AUSTRALIAN HOTELS ASSOCIATION

Accommodation Australia
A DIVISION OF THE AHA

Chef Skills Crisis in Hospitality

Updated February 2026

Australia's hospitality industry is experiencing a critical shortage of chefs.

Although chef shortages have been a structural long-term problem for the industry over many years, the current confluence of factors has seriously exacerbated the situation. Despite improvements in workplace conditions, including higher wages driven by award increases and labour market demand, the industry continues to struggle with attracting and retaining chefs, with an insufficient local chef training pipeline and limitations in using the migration options.

On the upside, the passion, creativity and opportunity for a lifelong rewarding career as a chef are available for those that seek it. However, there is little doubt that there are, for many people, perceived and real downsides to a job as a chef such as working during hours when others may be resting or partying (such as evenings or weekends) or the pressure of working in a commercial kitchen. Given the very nature of the hospitality industry, factors such as the hours of work and customer demand for efficient and high-quality food service are unavoidable. These are the givens, so we need to look elsewhere for solutions.

There is no single solution to the chef shortage crisis. Action is needed on all policy fronts including apprenticeships, innovative training approaches, migration, and attracting more people to choose cooking as a career.

This paper was originally designed as background to consultation with AA/AHA members which took place between September and October 2025. This updated document has been informed by this consultation as well as by recent data and policy changes.

State of Play

According to the ABS, the industry value-add (IVA) for the Accommodation and Food Service Industry in 2023-24 was $63.4 billion (compared with $60.4 billion in 2022-23) on revenue of $156.2 billion[1]. Wages and salaries paid by AFS employers to 1.22 million workers in 2023-24 totaled over $39 billion. Within that substantial workforce, Jobs and Skills Australia estimates that there are approximately 133,300 chefs as well as 40,000 cooks and pastrycooks.

Chefs and cooks are not just needed in hospitality. Aged care homes, long day childcare, mining camps, food manufacturing and hospitals all need commercial cooks. The number of chefs in Australia quoted above is also an underestimate. Many café, catering and restaurant managers and owners are also chefs, either actively still utilising their skills or supervising others in the delivery of cuisine. The level of skill in cooking varies from short order and breakfast cooks through to fine

[1] ABS, 81550DO001_202324 Australian Industry, 2023-24 released on 30 May 2025.

dining. The variety of cuisine on offer in Australia also changes the skills needed – Japanese, Italian, Chinese, French, Thai and Cajun to name but a few all have different requirements. Restaurants and hotels stand on their food reputation - innovation and creativity for some; consistency and value-for-money for others. Hundreds of thousands of other hospitality jobs as well as the sustainability of businesses depend on the skills of the chef. Australia needs chefs - both those that are trained here as well as from across the world - in order for us to maintain our reputation for good food, wide variety and great value.

Australia needs more chefs

Jobs & Skills Australia predicts that the number of chefs need to increase in net terms by 5.8% by 2030 and 12.5% by 2035, and cooks by similar amounts. Importantly, this growth in chefs is a net figure – the actual need for trained chefs is likely to be three or even four times that many over the next ten years due to attrition or transition into other hospitality roles. The JSA prediction is also likely to be conservative at it is making the estimate based on existing trend growth. The bottom line is that the current apprentice chef commencements each year are simply insufficient to meet our future needs.

Cooking Apprenticeships

Declining Skills Pipeline - apprentices

As the table below shows, the number of apprentice chefs and cooks in training fell by 11.6% over the year to June 2025. Across 2024-25, the number of apprentices commencing as cooks and chefs (including patisserie and catering) fell by 25% to 2,210 compared to the 2,935 that commenced the previous year. These numbers compare unfavourably to the pre-COVID levels when the number of cooking apprentices in training in September 2019 were 7,685, and 3,725 commenced their training in the year to September 2019. In the period 2004-2017, the number of commencements in the Certificate III alone were in the 4,500 – 6,400 range per annum, putting the 1,940 in 2024-25 in stark contrast.

Chef Apprentices in training June quarter							
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2025 v 2021	2025 v 2024
Chefs Cert IV	435	630	540	515	720	65.5	39.8
Cooks Cert III	7375	7745	6945	6020	5055	-31.5	-16.0
Total	7810	8375	7485	6535	5775	-26.1	-11.6
Chef Apprentices commencements year to 30 June							
Chefs Cert IV	260	535	125	430	270	3.8	-37.2
Cooks Cert III	4170	4005	2725	2505	1940	-53.5	-22.6
Total	4430	4540	2850	2935	2210	-50.1	-24.7

Without intervention, the number of apprentice chefs currently in training is sure to fall even further as those that commenced in COVID when wage subsidies were in place complete their training.

Apprentice Chef non-completions

An analysis of survey results released in March 2025 by NCVER on the outcomes of food trade apprentice non-completers provides some challenges to often-heard presumptions as to why chefs drop out of their apprenticeship. Dealing with the most often mentioned issue up-front, according

to the survey only 25.2% of those not completing their food trades apprenticeship cited *low pay and working conditions* as their main reason for discontinuing, compared with 29.7% for the all-industry average. Also, only 11% said that *not liking the type of work* was their main reason, which was only marginally higher than the average of 10.2%. The two reasons given by discontinuing food trade apprentices which were most significantly higher than the average was the *lost/job or apprenticeship discontinued (*17.9% compared with 12.4%) and *personal reasons* (20.3% compared with 16.5%). A full analysis of food trade apprenticeship outcomes is available here.

Employer incentives impact Apprentice Chef numbers

Prior to the pandemic, the number of apprentice chefs in training was 7,685 but by June 2020 as the pandemic took off, the number in training had dropped by 13% to 6,675 and commencements were down over 22%. Recovery came in the form of the wage subsidies, which boosted commencements by 1500 in each of the years 2021 and 2022 (even when the pandemic was raging). This is irrefutable evidence that subsidies paid to employers are effective in boosting chef apprenticeship commencements. Although it is acknowledged that the COVID support of a 50% wage subsidy is unsustainable in the long term, the employer incentives need to be sufficient to impact the decision to hire an apprentice chef.

