



**Local Jobs
Program**

Local Jobs Plan

Townsville Queensland

October 2020

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The Department of Education, Skills and Employment acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of lands where we work and travel through. We pay our respects to their people, cultures and their Elders past, present and emerging.

Preface

The Local Jobs Program (LJP) brings together expertise, resources and access to funding at the local level to focus on the reskilling, upskilling and employment pathways for job seekers in 25 Employment Regions, as part of supporting Australia's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This plan identifies the key priorities for the Townsville (including Mount Isa) Employment Region (Townsville ER), Queensland, with a focus on **creating employment opportunities**, meeting local **employer demands** and **better skilling** local job seekers. The plan reflects elements of the [Townsville Workforce Development Plan 2020 – 2025](#), developed by the Jobs Townsville North Queensland Advisory board, to compliment the work of this committee. The plan identifies key employment and training priorities in the Townsville ER, which the interim Employment Facilitator and the Townsville Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce agree will provide the framework for driving positive employment outcomes in the local labour markets within the Townsville ER.

This plan will be reviewed when the Employment Facilitator and the Townsville Local Jobs and Skills Taskforce is in place, and whenever the priorities change (or every six months).

Local Jobs Program Key Priorities: Townsville Region

1. Increase workforce skill levels to meet the needs of local employers, including those delivering infrastructure projects.
2. Create opportunities for Indigenous Australians to increase their skill levels and be supported to achieve equitable access to the local labour market.
3. Identify pathways for young people to develop skills and be supported to access labour market opportunities, particularly through apprenticeships and traineeships.

A full description of these key priorities, the strategies to address these and a list of key stakeholders can be found at Attachment A.

Townsville Region Overview



The Townsville ER is located on the east coast of Northern Queensland, 1335 kilometres north of Brisbane, and includes the far western town of Mount Isa, which is separated from the rest of the Townsville ER by extensive CDP-serviced remote areas. The ER also includes the towns of Charters Towers, Ingham, Home Hill and Ayr. There are direct flights from Brisbane to Townsville.

The Townsville ER is geographically diverse with several unique labour markets:

- Townsville – strong defence force, government services, education and health care sectors;
- Burdekin and Hinchinbrook – primarily agricultural regions;
- Mount Isa – service centre for the resource sector in North West Queensland and;
- Charters Towers – service centre for agricultural and resource sectors.

The Townsville ER also has a significant presence for the tourism sector, mainly located in the east of the employment region, with attractions such as Magnetic Island and access to the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef; however, this sector has seen a serious recent decline due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions.

The Townsville ER has a high number of Indigenous and Youth job seekers on employment services provider caseloads. Mount Isa caseloads can reach up to 70 per cent Indigenous Australian representation. Overall, the proportion of Indigenous job seekers on Townsville jobactive caseloads is approximately 30 per cent. Approximately 21 per cent of job seekers are classified as Youth (aged 15-24) and just over 23 per cent are classified as Mature Age (aged 50+) on the jobactive caseload.

The working age population is 151,100, with an employment rate of 70.1 per cent¹.

Considerable labour market disparity exists within the Townsville ER. Latest available *Small Area Labour Markets* data show that, in the March quarter 2020, the unemployment rate in the Townsville region ranged from just 2.0 per cent in Bohle Plains, to 15.8 per cent in Heatley.²

¹ Source: *Labour Market Information Portal (lmip.gov.au)*

² Data for Statistical Area 2s (SA2) are sourced from the National Skills Commission, *Small Area Labour Markets, March quarter 2020, smoothed estimates*. Labour market data at the regional level can display significant variability and should be viewed with caution.

Key challenges in the Townsville region

The jobactive caseload in the Townsville ER has substantially higher proportions of Indigenous Australians and youth, compared with Queensland. Official figures show the youth unemployment rate for the Townsville ER stood at 14.2 per cent in August 2020, compared with 15.0 per cent for Queensland and that this was a decrease of 2.4 percentage points since March 2020. However, anecdotal feedback from the local community is that the true youth unemployment rate may be 'masked' and some claim that the true rate in Mount Isa may be as high as 60 per cent, taking into account the large number of Indigenous youth who may experience significant barriers in engaging with mainstream employment services.

Data from the 2016 census indicates that there are 15.9 per cent of young people neither studying nor working, compared with a Queensland rate of 15.7 per cent and a nationwide rate of 13.2 per cent. It should be acknowledged though, that the Census figures are now over four years old and do not take into consideration the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on retail and hospitality workers, many of whom are young people in entry-level and low-skilled positions.

In August 2020, the proportion of the working age (15-64 years) population on income support in Townsville stood at 19.5 per cent, above the 18.2 per cent recorded in Queensland and the 16.3 per cent recorded nationally.

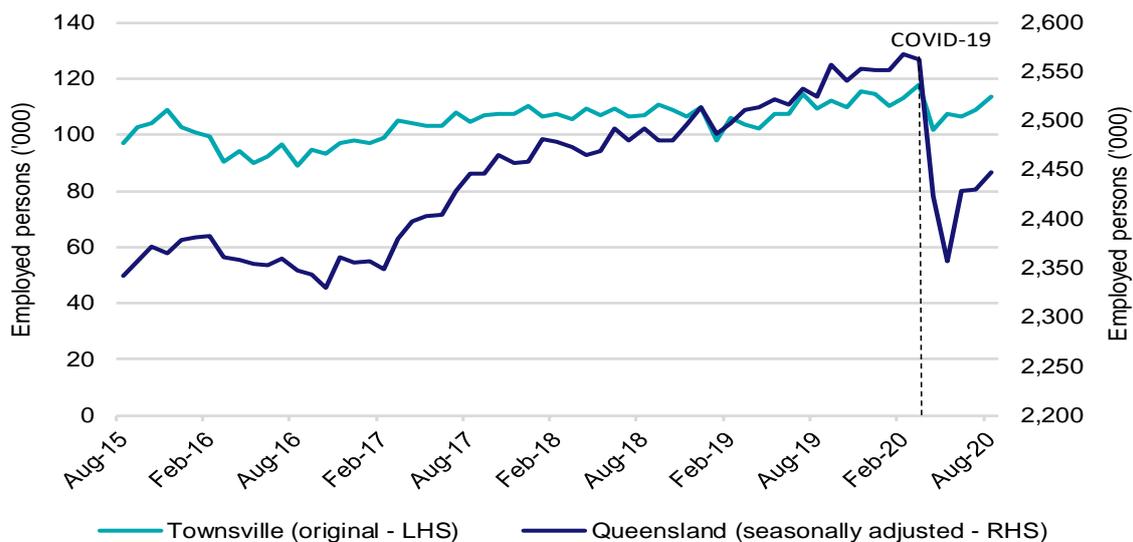
Impacts of COVID-19

The Townsville ER has been heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Labour market conditions in the region have softened since March 2020, the month in which Australia recorded its 100th case of COVID-19 and just prior to the shutdown of non-essential services and when trading restrictions took effect. This is not surprising, given the region's heavy reliance on industries which have been hard-hit by COVID-19, such as accommodation and food services.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in large declines in employment, and subsequent rises in unemployment. ABS weekly payroll data shows that between 14 March 2020 and 5 September 2020:

