Personal Services Workforce Planning Update 2026

SaCSA
Service and Creative Skills Australia





About SaCSA

Service and Creative Skills Australia (SaCSA) is an industry-owned, industry-led Jobs and Skills Council funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. We offer workforce planning, guidance and advocacy for the arts, personal services, retail, tourism and hospitality industries.

Working within a tripartite approach, SaCSA is the critical link between industry stakeholders, government and unions to strengthen Australia's vocational education and training sector and deliver stronger outcomes for employers, workers, learners, trainers and educators.

As the leader in workforce development initiatives for our industries, SaCSA collaborates with industry to identify and articulate current and future employment trends and develops solutions that best serve those needs.

Acknowledgements

SaCSA extends its gratitude to the industry, union and government representatives who provided their help in formulating our Personal Services Workforce Planning Update, 2026.

We also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the Country, including lands and waters, where we work and live.

We acknowledge the valued partnership of the Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, whose funding supports SaCSA's role as a Jobs and Skills Council.

Disclaimer

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CEO foreword

I am pleased to present SaCSA's Personal Services Workforce Planning Update 2026 (Workforce Plan). This report builds on our previous workforce planning and reflects a maturing evidence base about the opportunities and challenges shaping the sector.

Personal services brings together diverse industries, including hairdressing and barbering, beauty, floristry and funeral services. Across these industries, skilled workers combine technical capability, creativity and personal connection to deliver services to communities throughout Australia.

The outlook is one of both growth and change. Employment and business activity have increased, while shortages and early career retention remain challenges in parts of the sector. Rising costs, growing self-employment and changing business models are also influencing how businesses employ, train and develop workers. The formal training pipeline remains under pressure, with additional barriers to training access in regional and remote areas.

Technology is adding another dimension to this change. Artificial intelligence, digital systems and automation are reshaping business operations and service delivery. Stakeholder insights highlight different technology needs across subsectors, alongside the continued importance of practical skills, creativity, professional judgement and human relationships.

These changes mean workforce planning cannot focus on shortages alone. We need to understand how people enter personal services, build their skills and careers, and what influences whether they stay or leave. We also need to consider how training and employment pathways can adapt to different ways of working.

This is where SaCSA's role continues to evolve.

SaCSA's work is moving from identifying workforce challenges to deepening the evidence and developing targeted responses. Research into workforce shortages, career journey mapping, qualification reviews and analysis of workforce capability are helping us connect industry priorities with practical action across hairdressing and barbering, beauty, floristry and funeral services.

We are also making workforce evidence more accessible. SaCSA's interactive Data Dashboard brings together data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Jobs and Skills Australia and other sources. It provides insights into the industries, occupations and qualifications within our remit to support evidence-based decision-making by industry, educators, policymakers and researchers.

As the Jobs and Skills Council for personal services, SaCSA brings together industry, unions, training providers, learners and government to ensure training remains relevant and responsive. Industry feedback makes clear that this is about more than qualification content. Practical learning, training delivery, workplace readiness and employers' capacity to supervise and mentor workers all matter. Apprenticeships remain central in hairdressing and barbering, while other subsectors rely on different combinations of formal training and workplace development.

This Workforce Plan brings together labour market and vocational education and training data, and the experiences and insights of stakeholders. Their contribution helps us look beyond individual indicators and understand how workforce supply, skills, retention, working conditions and business pressures interact. It also ensures our priorities reflect what people are experiencing in workplaces and communities.

The evidence points to stronger connections between schools and industry, clearer career pathways, accessible and relevant training, and support for workers to develop and remain in the sector. No single response will suit every subsector or business model.

Workforce planning is therefore not a once-a-year exercise. It is an ongoing cycle of listening, analysing, testing and responding. The findings in this Workforce Plan will continue to inform SaCSA's workforce projects, training product development, industry stewardship and advice to government.

I thank the employers, workers, unions, industry associations, education and training providers, government representatives and other stakeholders who have shared their expertise and experience. Your contribution keeps our work grounded in the realities of personal services.

By continuing to work together, we can strengthen pathways into and through personal services and build a skilled, adaptable and sustainable workforce.

Natalie Turmine
CEO

About the Workforce Planning Update

Workforce planning is a central part of SaCSA's role in understanding and responding to the workforce and skills needs of the sectors SaCSA serves. It brings together industry experience, stakeholder insights and data to build a clear picture of what is happening now, what is changing and where action can make a difference.

This Workforce Plan builds on SaCSA's previous workforce planning work and reflects what we have learned through ongoing engagement with employers, workers, unions, industry associations, education and training providers, government and other stakeholders. Their perspectives help us and our industry leaders understand workforce challenges in context and identify opportunities that are practical and grounded in the realities of the sector.

SaCSA combines these insights with economic, labour market and vocational education and training data to identify current and emerging trends, test what we are hearing from industry and highlight areas where further research, collaboration or action may be needed. The Workforce Plan considers both immediate workforce pressures and the longer-term forces shaping the sector, including changing skills needs, technology, workforce participation and broader economic and policy settings.

Importantly, the Workforce Plan connects insight with action. Its findings help shape SaCSA's projects, training product development, industry stewardship and advice to government, while providing a shared evidence base for continued collaboration with industry and our stakeholders.

SaCSA's engagement across Australia

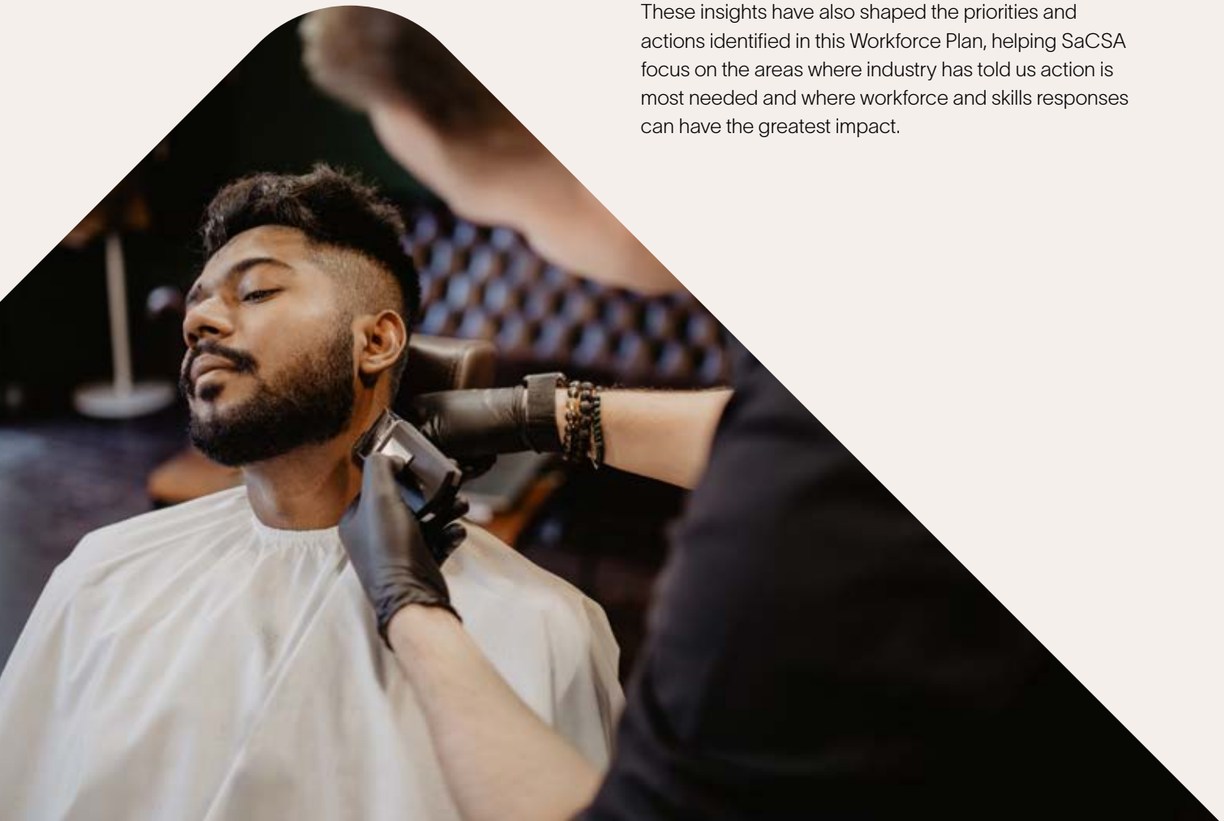
SaCSA's workforce planning is grounded in extensive and ongoing engagement with stakeholders across Australia. Over the course of the past year, SaCSA engaged with more than 4,100 stakeholders across every state and territory, bringing together a broad range of voices, experiences and perspectives from across the industries we represent.

Our engagement reaches metropolitan, regional and remote communities and includes large, medium and small employers, workers, unions, industry associations and peak bodies, education and training providers, learners, government representatives and other Jobs and Skills Councils. SaCSA also seeks to ensure that perspectives that may be underrepresented in traditional consultation processes are heard, including First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people with disability, people in regional and remote Australia, and other priority cohorts relevant to our industries.

Engagement takes place throughout the year and through multiple channels, including industry events, roundtables, workshops, webinars, surveys and conferences, as well as SaCSA's Strategic Workforce Advisory Groups, technical committees and project reference groups. This combination of broad engagement and more focused consultation enables SaCSA to hear directly from industry, explore issues in depth and understand how workforce experiences and challenges differ across occupations, locations, business types and workforce cohorts.

Stakeholder voices, insights and perspectives are embedded throughout SaCSA's work and have directly shaped the development of this Workforce Plan. Workforce data and research have been tested against the experiences of industry, and the workforce challenges identified in this plan have been discussed and validated through stakeholder engagement. This process helps ensure that the issues presented are not considered through data alone, but reflect the experiences, priorities and concerns of the people and organisations working across the industry.

These insights have also shaped the priorities and actions identified in this Workforce Plan, helping SaCSA focus on the areas where industry has told us action is most needed and where workforce and skills responses can have the greatest impact.



Defining the personal services workforce

The personal services sector in Australia is characterised by a diverse workforce operating across a range of subsectors, including hairdressing, barbering, beauty services, floristry and funeral services. SaCSA uses the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification, together with relevant occupation and training package classifications, to define the sector within our remit.

The sector covers a wide range of activities, including hair cutting, hair colouring, styling and treatment, beauty product sales and services, floral design and arranging, and funeral and memorial services, including cemetery and crematorium operations. It also includes other subsectors such as cosmetic tattooing, skin services, religious assistants, sex work and rental services. A full list of industries and occupations included in this Workforce Plan is provided in Appendix A.

Important data notes

Data currency

Unless otherwise stated, the data presented in this Workforce Plan reflects the latest available information as of September 2026.

2021 Census data

The 2021 Census was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when employment across the personal services sector was significantly disrupted. As a result, Census-based figures may not reflect typical workforce conditions. This should be considered when analysing workforce trends or informing decisions.

Executive summary

Employment across personal services is expected to grow over the longer term, although the outlook varies considerably across subsectors and occupations. Employment reached approximately 313,300 workers in February 2026, up around 8% from a year earlier.[1]

Longer-term projections indicate employment will reach nearly 314,000, workers by May 2035, representing growth of approximately 9.5% from May 2025.[2] The number of personal services businesses has also continued to increase.[3] Meeting future workforce needs will therefore depend on both a reliable pipeline of skilled workers and stronger retention of the existing workforce.

Workforce pressures remain concentrated in particular occupations. Hairdressers, barbers, beauty therapists and dermal therapists were assessed as being in national shortage in 2026.[4] Education and training gaps were identified as key drivers of shortages for hairdressers and beauty therapists, indicating that the training system is not producing a sufficient supply of qualified workers to meet labour market demand. Retention also remains a challenge, with fewer than half of new entrants remaining in hairdressing, beauty therapy and floristry three years after entering these occupations.[5] Employers also show a strong preference for experienced workers. Around 95% of job postings examined specify some prior experience and almost 40% require at least 3 years.[6]

These workforce pressures are occurring within a challenging operating environment. Higher labour and operating costs, cost-of-living pressures and weaker business confidence may constrain businesses' capacity to recruit, train and retain workers.[7] Online recruitment activity was above historical benchmarks for some occupations but slightly below typical levels for hairdressers and beauty therapists, despite both being in national shortage.[8] This highlights that workforce pressures are shaped by recruitment demand, retention, training access, employer capacity and changing business models.

The training pipeline is also under pressure. Personal services qualification enrolments fell by 4% to 42,895 in 2025, while completions declined by 5% to 14,875, with much of the fall in enrolments concentrated in Certificate III in Hairdressing.[9]

Although apprenticeship and traineeship commencements increased slightly in 2025, completions fell by 7%.[10] These mixed outcomes highlight the importance of not only attracting learners into training, but also supporting completion, practical workplace learning and progression into employment.