Solution 1: Increase Cooking Trade Apprenticeships through incentives

Government apprenticeship policy does not prioritise chefs

Despite the importance of chefs across a range of industries, current apprenticeship policies do not prioritise chefs or the hospitality industry generally. In June 2024, all employer incentive support was removed for hospitality traineeships. Of even greater concern, the $5,000 hiring incentive to the employer of apprentice chefs, which was already not sufficient to increase the apprenticeship numbers sufficiently to meet industry needs, was halved as at 1 January 2026. Across the apprenticeship system, all new funding for incentives has gone to apprentices rather than employers, particularly those in clean energy sectors and house building trades. However, with trade apprenticeships numbers falling across the board, it is questionable whether the money redirected from employers to apprentices is having any positive impact.

Encouraging more Australians to pursue chef apprenticeships requires financial incentives that support both apprentices and employers. A well-structured subsidy model can alleviate those financial pressures on both businesses and apprentices.

Proposed Incentive Payment Structure

It is proposed that the financial incentives should be distributed as follows:

Incentives Payment Schedule	Chef apprentice	Chef Employer
Year One		
3 months		2,000
6 months	3,000	2,000
9 months		2,000
12months	3,000	2,000
Year Two		
18 months	2,500	2,000
24 months	2,500	2,000
Year Three	2,000	2,000
On completion	2,000	1,000
Total	**15,000**	**15,000**

This structured approach ensures ongoing financial support, increased apprentice retention, and encourages businesses to commit to long-term training with:

- Increased commencements of chef apprenticeships
- Increased apprentice retention – financial security during training will reduce the need for apprentices to work multiple jobs, lowering dropout rates.
- A more attractive structure to better enable the hiring of adult apprentices who are highly valued as apprentice chefs due to their ability to handle pressure in the kitchen and the application of experience and other life skills.
- Stronger domestic workforce – A greater supply of local chefs will reduce reliance on migrant workers, enhancing industry stability.
- Support for small and regional businesses – stronger incentives will help small hospitality venues invest in training without excessive financial strain.

Expanding employer wage subsidies and apprentice financial support will create a sustainable and attractive career pathway, ensuring a skilled, local workforce for the hospitality sector.

Employer incentives need to focus on commencements and the first year

As was very clear from the consultations with members (see Appendix for full summary), one of the largest barriers to apprentice chef commencements is the cost to the employer in the first year. A new apprentice knows little about operations in the kitchen, their productive output is low and supervisory costs high. These costs are even higher in hospitality due to the 24/7 nature of the industry and the rostering complexities of ensuring adequate supervision for the apprentice. Most members supported the above proposed incentive level for employers, with some suggesting that would be better at $10,000 in year 1.

Apprentice incentives to complete

It is also important to encourage more apprentices to complete. Being an unlicensed trade, many cooking apprentices leave before completion due to the high demand for cooks as, unlike an electrician or plumber, they do not need a licence to utilise their skills. While the skills of a non-completer are still very valuable in the industry, finishing their apprenticeship delivers even more value to both the apprentice and the industry.

Members identified that barriers for apprentices relate to housing costs and availability as well as travelling time and availability of suitable training colleges, particularly in the regions. It was also suggested that the apprentice wages should be more in line with HIGR unqualified cooks. There was general support for government incentives to complete their apprenticeship, although some questioned whether cash was the right approach, and instead suggested a return to the old tool allowance. Another suggestion made by a few members was financial support to attend farm visit, artisan workshops or food festivals where the apprentice can be exposed to ideas.

Consultation also reinforced the value of mentoring. For some time, the AHA/AA have advocated for a reintroduction of government funding for industry-based mentorship. As mentioned above, one of the most likely reasons for food trades apprentice to drop out is personal reasons, and it is believe that appropriate mentorship could help keep the apprentice in the industry if not that particular job.

In addition to the proposed payment schedule, there was strong support for extra incentives to both the employer and the apprentice for adult apprentices (over 20). Adult apprentices are well regarded for their maturity in the kitchen environment, and their life skills. However, the first year

costs are an even bigger barrier due to the higher wages for an adult apprentice, who is still likely to have little or no cooking experience.

Although it was not a feature in the consultations, group training employers of chefs have been an important part of the apprentice landscape in hospitality. Group training companies enable apprentices to potentially be exposed to different kitchen and cuisine environments, and allow flexibility for employers and apprentices to discontinue the enterprise arrangement without impacting the apprentice's contract. It is important they remain an option for cooking apprenticeships.

Solution 2: Adapt the apprenticeship pathway

In the consultation undertaken with AA and AHA members prior to the apprenticeship incentive submission in 2024, one of the key issues raised was the length of the trade apprenticeship and the incentive for apprentices to opt out early to take up higher paying cooking roles as an unqualified but still skilled cook. One of the recommendations in our submission was that the Cert III Commercial cooking qualification be structured in a way that an early opt out after say 2 years should at least result in a Certificate II and an encouragement to complete the extra units required for a Cert III outside of the apprenticeship. The encouragement to complete the Certificate III should be enabled by better RPL and trade recognition processes, and active promotion of the option in the industry via eeger.com.au and other channels.

Both of these ideas were widely supported in the 2025 consultations.

Discussions with Tourism Training Australia, and backed up through the consultations, have also revealed that there was much industry support for a menu-driven structure for the Certificate III. This structure would encourage an approach to learning cooking skills according to menu complexity rather than delivering the training in the current produce-based approach, ie. beef, chicken, seafood and desserts. The menu approach would result in students being able to tackle cooking for whole menus starting with simple fare and then as the apprenticeship progresses, learning how to cook more complex or fine dining fare.