- The number of employee jobs in the Townsville employment region (excluding Mount Isa) fell by 3.5 per cent, compared with a 3.1 per cent decline for Queensland;
- Over the last month to 5 September, employee jobs in both Townsville and Queensland have decreased, by 0.4 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively.
- The participation rate in Townsville has declined sharply, by 3.6 percentage points between March and August 2020, to stand at 63.1 per cent, just below the 63.6 per cent recorded for Queensland.
- The job seeker caseload in the Townsville ER increased from 10,433 people in March 2020 to 17,724 in September 2020, a rise of 70 per cent.
- In August 2020, the proportion of the working age (15-64 years) population on income support in Townsville ER stood at 19.5 per cent, above the 18.2 per cent recorded in Queensland and the 16.3 per cent recorded nationally.

Employed persons aged 15 and over (five years to August 2020)



Source: ABS, Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, August 2020

ATO data on the JobKeeper program also highlights the significant impact of COVID-19 on business. There were 14,902 businesses in Townsville and Mount Isa with applications for wage subsidies between April and June 2020.³ The highest number of applications came from:

- Townsville (4810) – 2835
- Kirwan/Annandale Mount Louisa (4814) – 3147
- Hermit Park/Mundingburra/Pimlico (4812) – 1866
- Thuringowa/Alice River (4817) – 1681
- Bohle/Deeragun (1818) - 1714

This likely means that many people employed in the area are receiving JobKeeper payments, and while being counted as employed, could be working greatly reduced or zero hours.

³ ATO, JobKeeper postcode data, as at 8 July 2020. Note: this data will not reflect businesses which operate in Townsville but have a primary address in another Employment Region.

Socio-economic profile

The Townsville ER has some very disadvantaged areas, with five main areas ranked in the lowest 10th percentile of disadvantage in the 2016 SEIFA Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage. These are:

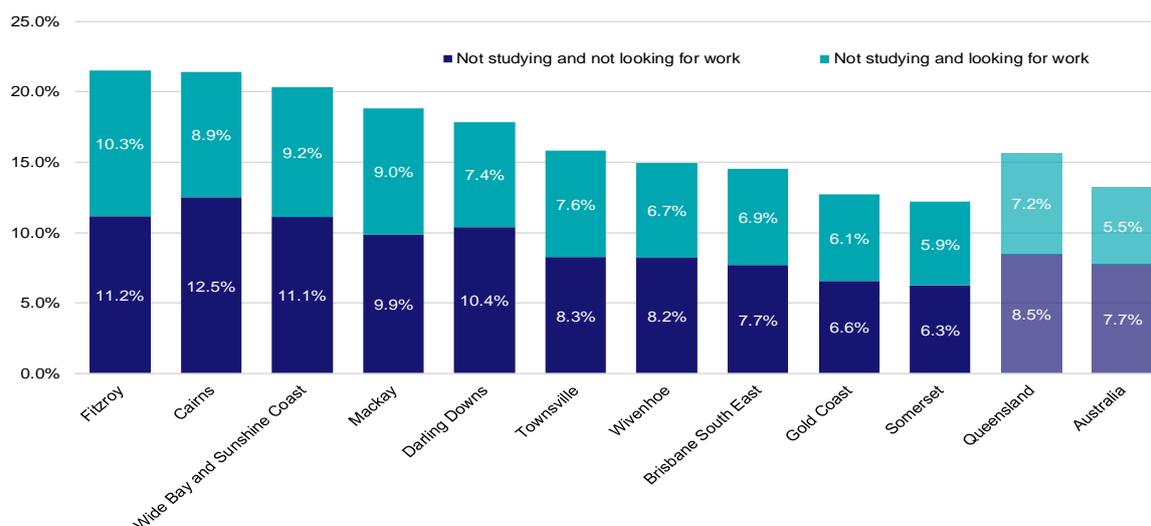
- Gulliver-Currajong-Vincent
- Garbutt – West End
- Hyde Park – Pimlico
- Kirwan – East
- Kelso

A low score on the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage indicates relatively greater disadvantage in areas such as:

- many households with low income;
- many people with no qualifications; or
- many people in low skill occupations.⁴

Youth

Young people not studying nor working (18-24 years old)



Source: ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2016

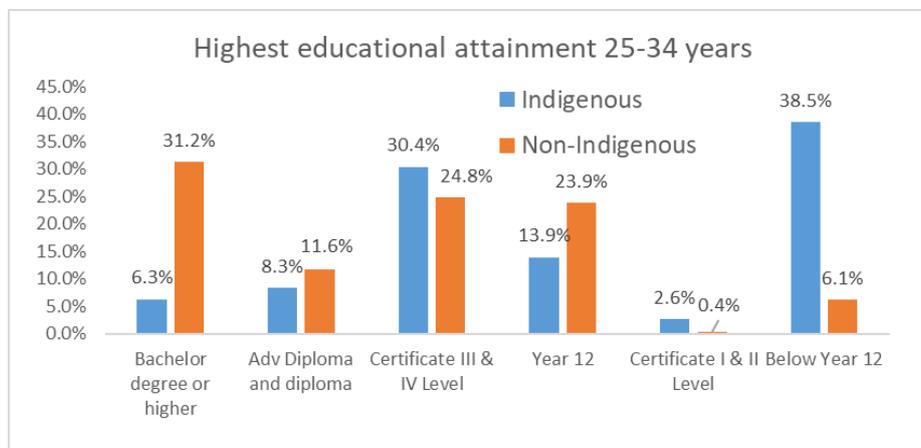
At the time of the last Census in 2016, 15.9 per cent of youth in Townsville were classified as disengaged and not studying or working. This result is considered mid-range in comparison to other regions in Queensland. The Queensland youth disengagement rate is 15.7 per cent, above the nationwide rate of 13.2 per cent for Australia.

