Appendix A: Bilateral Implementation Plan – National Skills Agreement Policy Initiatives

PRELIMINARIES

1. This implementation plan is made between the Commonwealth of Australia (Commonwealth) and the Northern Territory (NT) under the 2024–2028 National Skills Agreement (the NSA) and should be read in conjunction with the NSA.

2. Once executed, this implementation plan and any updates agreed with the Commonwealth, will be appended to the NSA and will be published on the Commonwealth's Federal Financial Relations website (https://federalfinancialrelations.gov.au).

3. This implementation plan is expected to expire on 31 December 2028 (in line with the NSA), or on completion of the initiative, including final performance reporting and processing of final payments against milestones.

4. In all public materials relating to the policy initiatives, the NT will acknowledge the Commonwealth's contribution with the following statement:

Improved Completions – especially for priority groups is a joint initiative between the Commonwealth and The Northern Territory Government.

REPORTING AND PAYMENTS

Reporting

1. Performance reporting will be due by 31 March and 30 September each year until the cessation of this implementation plan, or the final payment is processed.

2. The NT will provide to the Commonwealth a traffic light status and activity summary on all policy initiatives.

3. The Commonwealth will provide templates for the purposes of reporting.

Payments

1. The Commonwealth will make payment subject to performance reporting demonstrating the relevant milestone has been met.

2. As part of the performance reporting, the NT will provide evidence of what has been delivered in the reporting period. Payments will be processed once performance reports have been assessed and accepted.

3. Where a payment is due at a reporting period (31 March and/or 30 September), the NT will complete the relevant section of the reporting template and provide the evidence required as agreed in the Milestones and Payments associated with this Implementation Plan.

4. Under A92 of the NSA, if a State is unable to expend any Commonwealth funding provided for policy initiative milestone payments, the Commonwealth may reduce a future payment by an amount equivalent to the unspent funds.

1. IMPROVED COMPLETIONS – ESPECIALLY FOR PRIORITY GROUPS (CLAUSE A141 TO A150 OF THE NSA)

1) Outline actions to improve completions and which element of clause A145 will be addressed.

The Northern Territory (NT) is committed to improving completions especially for priority groups such as people with disability, women in non-traditional trades, those facing disadvantage and First Nations people, through apprenticeship and traineeship qualification completions. Efforts under Clause A145 of the National Skills Agreement. will focus on learners at risk, including those in remote areas.

Implementation will be informed by input from providers, community organisations, and key stakeholders through flexible engagement methods. This approach ensures responsive, learner-focused actions that support NT Government priorities to build a stronger workforce, unlock regional growth, improve access to training, meet industry needs, and increase priority group participation. Collaboration will target investment for maximum impact, reduce duplication, and drive continuous improvement through evidence and feedback. Key industries include agriculture, Defence, mining and energy, tourism, and healthcare.

These actions support NT Government strategies, including Rebuilding the Economy and Lifestyle, and align with Department of Education and Training (DET), strategic objectives 4B and 4C.

Delivery will be coordinated through community organisation, industry partnerships, training providers, Group Training Organisations, and regional pathways to ensure practical, scalable solutions that lead to sustained employment and community benefit.

To meet obligations under the NSA, the NT has developed actions to address unsatisfactory completion rates. These align with four strategic focus areas:

1. Strengthening learner support mechanisms
2. Enhancing employer, RTO, and GTO engagement
3. Supporting participation in non-traditional and high-attrition industries
4. Improving access and delivery in remote and very remote communities

These focus areas are reflected in the initiatives described in this Implementation Plan.

The Northern Territory Government has extensive experience in administering grants and funding programs, supported by robust governance frameworks that ensure transparency, accountability, and probity. These processes address equitable access, conflict-of-interest management, and compliance with relevant policies, providing confidence in effective, best-practice funding management. The NT also retains flexibility to adjust programs in response to evidence, stakeholder feedback, or regional priorities, subject to Commonwealth agreement under the NSA, ensuring a responsive approach to improving completion rates across all learner cohorts.