At the same time, the skills required across personal services are changing. Artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies are increasingly influencing administrative, information-based and customer-facing tasks. Across the occupations examined, the potential for AI to augment workers was consistently higher than the potential for automation, suggesting that technology is more likely to change how work is performed than replace entire roles.[11] Practical skills, interpersonal interaction and professional judgement remain central to service delivery. Training and workforce development will need to keep pace with emerging technology while continuing to build the technical, creative, interpersonal and business capabilities required across the sector.

These pressures point to 5 interconnected workforce priorities for personal services:

- strengthen workforce supply, attraction and retention
- build clearer career pathways and progression opportunities
- improve the relevance, accessibility and workplace alignment of training
- support sustainable apprenticeship and traineeship pathways where they are an important route into the workforce
- strengthen school-to-work transitions and career awareness.

While these priorities are shared across personal services, their causes and implications differ between subsectors.

SaCSA will continue to work with industry, government, unions and the vocational education and training sector to strengthen the evidence base, improve career and training pathways, develop responsive training products and identify practical responses to persistent and emerging workforce issues.

Explore more workforce data and detailed industry, occupation and qualification insights online.

SaCSA's interactive Data Dashboard brings together data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Jobs and Skills Australia and industry reports. Explore workforce trends, occupations, qualifications and skills data across SaCSA's sectors to support evidence-based workforce planning and decision-making.

Scan the QR code to explore the SaCSA Data Dashboard.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average).
2 Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035.
3 ABS, *Count of Australian Businesses, including entries and exits*, June 2025.
4 JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2025.
5 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project*.
6 Lightcast, *Labour Insights*, job postings for hairdressers, florists, funeral workers, beauty therapists, and ministers of religion. Based on approximately 2,600 job postings. Time period 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026.
7 National Australia Bank (NAB), *Quarterly Business Survey*, Q2 2026; ABS, Business Conditions and Sentiments, June 2026.
8 JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index (IVI),2026 ; ABS, Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026
9 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity program completions, 2025
10 NCVER, *Apprentices and Trainees*, December 2025
11 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills*, August 2025.

At a glance

Hairdressing and barbering

Hairdressers and barbers provide a broad range of technical hair services, product advice and personalised client experiences. The subsector is dominated by very small businesses, averaging around four workers per business. Salons and barbershops often play an important role in local communities. Apprenticeships remain a core entry pathway, although growing self-employment and chair rental business models may reduce employers' capacity to take on and supervise apprentices.

Headline indicators

Employment and outlook	**Size:** 69,110 employed in February 2026[a] **Projected employment:** 68,500 in May 2035, with 5.77% growth from May 2025[b]
Online recruitment activity indicator	**Hairdressers:** slightly below the pre-COVID benchmark in the 12 months to February 2026[c]
Occupational shortage	**Hairdressers and barbers:** national shortage in both 2025 and 2026[d]
VET training (VET)[e]	**Certificate II in Salon Assistant:** 6,075 enrolments in 2025, up 3% from 2024; 2,520 completions in 2025, up 9% from 2024 **Certificate III in Hairdressing:** 10,387 enrolments in 2025, down 10% from 2024; 2,550 completions in 2025, down by 13% from 2024 **Certificate III in Barbering:** 2,445 enrolments in 2025, down 11% from 2024; 760 completions in 2025, down 28% from 2024

77.2%[a] Female share

37[a] Median age

2.3%[f] First Nations share

18.8%[g] Proportion with disability

32%[a] Proportion born overseas

a ABS *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026. (4-quarter average). Includes both hairdressers and barbers.
b JJSA), *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035. In May 2025, employment was 65,300.
c JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index, 2026; ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table EQ08, 2026.*
d JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.
e National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Total VET Activity (TVA), Program Enrolments and Completions,* 2025.
f ABS, *Census of Population and Housing*, 2021.
g ABS, *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers*, 2022.

Beauty

Beauty services combine practical treatments with client consultation and product advice. The industry has become increasingly specialised. Businesses and workers often focusing on areas such as nails, lashes and brows, skin treatments and hair removal, rather than working across the full scope of traditional beauty therapy. This specialisation, alongside salon-based and freelance work and changing business models, is influencing the shape of the workforce, training opportunities and skill needs.

Headline indicators

Employment and outlook	**Size:** 61,900 employed in February 2026[a]
Online recruitment activity Indicator	**Beauty therapists:** slightly below the pre-COVID benchmark in the 12 months to February 2026[b]
Occupational shortage	**Beauty therapists and dermal therapists:** national shortage in both 2025 and 2026[c]
VET training[d]	**Certificate III in Beauty Services:** 7,650 enrolments in 2025, relatively unchanged from 2024; 2,190 completions in 2025, down 2% from 2024 **Certificate II in Salon Assistant:** 6,075 enrolments in 2025, up 3% from 2024; 2,520 completions in 2025, up 9% from 2024 **Diploma of Beauty Therapy:** 4,875 enrolments in 2025, down 8% from 2024; 2,230 completions in 2025, down 12% from 2024

90.9%[e] Female share

33[e] Median age

0.7%[e,f] Proportion requiring assistance with core activities

1.6%[e] First Nations share

a ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026. (4-quarter average). Apportioned across occupations using 2021 Census data.
b JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index, 2026*; *ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table EQ08, 2026.*
c JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.
d NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments,* 2025; NCVER, *Total VET Activity program completions,* 2025
e ABS, *Census of Population and Housing*, 2021.
f Note: Defined as the number of people requiring assistance with self-care, mobility or communication due to a long-term health condition, disability (lasting 6 months or more) or old age.

Floristry

Florists combine creative and technical skills to design and produce floral products for a range of customers and occasions. The subsector also requires strong customer service and increasingly business, digital and e-commerce skills. Qualifications extend from Certificate III to Diploma level.

Headline indicators

Employment and outlook	**Size:** 4,870 employed in February 2026[a] **Projected employment:** 6,200 in May 2035, with 5.1% growth from May 2025[b]
Online recruitment activity indicator	**Florists:** slightly above the pre-COVID benchmark in the 12 months to February 2026[c]
Occupational shortage	**Florists:** not assessed as being in shortage in both 2025 and 2026.
VET training (VET)[e]	**Certificate II in Floristry (Assistant):** 285 enrolments in 2025, down from 11% from 2024; 120 completions in 2025, down 29% from 2024 **Certificate III in Floristry:** 1,595 enrolments in 2025, down 5% from 2024; 705 completions in 2025, down 7% from 2024 **Certificate IV in Floristry:** 70 enrolments in 2025, unchanged from 2024; 40 completions in 2025, unchanged from 2024

86.9%[a] Female share

40[a] Median age

1.2%[f] First Nations share

1.1%[f,g] Proportion requiring assistance with core activities

35.5%[a] Proportion born overseas

a ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026. (4-quarter average).
b JSA, *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035.
c JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.
e NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments,* 2025; NCVER, *Total VET Activity program completions,* 2025
f ABS, *Census of Population and Housing*, 2021.
g Note: Defined as the number of people requiring assistance with self-care, mobility or communication due to a long-term health condition, disability (lasting six months or more) or old age.

Funeral services

Funeral services spans funeral businesses, cemeteries and crematoria, with roles across funeral arranging and directing, funeral assistance, mortuary work and embalming, crematorium operations, cemetery operations, and grounds and maintenance. Training needs to reflect the different practical and technical requirements across these settings and roles.

Headline indicators

Employment and outlook	**Size:** 6,610 employed in February 2026[a] **Projected employment:** 5,600 in May 2035 (9.8% growth from May 2025)[b]
Online recruitment activity indicator	**Funeral workers:** close to the pre-COVID benchmark in the 12 months to February 2026[c]
Occupational shortage	**Funeral workers:** not assessed as being in shortage in both 2025 and 2026[d]
VET training[e]	**Certificate IV in Embalming:** 40 enrolments in 2025; 15 completions in 2025 **Certificate IV in Funeral Services:** 5 enrolments in 2025

51.6%[a] Female share

52[f] Median age

1.7%[f] First Nations share

1.3%[f,g] Proportion requiring assistance with core activities

25.6%[a] Proportion born overseas

a ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026. (4-quarter average).

b JSA, *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035.
Note: Employment projections are based on May 2025 estimates, while current employment figures reflect February 2026. Employment can fluctuate over time due to economic conditions, changes in labour demand and other short-term factors, meaning current employment may exceed longer-term projected levels without necessarily invalidating the projections. If higher employment levels are sustained, future projections may be revised to reflect emerging trends.

c JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index, 2026;* ABS, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table EQ08, 2026*

d JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.

e NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025; NCVER, *Total VET Activity program completions*, 2025

f ABS, *Census of Population and Housing*, 2021.

g Note: Defined as the number of people requiring assistance with self-care, mobility or communication due to a long-term health condition, disability (lasting six months or more) or old age.



The forces shaping workforce change

The personal services sector covers a diverse range of industries, including hairdressing and barbering, beauty services, floristry and funeral services. It also includes activities such as cosmetic tattooing, skin services, religious services, sex work, and rental service and hiring services. A full list of industries and occupations included in the sector is provided in Appendix A.

At the same time, workforce shortages, changing business and employment models, technology and rising operating costs are reshaping workforce needs across the sector. These changes are influencing how businesses attract, train and retain workers, and the skills and capabilities workers need.

Labour market and workforce conditions

The personal services labour market strengthened over the past year; employment reached around 313,300 in February 2026, up 8% over the previous year.[12] Looking ahead, employment is projected to continue growing, although labour market conditions remain uneven across occupations. Table 1 summarises the key labour market indicators affecting the sector.

Table 1: Key labour market indicators for the personal services sector

Labour market indicator	Current position	Implication
Employment	Employment in the personal services sector[13] increased (8%) over the year. Around 313,300 workers were employed in February 2026, compared with 290,750 employed a year earlier.[14] Personal care services, which includes hairdressing and beauty services, was the sector's largest industry group, employing around 128,200 people and growing by 3% over the year.[15]	Strong employment growth is expanding the personal services workforce, particularly in personal care services. This increases the importance of ensuring that training pathways, skills development and workforce planning keep pace with industry growth and changing workforce composition.
Future employment growth	Employment is projected to grow by approximately 9.5% between May 2025 and May 2035, reaching nearly 314,000 workers.[16] (Figure 1) Religious services is projected to record the fastest percentage growth over this period, increasing by around 13% to approximately 40,900 workers by 2035.	Employment is projected to grow through to 2035, although at a slower rate than national employment (13.3% vs 9.5%).[17] This reinforces the importance of monitoring how workforce composition, skills needs and training activity evolve as the sector expands.
Business activity	The number of businesses in the personal services sector increased approximately 3% from around 78,200 at the end of 2023–24 to around 80,200 at the end of 2024–25.[18] Personal care services led this growth. Business numbers rose from around 36,700 to 37,800. Much of this increase came from non-employing businesses, which grew from around 15,800 to 17,000.	The expanding business base, particularly growth in non-employing businesses, indicates that sector growth is being driven by sole operators and small businesses. This highlights the need for workforce planning and skills development approaches that are accessible to self-employed workers and small business owners.

12 ABS, *Labour Force Survey,* February Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average).
13 The personal services sector workforce is estimated by aggregating employment across the industries listed in the Appendix A.
14 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average).
15 ABS, *Count of Australian Businesses, including entries and exits,* June 2025.
16 JSA, *Employment Projections,* May 2025 to May 2035.
17 JSA, *Employment Projections,* May 2025 to May 2035.
18 ABS, *Count of Australian Businesses, including entries and exits*, June 2025.

Labour market indicator	Current position	Implication
Labour demand	In the 12 months to February 2026, online recruitment activity varied across personal services occupations relative to pre-COVID historical benchmark levels. Activity was stronger for some occupations, while hairdressers and beauty therapists were slightly below typical levels.[19] (Figure 2) Employers also showed a strong preference for experienced workers over the period. Around 95% of job postings specified some prior experience; almost 40% required at least 3 years of experience.[20]	These trends suggest that labour demand across the personal services sector is mixed, with stronger recruitment activity in some occupations and softer activity in others. Employers' strong preference for prior experience may be particularly significant where sectors experience high workforce turnover, as the loss of experienced workers can reduce the pool of workers available to fill vacancies. This highlights the importance of retention, alongside training and employment pathways that enable workers to build relevant skills and experience.
Labour costs	Minimum Award wages increased by 4.75% from 1 July 2026, following a 3.5% increase in 2025.[21] Junior, apprentice and trainee rates also increased. The National Minimum Wage increased to $26.44 per hour or $1,004.90 per week from 1 July 2026. Minimum rates for apprentices and trainees were also increased from 1 July 2026.	Higher minimum and Award wage rates increase labour costs for employers. This is particularly relevant to personal services, where around 41% of businesses are small businesses.[22] Small businesses also account for 86% of employees directly receiving the National Minimum Wage and 54.1% of employees on a modern Award.[23] These increases may place additional pressure on business margins and employers' capacity to recruit, train and retain staff.