The 2016 Census reports that 53.8 per cent of the total population aged 15 years or over had not completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared with 48.1 per cent nationally.

⁴ Source: ABS, SEIFA, 2016.

Indigenous

Some 7.86 per cent of the population are Indigenous compared with 4.0 per cent in Queensland.⁵ Educational attainment for the Indigenous population is substantially lower than non-Indigenous adults, with 45 per cent of the Indigenous population aged 25-34 having attained a Certificate III level qualification or above, compared with 67.6 per cent of non-Indigenous adults.



Culturally and linguistically diverse

Some 8.7 per cent of the population in Townsville live in households where a non-English language is spoken.⁶ This is low compared with Queensland for which the figure is 13.5 per cent.

Population change

Population growth in the Townsville region has been consistent, increasing by an annual average rate of 1.67 per cent over the last five years, slightly higher than that of Queensland's annual average of 1.35 per cent over the last five years.

Source: population.net.au

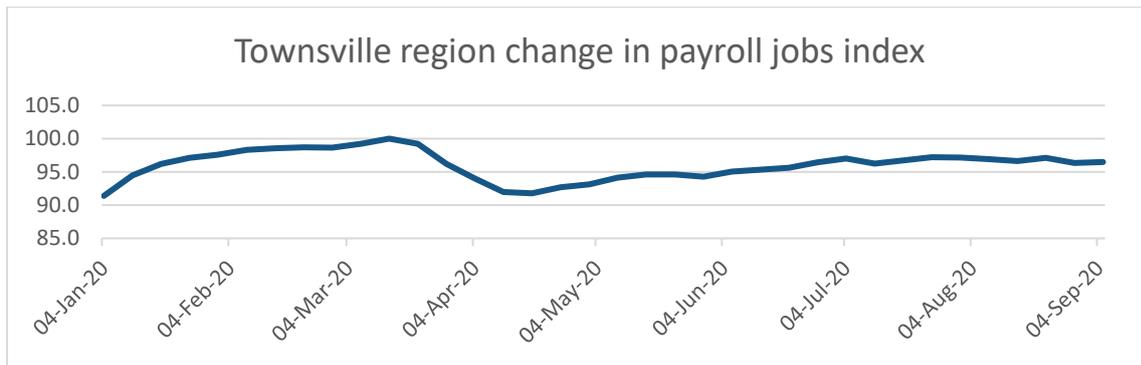
Labour market conditions

The Townsville ER has a history of labour market disadvantage and has been particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics payroll data, the number of jobs has fallen substantially in the Townsville region since the 100th confirmed case of COVID-19 in Australia on the 14 March 2020. The chart below shows the change in payroll jobs between 14 March and 8 August.

⁵ Source: ABS, Census, 2016

⁶ Source: ABS, Census, 2016

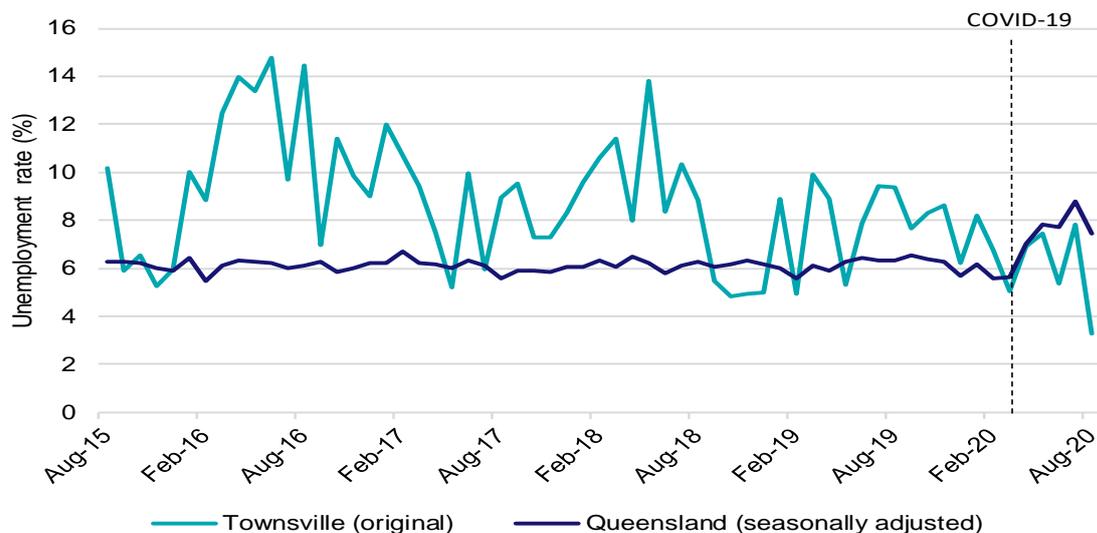


Source: ABS, Weekly Payroll Jobs and Wages in the Townsville (note does not include Mt Isa), Week ending 05 September 2020.

The unemployment rate in Townsville stood at 5.1 per cent in March 2020 and reached a high of 7.8 per cent in July, before falling to 3.3 per cent in August.

It is worth bearing in mind that regional monthly estimates can be highly volatile and should be viewed with extreme caution. It is also worth noting that the large fall in the participation rate indicates that people have dropped out of the labour force altogether and would therefore not be counted as unemployed. Jobactive caseload data suggest that joblessness in the region is greater than the current unemployment rate might indicate.

Unemployment rate time series (5 years to August 2020)



Source: ABS, Labour Force Survey, July 2020 (Statistical Area 4)