2. ACTION 1. INDUSTRY-LED WORKFORCE SUPPORT

(Upscaling Potential: High)

Implementation Approach (New Initiative)

Research from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) shows workplace supervision and mentoring strongly influence apprentice and trainee completions. This pilot addresses the lack of structured mentoring in small businesses, a key driver of early attrition and low completion rates. Larger employers achieve better outcomes due to capacity for structured supervision and dedicated support. In contrast, about 95% of NT employers are small to medium enterprises (SME), often with one or two apprentices, limited resources, and minimal access to formal support. This initiative will build mentoring capability in SMEs to improve retention and completions across the NT. This is a three-year pilot initiative designed to reduce early attrition and improve apprenticeship and traineeship completions in priority industries by enhancing the workplace experience of apprentices and trainees.

A closed contestable fund will be established to support industry groups and peak bodies to deliver tailored programs that strengthen workplace mentoring and supervision. Industries and regions will be prioritised using NT labour market data, Jobs and Skills Australia forecasts, and employer demand signals. Through this fund, organisations will manage dedicated grants that may run programs to upskill a senior employee as a workplace mentor, either within their own business or across a cluster of businesses.

The funding will also cover the provision of structured onboarding and mentoring resources to assist employers and mentors in integrating apprentices effectively. Key features include:

- Training and coordination of workplace mentors.
- Use of structured onboarding tools to support apprentice integration.
- Candidate matching resources to improve role alignment and retention.
- Industry-led mentoring to promote sector-wide collaboration and sustainability.

When selecting successful proposals, the department will consider the following key elements of the program.

Key elements

- Employer capability and mentoring: Resources and training to strengthen workplace mentoring, onboarding and cultural safety.
- Industry-led solutions that reflect local conditions and seasonal work patterns.
- Integrated support for priority cohorts: Tailored interventions for groups with historically lower completion rates.
- Flexible delivery and shared responsibility: Partnerships between employers, providers and GTOs to deliver support suited to business and regional needs.

3. ACTION 2. YOUTH AND PRIORITY COHORT CERTIFICATE II PATHWAYS

(Upscaling Potential: High)

Implementation approach (Expansion of Previous Pilot)

This program will be delivered by community organisations with a proven record of supporting youth and priority cohorts through Certificate II pathways with strong industry alignment. Organisations with demonstrated experience in delivering best practice initiatives, achieving strong completion rates and employer engagement will be considered.

The selected organisation will manage the end-to-end delivery of Certificate II pathways, including the preparatory industry readiness program. Community organisation management of the program will include:

- Coordinating with RTOs for training delivery and compliance
- Managing the industry readiness program and pastoral care
- Facilitating employer-linked learning (work tasters, site visits)
- Overseeing placement arrangements and monitoring quality
- Reporting on learner progress, completions, and KPIs to the NT Government

The program builds on and complements previously delivered pre-employment initiatives (Workstart programs) for similar cohorts. The previous Workstart pilot achieved high engagement and completion rates in Electrotechnology, supported by strong employer feedback, providing a robust evidence base for this expansion. This initiative addresses the gap where many young people and priority cohorts disengage before completing qualifications due to a lack of structured job-readiness preparation and employer-linked pathways. Industries will be prioritised using NT labour market data, Jobs and Skills Australia forecasts, and employer demand signals.

Unlike earlier Workstart programs, which delivered a single Certificate II in Electrotechnology, this initiative offers participants a choice from multiple Certificate II streams and begins with a short, intensive industry readiness program to build essential life and employability skills before formal training. The industry readiness program specifically addresses the gap where young people and priority cohorts often lack essential life skills, workplace behaviours, and job-readiness before entering formal training. It focuses on workplace behaviours and job-readiness, not language, literacy or numeracy remediation.

The program will support young people aged 16–24 who are preparing to leave school or have already left school. These participants will undertake the industry readiness program and transition into Certificate II pathways delivered by RTOs in flexible formats.