19 JSA, *Internet Vacancy Index*, 2026; ABS, *Labour Force, Australia, Detailed*, Table EQ08, 2026.

20 Lightcast, *Labour Insights*, job postings for hairdressers, florists, funeral workers, beauty therapists, and ministers of religion. Based on approximately 2,600 job postings. Time period 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026.
Note: Occupations where the unit group did not fall entirely within SaCSA's occupation scope were excluded, as the data could not be appropriately weighted to reflect the relevant 6-digit occupations. This includes retail managers, performing arts technicians, other sales assistants and salespersons, and other miscellaneous labourers.

21 Fair Work Ombudsman, *Minimum wages increase* from 1 July 2026, 2026.

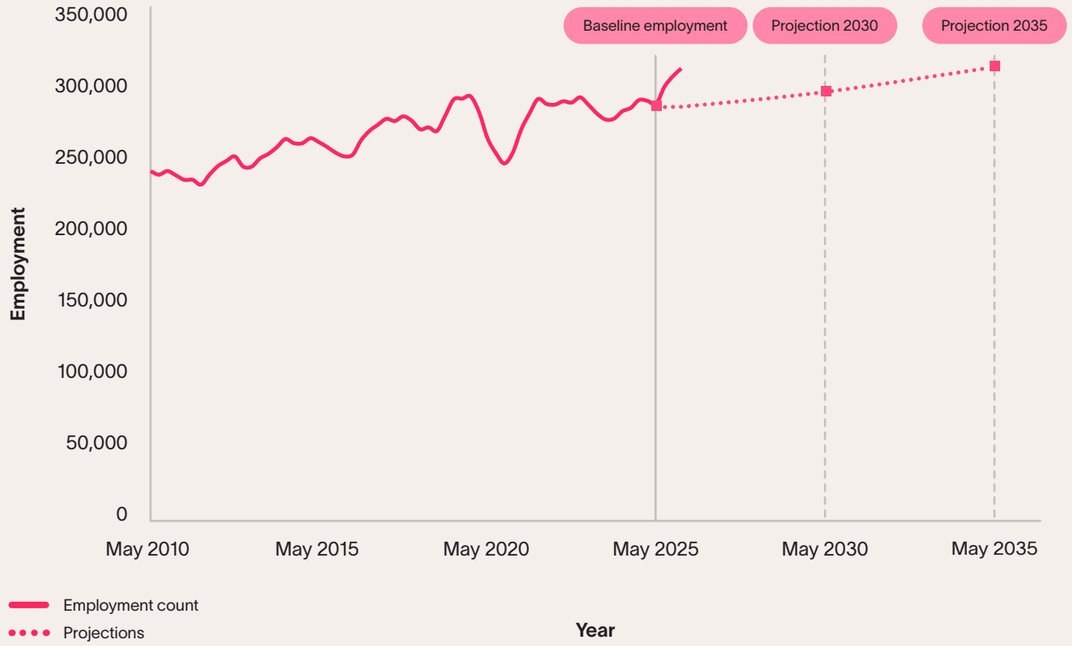
22 ABS, *Count of Australian Businesses*, including Entries and Exits, June 2025.

23 Fair Work Commission, *Characteristics of employees on the National Minimum Wage 2023–24*.

Current labour market conditions and outlook

Employment growth is projected to continue over the next decade (see Figure 1). Jobs and Skills Australia projects that personal services employment will reach approximately 314,000 workers by May 2035.[24,25] Growth is expected across several key occupations, although the rate varies considerably by occupation (see Table 2).

Figure 1: Employment growth in the personal services sector 2010–2035



Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, February quarter 2026, detailed 4-quarter average. JSA, Employment Projections (May 2025 to May 2035).

24 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average).

25 JSA, *Employment Projections*, May 2025 to May 2035. The 10% increase is relative to the May 2025 benchmark.

Table 2: Employment and projected growth in selected personal services occupations, 2025–35

Occupation	Employment (May 2025)	Current employment (Feb 2026)	Projected employment (May 2035)	Projected growth (2025–35)
Hairdressers[26]	64,840	69,110	68,500	5.8%
Beauty therapist	39,260	44,470	43,400	10.4%
Ministers of religion	19,450	17,830	23,100	18.6%
Florists	5,900	4,870	6,200	5.1%
Funeral workers	5,100	6,610	5,600	9.8%
Total personal services workforce	**286,900**	**313,300**	**314,200**	**9.5%**
Total workforce	**14,701,000**	**14,672,600**	**16,655,500**	**13.3%**

Source: JSA, Employment Projections (May 2025 to May 2035). ABS, Labour Force Survey, February quarter 2026, detailed 4-quarter average

Note: Employment for each unit group was weighted by the proportion of employment that is within SaCSA's occupation scope at the 6-digit occupation level for each sector using data from Census 2021.

Note: Employment projections are based on May 2025 estimates, while current employment figures reflect February 2026. Employment can fluctuate over time due to economic conditions, changes in labour demand and other short-term factors, meaning current employment may exceed longer-term projected levels without necessarily invalidating the projections. If higher employment levels are sustained, future projections may be revised to reflect emerging trends.

26 Also includes barbers as a specialisation under the hairdressers ANZSCO code.

Challenging economic conditions

Despite the positive longer-term outlook, near-term operating conditions are more challenging. Weak business confidence, rising cost pressures and subdued household demand may constrain personal services businesses' capacity and willingness to expand employment or invest in workforce development. Business confidence deteriorated sharply in the June quarter 2026, while expectations for business conditions over the following 12 months also weakened.[27]

These pressures are reflected in recent business conditions. In June 2026, 46% of Australian businesses reported that operating expenses had increased over the previous 4 weeks, one-third expected expenses to increase further and 24% expected revenue to decrease.[28,29,30] Fuel prices, business overheads and freight or delivery costs were among the most commonly reported reasons for higher expenses.[31] Around 8% of Australian businesses also reported reducing the size of their workforce in response to fuel prices or availability, while 15% delayed or cancelled capital investment.[32]

Household conditions present a further risk, particularly for personal services businesses that rely heavily on discretionary spending. The consumer sentiment index fell 9.7% over the year, from 98.5 in August 2025 to 88.9 in August 2026, remaining in pessimistic territory and below its long-run average of 100.[33] Consumer inflation expectations also remained elevated at 4.9% in August 2026.[34] Continued cost-of-living pressures may lead households to further reduce, postpone or change discretionary spending (including on personal services), placing additional pressure on business revenue and affecting workforce decisions.

The impact is likely to vary across the sector. Stakeholder feedback points to changing consumer behaviour and business models across floristry, hairdressing and beauty, including greater online purchasing and direct-to-consumer retail, while funeral services is also experiencing changes in the types of services consumers choose. These shifts may affect revenue streams and the mix of skills businesses require, alongside the broader pressure from weaker household demand.

Together, weaker business confidence, higher operating costs and subdued household demand may temper near-term workforce demand and reduce employers' capacity to invest in recruitment, training and retention.

Occupational shortages

The shortage assessment by Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) reflects employers' ability to fill vacancies under prevailing pay and employment conditions. It does not measure consumer demand for services and should not be interpreted as a count of how many qualified workers are available overall.[35]

Recruitment pressures remain concentrated in several personal services occupations. In 2026, barbers, hairdressers, beauty therapists and dermal therapists continued to be assessed as being in national shortage, consistent with their 2025 ratings. Other personal services occupations were not identified as being in national shortage in either 2025 or 2026 (Table 3).

27 National Australia Bank (NAB), *Quarterly Business Survey,* Q2 2026.
Note: The NAB Quarterly Business Survey reported business confidence of +1 in Q2 2025 and –19 in Q2 2026, while business conditions remained at +2 over the same period. Expectations for business conditions over the following 12 months also weakened, falling from +17 in Q1 2026 to +5 in Q2 2026.

28 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.
Note: The ABS Business Conditions and Sentiments survey does not separately identify the personal services sector. These figures relate to businesses across all industries and provide broader context on prevailing business conditions.

29 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.

30 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.

31 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.

32 ABS, *Business Conditions and Sentiments*, June 2026.

33 Westpac-Melbourne Institute, *Consumer Sentiment,* August 2025 and August 2026.

34 Melbourne Institute, *Survey of Consumer Inflationary and Wage Expectations*, August 2026.

35 JSA, *Occupation Shortage List Methodology*, 2025

Table 3: Occupation shortage list (OSL), personal services occupations, 2025 to 2026

Occupation code (OSCA)	Occupation title	2025	2026
172431	Hair or beauty salon manager	-	-
172499	Hair, body and beauty service managers nec	-	-
342331	Florist	-	-
392131	Barber	AUS	AUS
392132	Hairdresser	AUS	AUS
461131	Beauty therapist	AUS	AUS
461132	Dermal therapist	AUS	AUS
461231	Body artist	-	-
461933	Funeral worker	-	-
461937	Religious assistant	-	-

Legend:

National shortages

\- Not in shortage

Source: JSA, Occupation Shortage List, 6-digit Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA), 2025–2026. Based on SaCSA's personal services occupation remit.

For the most up-to-date occupation shortage information, refer to SaCSA's Data Dashboard. The dashboard brings together workforce, occupation and training data across SaCSA's remit, including personal services, and provides current insights into employment, workforce characteristics, occupation shortages and vocational education and training (VET) participation to support evidence-based workforce planning.

Recruitment conditions and online recruitment activity

Online recruitment activity varies across personal services occupations. To provide a more meaningful comparison than raw job advertisement counts alone, SaCSA compared online job advertisements with the size of each occupation's workforce and benchmarked this against pre-COVID recruitment patterns from 2017 to 2019. This indicator, referred to as the Online Recruitment Activity Indicator (ORAI), provides a clearer view of recruitment intensity by accounting for occupation size, making it easier to identify where activity is unusually strong or weak and to compare conditions across occupations.[36]

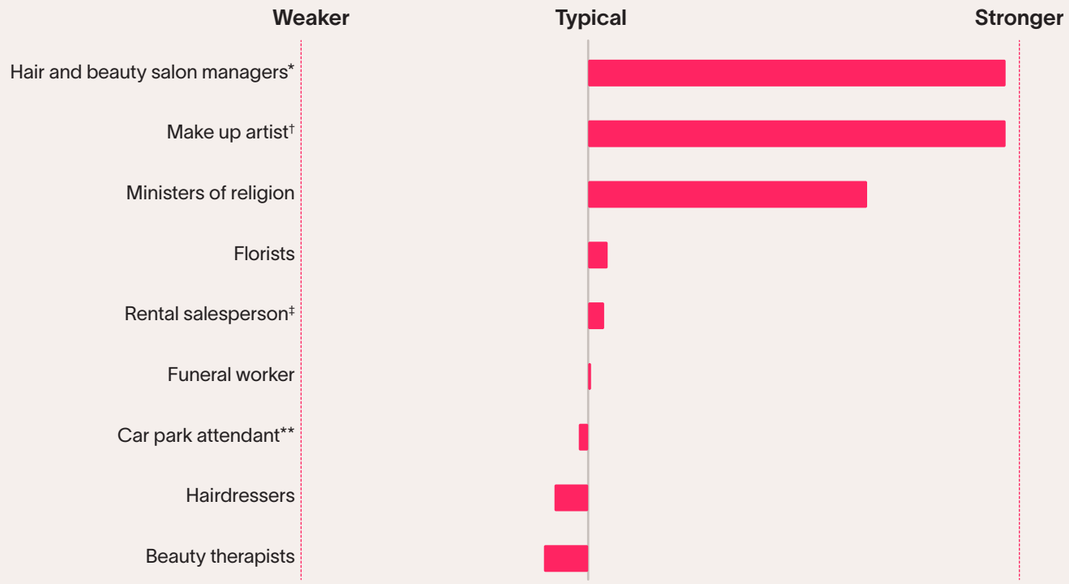
Positive index scores indicate stronger-than-typical activity and negative index scores indicate weaker activity (Figure 2).

Although online recruitment activity for hairdressers and beauty therapists was slightly below historical benchmarks, both occupations were assessed as being in national shortage in both 2025 and 2026. This apparent contrast reflects the fact that ORAI measures online recruitment intensity, rather than workforce shortage. Labour supply and retention challenges may persist even when online advertising is subdued, particularly where employers recruit through informal channels not captured in online job advertisement data.

Key occupation-level patterns:

- Recruitment activity was strongest for hair and beauty salon managers and make up artists, followed by ministers of religion. For the broader retail managers and performing arts technicians groups, the estimates have been weighted to reflect the share of employment within SaCSA's personal services scope.
- Activity was slightly above pre-COVID benchmark levels for florists and other sales assistants and salespersons, while funeral workers were close to typical levels.
- Hairdressers and beauty therapists recorded activity slightly below typical levels, despite both being assessed as in national shortage in 2025 and 2026.[37]

Figure 2: Online recruitment activity index, personal services occupations, Australia, 12 months to February 2026



Source: JSA (2026), Internet Vacancy Index (IVI), ANZSCO 4-digit occupations; ABS (2026), Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, Table EQ08.