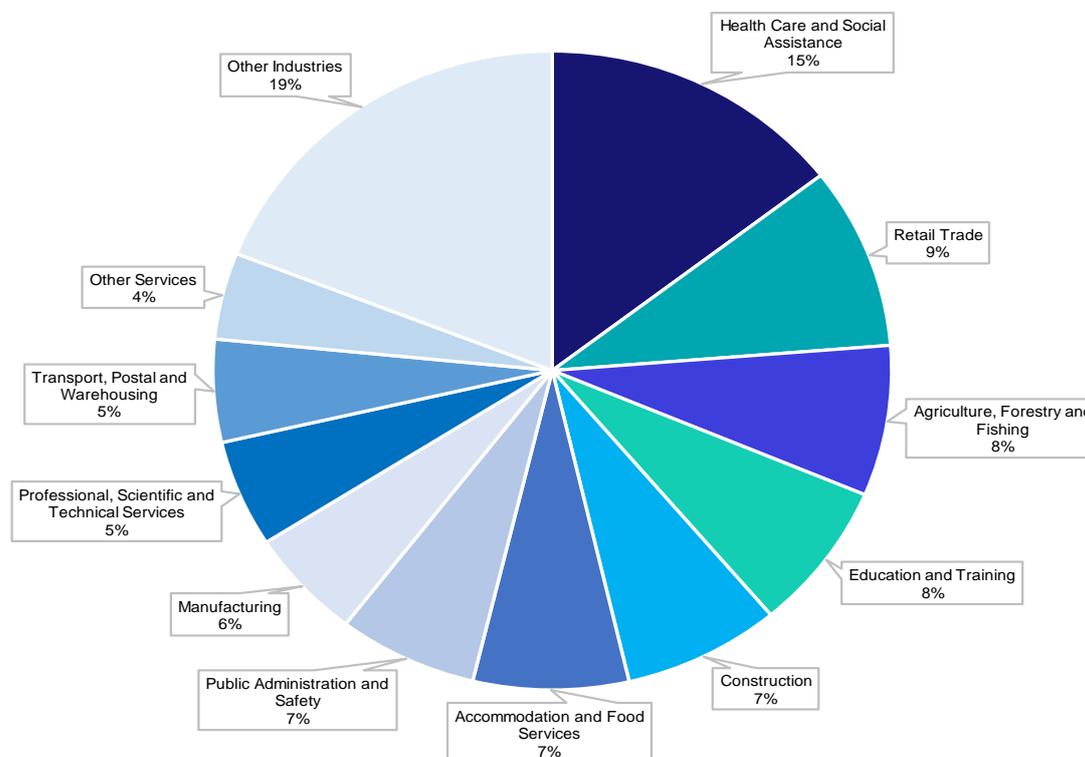
Of those who are unemployed in the region, approximately 49 per cent are also long term unemployed (persons who have been unemployed for 52 consecutive weeks or longer). This is in sharp contrast to the Queensland figure which shows just over 37 per cent long term unemployed⁷.

⁷ Source: jobactive caseload data as at 09 October 2020

Industry Composition

As at August 2020, the largest employing industries in Townsville were Health Care and Social Assistance and Retail Trade. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Education and Training both had an employment share of 8 per cent, closely followed by Construction, Accommodation and Food Services and Public Administration and Safety, each with an employment share of 7 per cent.

Share of employment by industry in Townsville, August quarter 2020



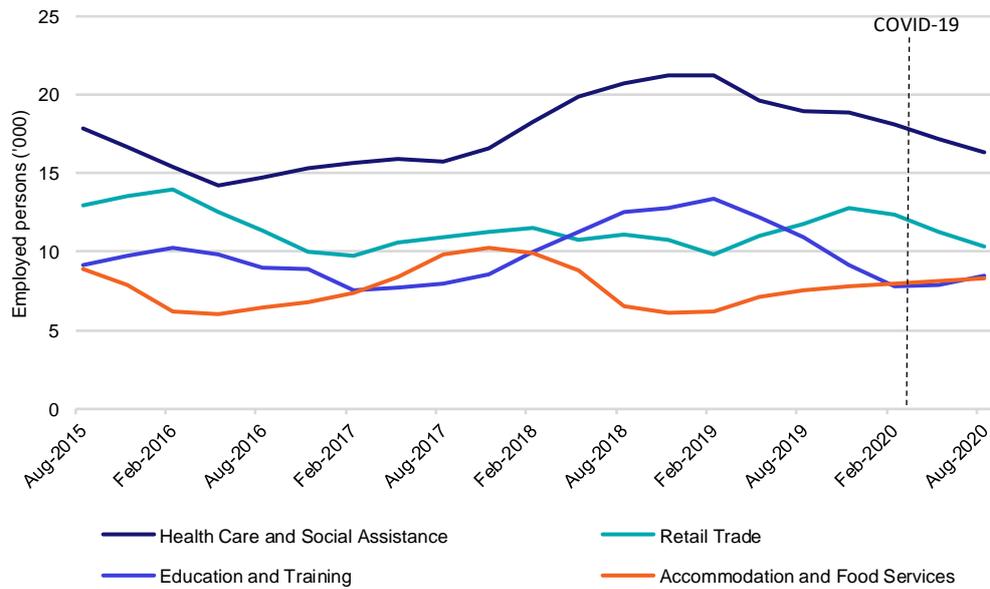
Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, August 2020. "Other industries" includes: Administrative and Support Services; Mining; Wholesale Trade; Information Media and Telecommunication; Financial and Insurance Services; Arts and Recreation Services; Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services; Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services.

Employment trends (for selected industries)

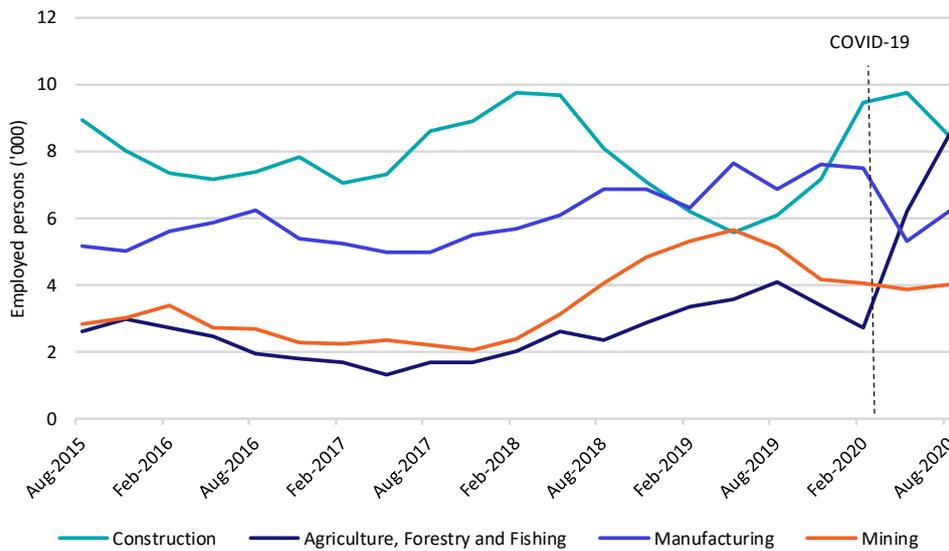
Although COVID-19 has affected some industries more than others, it is important to consider longer term employment trends to understand where current and emerging opportunities may be in this region. Over the last five years:

- Employment has increased in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing; Manufacturing; and Mining, while decreasing or remaining steady in most other industries.
- The recent sharp increase in the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry is not unprecedented (for example, a similar increase occurred in 2007) and may relate to specific events such as agricultural exports or improved weather conditions. More data is needed to verify whether this will be sustained and becomes a longer-term trend.
- Pre COVID-19, Construction was trending up (from the low point in early 2019), likely as a result of the rebuilding efforts following the Townsville floods.