The community organisation will receive support to:

- Cover management fees for coordination with RTOs, delivery of the industry readiness program, pastoral care, employer engagement, placement oversight, and reporting
- Deliver the industry readiness program
- Support industry engagement to inform co-design
- Facilitate work placements
- Engage RTOs to deliver training and upskill staff
- Enable RTOs to identify at-risk qualifications and cohorts and propose targeted interventions

Initiatives will be piloted and refined based on evidence, employer feedback, and learner outcomes, with successful approaches embedded into standard practice.

Throughput will be demand-driven and informed by employer engagement, with capacity to scale across multiple Certificate II streams as required. Annual intake volumes will reflect pilot outcomes and labour market needs, ensuring flexibility rather than fixed targets. Anticipated class size is 15–20 learners per cohort, with cohorts launched only when confirmed employer placements and mentor capacity are in place. Minimum viable cohort size will be specified in the Action Plan. Regional delivery will prioritise Darwin, with Alice Springs considered based on outcomes from the Darwin pilot.

Key elements

- Pre-training industry readiness program covering life skills, employment readiness, and vocational exploration.
- Cohort-based Certificate II pathways for marginalised youth, with pastoral care and employer-linked learning.
- Co-designed delivery models with employers and community partners, including flexible formats such as block release and modular learning tailored to sector needs.
- Employer-endorsed standards and structured assessments to confirm job-readiness.
- Data-led identification of at-risk qualifications and cohorts, with targeted interventions.

4. ACTION 3 – SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISE (SME) CONTINUITY AND SCHOOL-BASED APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS (SBAT)

(Upscaling Potential: Moderate to High)

Implementation Approach (New Initiative)

Action 3 builds on the existing role of the two Group Training Organisations (GTOs) in providing continuity for apprentices and trainees when small and medium-sized employers (SMEs) cannot complete the training on their own. It also strengthens links between schools, employers and training providers to support school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, leveraging Local Jobs Networks to identify employers and coordinate support.

SMEs play a critical role in providing apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities across the Northern Territory but often face challenges sustaining placements through to completion. Limited staffing, fluctuating workloads, and supervision costs add pressure on smaller employers. Under this initiative, targeted support will help at-risk SMEs maintain training continuity. Where an employer cannot complete the apprenticeship or traineeship, the initiative will enable and incentivise transfer to a Group Training Organisation (GTO), ensuring the learner continues training without disruption. This will be achieved through subsidised GTO hosting fees and streamlined transfer arrangements, reducing costs and administrative burden for employers, with SME vetting and SBAT KPIs embedded as risk mitigations.

Liaison officers will be employed through participating GTOs, ensuring local delivery and strong links to employers and apprentices. These officers will coordinate with Apprenticeships Northern Territory (the NT's Apprentice Connect provider) under clear protocols to complement, rather than duplicate, existing wrap-around supports such as mentoring, pastoral care and peer support. This partnership approach ensures a consistent level of service while extending support to SMEs and apprentices who may not currently access these services.

By dedicating liaison officers to work with schools in Alice Springs and Darwin and providing mentoring and pastoral care, this strategy ensures learners receive consistent support across different settings. These measures help maintain quality and improve completion rates, particularly for learners in regional areas and those from priority groups.

Key Elements

- SME Support: Enables at-risk SMEs, particularly in priority sectors, to transfer apprentices to a Group Training Organisation (GTO) through subsided hosting fees, ensuring continuity and completion rates.
- SBAT Engagement: Dedicates liaison officers to support SBAT students, coordinating with schools and employers, and improve completion outcomes.
- Mentoring and pastoral care: Provides targeted support to apprentices and trainees through mentoring and development of essential workplace behaviours.
- Priority cohorts: Focuses on people with disability, EAL/D learners, women in non-traditional trades, young people, mature-age learners, those at risk of disengagement, those facing socio-economic disadvantage and Aboriginal Territorians.