* Note: Hair and beauty salon managers is represented using the broader retail managers occupation group (1421). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

† Note: Make up artist is represented using the broader performing arts technicians occupation group (3995). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

‡ Note: Rental salesperson is represented using the broader other sales sssistants and salespersons occupation group (6219). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

** Note: Car park attendants are represented using the broader other miscellaneous labourers occupation group (8999). IVI and employment data were weighted to reflect SaCSA's occupation scope using Census 2021 data.

36 SaCSA created the Online Recruitment Activity Index as a standardised measure of relative labour demand based on the ratio of online job advertisements to employment at the occupational level. Scores for the 12 months to February 2026 are benchmarked against non-overlapping annual ratios for 2017–2019 (pre-COVID period). The index measures online recruitment activity relative to employment. It does not measure total labour demand or whether an occupation is in shortage. This limitation is particularly relevant in personal services sector, where recruitment may occur through word of mouth and other informal channels that are not captured in online job advertisement data.

37 JSA, Occupation Shortage List 2025

Implications for workforce supply and training

Workforce conditions differ across personal services occupations. Hair and buty salon managers show particularly strong online recruitment activity relative to historical levels, although they are not currently assessed as being in shortage. Hairdressers, barbers, beauty therapists and dermal therapists remain in national shortage, despite online recruitment activity for hairdressers and beauty therapists sitting slightly below historical levels. Florists and funeral workers are not currently assessed as being in shortage, with recruitment activity around or slightly above typical levels, while religious services is projected to record comparatively strong employment growth. Across the sector, employers' preference for experienced workers, together with rising labour and operating costs, may affect businesses' capacity to recruit and develop new workers. Changing business and employment models are also influencing workforce supply, particularly the growth of sole operators and non-employing businesses, which can reduce employers' capacity to employ, train and develop new workers. These differences mean workforce supply and training needs will vary across subsectors rather than follow a single sector-wide pattern.



Personal Services VET Update 2025

Total VET activity

Personal services VET enrolments remained broadly stable from 2019 to 2024, before declining in 2025.

2025 Enrolment profile

91% Female

80% aged under 25

2025 enrolments snapshot

49% in TAFE institutes, followed by 41% in private Registered Training Organisations and 5% in schools.

29% in regional areas, while 64% were in major cities

24% Certificate III in Hairdressing, which was the most enrolled qualification

Changes in VET activity, 2024 to 2025

Total enrolments

42,895

44,920 in 2024 | **-4%**

Total completions

14,875

15,690 in 2024 | **-5%**

Top four qualifications: 2024 to 2025 trends

Qualification	Enrolments	Completions
Certificate III in Hairdressing	–10%	–13%
Certificate III in Beauty Services	~0%	-1%
Certificate II in Salon Assistant	+3%	+9%
Diploma of Beauty Therapy	-7%	-11%

Across the 2016–2020 commencing cohorts, **4-year completion rates** average:

Hairdressing and Beauty Services (SHB): 49%

Floristry (SFL): 63%

Funeral Services (SIF): 33%*

The decline was primarily driven by Certificate III in Hairdressing

Certificate III in Hairdressing accounted for around 59% of the overall decline in personal services enrolments in 2025; enrolments fell by 10% and completions by 13%. This means the sector-wide decline was not uniform. Beauty services remained broadly stable and salon assistant activity increased. Given hairdressing is the largest qualification in the sector and supports an occupation experiencing persistent workforce shortages, continued declines in training activity may further constrain the future supply of qualified workers.

Source: NCVER, Total VET Activity program enrolments, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity program completions, 2025. VET Qualification Completion Rates 2024: Observed completion rates DataBuilder: 4 year rates. An asterisk (*) indicates a percentage has been generated on fewer than 100 commencements and is prone to large fluctuations based on small actual shifts. Averages calculated as weighted average.

Figures are rounded.

Apprenticeships and VET in schools

VET in Schools grew, while apprenticeship pathways weakened.

VET in schools (VETiS), 2025

9,450

school-based VET enrolments

+1% from 2024

2,945

school-based VET completions

+18% from 2024

2025 profile

Leading VETiS qualifications

Qualification	Share of enrolments	Share of completions
Certificate II in Salon Assistant	33%	46%
Certificate III in Beauty Services	30%	20%
Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics	15%	23%

Together, these 3 qualifications accounted for **78%** of enrolments and **90%** of completions.

School-based participation strengthened, while apprenticeship outcomes remained mixed.

Personal services VET in schools activity increased in 2025, with enrolments up 1% and completions up 18%. Apprenticeship and traineeship commencements also increased slightly, by 2%, while completions fell by 7%. At the same time, employment based training remained concentrated in hirdressing and barbering, while school-based VET was concentrated in introductory qualifications. This highlights the importance of understanding how school-based participation translates into further training, apprenticeships and employment, particularly in occupations where workforce shortages persist.

Source: NCVER, VET in School Program Enrolments, 2025; NCVER, VET in School Program Completions, 2025

Apprenticeships and traineeships, 2025

3,900
commencements
+2% from 2024

2,355
completions
-7% from 2024

Where activity was concentrated in 2025

Top qualifications

Qualification	Share of commencements
Certificate III in Hairdressing	72%
Certificate III in Barbering	17%
Certificate IV in Beauty Therapy	4%

Top occupations

Occupation	Share of completions
Hairdresser	89%
Beauty therapist	5.5%
Hair or beauty salon assistant	3.1%

Across the 2017–2021 commencing cohorts, the **4-year completion rate:**

Hairdressing and Beauty Services (SHB): 41%*

Floristry (SFL): 54%

Apprenticeship commencements increased, but completion and employer capacity remain key challenges.

Employer capacity, changing business models and access to structured workplace learning remain important considerations for the apprenticeship pipeline.

Overall, the 2025 VET data points to a training pipeline under pressure. Total enrolments and completions declined, with much of the fall concentrated in Certificate III in Hairdressing. Apprenticeship outcomes also remained mixed, despite stronger VET in schools participation. Together, these trends suggest that maintaining future workforce supply will require continued attention not only to attracting learners into personal services training, but also to progression, completion and transition into employment, particularly in occupations where shortages persist.

Source: NCVER, Apprentices and Trainees, December 2025; NCVER, Apprentices and trainees - apprenticeship-level completion rates, December 2025. Note: An asterisk (*) means the rate/duration is based on a low number of records or where a high number of apprenticeships are still in progress, and therefore should be treated with caution. Averages calculated as weighted average. Figures are rounded.



Workforce impact of technology and artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a workforce issue that extends across industries and the Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) network. SaCSA is working with the Future Skills Organisation and other JSCs to contribute industry insights to national work on AI skills and workforce capability. This collaboration recognises that many of the capabilities required to work effectively with AI are transferable across sectors, while its workforce impacts will differ by industry and occupation. Cross-JSC collaboration provides an opportunity to develop more coordinated responses to shared skills needs, while ensuring the specific experiences and requirements of the personal services workforce inform national approaches.

For personal services, technology change extends beyond AI. Stakeholders have highlighted the growing use of e-commerce and digital business systems, technology supporting beauty treatments and analysis, automation and potentially robotics in floristry, and digital mapping, machinery and automation across cemeteries and crematoria. These developments are changing business operations, tasks and skill requirements in different ways across the sector.

AI adoption and generative AI exposure

AI use remains relatively limited across Australian businesses; 12% reported using it in 2024–25.[38] Between November 2022 and February 2026, employment grew in both high and low AI-exposure occupations, but growth was slower in the occupations most exposed to AI automation.[39] Employment in the most exposed fifth of occupations increased by 5.6%, compared with 9.5% in the least-exposed fifth.[40,41,42]

For personal services, technology is changing how services are delivered and how businesses operate, but stakeholder feedback indicates that practical skills, professional judgement, creativity and human interaction remain central across the sector. Technology is more likely to support these capabilities and change how particular tasks are performed, although its role varies across subsectors and technologies.

Table 4 applies JSA's GenAI Capacity Study to selected personal services occupations within SaCSA's remit. It shows the potential for generative AI (GenAI) to augment or automate occupational tasks and identifies the tasks with the highest exposure. The scores indicate technological potential rather than actual adoption or predicted job loss.[43]

Among the occupations examined, florists recorded the highest augmentation likelihood at 60%, followed by beauty therapists at 59% and ministers of religion at 54%. Hairdressers and funeral workers recorded lower augmentation likelihoods, both at 47%. The task-level results show that augmentation exposure is concentrated in advisory, planning, administrative and information-based activities, including customer advice and floral design planning, bookings and client records, payments, record keeping and compliance-related tasks. Automation likelihood was lower across all occupations, ranging from 24% for hairdressers to 34% for funeral workers.

Table 4: GenAI exposure across selected SaCSA personal services occupations

Occupation	Augmentation likelihood	Automation likelihood	Tasks with highest GenAI exposure	What it could mean
Florist	60% **Medium** *Higher than 34% of all occupations assessed*	28% **Low** *Higher than 35% of all occupations assessed*	• Advising customers on the selection of flowers and floral arrangements • Planning and designing floral arrangements	AI can support customer advice and the planning and design of floral arrangements, while the hands-on creation of arrangements continues to rely on practical skill, creativity and judgement.
Funeral worker	47% **Low** *Higher than 21% of all occupations assessed*	34% **Low** *Higher than 53% of all occupations assessed*	• Keeping records and accounts of transactions and services performed • Ensuring certificates and other legal requirements are met	AI can support record keeping, administration and compliance-related tasks, while the practical and interpersonal aspects of funeral service delivery remain human-led.
Hairdresser	47% **Low** *Higher than 21% of all occupations assessed*	24% **Very Low** *Higher than 25% of all occupations assessed*	• Arranging appointments and collecting payments • Providing advice on hair care, beauty products and hairstyles	AI can support bookings, payments and customer advice, while cutting, colouring and styling remain hands-on activities requiring technical skill and interpersonal interaction.
Beauty therapist	59% **Medium** *Higher than 34% of all occupations assessed*	33% **Low** *Higher than 47% of all occupations assessed*	• Receiving bookings, arranging appointments and maintaining client records • Providing advice on and selling cosmetic products	AI can support bookings, client records and product advice, while treatments and client consultation continue to rely on practical skill, judgement and human interaction.
Minister of religion	54% **Medium** *Higher than 44% of all occupations assessed*	31% **Low** *Higher than 43% of all occupations assessed*	• Keeping records as required by church and civil law • Preparing and delivering sermons, homilies and special talks	AI can support record keeping and the preparation of written content, while pastoral care, community relationships and in-person service delivery remain human-led.

Source: SaCSA analysis of JSA, Gen AI Capacity Study Bespoke Tables 3 and 4, 2025. Augmentation and automation exposure scores are JSA estimates; occupation-specific interpretations are SaCSA analysis.

Note 1: 'Augmentation likelihood' reflects AI's potential to enhance how occupational tasks are performed, while 'automation likelihood' reflects the potential for AI to perform those tasks with little or no human involvement.

Note 2: 'Higher/lower than x% of occupations' indicates how an occupation's GenAI exposure score compares with other occupations assessed by JSA.

Note 3: Exposure levels follow JSA's classification: High (0.70 and above), Medium (0.50 to below 0.70), Low (0.25 to below 0.50), and Very Low (below 0.25).

38 ABS, *Characteristics of Australian Business*, June 2026.

39 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), *AI and employment in Australia: Monitoring framework and evidence to date*, July 2026.

40 DEWR, *AI and employment in Australia: Monitoring framework and evidence to date*, July 2026.

41 Note: DEWR cautions that this difference cannot be attributed to AI alone.

42 Note: DEWR cautions that this difference cannot be attributed to AI alone.

43 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills*, August 2025. GenAI refers to AI systems that can create new content, such as text, images or other media, based on patterns learned from data.

Taken together, the results suggest GenAI is more likely to support than replace work across the selected personal services occupations. This aligns with stakeholder feedback that technology is changing how work is performed, while practical skills, professional judgement, creativity and human interaction remain central.

Skills and training implications

As AI, digital systems and other technologies reshape tasks across personal services, workers will need to build capability in emerging technologies alongside the practical, interpersonal and judgement-based skills that remain central to service delivery. Stakeholder feedback indicates that these capability needs differ across subsectors.

In hair and beauty, stakeholders highlighted digital business systems, bookings and client records, marketing and social media, and technology supporting service delivery. In floristry, the focus is more on e-commerce, digital ordering, business systems and potential automation in production. In funeral services, technology needs span digital records, cemetery mapping and management systems, digital memorialisation, virtual and streamed funerals, and increasing use of technology and automation in operations. Stakeholder feedback was less specific about the AI capabilities required within each subsector, suggesting that broader digital and technology capability is currently the more immediate workforce consideration.