Although shortening the Certificate III apprenticeship is one option, this was viewed in consultations as devaluing the trade qualification. Other options within or connected with an apprenticeship framework which could be considered separately or as mutually beneficial are:

1. Work with SaCSA to ensure the structure of the Cert III allows for an early opt out and a Certificate II being awarded. Early advice is that they training package development guidelines may limit changes in the way sought, but this is to be further explored.
2. Work with providers to develop and support a ***Certificate II Hospitality plus*** option which officially in VET would still be seen as a Cert II but seeking industry-wide recognition which will give it a higher status than a Cert II. This could be a two-year apprenticeship/traineeship model which incorporates all Certificate II units plus additional units of value to the industry. The apprentice could enrol in the Cert III in order that employer incentives on commencement can be accessed or otherwise all governments accept this as an approved traineeship which attracts employer incentives.

   It is noted that a pilot has been developed in South Australia for a cooking 2-year traineeship. This pilot is worthy of close examination across Australia as it will hopefully lead

to a higher completion rate of a shorter qualification, and at the same time deliver much valued cooking skills into the industry. One potential concern that will need to be considered will be that if it delivers a Certificate III, how that will be respected against a 3-4 year apprenticeship delivering the same level of qualification.

3. A logical extension of the above would be that industry consider encouraging potential cooks to undertake a 2-year traineeship delivering a certificate 3 and potential chefs seeking a higher level of skill undertake a certificate IV via a 3-4 year trade apprenticeship. If this approach was widely adopted, it would be essential that should a trainee completing their two-year traineeship and their employer wish to extend to a 4-year apprenticeship to received a Certificate IV, that this would be seamless as an option for both. As an added benefit, this qualification structure would best reflect the distinction in the ABS's Occupational Standard Classification Australia (OSCA) where a Cook is Skill level 3 and a Chef is rated at a higher-level Skill level 2. This approach also recognises that there was a trend for a few years for a growth in Cert IV apprenticeships.[2]
4. Ensure SaCSA in its review of the Cert III qual provide greater emphasis on the benefit of a menu-style model and encourage RTOs to deliver that way to ensure that apprentices who do not complete their certificate III trade qualification, have more holistic skills for cooking whole menus. The menu-based approach was widely supported in consultations including comments that it would provide more holistic skills, particularly for non-completers.
5. Encourage State and Territory governments to fund cooking qualifications in a way that maximises flexibility and responsiveness.
6. Ensure that RPL is more widely available in industry to help workers achieve post-secondary qualifications and encourage continuing professional development. Increased RPL was strongly supported in the consultations.

There were important comments in the consultation about the importance of updating the curriculum to include more practical skills and contemporary cooking methods (including nutrition, presentation and sustainability). Use of new technologies was also important, as is the acknowledgement that many cooks/chefs undertaking cooking qualifications do not end up in a restaurant kitchen, but instead in a large catering situation such as an institution or "industrial" kitchen providing pre-prepared high-quality food for other foodservice businesses.

Importance of Migration

With the pipeline of apprenticeship chefs getting narrower, many establishments are increasingly relying on temporary skilled migrants to maintain kitchen operations. Reflecting the skill shortages in the industry for chefs as well as other key occupations, in 2024-25, of the 68,200[3] primary temporary skilled migration visas granted across all industries, 10,770 were for the accommodation and food service industry, which was 125.2% more than the previous year. Chefs accounted for

[2] As it is an unlicensed occupation, the distinction between cook and chef has always been fluid. According to ABS Census information, many more people declare themselves as Chefs rather than cooks. In the Hospitality Industry General Award, there are two levels of cook below the tradesperson level of Cook Grade 3, and five levels altogether with the highest level under the award (non managerial) being Chef de partie Cook Grade 5.

[3] Home Affairs (2025), *Temporary Resident Skilled Report 2024-25*, Temporary resident (skilled) report 30 June 2025

6,360 of these visa grants which represented 9.3% of all occupations granted a temporary skilled visa – the highest across all industries and cooks were the 6th highest.

Given both the shortage of chefs and the wide variety of cuisine styles on offer in Australia, there will always be an important role for skilled permanent and temporary migration options for chefs. It is essential that the occupations of both cook and chef remain on the JSA Skills in Demand list. Under the new OSCA which replaces ANZSCO there is also a new occupation for Senior Chef, and this too should be available for sponsorship.

The complexity and costs of the migration system are barriers to access. In addition, two recent changes have exacerbated the problem: the rise in the CSIT and the reduction in international students undertaking cooking qualifications.

With the 1 July 2025 increase in the Core Skills Income Threshold to $76,515 to well above award rates with the possible exception of Chef de Partie, the sponsorship of skilled chefs is even tougher. The CSIT not only has the role of ensuring the migrant is paid annually above the threshold, but according to the migration regulations, it is used as a threshold for the market rate of the occupation. For example, if the market rate for chefs in the locality of the sponsoring employer is below the CSIT, then the migrant cannot be sponsored even if the employer is willing to pay above the CSIT. This market rate measure needs to be removed at the CSIT level to leave the only threshold being that the employer pays above the threshold. For chefs with a market rate above the CSIT, such as many Executive or Sous Chefs, the market rate requirement would still apply.

Another option within the migration program would be for an industry labour agreement to cover chefs. An industry labour agreement allows businesses to apply for template company labour agreement to specific numbers of the occupation (s) covered by the agreement, somewhat simplifying what is a complex process. At present there is a Fine Dining labour agreement which covers occupations such as chef, fine dining waiter, sommelier and restaurant manager which allow for special requirements for English language levels. However, this labour agreement does not enable a reduction of the CSIT which is a common option with other labour agreements. A new labour agreement allowing a ten percent reduction on the CSIT for chefs and cooks should be initiated, or otherwise an amendment to the Fine or Formal Dining Labour Agreement.

Over the last year the Federal Government has effectively capped student numbers, which have particularly impacted vocational training providers. While a crack down on dodgy providers who were enrolling students in non-genuine qualifications is supported, the caps have impacted many industry-respected training providers who were producing high quality outcomes for students who were than a valuable source of migrants for sponsorship as skilled chefs.