Employed persons in selected 'services' industries, five years to August 2020 ('000)



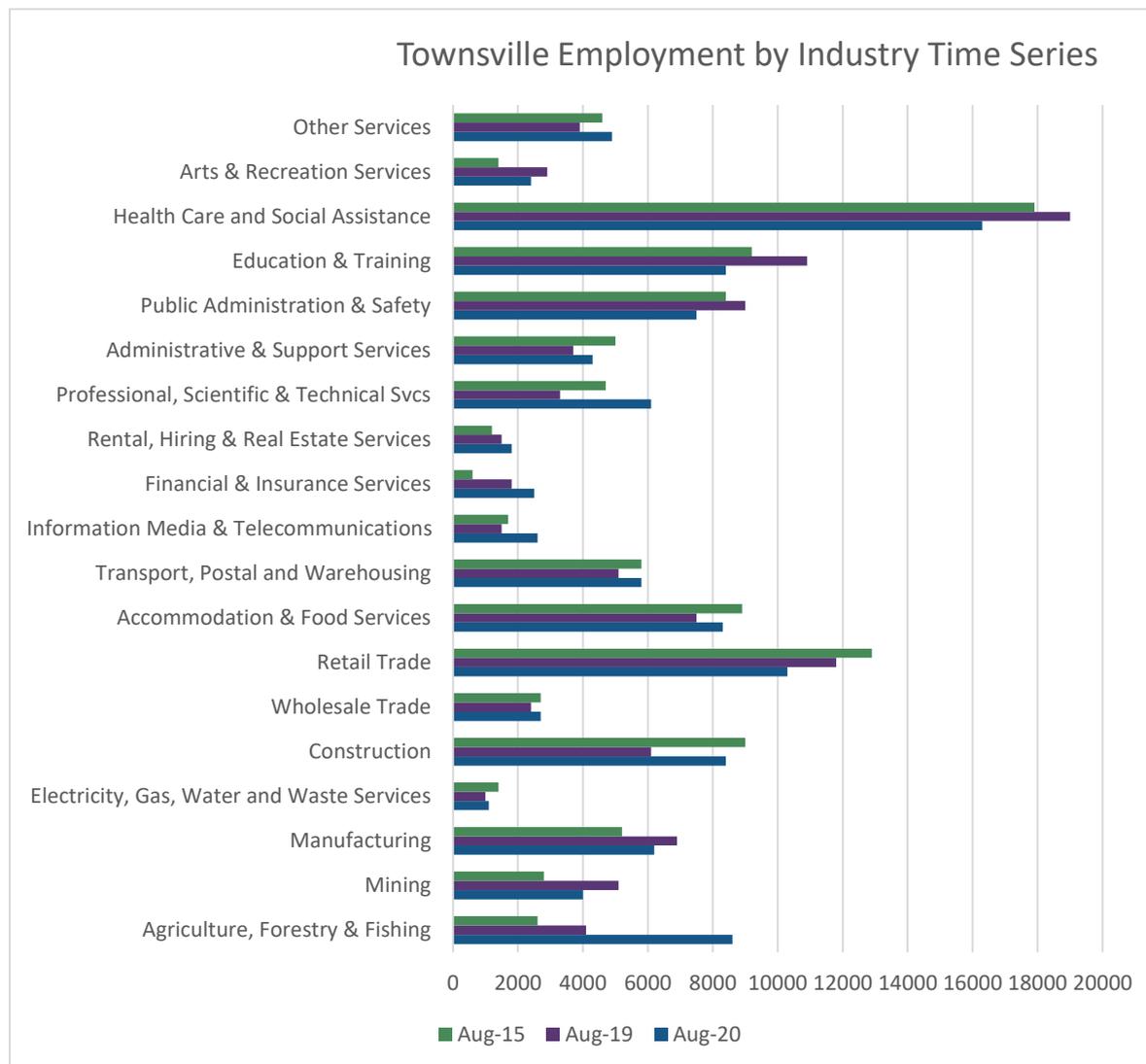
Employed persons in selected 'services' industries, five years to August 2020 ('000)