JSA found that businesses most commonly identified familiarity with GenAI as an important workforce skill, followed by digital skills and human capabilities such as communication and critical thinking.[44]

National evidence suggests that employers are predominantly building AI capability through informal and unaccredited training rather than nationally recognised training. In the 2025 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) Survey of Employers' Use and Views of the VET System,[45] 39.8% of employers reported using AI technologies or tools and 26.8% had provided some form of AI training. Among employers providing AI training, only 3.7% used nationally recognised training, compared with 29.4% using unaccredited training and 80.6% using informal training.[46] This may indicate that employers do not yet see formal VET as the primary way to respond to rapidly changing AI capability needs. It also highlights the importance of considering how nationally recognised training can remain responsive as technology and workplace practices evolve.

JSA's VET analysis also indicates that relevant personal services qualifications are likely to be affected by AI-driven task change. Certificate III in Floristry, Diploma of Beauty Therapy and Certificate III in Hairdressing all recorded medium augmentation exposure but low automation exposure. This suggests GenAI is more likely to support or change how tasks are performed within these occupations than automate them entirely.[47,48]

For personal services, the workforce implication is therefore less about creating standalone AI training and more about ensuring occupational training keeps pace with broader technological change and the different capability needs emerging across subsectors. This could include embedding appropriate AI and digital capability within existing training, supported by shorter and more flexible training where skills need to be updated quickly. Practical, creative, interpersonal and professional judgement skills will remain important, while educators and trainers will also need to maintain current knowledge of emerging technologies and industry practice.[49]

To strengthen the evidence base in this area, SaCSA is undertaking research into how AI, automation and robotics are reshaping jobs, skills and workforce pathways across the service and creative sectors. The findings are expected to be released in late 2026.

44 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills,* August 2025.

45 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills,* August 2025.

46 National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), *Employers' use and views of the VET system 2025,* December 2025.

47 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills,* August 2025.

48 JSA rated augmentation exposure as Medium for Certificate III in Floristry (0.62), Diploma of Beauty Therapy (0.60) and Certificate III in Hairdressing (0.51). Automation exposure was rated Low for all 3 qualifications, at 0.37, 0.37 and 0.29 respectively.

49 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Implications for Work and Skills,* August 2025.

Policy and regulatory landscape

During 2025–26, a range of policy and regulatory developments shaped the operating environment and workforce settings of the personal services sector. Further changes have also been announced or introduced for 2026–27 and beyond, with implications for workforce capability, apprenticeship pathways, and service delivery.

At the national level, the Australian Government's National AI Plan, released in December 2025, reinforces the growing focus on digital and AI capability across the workforce.[50] The plan emphasises lifelong learning, workforce transitions and addressing digital literacy gaps, which reinforces the need for training content and trainer capability to keep pace as technology changes how work is performed.

SaCSA is collaborating with other Jobs and Skills Councils to provide industry-specific insights into the Future Skills Organisation's work supporting the Australian Government's National AI Plan. This collaboration will help identify emerging AI skills needs, workforce impacts and training priorities across the personal services sectors, ensuring that industry perspectives inform national approaches to AI capability development.

Apprenticeship policy is also changing at both national and state levels, with implications for employer participation, training access and the sustainability of apprenticeship pathways. From 1 January 2027, changes to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System will focus specified employer incentives on small and medium employers and group training organisations.[51] Except for group training organisations, employers with 200 or more employees will no longer be eligible for the Key Apprenticeship Program Employer Incentive or Priority Hiring Incentive. Changes will also be made to the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List methodology, including greater consideration of national and regional shortages and government priorities.

For personal services, these reforms are particularly relevant to hairdressing and barbering, where apprenticeships remain a core entry pathway. More targeted incentives may help smaller employers take on apprentices. Feedback from industry confirms that incentives help with offsetting the time, staffing and cost pressures associated with taking on apprentices. The reforms therefore intersect directly with apprenticeship sustainability and employer capacity, rather than simply influencing the number of apprenticeship places available.

Regulatory change is also creating new service opportunities within specific personal services subsectors, such as pet burials for the funeral and related services. New South Wales amended its legislation in June 2025 to permit the placement and burial of animal remains in interment sites; the changes took effect from September 2025.[52] Cemetery operators are not required to offer animal burials but can develop their own approaches based on community needs and site-specific considerations. Victoria introduced similar legislative changes in November 2025, permitting animal remains to be placed and buried in places of interment.[53] Western Australia has also undertaken consultation as part of a broader review of its cemeteries and cremation legislation.[54]

For funeral services, these developments may broaden the range of services some cemetery and funeral operators choose to provide. This may create new operational and customer service requirements, including knowledge of relevant legislation, site procedures, record keeping and communication with clients. As the subsector already relies heavily on workplace learning and there is limited uptake of formal funeral services qualifications, emerging service areas such as pet interment reinforce the need for training and workforce development to remain aligned with changing industry practice.

Overall, these policy and regulatory developments interact with several of the workforce challenges identified throughout this Workforce Plan. Business operating conditions and regulations affect their capacity to recruit, train and retain workers. Apprenticeship reforms influence the sustainability and accessibility of entry pathways, while AI policy reinforces the need for responsive training and workforce capability. Subsector-specific regulation can also create new skills and service requirements. The impacts will vary by business size and subsector, but collectively they reinforce the importance of ensuring workforce development and training settings can respond as the operating environment changes.

50 Department of Industry, Science and Resources, *National AI Plan*, December 2025.

51 Australian Government, *Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System*, 2026.

52 Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW, *Review of NSW Cemeteries and Crematoria Act.*

53 Parliament of Victoria, *Victoria legalises pet burials in human cemeteries.*

54 Western Australian Government, *Have your say to update cemeteries and cremation laws in WA*, November 2023.

Current workforce issues and priorities

The following priorities are informed by both workforce and training data, and direct stakeholder insights gathered through SaCSA's industry engagement. Together, this evidence provides a more complete picture of the workforce issues affecting personal services and where further action or investigation may be needed.

While many issues are shared across the sector, their drivers and impacts vary across subsectors. The At a Glance section provides headline workforce and training information for each subsector, while this section examines the key workforce issues, supporting evidence and subsector-specific differences in greater depth.

Workforce shortages, attraction and retention

Labour and skill shortages remain a key workforce challenge across personal services, although the nature and drivers of workforce pressure vary by occupation and subsector. In 2026, hairdressers, barbers, beauty therapists and dermal therapists were assessed as being in national shortage on the JSA Occupation Shortage List[55] (Table 3). While JSA identified education and training gaps as the primary drivers of shortages for hairdressers and beauty therapists in 2026, retention had been identified as the primary driver for these occupational groups in 2025.[56] Retention nevertheless remains an important workforce challenge, with stakeholder feedback to SaCSA highlighting concerns about low pay, working conditions and limited access to social infrastructure. These findings suggest that increasing the supply of qualified workers alone may be insufficient to address shortages without also addressing the factors contributing to workers leaving these occupations.[57]

SaCSA's early career retention analysis provides further evidence of this challenge (Table 5). Retention declines considerably over time across most personal services occupations. By year 4, fewer than half of new entrants remained in hairdressing, beauty therapy, floristry and hair or beauty salon management. Hair or beauty salon assistants recorded the lowest year-4 retention (31.3%), followed by hair or beauty salon managers (42.0%) and florists (42.4%). Funeral directors and ministers of religion recorded comparatively stronger retention at 57.1% and 62.5%, respectively.

Given employers' preference for experienced workers, low early career retention may further reduce the pool of workers available to fill vacancies. Where workers leave early in their careers, increasing training commencements or attracting new entrants may not translate into a sustained pool of experienced workers.

Table 5: Early career retention across personal services occupations

Occupation	Number of new workers (Year 1)	Year 2 retention	Year 3 retention	Year 4 retention
Beauty therapist	9,730	73.3%	58.1%	46.5%
Hairdresser	9,500	71.6%	57.5%	47.3%
Florist	1,440	70.8%	52.8%	42.4%
Funeral director	560	82.1%	67.9%	57.1%
Hair or beauty salon assistant	3,420	63.5%	43.3%	31.3%
Hair or beauty salon manager	2,380	70.2%	53.4%	42.0%
Minister of religion	3,120	83.0%	71.8%	62.5%

Source: SaCSA Early Career Mobility project

Note: For this analysis, 'new workers' are individuals employed in a given occupation in 2018 or 2019 who had no recorded employment in that same occupation during the preceding 8 financial years.

55 JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.
56 ANZSCO unit group: a 4-digit occupation grouping used to classify closely related occupations that perform similar tasks and require similar skill levels.
57 JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2025.



Life stage and caring responsibilities may also influence retention, especially in highly feminised parts of personal services, particularly hairdressing, beauty and floristry. SaCSA's research found that hairdressing workforce exits were highest among women aged 25–34, while stakeholder feedback identified family care, working hours and return-to-work barriers as factors that may influence retention.[58] These issues may also be relevant to \ other highly feminised personal services occupations and warrant further consideration when examining retention and re-entry pathways.

Hair or beauty salon managers, body artists, florists, funeral directors and funeral workers were not assessed as being in shortage. However, stakeholder feedback and labour market evidence indicate that employers can still experience recruitment difficulties, particularly when seeking workers with the required skills and experience. Job postings for florists, funeral workers and funeral directors frequently require prior experience, suggesting that recruitment pressures may be concentrated in particular segments of the workforce.

More broadly, workforce pressures across personal services reflect a mix of attraction, retention, training and employer capacity issues. Their relative importance varies by subsector.

In hairdressing, SaCSA's 2026 research found that persistent workforce shortages reflect interconnected factors, including the cost, duration and alignment of training, limited regional and remote training access, salon capacity constraints and increasing self-employment, low wages, working conditions, limited career progression and perceptions of the occupation.[59] These pressures also intersect with apprenticeship policy settings and the capacity of small employers to provide workplace-based training.

In the beauty industry, workforce pressures include attraction and retention challenges, which are exacerbated by fragmented and inconsistent regulation.[60] Differences in regulation across jurisdictions can affect labour mobility, professional recognition and the attractiveness of beauty careers.[61,62] These inconsistencies can make it more difficult for workers to move between jurisdictions and for employers to access and retain suitably skilled workers.

In floristry, stakeholders have particularly highlighted seasonality, limited full-time employment, limited pay progression, high physical demands and intense peak-period workloads. Together with the relatively low early career retention shown in Table 5, these factors suggest that workforce stability is influenced not only by attracting new entrants but also by the availability and sustainability of longer-term employment and career opportunities.

In funeral services, the workforce challenge is different. Early career retention is comparatively stronger than in hairdressing, beauty and floristry, but stakeholders have identified limited formal training opportunities and the emotional and physical demands of the work as ongoing issues. Work health and safety is also a concern. Safe Work Australia data shows that funeral workers recorded injury frequency rates above the national average for most of the period from 2013–14 to 2021–22.[63] Together with the emerging service and regulatory changes identified earlier in this Workforce Plan, these findings point to the importance of accessible training, workplace capability and worker wellbeing in sustaining the funeral services workforce.[64,65]

These constraints affect both sides of the workforce pipeline. They can limit opportunities for people to enter and develop within personal services occupations, while also making it more difficult for employers to recruit, train and retain workers where the local pool of skilled workers is already small.

Regional and remote areas face additional workforce pressures across personal services. Limited access to training providers and qualified educators, together with travel, accommodation and delivery costs, can make training more difficult to access and sustain.[66,67] These barriers can constrain the supply of new entrants and limit opportunities for apprentices and existing workers to develop their skills locally.

58 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.

59 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
60 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
61 RBA, *Examining the Macroeconomic Costs of Occupational Entry Regulations*, 2024.
62 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
63 Safe Work Australia, *Workers' Compensation Injury Frequency Rates.*
64 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
65 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
66 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
67 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.

Across personal services, these findings highlight that increasing worker supply alone is unlikely to resolve workforce shortages. Retention, employment conditions, employer capability and access to training also influence workforce stability, although their relative importance varies by subsector.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Exploring Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages
- Drivers of Beauty Workforce Shortages
- Deepening Analysis of Workforce Needs for the Floristry Sector
- Deepening Analysis of Workforce Needs for the Funeral Sector
- Scoping Service Industries Futures: Career Journey Mapping
- Early Career Mobility Analysis
- Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries.

Strategic opportunities for the personal services sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan.

- Consider further analysis of early career exits and broader retention and re-entry barriers in personal services to better understand the influence of pay, working conditions, career progression, employer capability, life stage and caring responsibilities, and barriers to returning to work.
- Explore opportunities to strengthen retention and progression in floristry and fneral services, particularly where limited career pathways, leadership capability and access to ongoing development have been identified as constraints.