5. ACTION 4. COMPREHENSIVE COMPLETIONS SUPPORT

(Upscaling Potential: Moderate)

Implementation Approach (New Initiative)

This initiative provides contestable funding to Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to deliver programs and student support initiatives aimed at improving completion rates in priority industry qualifications. Funding may cover transport, childcare, mentoring, wellbeing support, and guidance on workplace behaviours. Programs will be informed by industry consultation and designed to strengthen engagement, attendance, and completion rates for priority cohorts.

Funding will only be available for programs that meet relevant eligibility criteria. Successful applicants must demonstrate how their proposed wrap-around services will:

- Remove practical barriers to participation in remote and regional communities (e.g., transport, childcare, personal protective equipment, provision of meals during training)
- Encourage consistent attendance and engagement
- Maximise completions through mentoring, pastoral care, and wellbeing support

These services will be tailored to individual learner needs, delivered face-to-face, and informed by local conditions and community consultation. Outcomes will be monitored to drive continuous improvement and inform future policy development.

Key Elements

- Capacity building for RTOs to deliver inclusive, community-responsive support in remote areas of the NT. Capacity building refers to provider-facing supports such as staff training in student wellbeing support and cultural safety, development of mentoring protocols, and creation of bilingual resources. It does not include infrastructure or capital works
- Provision of context-specific resources to support learner attendance and engagement in remote settings
- Assignment of mentors or support officers to maintain engagement and resolve participation issues.
- Access to student wellbeing support and guidance on workplace behaviours.
- Support for developing routines and employability skills, building student confidence in workplace settings.

6. ACTION 1 TO 4 - PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Employer and Industry Engagement: Number of employers, SMEs, and industry partners actively participating in mentoring, onboarding, and training continuity initiatives.
- Learner Participation and Retention: Enrolment and retention rates for apprentices, trainees, and priority cohorts across all supported pathways.
- Completion Outcomes: Improvement in completion rates for apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in priority industries and regional areas.
- Support Services Delivery: Uptake of mentoring, pastoral care, and wellbeing support by learners and employers.
- Stakeholder Collaboration: Evidence of partnerships and co-designed delivery models between employers, schools, RTOs, GTOs, and community organisations.

7. ACTION 1 TO 4 - EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS

- Progress Tracking: Monitor participation, retention, and completion rates for apprentices, trainees, and priority cohorts across all initiatives.
- Stakeholder Feedback: Collect input from learners, employers, training providers, and community partners to assess relevance and quality of support measures.
- Impact Assessment: Compare outcomes against baseline data to evaluate improvements in engagement, continuity, and completions.
- Continuous Improvement: Use interim and final evaluations to identify lessons learned and inform adjustments or scaling of successful approaches.

8. ACTIVITY PLANS

An Activity Plan will be developed for each of the four Action items (Actions 1–4).

Each plan will outline:

- Program objectives and rationale
- Key activities and implementation timelines
- Roles and responsibilities, including contributions from community organisations, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), and employers
- Budget breakdown, aligned to the funding allocations for each
- Action Risk management and mitigation strategies
- Monitoring and evaluation framework, including key performance indicators (KPIs), learner outcomes, and employer feedback mechanisms

MATCHED FUNDING APPROACH

The NT's matched funding comprises approximately 60% new funding and 40% reprioritised NT VET expenditure tied specifically to the initiatives set out in this Implementation Plan. The NT will report annually on matched funding by Action and financial year, with CFO attestation, and will identify any elements from existing appropriations that are being reprioritised to support this Implementation Plan.

Action	Commonwealth Investment ($)	NT Investment ($)	Planned Start	Planned End
Action 1 – Industry-led workforce support	$2,000,000	$2,000,000	1 Mar 2026	31 Dec 2028
Action 2 – Youth & priority cohort Certificate II pathways	$1,600,000	$1,600,000	1 Apr 2026	31 Dec 2028
Action 3 – Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) continuity and School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT)	$1,000,000	$1,000,000	1 Jul 2026	31 Dec 2028
Action 4 – Comprehensive completions support	$600,000	$600,000	1 Jul 2026	31 Dec 2028
Total	$5,200,000	$5,200,000		

Details of matched funding ($millions)	**2025-26**	**2026-27**	**2027-28**	**2028-29**	**Total**
Northern Territory contribution	$2.52	$1.68	$0.75	$0.25	**$5.20**
Commonwealth contribution	$2.52	$1.68	$0.75	$0.25	**$5.20**
Total	**$5.04**	**$3.36**	**$1.50**	**$0.50**	**$10.40**

The Northern Territory Government will provide details of their matched funding contributions at the end of each financial year, commencing 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2028. Final payments under this implementation plan may be reduced where the total contribution by the Northern Territory Government over the life of the project does not align with the Commonwealth contribution.

