profile and connection with the business community even further when we relocate in 2025.

Our move will also enable Skillset Senior College to take over the full Flannery Centre premises to support their expansion and growth strategy from 2025 into the future.



### Expenses







Creating *life-changing* opportunities for people and communities across regional NSW.



## Office Locations

### Bathurst

341 Havannah Street  
Bathurst NSW 2795

### Orange

2/150 Lords Place  
Orange NSW 2800

### Dubbo

34A Victoria Street  
Dubbo NSW 2830

### Mudgee

48 Market Street  
Mudgee NSW 2850



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