Career pathways and progression

Career pathways and progression remain a workforce issue across personal services. While formal entry qualifications exist across much of the sector, progression beyond initial qualifications is often less clearly defined, particularly into specialist, leadership, management and business roles. SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Analysis shows that movement into management is relatively uncommon and that workers who change occupations do not always follow a clear progression pathway.[68]

In hairdressing and barbering, progression beyond Certificate III remains limited. JSA's VET National Data Asset shows that only around 6% of Certificate III in Hairdressing graduates progressed to higher-level VET, compared with 17% across VET nationally.[69] Certificate III in Barbering showed a similar pattern; around 5% progressed to higher-level VET.[70] SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Analysis also found that only 1.4% of hairdressers had moved into hair or beauty salon manager roles by year 4.[71]

This indicates relatively limited formal progression from trade-level qualifications into higher-level VET and management roles. However, career progression in hairdressing and barbering can also occur through senior technical roles, specialisation, education and mentoring, business ownership and independent work. Clearer and more visible pathways across these different forms of progression could help build senior capability within salons, including by workers taking on leadership and workplace training responsibilities. This is particularly important given 65% of respondents to SaCSA's Hairdressing Workforce Shortages Survey identified a lack of leadership skills as a barrier to developing technical and management capability, particularly among young apprentices.

SaCSA's current review of hairdressing and barbering qualifications is responding to this issue by seeking to create clearer progression from Certificate III through to higher-level qualifications and salon management.

In beauty, formal training progression is more established; around 35% of Certificate III in Beauty Services graduates progress to further VET.[72] However, occupational progression into management appears less common. Only 1.7% of beauty therapists moved into hair or beauty salon manager roles by year 4. Among new hair or beauty salon managers who changed occupations, movement into senior management was also limited; 2.5% moved to chief executive or managing director roles and 1.7% to corporate general manager roles.[73] This suggests that qualification progression does not necessarily translate into a traditional management pathway. Specialist practice, self-employment and business ownership may therefore represent important forms of career progression in beauty and should be considered alongside formal management roles when mapping how workers develop their careers.

In floristry, qualifications extend from Certificate III through to Diploma level, but progression into higher-level training remains relatively limited. Around 14% of Certificate III in Floristry graduates progressed to higher-level VET.[74] SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Analysis also found no clearly established progression pattern among florists who moved into other occupations.[75] The issue is therefore not simply whether higher-level qualifications exist, but whether workers can see how further training connects to specialist, senior or business roles within floristry. This is consistent with SaCSA's current review of Certificate III in Floristry, which is seeking to improve alignment with career pathways, evolving business models and skills such as technology, sustainability and small business.

Funeral services has a different pathway challenge. Formal qualifications are not generally mandatory and stakeholders report that many workers enter through informal routes, including family businesses and personal connections. Career progression can occur across a range of roles within funeral businesses, cemeteries and crematoria, but these pathways are not always clearly defined or visible. SaCSA's Funeral Sector Skills and Capability Review is examining roles and skills across the sector to better understand these pathways and how workers develop and progress between them.

68 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project.*
69 JSA, *VET National Data Asset (VNDA).*
70 JSA, *VET National Data Asset (VNDA).*
71 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project.*
72 JSA, *VET National Data Asset (VNDA).*
73 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project.*
74 JSA, *VET National Data Asset (VNDA).*
75 SaCSA, *Early Career Mobility Project.*

Technological change may also reshape entry and progression pathways across personal services. As routine administrative tasks such as bookings, customer communications and record keeping become increasingly supported by AI and digital tools, early career workers may need greater opportunities to develop practical experience, judgement, interpersonal and digital skills.[76]

Across personal services, these findings highlight that stronger career pathways require more than the availability of higher-level qualifications. SaCSA's mobility analysis shows limited movement into management and no consistent progression pathway for workers who leave several core occupations.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Exploring Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages
- Drivers of Beauty Workforce Shortages
- Deepening Analysis of Workforce Needs for the Floristry Sector
- Funeral Sector Skills and Capability Review
- Scoping Service Industries Futures: Career Journey Mapping
- Early Career Mobility Analysis.

76 JSA, *Our Gen AI Transition: Analysis Papers – Skills,* September 2025.

Strategic opportunities for the personal services sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan.

- Explore how AI and digital adoption may change entry-level tasks and recruitment across personal services, including whether traditional opportunities for early career workers to build experience are being affected.
- Consider opportunities to strengthen progression from technical roles into specialist, leadership, management and business pathways, particularly where current movement into management is limited.
- Examine how more flexible progression pathways, including short-form training, workplace-based development and re-entry options, could support workers whose careers do not follow a traditional qualification pathway.

Training and development

The quality, relevance and accessibility of training are central to workforce development across personal services. Stakeholder engagement has identified gaps between formal training and current workplace requirements, particularly in practical skills, contemporary industry practices and changing business models. These concerns sit alongside a **limited formal training pipeline, with relatively low participation.**

Between 2015 and 2025, personal services qualification enrolments fell by around

37%

while completions declined by around

15%

Patterns vary considerably by subsector and qualification.[77]

77 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity program completions,* 2025

Enrolments declined sharply between 2017 and 2020 and have remained well below earlier levels. In 2026, JSA identified education and training gaps as the primary drivers of shortages for the hairdressers and beauty therapists occupational groups, indicating an insufficient supply of qualified workers relative to labour market demand.[78] This highlights the importance of strengthening the training pipeline alongside addressing concerns about training quality, relevance and delivery.

In **hairdressing and barbering,** concerns relate to both qualification content and training delivery. Hairdressing stakeholders have identified outdated or inflexible units and a need for training to better reflect contemporary salon practices and practical workplace requirements. SaCSA's 2025 Hairdresser Shortage Survey found that 71% of respondents agreed that some elements of training do not meet current and future workforce needs, while 65% identified gaps in leadership and mentoring capability.[79] SaCSA's current review of hairdressing and barbering qualifications addresses concerns about qualification content and alignment with contemporary industry practice. Separate concerns about training delivery, practical experience and graduate job readiness point to the importance of how training is delivered and supported in the workplace.

Similar concerns are evident in the **beauty** industry. Almost 70% of respondents to SaCSA's Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey reported that training is misaligned with modern salon needs, increasing to 85% among hair or beauty salon managers.[80] Stakeholders identified gaps in practical skills, contemporary treatments, digital systems, client consultation and communication. These findings point to a workplace readiness issue rather than simply a need for more training participation.[81] This distinction is important because Certificate III in Beauty Services enrolments were relatively stable in 2025, while bty therapists and dermal therapists remained in national shortage. Improving alignment with contemporary practice will require attention to both qualification content and how training is delivered, including opportunities for practical learning and workplace experience. SaCSA's current update of 5 beauty qualifications is addressing concerns about qualification content and alignment with contemporary industry practice, while broader concerns about training delivery and graduate job readiness will also require consideration beyond the qualification review.

Floristry presents a different picture. Over the longer term, training participation has been comparatively stable. Enrolments decreased slightly from 2,025 in 2015 to 1,950 in 2025 and completions increased from 770 to 865.[82] However, recent stakeholder consultation has identified a gap between foundational training and workplace readiness, particularly in commercial speed, confidence and the application of skills in real-world settings. Emerging needs also include business, digital and e-commerce capability, sustainability skills and skills that can be applied across different floristry business models.[83] Access to workplace experience is therefore important because some of the capabilities employers require are developed through applying technical skills under commercial conditions. Declining access to work placements, particularly in regional areas, may limit these opportunities. For floristry, the key training issue is therefore not primarily the size of the training pipeline, but how effectively training and workplace learning combine to develop job-ready capability for contemporary floristry businesses. SaCSA's review of Certificate III in Floristry is addressing this through stronger foundational and job-ready skills and updated content covering areas including technology, sustainability and small business.

Funeral services faces a different training challenge. Participation in SIF Funeral Services qualifications remains very low and is limited to a small number of specialist training providers.[84] Stakeholder feedback indicates that much of the subsector's capability is developed through on-the-job learning and workplace experience, meaning low formal training participation should not be interpreted as limited skills development.

78 JSA, *Occupation Shortage List*, 2026.
79 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
80 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
81 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
82 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025; NCVER, Total VET Activity program completions, 2025
83 SaCSA, *Review of SFL30115 Certificate III in Floristry*, initial analysis.
84 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025

Stakeholders have also raised concerns that some qualifications do not adequately reflect the practical requirements of funeral businesses, cemeteries and crematoria. The workforce issue is therefore less about increasing qualification participation in isolation and more about ensuring workers can access relevant skills development through a mix of formal training and workplace learning that reflects how capability is developed in the subsector. This is becoming increasingly important as funeral services responds to the changing service and regulatory requirements identified elsewhere in this plan.

SaCSA's Funeral Sector Skills and Capability Review is examining accredited and non-accredited training to determine how well existing provision aligns with current and emerging industry requirements.

Training access adds a further workforce dimension, particularly outside major cities. Across personal services, the share of enrolments in major cities increased from 60% to 64% between 2015 and 2024, while the regional share declined from 35% to 29%.[85] Around 70% of hairdressing survey respondents and 67% of beauty survey respondents also reported that access to training in regional and remote areas is limited or inconsistent.[86,87] SaCSA's hairdressing research found that limited training availability can restrict local entry into the occupation and require learners to travel or relocate in order to undertake training and qualifications, potentially further weakening workforce supply in communities already experiencing service gaps. Training accessibility is therefore a workforce supply issue as well as an education issue. Where local training and practical learning opportunities are limited, regional businesses have a smaller pool from which to develop future workers.

Across personal services, these findings highlight that strengthening training requires attention to both participation and quality. Qualification content needs to remain aligned with contemporary workplace requirements, but outcomes are also influenced by practical learning opportunities, trainer industry currency, delivery models and regional access. The evidence also points to a need to better understand where participation is declining, where learners disengage and which aspects of training delivery are most strongly associated with successful employment outcomes.

85 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025. Based on Student Remoteness Status (ARIA+).
86 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
87 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.

Training will also need to respond to changing skill requirements. As identified in the technology and AI analysis earlier in this plan, digital systems and AI are increasingly able to support administrative, information-based and customer-facing tasks, while practical skills, interpersonal interaction and professional judgement remain central to personal services work. This reinforces the need for training to evolve with workplace practice, incorporating emerging digital capability without displacing the technical and interpersonal skills on which service delivery depends.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Update of Hairdressing and Barbering Qualifications
- Update of Beauty Qualifications
- Update of Certificate III in Floristry
- Funeral Sector Skills and Capability Review
- Early Career Mobility Analysis
- Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries
- Service Skills Portability & Pathways (Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) Level 2).

Strategic opportunities for the personal services sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan.

- Support the implementation, promotion and monitoring of updated qualifications and new skill sets, including helping learners and employers understand new progression pathways and how these products can support upskilling, reskilling and workforce retention.
- Explore how practical learning, employer involvement and trainer industry currency could be strengthened to improve alignment between formal training and contemporary workplace requirements.
- Consider opportunities to improve access to training in regional and remote areas, including more flexible delivery and workplace-based learning options.
- Examine the drivers of declining VET participation and completion across personal services to identify where training pipeline pressures are greatest and what is contributing to learner disengagement.

Apprenticeship and traineeship sustainability

The role of apprenticeships and traineeships varies considerably across personal services. They are a core entry and training pathway in **hairdressing and barbering**, play a much smaller role in **beauty and floristry**, and are not an established pathway across all personal services subsectors. The sustainability of employment-based training is therefore most critical where apprenticeships and traineeships are central to workforce entry and skill development.

In **hairdressing**, apprenticeships remain the dominant training pathway. In 2025, around 74% of VET enrolments associated with the hairdressers occupation were undertaken through an apprenticeship or traineeship,[88] yet completion of these learning pathways remains comparatively low. Latest NCVER data shows that 47.6% of hairdressing apprenticeships commencing in 2019 were completed within 6 years, compared with 58.7% across trade apprenticeships overall.[89] Hairdressers recorded the second-lowest completion rate among the 10 trade occupations and the largest number of commencements. SaCSA's hairdressing workforce shortage research also identified 3,090 cancellations or withdrawals in 2025, equivalent to around 10% of apprentices in training, compared with 7% nationally.[90] Apprentices aged 15 to 24 accounted for almost 90% of hairdressing cancellations or withdrawals.

This is significant because hairdressing is already experiencing workforce shortage and weak early career retention. Where apprenticeship completion is low, the sector loses part of its future qualified workforce before workers reach the level of experience employers are seeking. This can also increase pressure on existing salons to continue recruiting and training replacement entrants.

Employer capacity is a further constraint. Around 97% of hairdressing and barbershop businesses employ fewer than 20 people; the average business employs approximately 4 workers.[91] Between 2015 and 2025, both apprenticeship commencements and completions among employers with one to 4 employees fell by 21%.[92] SaCSA's 2025 survey found that 76% of respondents believed salons struggle to support apprentices because of time, staffing and cost pressures, while 90% agreed that tight margins limit investment in workforce development.[93]

Changing business models may further weaken the potential apprenticeship base. Growth in self-employment, chair rental and freelance work can reduce the number of employing businesses able to take on apprentices and the pool of experienced workers available to supervise and mentor them. SaCSA's survey found that 82% of respondents agreed that an increase in self-employment or freelance stylist work is reducing opportunities for apprenticeships and formal upskilling.[94] This is particularly significant in a subsector where workplace-based training depends heavily on experienced staff and small employers having the capacity to support learners.