Source: ABS Labour Force, Australia, Detailed, August 2020

Longer term trends

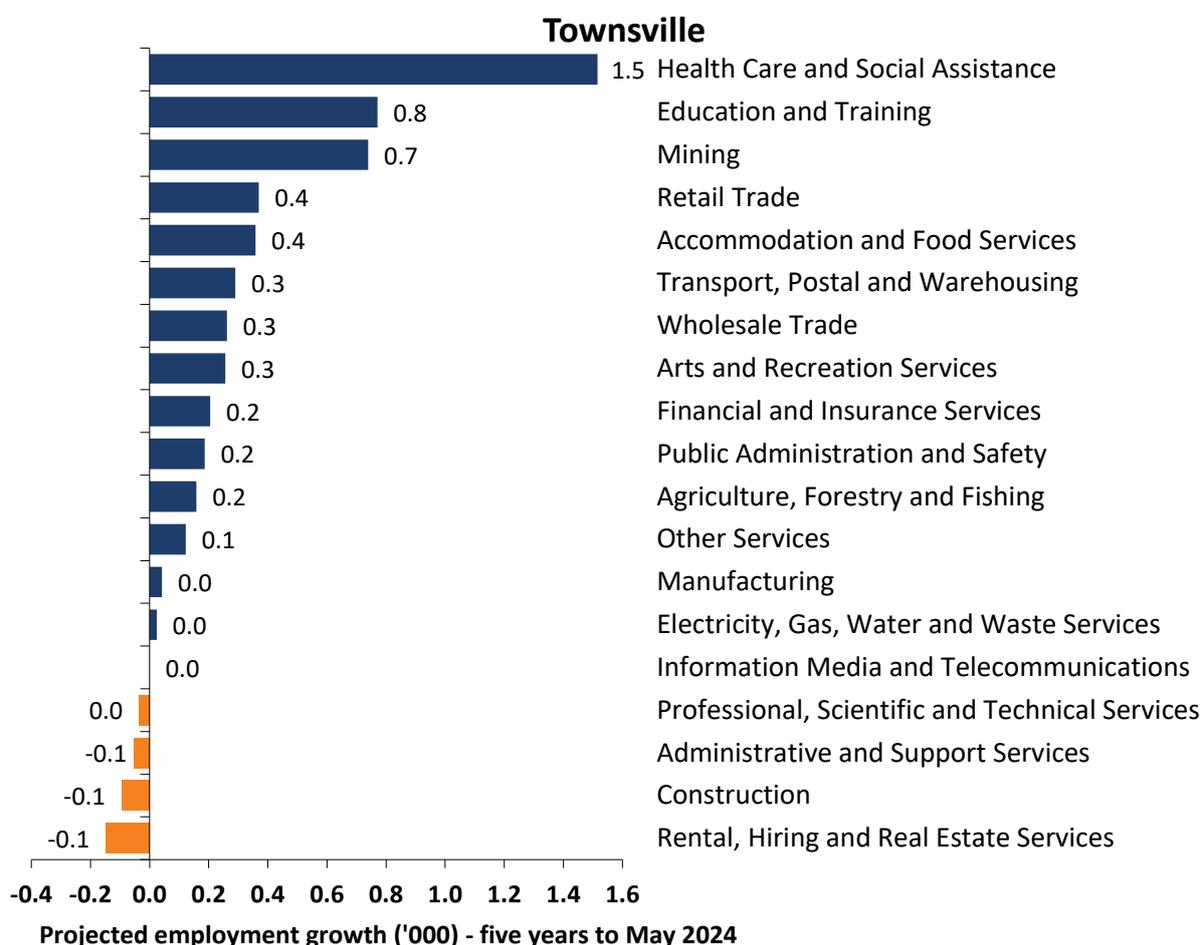
For historical context, despite the overall decline in employment over the five years to May 2020, gains were recorded for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services, Information Media and Telecommunications and Transport, Postal and Warehousing. The largest employing sector, Health Care and Social Assistance has seen initial gains in employment due to the roll-out of the NDIS in Queensland, followed by a decline this year, possibly due to a rationalisation of services and a settling of the market. Retail Trade has seen steady losses in employment which are expected to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Construction appears to be recovering after a contraction in 2019 and manufacturing and mining are continuing with steady gains over five years although there has been some contraction in 2019.



⁸ This data does not include the Mt Isa part of the employment region

Industry projections

The National Skills Commission projections⁹, developed prior to the onset of COVID-19, show over the five-year period to May 2024 employment in the Townsville region¹⁰ was expected to increase by between 5.5 and 7.0 per cent (Employment Outlook to May 2024). Employment was projected to increase for 14 of the 19 broad industry groups over the period with the largest gains expected for the Health Care and Social Assistance, Education and Training and Mining.



Vacancies and job advertisements

Across Australia, there has been a significant decrease in the number of vacancies as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic with many employers freezing recruitment activity due to uncertainty in the economy and in relation to public health concerns.

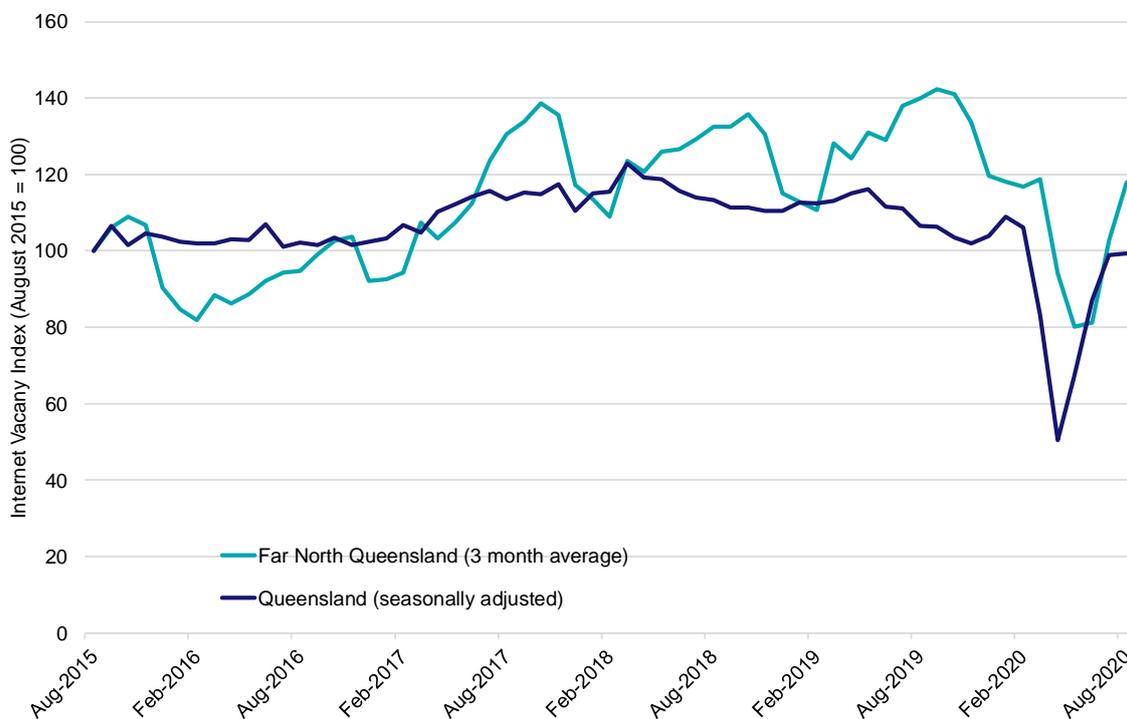
⁹ The 2019 employment projections do not take account of any impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and are therefore no longer reflective of current labour market conditions. As such, they should be used, and interpreted, with extreme caution.

Projections data can be referenced as: National Skills Commission, May 2019 Employment Projections, five years to May 2024.

¹⁰ The Townsville region is approximated by the ABS Statistical Area Level 4s (SA4s) of the Townsville region excluding Mt Isa.

The level of vacancies in the Internet Vacancy Index Far North Queensland region declined by nearly 32.7 per cent over the two months to May 2020, before increasing again to August 2020 (up by 47.4 per cent from the lowest point) and is now at similar levels to pre-COVID.

Online job advertisement time series (Five years to August 2020)



Source: National Skills Commission, Internet Vacancy Index, August 2020. Data for Far North Queensland is a three-month moving average, and data for Queensland is seasonally adjusted; both have been indexed to August 2015.