Solution 3 - Migration options for Chefs

1. Retain the occupations of cook and chef on the SID list and ensure the new occupation of senior chef is on the list.
2. Change the migration regulations to allow employers who are willing to pay above the CSIT to sponsor cooks and chefs, even if the market rate is lower than the CSIT.
3. Explore the option of allowing migrants to become apprentice chefs. This could potentially be achieved on a pilot or capped basis recognising that the rates of pay would be below the CSIT. These apprentices would not receive funded training but be on a fee for service basis. Close neighbours such as the Pacific Islands or Indonesia may be good sources of people

interested in working and studying to be chefs. To deal with the wage/cost issue, perhaps it is only available to hospitality businesses willing to provide suitable accommodation. This option was strongly supported in the consultations.

4. Initiate a process to finalise an industry labour agreement covering cooks and chefs which allows for reduced English language requirements and up to a 10% reduction in the CSIT for cooks and lower-level chefs such as commi, demi chefs and chef de partie.
5. Advocate for a raising of caps for international students studying cookery at well respected providers.
6. Need to streamline sponsorship processes to make them less costly and complex.
7. Explore reciprocal visas with countries such as USA, UK, Canada and Europe so that Australian chefs can gain international experience, and international chefs can work here. This could be negotiated like a WHM bilateral agreement.
8. Better use of the Training Visa (407) which offers a pathway for other visa holders, say a WHM, doing unqualified cooking work towards a formal training qualification.

Innovative Training Solutions

Due to poor and inconsistent funding, including the removal of employer incentives from hospitality traineeships, the hospitality industry is increasingly disengaging from the national VET training system, and domestic enrolments are also declining.

Between 2015 and 2023, international enrolments in the SIT Tourism, Travel and Hospitality Training package qualifications more than tripled while domestic enrolments declined by 29%. The domestic share of total enrolments has declined from 87% to 53% over the period. The increase in international enrolments and completions, as mentioned above, have more recently decreased due to policy changes but there is no sign that domestic enrolments will fill the gaps.

The decline in domestic enrolments reflects many factors, not the least of which is inconsistent approach to funding by State and Territory governments. Although it is an overall trend, there are however examples of arrangements between industry and providers that are working to boost numbers. We need to better capture and replicate what is working, and address that which is not.

Solution 4 - Introduce innovative training solutions to develop chefs

1. Ensure all State and Territory governments are fully funding cooking qualifications for domestic students.
2. Within the constraints of the new migration program for international students, work with respected industry-engaged international providers to integrate an institutional based Certificate III or IV program with paid industry work experience - replicating an apprenticeship model but outside of the formal apprenticeship system.
3. Identify through member consultation innovative partnerships between training providers and members that are working to increase the number of trained cooks and chefs.
4. Improve mechanisms to ensure trainers are up to date and passionate about cooking. Strong member feedback emphasized the importance of this, as the quality of the trainer is so important. Providers are not adequately preparing students for the pressure of a commercial kitchen and the transition is too difficult for some.

Attracting people to choose Chef as a career

One of the most stubborn challenges to overcome is the difficulties in attracting more Australians to choose cooking as a career. This challenge is not exclusive to cooking - it impacts almost all occupations in the hospitality industry and even more broadly VET or trade level occupations as against careers requiring a higher education qualification.

Over the last two decades with the popularity of cooking shows such as MasterChef, it was hoped that it would inspire more people to choose cooking as a career. Ironically, in many cases it has done the opposite, as the reality of cooking multiple dishes for a large number of customers is far removed from the time allowed to present a single creative dish.

The long-held concern of tourism and hospitality stakeholders that the industry is seen as providing jobs rather than careers is currently being addressed through a government Austrade Grant given to Accommodation Australia to launch a major jobs, careers and training website just for tourism and hospitality. eeger.com.au is to be launched in July 2025 and a major role for this new website is to promote careers in our industry.

The new eeger platform needs to include an important element to encourage more people to become chefs. Given that chefs have such a pivotal role in the hospitality industry, it needs to be given a featured role within the website and beyond.

The need to better promote chef as a career was the most engaged issue across all of the consultation. It came up constantly, even when talking about other potential solution areas. Members feel passionate about the career and the opportunities, and how these are not being adequately promoted.

Solution 5 - Promoting chef as a career

1. Encourage eeger.com.au to feature chefs as a critically important career for the hospitality industry and maximise the promotional investment of eeger.com.au at career expos and similar events and activities.
2. Promote eeger more widely with industry so that it is more actively used by employers.
3. Better coordinate hospitality industry participation in careers expos and similar activities.
4. Do more to promote cooking as a career at schools though visits by passionate chefs and cooking competitions.
5. Field trips (paddock to plate) are also seen as useful tools in creating interest.
6. Modernise the industry's image and showcase diverse career pathways beyond traditional cooking roles. There is a need to target parents and highlight the evolving nature of culinary skills and production environments – modern approaches are so much different than 25 years ago.
7. Work with State governments on improving the overall approach to cooking in schools. Hosptiality is often taught by non-specialist teachers who do not instill any passion in the career option.

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Appendix A: Summary of Feedback from Consultation Sessions on the AHA/AA Chef Shortages Document

Apprenticeships – Proposed Solutions

Tate Regional NSW – Bowral – local TAFE does not supply any training for chefs and cooks so they move to other regions for training and when return cannot afford housing and affordability to live locally

Fiona P - Finding local apprentices is a challenge – hotels use a third party (GTO) to source and then don't get incentives but higher fees – advantages are that if they don't work out it is easy to switch out

Kylie Gold coast – housing is more and more expensive and commonly apprentices are looking for shared accommodation, finding local talent, visas and sponsorship expensive and need owner approval, art of being a chef when you work in a large production is being lost and they want to learn how to make from scratch (currently not a creative activity)

Bernhard – creating desirability for chef as a career. He started as a chef 38yrs ago and now a GM – great career but need to create desirability, people are currently looking for instant fame / recognition – but you need to put in the time building the skills and experience. Do High schools still teach hospitality and what is the engagement here. Working hours will always be a barrier but we can assist with scheduling but not just chefs that this affects. Migration numbers – is there a particular country they are coming from – Jenny stated India is the main source across all industries but published statistics don't specifically provide information on where chefs are coming from.