MILESTONES AND PAYMENTS – IMPROVED COMPLETIONS

Milestone	Evidence	Payment Value Up To (Commonwealth funded)	Commonwealth reporting period
Milestone 1. Initial payment on agreement of bilateral implementation plan (BIP)	1: Bilateral implementation plan agreed with Commonwealth	1: $520,000	N/A
Milestone 2 Commonwealth acceptance that NT has implemented measures to support Improved Completions (IC) to 31 March 2026 by: • Commencement of Agreed Actions 1-4	2. Progress report, signed by an NT Senior Skills Official, demonstrating implementation or progress towards implementation, of Actions 1–4 in alignment with the IC BIP attaching evidence and/or progress of: • stakeholder engagement (e.g., consultations completed, feedback incorporated, partnerships formalised), • evidence of project commencement (e.g. Expression of Interest requests, advertising) • Four activity plans for Actions 1-4	2: $2,000,000	31 March 2026
Milestone 3. Commonwealth acceptance that NT has progressed measures to support IC to 30 September 2026 by: • Progression of Agreed Actions 1-4	3. Annual report, signed by an NT Senior Skills Official, demonstrating progression of Actions 1–4 in alignment with the IC BIP and attaching evidence and/or progress of: • Stakeholder engagement progress (e.g., consultations completed, feedback incorporated, partnerships formalised)	3: $1,680,000	30 September 2026

	• Progress against project deliverables, such as contracts executed, activities underway, or measurable outputs achieved • Four updated Actions 1-4 activity plans, showing milestones reached and next steps		
Milestone 4. Commonwealth acceptance that NT has operated measures to support IC to 30 September 2027 by: • Continuation of Agreed Actions 1-4 • Evaluation of progress and outcomes for Actions 1-4 to date • Provision of initial recommendation on upscaling opportunities	4. Progress report signed by an NT Senior Skills Official, demonstrating progress against performance indicators outlined in Actions 1 – 4. Annual report, signed by an NT Senior Skills Official, demonstrating: • Progression and evaluation of Actions 1–4 in alignment with the IC BIP and Action Plans 1–4 activity plans • Identification of initial recommendations for upscaling opportunities.	4: $750,000	30 September 2027
Milestone 5. Commonwealth acceptance of the NT's final report on implemented measures supporting IC to 31 December 2028 demonstrated through: • Submission of Final Outcomes Report	5. Progress report signed by an NT Senior Skills Official, demonstrating progress against performance indicators for Actions 1 – 4. Final report to the Commonwealth, signed by an NT Senior Skills Official providing: • Summary of project outcomes and student impacts • Evaluation of Actions 1–4 and lessons learned	5: $250,000	31 December 2028

	• Recommendations for upscaling opportunities • Contribution to the national evidence base (shared with Jobs and Skills Australia and National Centre for Vocational Education Research)		
	Total	**$5,200,000**	

The Parties have confirmed their commitment to this implementation plan as follows:

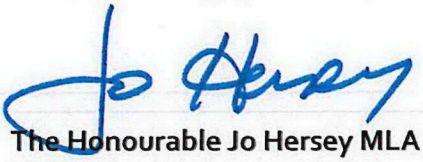
Signed *for and on behalf of the Commonwealth of Australia by*



The Honourable Andrew Giles MP
Minister for Skills and Training

23/12/2025

Signed *for and on behalf of the Northern Territory by*



The Honourable Jo Hersey MLA
Minister for Education and Training

23/11/2025