Top 10 advertised occupations (August 2020)

ANZSCO Occupation
General Clerks
Sales Assistants (General)
Other Miscellaneous Labourers
Registered Nurses
Metal Fitters and Machinists
Aged and Disabled Carers
Truck Drivers
Electricians
Motor Mechanics
Earthmoving Plant Operators

Source: National Skills Commission, Internet Vacancy Index, August 2020. Raw data are used for analysis. Note: the Far North Queensland region is the best fit from the regions available from the contributing job boards and does not precisely correspond to the Townsville Employment Region.

Vacancy comparisons with other regions

The below table also shows that Townsville has experienced weaker growth over the year to July 2020 compared with other Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) regions in regional Queensland.

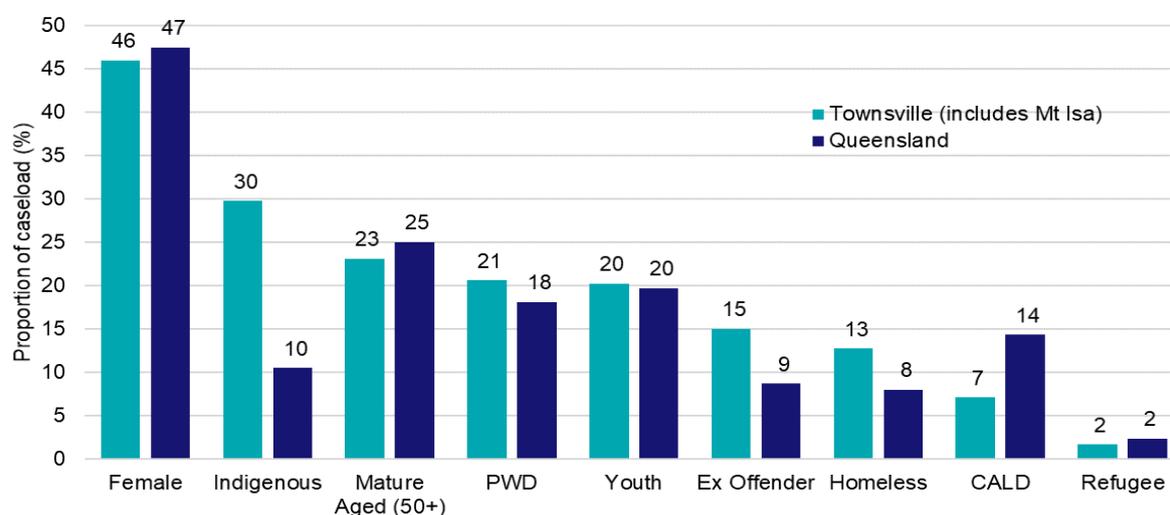
Table 3: Selected indicators from the Vacancy Report, July 2020

Regional IVI – Three Month Moving Average	Index May '10 =100	Yearly change (%)	Number of job advertisements
Brisbane	66.3	-20.7	14,800
Central Queensland	93.6	1.5	2,400
Far North Queensland	113.2	-15.7	3900
Gold Coast	98.4	3.5	500
Outback Queensland	127.9	-15.5	380
Sunshine Coast	160.5	13.5	1900
Toowoomba and South West Queensland	140.2	12.5	1400

Source: National Skills Commission, Vacancy Report, July 2020, three month moving average data. Note: Far North Queensland IVI region does not correspond exactly to the Townsville Employment Region but provides best fit from the available IVI regions.

Employment services caseload characteristics

Employment services caseload for selected cohorts (September 2020)



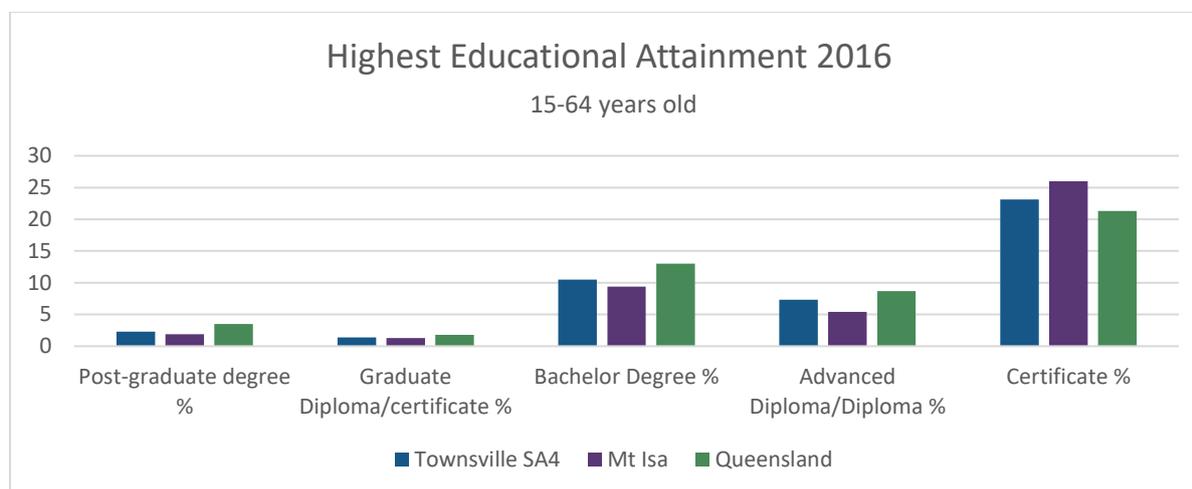
Source: Department of Education, Skills and Employment, administrative data, September 2020. PWD = Persons with disability. CALD = Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

The Townsville ER jobactive caseload has a substantially higher proportion of Indigenous Australians compared with the rest of Queensland. There are also higher proportions of ex-offenders and homeless people on the caseload compared with Queensland, however, it is also likely that there may be cross-over and intersectionality between the identified cohorts. These high numbers of highly disadvantaged job seekers are also reflected in the higher proportion of long-term unemployment in the Townsville ER compared to the urban, south-east corner of Queensland.

Educational attainment and attendance in the region

Educational attainment

Townsville has a lower level of education compared with the rest of Queensland. In 2016, 14.2 per cent of the working age population in Townsville had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 15.8 per cent in Queensland. Additionally, 53.8 per cent of the population in Townsville had not completed Year 12, compared with 48.1 per cent across QLD.



Source: ABS, Census, 2016

Post-school qualifications are crucial to the labour market outcomes for young people in the region. People aged 25-34 are far less likely to be unemployed if they have completed a Certificate III or above than if they have not completed Year 12 or have just completed Certificate I or II¹¹.

University

The Townsville region has campuses for a number of publicly funded universities, including [James Cook University](#), and [Central Queensland University](#).