Fiona – agree with Bernhard – with hours – had opportunity to speak with high school counsellors and shocked by how outdated their information was

Phil – SaCSA is undertaking a career mapping exercise to identify where people can go with their career to use as a promotional tool. Agree strongly with Bernhard and Fiona about promoting benefits to students. Thirdly, high school hospitality needs to be updated for relevance and benefits

Bernhard –various cuisines demand respect of the cultures and cooking techniques but this takes time so not something to be rushed. This questions the ability to increase the number of cuisine styles that can be covered in a Cert III.

Tate – change in structure might help to get more engagement. Keen to see how to get re-engagement from those who might have left the industry

Nicole – agree with Fiona and Bernhard, when doing career Tafe days, seeing young mothers return to workforce looking for niche role, also need to think about adult apprentices to drive them to return and be mentored

Stella – applicants for apprenticeships often state that "my parents wanted me to do something else" responses – need to engage / education to parents through career advisors

The group (2nd session) discussed challenges in the hospitality industry, particularly regarding chef recruitment and training. Jack Milbourne highlighted the issue of limited access to training facilities in regional areas, while Mitch and Danielle pointed out difficulties in sourcing apprentices and promoting chef careers in schools. Iain noted that many international chefs, though skilled, struggle with the Australian apprenticeship system due to unfamiliarity and frustration with the bureaucracy. This reinforces the importance of bringing back the industry mentoring to help both the apprentice and the supervisor. Kathy from Hilton said they were keen to have apprentices, but expressed concerns about the quality of transient cooking staff in their region (80% of the chef workforce has only been cooking for a couple of years) and the limitations of cooks with varying skill levels supervising apprentices. Michelle mentioned she had conducted internal consultation with chefs before joining the call. They said that training partnerships are existing but

they are dominated by providers with international students. They are not seeing the same promotion of domestic arrangements. For the apprentice they are seeing other trades as more attractive as the pathway to higher pay in, say, construction is clearer – even under the award systems. Chefs are therefore sometimes perceived as a less desirable career path compared to other trades.

Mark shared insights from the WA mining sector about block release training at TAFE and may be worth exploring for regions for chef training. He highlighted that other careers also have downsides and we need to better promote the industry's benefits, including career progression and work-life balance. In one workplace he had implemented a 4-day week – it was difficult at first but it worked well.

In relation to apprenticeship incentives, there was a question as to whether cash is the best option for incentivising the apprentice. Iain suggested cash for apprentices is a waste of time, it is merely supporting their social habits. The previous tool allowance and uniform vouchers was better – tax incentives. We are always going to be competing against other industries where apprentices also get the cash.

The group discussed reforms to apprenticeship programs in the hospitality industry, with participants agreeing that pre-apprenticeship training and workplace-based learning should be expanded. Kathy suggested the traditional one day a week, and the seafood/poultry approach is stagnant. A month-long basic skills training program followed by menu-driven learning would work better. If you could get them already with some know-how that would be beneficial. Apprentices need to be skilled across areas a lot faster.

Daniel agreed with the need for pre-learning and also recognised that a lot of the skills you learn on the job. The off the job training could include the importance of wider industry knowledge including supply chain and product sourcing. There as a benefit in the first year on an apprenticeship being largely on the job. Michelle said that her team was very much in favour of spreading the incentives. In terms of training her team's feedback she was getting was that the apprenticeship model for cooking has had its day as a four-year program. Proposed redesigning the apprenticeship model to include accelerated learning and work experience, getting people interested in years 9 and 10, and then doing their certificate II in years 11 and 12 with a part time job to give work experience. Agreed with Daniel that the training should be more about supply chain and product sourcing and creativity in menu.

Iain endorsed more workplace-based training delivered by experienced chefs. Chefs get frustrated with the report of what the apprentice is learning from their structured learning and reinforced the fact that most of the skills can be learning on the job.

With the funding framework, consideration should be given to pilot programs for shorter qualifications, encouraging higher-level certifications, and ways to attract and support adult apprentices.

The group discussed strategies to attract more people to the culinary industry, with Natalie suggesting that chefs on cooking shows, such as Matt Moran, could help promote apprenticeships. Daniel said that at a large resort, the parents see a career in a large hotel more appealing. He highlighted the need for more higher-level qualifications to make the industry more appealing and competitive (such as in Canada - Chef de Cuisine qual). It would create more layers and ability to be paid more by having higher qualifications.

Jack noted that cooking shows might not be the best platform to showcase apprenticeships, as the model is that the people come into the show without any cooking qualifications and develop their skills rather than pushing the career.

Daniel also suggested capturing young people through the fast-food industry as a potential source of new apprentices. Young people working in a structured environment such as McDonalds – how do we get them out of fast food and into a career.

Migration Options

Fiona – caps on students and RTO requirements and capabilities / regulations on delivery of culinary for hands-on course is needed, classroom education lacking hands-on experience

International students cannot complete apprenticeships at the moment. Iain suggested an apprenticeship model for international students on a visa, proposing a fee-for-service approach that could attract students from neighbouring countries like Indonesia. He has a wider paper which he will share with AA. The group agreed on the importance of migration as a key strategy for addressing the chef skills shortage – it is not just a nice to have, it is fundamental to our chef workforce.

The group discussed migration and training options for the hospitality industry, with Jenny highlighting the potential of training visas and structured apprenticeship models. Michelle emphasized the importance of migration as a workforce requirement, while the cost of sponsorship was noted as a significant barrier. The discussion also touched on the need to reassess wages and income thresholds for sponsored workers

Innovative Training Approaches

Kylie – talking to15yr old son, does cooking at school about careers and pathways for chefs – look at getting exec chefs to schools to facilitate in the schools – work with the schools and then create pathways to hotels and structure for connection

Althea – agree – it comes done to the teacher and their experience.