In **barbering**, stakeholder feedback points to similar sustainability pressures, particularly around the quality and sequencing of workplace learning. Early-stage apprentices may have limited opportunities to practise specific skills, such as cutting and fading, while some employers lack the capacity to provide structured workplace training alongside RTO delivery. Around 75% of barbering respondents to SaCSA's 2024 Workforce Planning survey preferred a combination of on-the-job training and short and longer-term formal training.[95] The workforce implication is that access to apprenticeship places alone is not sufficient. The quality of workplace learning and the connection between provider-based training and employer supervision are also important to developing competent workers who remain in the occupation.

Traineeships play a much smaller role in the **beauty** industry. In 2025, apprentices and trainees accounted for around 3% of beauty VET enrolments, up from approximately 1.5% in 2015 but still well below hairdressing.[96] Employer capacity remains a constraint; 80% of beauty survey respondents reported that tight profit margins limit investment in workforce development and 64% agreed that freelance and booth or room-rental models reduce opportunities for structured training and skill development.[97] Given the limited use of apprenticeships in beauty, the workforce issue is therefore less about sustaining an established apprenticeship pathway and more about ensuring workers can access practical, workplace-aligned skill development through other training and employment models.

Traineeships are one of several possible **floristry** entry pathways, but their role has declined over time. Among VET enrolments associated with the florist occupation, the share undertaken through a traineeship fell from around 7.99% in 2015 to 3.8% in 2025.[98] Stakeholders have identified low traineeship wages, cost-of-living pressures and declining access to workplace placements as barriers to participation and completion. Given the relatively small role of traineeships in floristry, flexible introductory pathways, workplace experience and targeted skills development may be more relevant than relying on traineeships as the primary workforce pipeline.

Taken together, the evidence shows that apprenticeship sustainability is primarily a hairdressing and barbering workforce issue, rather than a personal services–wide pathway challenge. In these subsectors, low apprenticeship completion, employer capacity constraints, changing business models and the quality of workplace learning can weaken the pipeline of qualified workers. In bauty and floristry, apprenticeships and traineeships play a more limited role, so workforce development depends more heavily on other formal training, workplace learning and flexible pathways.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Exploring Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages
- Update of Hairdressing and Barbering Qualifications
- Update of Beauty Qualifications.

Strategic opportunities for the personal services sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan.

- Consider further analysis of apprenticeship and traineeship completion and withdrawal patterns across personal services, including when learners leave and the factors associated with non-completion.
- Explore how employer size, business models and operating pressures affect the capacity of businesses to take on, supervise and retain apprentices and trainees.

88 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025. Based on apprentice/trainee status.
89 NCVER, *Apprentice and Trainee Completion Rates*, 2025.
90 NCVER, *Apprentices and Trainees*, December 2025.
91 Hair and Beauty Australia, *Submission: Penalty Rates Case*, March 2018.
92 NCVER, *Apprentices and Trainees*, December 2025.
93 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
94 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
95 SaCSA, *Workforce Planning Report 2024*, 2024.

96 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025. Based on apprentice/trainee status.
97 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
98 NCVER, *Total VET Activity program enrolments*, 2025. Based on apprentice/trainee status.

School-to-work transitions and career awareness

School-to-work transitions are an important part of building the future personal services workforce, but the pathway from school-based participation into further training and employment is not always clear. Stakeholder feedback suggests that students, parents, schools and career advisers do not always have a strong understanding of personal services occupations, training pathways or longer-term career opportunities.[99,100] VET in schools can provide early exposure to the sector, but participation alone does not necessarily translate into qualification completion, apprenticeship entry or employment.[101]

In **hairdressing** and **barbering**, stakeholders have highlighted the importance of earlier engagement with prospective entrants and stronger links between schools and industry. Certificate II in Salon Assistant provides an introductory pathway into further hairdressing training. Hairdressing recorded around 860 VET in schools enrolments nationally in 2025, while only 16 completions were recorded in the same year.[102] These figures do not represent the same student cohort and should also not be interpreted as a direct measure of completion or attrition.

Stakeholder feedback also indicates that some students may move from a Certificate II into a Certificate III apprenticeship before completing the initial qualification, while funding settings and senior secondary certificate requirements can also influence participation. The key issue is therefore understanding how school-based participation translates into further training, apprenticeships and employment. This is particularly important in hairdressing, where workforce shortages persist and apprenticeships remain the main entry pathway.

In **beauty**, VET in schools participation has grown, but the mix of training has shifted. Total enrolments across beauty-related qualifications increased from 5,244 in 2015 to 8,565 in 2025, while beauty therapy enrolments fell from 480 to 130 over the same period. Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics provides an introductory pathway into beauty-related work, but not necessarily into beauty therapy. This suggests that growth in school-based beauty participation has been concentrated in introductory qualifications rather than higher-level beauty therapy pathways.[103] Given the shortage of bauty therapists identified elsewhere in this Workforce Plan, the workforce question is whether this increased school-based participation is creating a stronger pathway into further training and employment, or whether students are engaging with beauty at an introductory level without progressing into occupations where workforce demand is strongest.

In **floristry**, the challenge is less about the scale of school-based training and more about career visibility. Stakeholders report that floristry can be perceived as a hobby or part-time job, rather than a viable long-term profession. This can limit awareness of the technical, commercial and creative skills involved, as well as the training and career pathways available. Where career information does not reflect the full scope of the occupation, prospective entrants may be less likely to see floristry as a skilled career with opportunities for progression.

In **funeral services**, there is no clearly established school-to-work pathway. Stakeholders report that many workers enter the subsector by chance, through family connections or after experience in other industries. The workforce issue is therefore less about improving an existing school-based pathway and more about making entry routes and career opportunities visible to people without existing industry connections. Clearer career information and structured industry exposure could broaden the pool of potential entrants and reduce reliance on informal recruitment networks.

Public perceptions also shape how personal services careers are presented to students. This is particularly relevant in hairdressing, beauty and floristry, which have highly feminised workforces. Women account for around 77% of hairdressers, 98% of beauty therapists and 87% of florists.[104] SaCSA's research found that 94% of hairdressing survey respondents considered hairdressing undervalued as a skilled trade, while 89% of beauty survey respondents considered beauty undervalued as a skilled profession.[105] In beauty, 78% of respondents also agreed that schools and career advisers do not present beauty as a professional career.[106] Floristry stakeholders have raised similar concerns about the occupation being viewed as a hobby or part-time role. These perceptions may narrow the pool of people who consider personal services careers and reinforce gendered or outdated assumptions about the skills, progression and earning opportunities available.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the school-to-work challenge is not simply about increasing VET in schools participation, but ensuring school-based exposure leads to informed career choices and progression into further training and employment. Stronger school–industry connections, meaningful workplace exposure and clearer career information could support more effective transitions, while further analysis could identify where students disengage or pathways break down.

SaCSA's projects and activities

The following SaCSA projects and activities are designed to investigate and respond to key workforce and skills issues identified in this section:

- Scoping Service Industries Futures: Career Journey Mapping
- Exploring Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages
- Drivers of Beauty Workforce Shortages
- Early Career Mobility Analysis.

Strategic opportunities for the personal services sector

The following strategic opportunities highlight areas where further consideration or action could help address the workforce and skills issues identified in this Workforce Plan.

- Examine the factors contributing to low VET in schools completions despite relatively high enrolments, particularly in hairdressing, including the role of delivery models, workplace exposure and transition arrangements.
- Consider targeted career awareness activity for hairdressing, beauty, floristry and funeral services, where stakeholder feedback points to weak or outdated perceptions of occupations and limited visibility of longer-term career pathways.
- Examine how students move from school-based personal services VET into further training, apprenticeships and employment, and identify where transition points are breaking down.
- Examine the role, currency and progression pathways of Certificate II in Salon Assistant and Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics, including whether the qualifications continue to support effective transitions into further training and employment.

99 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.
100 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
101 NCVER, *Apprentices and Trainees*, December 2025.
102 NCVER, *VET in Schools Program Enrolments*, 2025.
103 NCVER, *VET in Schools Program Enrolments*, 2025.
104 ABS, *Labour Force Survey*, February Quarter 2026. (4-quarter average).
105 SaCSA, *Exploring the Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages*, 2026.
106 SaCSA, *Beauty Workforce Shortages Survey*, 2025, n=139.

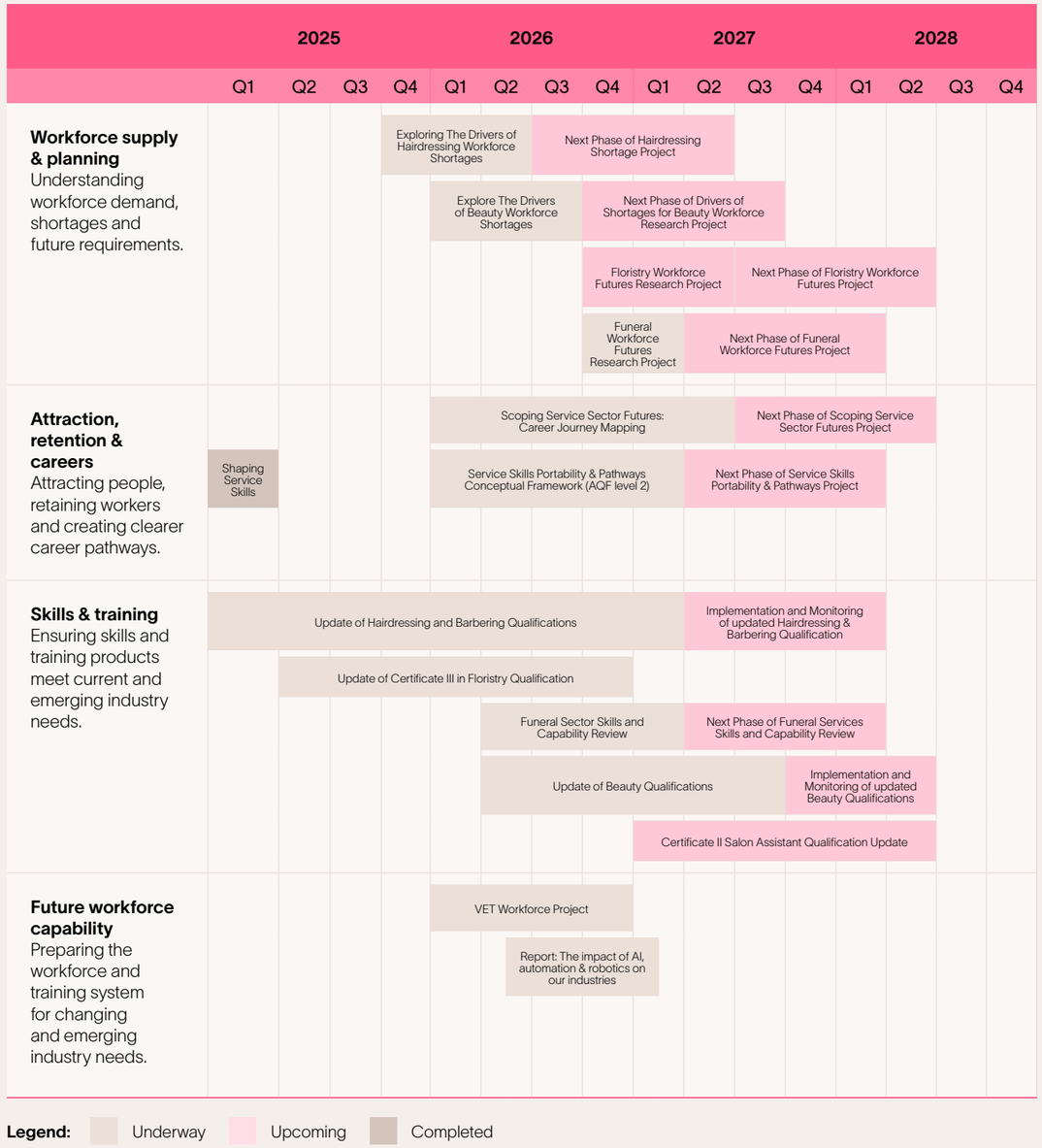
From evidence to action

SaCSA's Personal Services Work Plan (Figure 3) is responding to the workforce challenges, priorities and opportunities identified through our research, data analysis and industry engagement. It brings together the key projects and activities underway and planned across the life of this Workforce Plan, showing how our work will contribute to addressing current workforce needs while preparing for emerging and longer-term challenges.

The Work Plan is organised around 4 areas of focus: workforce supply and planning; attraction, retention and careers; skills and training; and future workforce capability. Together, these activities demonstrate how the evidence and stakeholder insights presented throughout this Workforce Plan translate into practical action.

The Work Plan will evolve as industry needs change, new evidence emerges and projects progress. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure SaCSA's work remains responsive to industry priorities and continues to address the workforce challenges identified in this plan.