James Cook University is a multi-campus 'tropical' university, specialising in tropical research. It also has strong health and medical programs. Central Queensland University is a multi-campus and distance education university, based in Rockhampton with high numbers of distance learners and international students.

Transport

The region has many outlying areas which lack (or have only very limited) public transport making it difficult for some seeking work to access job opportunities in the major centre. In the more rural areas of the Townsville ER, lack of access to personal transport affects the ability of low-skilled workers to get to available seasonal agricultural work in Ingham, Home Hill and Ayr and the Burdekin.

A greater reliance on private vehicles may act as a barrier, particularly for disadvantaged job seekers who do not have a valid driver's licence or regular access to a vehicle.

¹¹ Source: *Benefits of Educational Attainment: Employment and Income Support*, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020)

At least anecdotally, there are sectors where local employers look outside the region to fill positions for some skilled workers and therefore there may be potential, with suitable support and planning, for greater reliance on preparation of locals for roles.

Large employers

Major employers in the Townsville ER to name a few, include James Cook University, the Australian Defence Force, Townsville Health Service, Local, State and Federal Government and Mount Isa Mines. While these large employers may drive economic development across the region, and employ significant numbers of local people, most job seekers on income support are eventually employed by small and medium enterprises, or labour hire companies. Opportunities exist within the supply chain of major employers and projects, and in the spin-off sales and personal services sectors that provide goods and services to the workforce brought to the location by larger employers and major projects.

Selected Major Projects

A number of major infrastructure and construction projects are underway or planned for Townsville and North Queensland, such as the Copperstring Electricity Transmission Line, local road projects, hospital upgrades, Big Rocks Weir, Sun Metals Zinc refinery, James Cook University Masterplan, improvements to Port of Townsville facilities and a range of Department of Defence upgrades to name a few. While it is unlikely that many opportunities will arise for low-skilled workers, the investment in these projects will lead to economic growth in the area, creating jobs in the supply chain and boosting demand for sales and personal services.

Local Stakeholders and Opportunities

The boundaries for the Townsville ER extend from Ingham in the north to Ayr in the south and west past Charters Towers, and the township of Mount Isa in the far west. Townsville stakeholders engage in close collaboration which is evidenced by the [Townsville Workforce Development Plan 2020 – 2025](#), developed by Jobs Townsville North Queensland (JTNQ), an advisory board as part of the Townsville City deal. The Townsville City deal brings together three levels of government to work with the private sector to drive an economic transformation for Townsville. Under the JTNQ sit a number of industry working sub-groups developing targeted economic development strategies that support jobs growth in a strategic manner resulting in a more capable, better skilled and stronger local labour pool that can positively impact the regional workforce, regardless of industry.

There are **five local councils** in the Townsville ER: Townsville City, Mount Isa City, Charters Towers Regional, Hinchinbrook Shire and Burdekin Shire. Of these five, four are part of the North Queensland Regional Organisation of Councils (NQROC) and provide a united North Queensland voice when representing North Queensland at the State and Federal levels. In addition to the abovementioned groups, TaskforceNQ is a collaboration and partnership between leaders and businesses to coordinate and accelerate the health, social and economic recovery of Townsville and the greater North Queensland region from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given these existing local partnerships, leveraging their networks will be a priority.

The Australian Government (through the Department of Education, Skills and Employment) funds several **employment programs** in the Townsville Employment Region:

- jobactive – Max Employment, CoAct/Workways, Neato Employment Services
- Transition to Work – BUSY at Work, Workways Australia
- ParentsNext – My Pathway, Multicultural Australia, Access Community Services
- Employability Skills Training – Designer Life, STEPS Group Australia Ltd, Strategix Training Group Pty Ltd

- Career Transition Assistance – Designer Life
- Time to Work Employment Services – Career Employment Australia Ltd
- Skills for Education and Employment – TAFE Queensland
- Australian Apprenticeship Support Network – Sarina Russo Job Access (Australia) Pty Ltd, The BUSY Group Ltd, MEGT (Australia) Ltd, MAS National
- Industry Training Hub – MEGT (Australia) Ltd

Other Australian Government programs include Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC), DES - Disability Management Service (DES DMS), DES - Employment Support Service (DES ESS), National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and more.

Queensland Government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work provides accredited training for eligible unemployed people in skills areas of demand. The Back to Work Regional program provides eligible employers up to \$20,000 to hire an unemployed job seeker into a full-time position and the Certificate 3 Guarantee Boost can provide 'second-chance' training for job seekers or works who already have a qualification but need to new or updated skills to gain, change or retain employment. This program has been extended to June 2021.

Townsville is home to [James Cook University](#), [Central Queensland University](#) and TAFE Queensland.

Attachment A: Key Priorities for the Townsville Region

<i>Priority One: increase workforce skill levels to meet the needs of employers, including those delivering infrastructure projects.</i>	
Strategies - short and long term?	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify existing skills audits undertaken through the Townsville City Agreement. Capacity-building and develop sustainability of employment outcomes through provision of professional mentoring (scope project to train/develop local Indigenous and youth mentors). Encourage workers and unemployed people with life skills to recognise career paths and other development opportunities. Life skills are particularly relevant to learning within the Aged Care and Disability sectors when working with people across the lifespan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jobs and Skills Taskforce Townsville Chamber of Commerce Peak organisations Employment Services providers (jobactive, Transition to Work, ParentsNext, NEIS) Registered training organisations James Cook University Central Queensland University Vocational Education and Training providers Veterans organisations (transitional networks)
<i>Priority Two: create opportunities for Indigenous Australians to increase their skill levels and be supported to achieve equitable access to the local labour market.</i>	
Strategies - short and long term?	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with local aged care and disability services providers to scope a project to provide culturally competent nursing and care staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aged care employers NDIS disability services employers Registered training organisations Community Service Industry Alliance (CSIA) Employment services providers (jobactive, Transition to Work, ParentsNext, Employability Skills Training, Career Transition Assistance Program) Vocational Education and Training providers
<i>Priority Three: identify pathways for young people to develop skills and be supported to access labour market opportunities, particularly through apprenticeships and traineeships.</i>	
Strategies - short and long term?	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design a project to engage young people into trades pathways leading to apprenticeships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Townsville Chamber of Commerce Australian Apprenticeship Support Network Employment services providers (jobactive, Transition to Work, ParentsNext, Employability Skills Training) Vocational Education and Training providers Registered training organisations <p>Youth Counselling / Mental Health Services and networks related to disengaged/ing youth and early school leavers.</p>