Bernhard – agrees with Kylie and referred back to number of students doing hospitality qualifications at school

School structure determines how many days / hours are attributed to training either practical or theory

Need to also address quality of training ensure current and

Phil – NSW school-based apprentices train with an RTO, go to school and train in the workplace

Tate spoke of school student placement training – challenge is their program now incorporates other career opportunities so hospitality competes against other options.

Mark shared that his organisation works with 21 schools which has worked very well. They had success with school-based apprenticeships in WA, which is a good pipeline. Jack said that THA worked a lot with schools with high enrolment numbers with hospitality and cooking quals but it was not translating into numbers into the industry. He highlighted challenges with training quality in Tasmania, with the training not up to industry standard. People are coming out schools with Certificate III's but cannot do the basics as the teachers are not skilled sufficiently.

The group discussed challenges in vocational training for commercial cookery, particularly the lack of translation from school-based training to industry careers. They identified issues including students being funnelled into hospitality without clear career intent, limited access to regional training, and concerns about the quality of training provided by some VET providers.

The students experience a shock moving from a cooking qual at schools to a commercial kitchen – it can be too much for them and they drop out. The providers are often not doing a good enough job in preparing the students. Mark said that a lot of hospitality training is to have skills while they are studying something else. On the chef side, they are more likely to go into the industry. Working with SaCSA, the emphasis is much more on the hands on work experience side, so that students know more about what they are getting into.

Promoting Chef as a Career

Althea - Schools can encourage, influence and promote the career pathway of the student by participating in cooking competitions with students in home economics classes. This will create excitement and drive

Stella – had not heard of Eeger prior to NoVacancy – needs to be promoted more on Linked In and other channels.

(QHA Member Gold Coast): I have just been in an EGC board meeting and brought up the whole issue of the shortage of chefs and kitchen staff, lack of apprentices and in general hospitality trainees from the locals pool. Whilst international visas are a concern so is the lack of hospitality exposure.

One thing that was mentioned was that when visiting the recent careers expo in Carrara there was very little exposure from the hospitality industry as a whole.
It was thought that we should be more coordinated in our overall approach and have a body represent us at these school leaver events

The group (2nd session) discussed strategies to inspire and recruit young talent into culinary and hospitality careers, emphasizing the value of field trips and hands-on experiences. Mark and Daniel highlighted the benefits of "field trips", exposing apprentices to farm-to-table practices and supplier interactions. The field trips could include having someone cook in a demonstration to inspire new entrants. Daniel has their apprentices out with suppliers and at the markets. The content of the marketing is really important. There is so much excitement in the industry, and careers that have started as chefs are a long way removed. The skills you learn as a chef aren't just about chef, they are counselling and budgeting. Great place to start.

Kathy and Emma stressed the importance of modernizing the industry's image and showcasing diverse career pathways beyond traditional cooking roles. There is a need to target parents and highlight the evolving nature of culinary skills and production environments – modern approaches are so much different than 25 years ago. Emma shared an internal approach across 20 hotels to capturing potential chefs from various entry points within hotels – workers in other departments should be attracted to think about cooking as a career.

Mario said that his experience in presenting to food tech classes was that people had very limited idea about what goes on in a commercial kitchen. Putting more effort into included professional chefs into the classes to talk about their career would be very helpful.

An expansion of a chef explaining their story, is also a "day in the life of" a chef. Also creating scholarships and other campaign vehicles to promote chefs.

Also a need to convey what happens to the dish once it leaves the kitchen – the pleasure of the customer in consuming the output.

The group discussed strategies to promote chef careers and address shortages in the hospitality industry. They explored ideas such as creating diverse chef story content, organizing masterclasses and competitions, and benchmarking against international models. James emphasized the need to think outside the box and be innovative in addressing workforce shortages.

There is a need to prioritize short-term actions, such as utilizing the eeger platform, and categorize longer-term initiatives. They also discussed the importance of engaging with government and creating an action group to drive immediate solutions across the hospitality industries – not an advisory group but a way of identifying priority solutions and facilitate change.

Appendix B: Summary of Email Feedback on the AHA/AA Chef Shortages Document

This document provides a summary of the feedback received via email input and the notes from Session 1 and 2 of the consultation addresses the proposed solutions in the AHA/AA paper across apprenticeships, migration, innovative training, and career promotion.

Here is a summary of the key feedback points:

1. Increase Trade Apprenticeships through Incentives

The general sentiment supports increased incentives, especially in the early stages, but many feel the proposed structure in the AHA/AA paper is **insufficient**.

- **Incentive Structure:**
  - The proposed structure recognises the **high cost** and **low productivity** of first-year apprentices.
  - **Higher first-year incentives** are advocated to better offset high supervision costs, especially in hospitality's 24/7 environment. A $10,000 first-year incentive was suggested as an improvement to the proposal.
  - **Apprentice Pay/Incentives:** The apprentice incentive needs to be adjusted **up** to at least meet the HIGA Level 1 Intro base wage.
  - Expand the proposed $2,500 apprentice payment at 12 and 24 months to prioritize adult learners, especially career changers. Adult apprentices excel in high-pressure kitchens, leveraging life experience to enhance team dynamics. Wide support for more adult apprentices.
  - Alternative payment models proposed include:
    - Scrapping apprentice rates and mirroring HIGA levels (Level 1, 2, 3, 4) for each year/qualification level.
    - Increasing the base pay for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd-year apprentices (e.g., $5,000 for each year) was mentioned on a number of occasions although it is not clear if employers making those comments believe this is a solution why overaward payments are not offered. Many members pay over the award.
    - Paying the business an incentive for taking a Chef out of operations to train the apprentice or paying 50% of the Sous Chef's wages[8].
  - Financial support to subsidise attendance at food festivals, farm visits and artisan workshops would broaden apprentice perspectives.
- **Barriers to Apprenticeships:**
  - Lack of candidates and difficulty with **supervision –** caused through qualified chefs being migrants unused to the Australian system, chefs not being qualified themselves not confident to supervise, smaller kitchens in smaller businesses, high staff turnover in the kitchens and difficulty of rostering supervisors with apprentices.
  - High supervision costs and rostering complexities and low apprentice productivity in year one.
  - **Housing** and cost of living (especially in regional areas).
  - Challenges in **training delivery** and access to TAFE/RTOs for regional properties.
  - **Apprentice attrition** (dropout rate).
- **Other Actions:**
  - Introduce **mentorship programs**.
  - Implement **affordable apprentice housing** support.
  - Restrict 1st-year apprentices from being rostered to work both Friday and Saturday.
  - offering high level education options for qualified chefs such as the C.C.C accreditation in Canada