Figure 3: Personal services work plan



SaCSA's projects and activities

The projects and activities below provide further detail on the work SaCSA is undertaking in response to the workforce priorities and challenges identified in this Workforce Plan. They reflect our ongoing work with industry to build the evidence base, address workforce and skills needs, and support longer-term workforce development

Projects are grouped as **active**, **planned** or **completed**. They provide a snapshot of SaCSA's current and recent work and a short overview of the purpose and focus of each project. SaCSA's program of work will continue to evolve as projects progress, new evidence emerges and industry priorities change.

Active

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Drivers of Beauty Workforce Shortages	SaCSA is examining the underlying drivers of workforce shortages across the beauty sector, with a focus on workforce supply, attraction, retention, skills and career pathways. The project combines workforce and training data with industry consultation to identify the structural causes of shortages and to inform evidence-based workforce planning, training and policy responses. The project is in the final stages of report development and will provide practical recommendations for industry to help address the factors contributing to workforce shortages.	Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression; school-to-work transitions and career awareness	Click to view project details
Early Career Mobility Analysis	This project uses linked ABS data to track how people move from education and training into employment and progress through their early careers across SaCSA's sectors, including personal services. The findings help address evidence gaps around career pathways, progression and retention and underpin SaCSA's Early Career Mobility Dashboard, an interactive dashboard that will be launched in 2026 to help industry explore the findings and support career guidance, workforce planning and training initiatives.	Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression; school-to-work transitions and career awareness	Click to view project details
Funeral Sector Skills and Capability Review	SaCSA is examining workforce capability and training needs across the funeral services, cemetery and crematorium sectors. The project is currently in Stage 1, focusing on initial occupation mapping. Later stages will include comparative analysis across occupations and training pathways. The review will identify current and emerging skills needs, examine how occupations are changing, assess the alignment of accredited and non-accredited training with industry requirements, and provide an evidence base for future workforce development and potential updates to the SIF Funeral Services Training Package.	Career pathways and progression; training and development.	Click to view project details
Report: The Impact of AI, Automation and Robotics on our Industries	This project explores the current and potential future impacts of AI, automation and robotics on SaCSA's industries. It will provide an understanding of the challenges and opportunities posed by technological advancements.	Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; training and development	
Scoping Service Industries Futures: Career Journey Mapping	SaCSA is mapping how workers enter, progress through and leave careers across SaCSA's service sectors, including personal services. It will identify key career transitions and progression and exit points, examine how qualifications support career mobility, and explore the barriers and enablers affecting specific career stages.	Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression; school-to-work transitions and career awareness	Click to view project detail

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Service Skills Portability & Pathways (AQF Level 2)	Building on SaCSA's Shaping Service Skills project, this project will develop a conceptual Certificate II framework that recognises shared foundation skills across service industries. It aims to support movement between industries, recognition of existing skills and access to new opportunities. Work to date has included research into existing Certificate II qualifications and a review of training products to identify common skills, duplication and industry-specific requirements. SaCSA has also consulted with industry, training providers, schools and VET stakeholders. Consultation has tested views on transferable skills, entry-level capability, industry identity and learner pathways. Findings are now being consolidated to refine the framework and inform final recommendations.	Training and development	Click to view project details
Update of Beauty Qualifications	SaCSA is reviewing and updating SHB30121 Certificate III in Beauty Services, SHB30221 Certificate III in Make-Up, SHB30321 Certificate III in Nail Technology, SHB40121 Certificate IV in Beauty Therapy and SHB50121 Diploma of Beauty Therapy in response to industry concerns about training alignment and graduate job readiness. The project aims to ensure qualifications are fit for purpose and future ready, and that they strengthen alignment with employment outcomes, reduce unnecessary duplication and create clearer pathways.	Career pathways and progression; training and development	Click to view project details
Update of Hairdressing and Barbering Qualifications	SaCSA is reviewing and updating SHB30416 Certificate III in Hairdressing, SHB30516 Certificate III in Barbering, SHB40216 Certificate IV in Hairdressing and SHB50216 Diploma of Salon Management to ensure training better reflects contemporary industry skills and workplace requirements. The project is in its final stages. The updated training products are expected to progress through assurance and endorsement processes in early 2027 before publication. The review aims to reduce duplication, strengthen practical and job-ready skills, improve alignment between training and industry practice, and create clearer progression from Certificate III through to higher-level qualifications and salon management.	Career pathways and progression; training and development; apprenticeship and traineeship sustainability	Click to view project details
Update of Certificate III in Floristry	SaCSA is reviewing and updating the SFL30115 Certificate III in Floristry to ensure the qualification reflects contemporary floristry practices, evolving business models and current and emerging industry skills needs. The project is updating core and elective content, strengthening foundational practical and job-ready skills, and improving the qualification's flexibility and alignment with career pathways and areas such as technology, sustainability and small business.	Career pathways and progression; training and development	Click to view project details
VET Workforce Project	This project is part of a national program aligned with the Australian Government's VET Workforce Blueprint. It focuses on understanding and addressing key challenges affecting the VET workforce, with the broader aim of building a strong, sustainable workforce of VET teachers, trainers and assessors that can meet industry skills and training needs.	Training and development	Click to view project details

Planned

- **Certificate II Salon Assistant Qualification Update.** This project is reviewing and updating the Certificate II Salon Assistant qualification to ensure it reflects current and emerging workforce needs. The review aims to strengthen practical, transferable and future-focused skills and support clear and relevant pathways for learners and the workforce.
  Relevant issues being addressed: Training and development
- **Deepening Analysis of Workforce Needs for the Floristry Sector.** Building on the workforce issues identified through SaCSA's Workforce Plan, this project will examine floristry workforce needs in greater depth, including the underlying factors influencing attraction and retention, changing business models, emerging skill requirements and workforce pathways. The research will strengthen the evidence base and identify potential workforce, training and industry-led responses.
  Relevant issues being addressed: Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression
- **Deepening Analysis of Workforce Needs for the Funeral Sector.** This research project is intended to deepen understanding of the fundamental workforce needs of the funeral sector through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The work will support workforce planning, inform consideration of the suite of SIF Funeral Services qualifications and identify priority areas for future training, workforce and policy initiatives.
  Relevant issues being addressed: Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression
- **Next Phase of Hairdressing Workforce Shortage Project.** SaCSA is consolidating findings and recommendations from its hairdressing workforce shortage research and industry roundtable to identify practical next steps within its remit. This work will help inform future workforce, skills, training and industry responses to persistent workforce shortages in hairdressing.
  Relevant issues being addressed: Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression; apprenticeship and traineeship sustainability; school-to-work transitions and career awareness

Completed

Project title	Project description	Relevant issues being addressed	Project details
Exploring Drivers of Hairdressing Workforce Shortages	SaCSA examined the underlying causes of Australia's persistent hairdressing workforce shortage through workforce and training data, stakeholder consultation and industry research. The project identified 5 interconnected root causes: training mismatch and cost pressures, limited regional training access, salon capacity constraints and rising self-employment, low pay and limited career pathways, and public perceptions and industry status. The findings provide an evidence base and action plan for future workforce, training and policy responses.	Workforce shortages, attraction and retention; career pathways and progression; apprenticeship and traineeship sustainability; school-to-work transitions and career awareness	Click to view project details

Looking ahead

The personal services sector is expected to continue growing over the coming decade, but meeting future workforce needs will require more than increasing the number of people entering the sector. The evidence in this Workforce Plan points to a broader challenge: strengthening workforce supply while improving the training, career pathways and workplace conditions that enable people to develop their skills and build longer-term careers in personal services.

Retention will be particularly important. Hairdressing, barbering, beauty therapy and dermal therapy remain in national shortage, while fewer than half of new hairdressers, beauty therapists and florists remain in their occupation after 3 years. At the same time, employers continue to place a strong premium on experience. This means attracting and training new workers will need to be accompanied by stronger pathways for workers to develop, progress and remain in the sector.

The future training pipeline will also require attention. Personal services enrolments and completions declined in 2025, with much of the fall concentrated in hairdressing, while apprenticeship completion remains a challenge. School-based VET participation has strengthened, but the pathways from school-based training into further training, apprenticeships and employment are not always clear. Across the sector, industry has also highlighted the importance of practical learning, workplace readiness and training that keeps pace with contemporary industry practice.

These challenges will not be the same across personal services. Apprenticeships remain central to hairdressing and barbering, while beauty and floristry rely more heavily on other combinations of formal training and workplace development, and much of the capability development in funeral services occurs on the job. Regional and remote communities face additional barriers to accessing training and practical learning opportunities. Responses will therefore need to reflect different occupations, locations and business models, rather than relying on a single sector-wide approach.

Changing business models and technology will add another dimension. Growth in self-employment and small and non-employing businesses is changing how workers access employment, supervision and workplace development. AI, digital systems and other technologies will also reshape some tasks and skill requirements, but current evidence suggests practical expertise, creativity, interpersonal capability and professional judgement will remain central to personal services work. Workforce and training responses will need to keep pace with these changes while preserving the capabilities that underpin quality service delivery.

SaCSA will continue to translate this evidence into practical responses through workforce research, qualification reviews, career pathway development and targeted initiatives across hairdressing and barbering, beauty, floristry and funeral services. Sustained collaboration with industry, governments, unions, training providers and other stakeholders will be important to ensure these responses remain grounded in workforce needs and will adapt as those needs change.

The longer-term opportunity is to build a personal services workforce with stronger entry and progression pathways, supported by greater employer capacity to retain and develop skilled workers, and training and workforce development that can respond to changing industry practices, technology and business models.



Appendix A

Table A1: SaCSA's personal services industries

ANZSIC Division	Subdivision level (ANZSIC 2-digit)		ANZSIC Group (3-digit)		Employed	
ANZSIC title	**ANZSIC code**	**ANZSIC title**	**ANZSIC code**	**ANZSIC title**	**(persons '000)**	**Share of total**
Rental, hiring and real estate services	66	Rental and hiring services (except real estate)	661	Motor vehicle and transport equipment rental and hiring	11.4	3.6%
			663 (50.2% of group allocated to SaCSA)	Other goods and equipment rental and hiring	12.7	4.1%
			664	Non-financial intangible assets (except copyrights) leasing	0.0	0.0%
Other services	95	Personal and other services	951	Personal care services	128.2	40.9%
			952	Funeral, crematorium and cemetery services	9.9	3.2%
			953	Other personal services	65.0	20.7%
			954	Religious services	34.5	11.0%
			955	Civic, professional and other interest group services	48.9	15.6%
	96	Private households employing staff and undifferentiated goods- and service-producing activities of households for own usehouseholds employing staff and undifferentiated goods- and service-producing activities of households for own use	960	Private households employing staff and undifferentiated goods- and service-producing activities of households for own use	2.6	0.8%

Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, February Quarter 2026 (4-quarter average)

Table A2: SaCSA's personal services occupations (ANZSCO)

6-digit ANZSCO code	Title	Is this occupation directly linked to a Personal Services qualification?
142114	Hair or Beauty Salon Manager	SHB-linked
272211	Minister of Religion	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
362111	Florist	SFL-linked
391111	Hairdresser	SHB-linked
399514	Make Up Artist	SHB-linked
451111	Beauty Therapist	SHB-linked
451311	Funeral Director	SIF-linked
451399	Funeral Workers nec	SIF-linked
451800	Other Personal Service Workers nfd	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
451812	Hair or Beauty Salon Assistant	SHB-linked
451813	Sex Worker or Escort	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
451814	Body Artist	SHB-linked
451816	Religious Assistant	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
451899	Personal Service Workers nec	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
621912	Rental Salesperson	Part of general Personal Services sector remit
899912	Car Park Attendant	Part of general Personal Services sector remit

Appendix B

Table A3: SHB – hairdressing and beauty services, SFL – floristry & SIF – funeral services training package qualifications AI exposure

Program ID	Program title	Augmentation exposure	Automation exposure
SHB20121	Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics	0.57	0.36
SHB20216	Certificate II in Salon Assistant	0.54	0.32
SHB30121	Certificate III in Beauty Services	0.59	0.36
SHB30221	Certificate III in Make-Up	0.6	0.38
SHB30321	Certificate III in Nail Technology	0.59	0.37
SHB30416	Certificate III in Hairdressing	0.51	0.29
SHB30516	Certificate III in Barbering	0.49	0.26
SHB40121	Certificate IV in Beauty Therapy	0.59	0.36
SHB40216	Certificate IV in Hairdressing	0.51	0.27
SHB50121	Diploma of Beauty Therapy	0.6	0.37
SHB50216	Diploma of Salon Management	0.59	0.36
SHB60118	Advanced Diploma of Intense Pulsed Light and Laser for Hair Reduction	0.62	0.35
SHB20121	Certificate II in Retail Cosmetics	0.57	0.36
SFL20115	Certificate II in Floristry (Assistant)	0.62	0.38
SFL30115	Certificate III in Floristry	0.62	0.37
SFL40115	Certificate IV in Floristry	0.6	0.28
SIF40213	Certificate IV in Embalming	0.47	0.34

Source: JSA, Gen AI Capacity Study Interactive Tables (2025), VET table. Exposure measures the potential for tasks to be augmented or automated and does not represent the proportion of jobs expected to disappear.



Appendix C

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