- **Star's** partnerships with Queensland TAFEs involve co-designed curricula and guest chef lectures, adding real-world relevance. Inviting chefs for masterclasses (paid or voluntary) inspires students and fosters ongoing collaboration**.**

2. Adapt the Apprenticeship Pathway

There is broad support for a more flexible and modern training structure.

- **Flexibility and Recognition:**
  - Members support a **flexible apprenticeship model** to reduce the dropout rate.
  - The option for **early opt-out** with a Certificate II award has merit, especially for regional areas. Many members commented in strong support of this option.
  - **Improving Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** for experienced cooks to gain national certificates is strongly agreed upon.
  - The length of the qualification should **not be shortened**, as this could devalue the trade qualification.
  - Fill gaps if skills are missed, for example those chefs from overseas with gaps in their training.
- **Curriculum and Delivery:**
  - The **menu-driven model** is welcomed as it is seen as more engaging and relevant than the current produce-based approach, and would provide more holistic skills for non-completers.
  - Curriculum should be modernized to incorporate **global cuisines**, **practical skills and contemporary cooking methods** (presentation, nutrition, sustainability), **leveraging technology** to include training on modern kitchen equipment and software and **business acumen** (finance, marketing). This shift would equip apprentices with holistic skills, preparing them for leadership roles and aligning with the industry's evolving demands. Most culinary skills can be learnt on the job so they should incorporate other soft skills, administrative tasks as well as sales and marketing to increase the wider skillsets of future chefs
  - Alternate delivery options include:
    - **Hybrid training models** combining VET coursework with paid industry placements.
    - Combining part-time formal training with **intensive on-the-job placements** to reduce time away from the kitchen[24].
  - Tasmania was suggested as an **ideal pilot location** for alternative traineeship approaches due to challenges in retention and limited providers.
- **Retention.** Success has been achieved by offering an Exposure to diverse cuisines across our venues, internal competitions, masterclasses, and recognition programs and a supportive, inclusive kitchen culture.

3. Migration Options for Chefs

Migration remains a **vital complement** to apprenticeships, especially in regional areas and for different cuisine styles. The proposed solutions are generally appropriate but need enhancements.

- **Core Skills Income Threshold (CSIT):**
  - The rise in the CSIT is a barrier.
  - Support for **CSIT reform** to remove the market rate requirement for lower-level chefs, allowing sponsorship if the employer pays above the threshold.
  - Proposals include a **lower CSIT threshold for regional employers**[30].
- **Visas and Processes:**

    - The occupations of **cook, chef, and senior chef** should be retained/added to the Skills in Demand (SID) list.
    - Allowing **migrants to become apprentice chefs** (on a pilot/capped basis) is strongly supported, even without subsidies, if it leads to a pathway to permanent residency. Many employers have migrant cooks working for them already and would be happy to take them as apprentices even without subsidies If that led to the option for a permanent visa for the apprentice following qualification as a chef.
    - Need for **streamlined and less complex sponsorship processes** for small/regional operators. Current costly process is deterring businesses from hiring international talent.
    - Our research (Perth) has shown that Colleges has difficulty in recruiting chef students, as many international students now prefer courses like carpentry, hairdressing, or childcare, which offer clearer pathways to PR. News about a national cap for international student applications have created further reduced enrolments in culinary programs
    - Implement an **industry labour agreement** for cooks and chefs with a reduction in CSIT (e.g., 10%).
    - The Gold Coast should be promoted as a location for specialized skill set sponsorship (e.g., pastry chefs, chocolatiers).
    - Support **reciprocal visas** with countries like the USA, UK, Canada, and Europe to gain global experience, fostering skill development and cultural exchange.
- **Use of training visa (407)**: use the current apprentice chef training plan (created by a RTO) to support visa applications under the training VISA – Commis, Demi, CDP.
- Ability to offer migration – Demi & DCP's look at 12mth to lock them in for to assist them in moving towards perm residency

4. Innovative Training Solutions

- **Funding:** Ensure all State and Territory governments are **fully funding** cooking qualifications for domestic students.
- **Hybrid training models**: Partner with respected providers to integrate Certificate III/IV programs with paid industry experience, mimicking apprenticeships outside the formal system.
- **Partnerships:** Identify and replicate successful **innovative partnerships** between training providers and industry.
- **Provider Reputation:** Highly respected training providers like **Le Cordon Bleu** and **William Angliss Institute** should be attracted, particularly to regional areas like Tasmania, to boost quality and attract international students.
- **Training Direct** (Queensland-based RTO) was mentioned as a respected provider.
- **Flexible apprenticeship structures**: Support a Certificate II Hospitality Plus option (2 years) with industry recognition, alongside an early opt-out for Certificate III with a Certificate II award,

5. Promoting Chef as a Career

The industry needs to **reframe the chef role** as a creative, culturally significant, and globally mobile career. Cooking shows like MasterChef have not translated into increased interest due to the gap between televised creativity and commercial kitchen realities. We must reframe the chef role as:

- A creative, culturally significant craft requiring intuition and emotional intelligence.
- A globally mobile, future-proof career with opportunities for leadership and entrepreneurship.
- A pathway to personal and professional growth.

- **Promotion:** Urgent need for industry-wide campaigns and education partnerships to reposition hospitality as a creative, sustainable profession

- **School Engagement:**
  - The **public education system's impact** is a major challenge, as hospitality is often taught by non-specialist teachers, leading to loss of interest. "The major challenge perhaps not explored thoroughly here is the public education systems impact on the industry. The National Curriculum includes technology subjects, food specialisations falls into this. Any teacher can teach these subjects, and I have seen first hand that in regional schools, which makes up about 50-70% of Tasmania, these subjects are taught by which ever teacher is available. The staffing models and literacy/numeracy focus means that this is often delivered like a baby sitting approach, kids lose interest, there is no passion, and its not well planned over years of delivery to really enable a good student to become a great student in this space - because its not valued highly enough in the education space."
  - The interest in cooking comes from passionate delivery from people around you, at home, or at school - it has to start somewhere. If we have up to 70% of students losing interest in cooking as a skill due to the way it's taught through the entire schooling over the primary and high school - then this definitely impacts the number of students that are interested in this for VET/College and Apprenticeship. Although schools can't afford chefs full time, definitely more engagement is needed.
  - Need for **more engagement** between the industry and schools, starting early in primary school to plant the seed, and at a higher level engage the chefs to ignite the passion in a kid to cook food.
  - Get **executive chefs into schools** to facilitate training and create pathways to hotels.
  - Support for participating in **cooking competitions** in home economics classes to create excitement.

- ***Eeger.com.au* Platform:**
  - *Eeger.com.au* should **feature chefs prominently** with video profiles, virtual kitchen tours, and career progression stories (apprentice to executive chef).
  - The platform needs to highlight the **global opportunities** and the diversity of the food ecosystem (e.g., farming, aquaculture).

- **Career Expos:**
  - Effective expos feature **live cooking demonstrations, Q&A sessions, and apprentice testimonials**. Static displays fail to engage.
    - The hospitality industry needs to be more **coordinated** in its approach and have a single body represent it at school leaver events.

Appendix C: Valuable additional comments on the impact of the chef shortage – Perth member

1. Severe Talent Shortage

- As of October 2025, over 533 chef vacancies remain unfilled in Perth, underscoring a critical gap between demand and supply.
- Many venues are reducing operating hours, simplifying menus, or even temporarily closing, directly affecting service quality and customer satisfaction.

2. Impact on Hotels and Events

- Hotels and resorts, particularly those hosting conferences, weddings, and luxury events, are struggling to maintain service standards.
- This undermines Perth's competitiveness as a destination for large-scale events and high-end tourism.

3. Decline in Innovation and Culinary Creativity

- Short-staffed kitchens force chefs to focus on survival over experimentation, leading to stagnation in menu development and concept evolution.
- The lack of fresh talent and time hinders the creative energy that drives culinary excellence.

4. Workforce Challenges

- The industry faces high turnover and burnout, driven by long hours and intense pressure.
- Restrictions on skilled migration and a decline in apprenticeships have slowed the pipeline of new chefs entering the workforce.

5. Cultural and Economic Implications

- Chefs are vital in celebrating global cuisines and enriching Australias multicultural identity, this is what people seek when coming to or living in Australia.
- Without strategic intervention, Perth/Australia risks losing its culinary vibrancy and global appeal.

Appendix D: Participants

Consultation Sessions September 23 and 30th

Attendees 23 Sep 25:

1. Ben Patten – AHA SA
2. Bernhard Langer, Sydney Harbour Marriott
3. Christine Reed, Sydney Boulevard
4. Fiona Pereira, Marriott
5. Georgina Winters
6. Kate – Novotel Sunshine Coast Resort
7. Kylie Mitchell – DOHR Sheraton Gold Coast - Marriott
8. Marvie Spies – Accor Melbourne Place
9. Nicole Taranto
10. Roxanne - PMOP
11. Tate Mandukuku – Peppers Craigieburn Bowral
12. Tom Fitzgerald - QHA
13. Tiona
14. Stella Daskalakis- Intercontinental
15. Joanne Carruthers - EVT
16. Scott Ratcliffe – Crystalbrook collection
17. Althea – SaCSA
18. Philip Caldicott – SaCSA

AA:

19. Jenny Lambert, Facilitator
20. Lorelle Gottardi

Attendees 30 Sep 25:

1. Emma Martin, Salter Bros
2. Victoria Timperon, Accor, GM Sydney Ibis
3. Kathy Tindall – Hilton
4. Aidan Murray, Star
5. Brooke Stewart, RACV
6. Erin Gibbons, Star
7. Aisha Braimah, Merivale
8. Cameron Bealing – Novotel Brisbane South
9. Chantelle Martin, SaCSA
10. Daniel Fox – Star Entertainment
11. Danielle Collett, Paradise Resort, Gold Coast
12. Dhiraj Simkhada, Industry Skills Advisory Council NT
13. Himanshu Shardo – InterContinental Sydney
14. Iain McDougall, Hospitality GTO, HGTWA
15. Jack Milbourne - THA
16. Jason Strickland - Accor
17. Mark Sainsbury - HGTWA
18. Kylie Thuyen - Swissotel

19. Marzio Lanzini, QANTAS
20. Andy, QANTAS Accor
21. Matt Hart – InterContintental Brisbane
22. Michelle Bevan, TFE
23. Mitch – Bannister
24. Megan Knoetze, Crystalbrook Collection
25. Natalie King, Accor Hotels
26. Paula Meyers, TAFE NSW
27. Pradeep Shinde, W Hotels
28. Richard Etherington, TAFE NSW
29. Sharnie Ferguson - Hilton
30. Tony Bowen – Redhill Hospitality
31. Zen Park, Swisshotel
32. Rebecca L
33. Stephanie Tang
34. Tangie Srisuk

AA Attendees

1. James Goodwin, AA CEO
2. Jenny Lambert, Facilitator
3. Lorelle Gottardi

Email Feedback:

1. Glenn Roberston at Launceston Grand Chancellor
2. Sam Johnson, IR Mgr, THA
3. Daniel Fox, Star
4. Anita Lewis, THA
5. Nigel Astridge, Hilton
6. Samantha Warkcup, Langham Gold Coast
7. Danielle Dasselaar, Hilton Perth