



**Careers at Council**  
**Jobs Summit 2024**

**Key takeaways**



# The state of the job market in 2024

## Simon Kuestenmacher – The Demographics Group

- The pandemic has exacerbated skill shortages, which are expected to persist over the next decade.
- Migrants alone cannot address the skills shortages in local government. Local government does not rely on migrant workers, e.g. in 2021, only 3% of the local government workforce in NSW were recent migrants who arrived between 2010-2021. In comparison, 81% were Australian born workers.
- Local governments (LGAs) offer superior work-life benefits compared to the private, national, and state sectors.
- To address skill shortages, efforts should focus on attracting local millennial women into the workforce rather than relying on migrant workers, 42% of whom are students.
- Councils should prioritise offering flexibility, work-life balance, and be less stringent with qualifications, as skills can be developed on the job.

# Local Government's Workforce Plan

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## Chloe Boyd, Manager of Workforce Planning – Public Skills Australia

- Public Skills Australia (PSA) is one of ten Jobs and Skills Councils established by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations.
- It performs four key functions: workforce planning, training product development, implementation and monitoring, and industry stewardship.
- Public Skills Australia has engaged with councils and national and state bodies in developing its Workforce Plan. The Plan will be submitted to Government on 31 May 2024 and publicly released later in the year.
- PSA has identified nine megatrends across all sectors of government and public safety and the following challenges specific to local government.
  - National skill shortages.
  - Low enrolment in the LGA local government training package.
  - Attracting and developing regional and remote workforces
- Possible Future Work:
  - Reviewing the uptake and effectiveness of the LGA training package, addressing issues like access, and exploring alternative solutions.
  - Conducting a local government skills audit to evaluate current employment profiles and identify workforce skill needs.

# Panel: Challenges and opportunities for local government

**Simon Kuestenmacher – The Demographics Group**

**Laureta Wallace – Regional Institute Australia**

**Hannah Curtis – Year 13**

**Sarah Ainsworth – Environmental Health Australia**

- Look at opportunities to address underemployment among specific groups (e.g., First Nations, people with disabilities, older workers, parents returning to work, migrants) by identifying and addressing barriers, such as improving job advertisements by using inclusive imagery and statements.
- Address concerns among 60% of high school students about the transition to the workforce by providing industry insights and job skill requirements early on.
- Leverage platforms like TikTok to showcase various careers (e.g., “day in the life” videos of garbage workers) to destigmatise certain jobs and make them more appealing.
- Recognise the desire of 89% of high school graduates to engage in climate change efforts and improving awareness of pathways into climate-related roles.
- Encourage councils to facilitate workshops and work experience opportunities in schools to debunk misconceptions about certain industries and provide exposure.
- Promote work-life benefits in regional areas and creating smoother transitions from university to local government trainee or graduate roles, especially for environmental studies graduates.
- Implement succession planning for trainees to showcase clear career pathways, emphasising the potential for advancement within local government, which is crucial for attracting the younger generation.
- Encourage regional councils to collaborate with universities to attract recent graduates and bridge the skills gap.
- Acknowledge young people’s priorities, such as work-life balance and finding purpose in their work, by demonstrating the meaningful impact of their roles within the community. This holistic view can help engage and retain younger talent.

# Attracting Young People to Local Government

## Ben Kirk - GradConnection

- Student job search activities peak in January, February, March, July, and August.
- According to surveys, graduates prioritise learning and development, mentoring and networking, competitive starting salaries, and meaningful work. Utilise this data to enhance job advertisements.
- 85% of students prefer hybrid working arrangements.
- Top Tips - Keep selection criteria straightforward; establish robust development programs and offer competitive pay; provide training for managers on effectively engaging with early talent.
- Engaging Job Ads - Use captivating titles that resonate with graduates; tailor content for specific disciplines; and clearly outline the role expectations and training opportunities.
- Engaging Content for Graduates - Video content (36%) and written content (21%) effectively engage graduates.
- Retention Challenges - 45% of graduates keep their options open after accepting a role.
- Key Takeaways - Consider campaign timings aligned with peak student activity; craft compelling job advertisements that resonate with students; and prioritise student-centric communication in advertising efforts.

# Attracting Young People to Local Government

## **Ben Gower – Wattle Range Council, SA**

- Wattle Range Council in South Australia leverages its status as a top regional hotspot for capital-to-regional net migration growth.
- Emphasises affordable rent at \$180 per week in job advertisements.
- Incorporates subliminal messages promoting work-life balance in job adverts.
- Targets foreign graduates by highlighting the fastest residency pathways for South Australian regional areas.
- Establishes relationships with Uni SA managers to facilitate recruitment.
- Offers project placement opportunities for 3rd and 4th-year students, with clear intentions of potential employment post-placement.
- Addresses unconscious biases towards job applicants with English as their primary language by actively seeking and hiring qualified graduates who may already be in the region but are employed in other roles (e.g., laborers, retail staff). This shift improves organisational diversity and culture.
- Focuses on nurturing local talent by employing apprentices on two-year contracts straight out of high school and engaging with high school career days to cultivate community talent.

# Attracting Young People to Local Government

## **Michelle Turner – Penrith City Council, NSW**

- Conducts workplace experience campaigns twice a year in February and July, targeting high schools, career advisors, TAFE, and universities.
- Overcomes challenges in Student Work Placements by:
  - Assigning a dedicated mentor to each student
  - Creating structured rotations to expose students to various aspects of the work environment.
  - Communicating with students to understand their goals and expectations.
  - Providing a clear set of tasks and responsibilities for each student.
  - Conducting weekly meetings and maintaining a logbook for feedback and progress tracking.
  - Encouraging students to stay in contact post-placement for potential references.
  - Organising career expos like the Greater Western Sydney Careers Market to facilitate student engagement.
- Traineeships have a strong track record, with 90% of participants securing employment and an average tenure of 9.5 years.
- Traineeship programs consistently attract young participants, contributing to a diverse age profile within the organisation.
- Retention Strategies include:
  - Providing clear paths for career progression.
  - Offering ongoing training and development opportunities.
  - Facilitating networking opportunities.
  - Providing flexible work arrangements to support work-life balance and employee satisfaction.

# Council Strategies to Attract and Retain Staff

## Settlement Services

**Kate Sowden – Work+Stay**

**Shireen Donaldson – Griffith City Council, NSW**

- Moving into a new community from a different cultural background can be daunting.
- Consider initiating welcome programs to ease the transition for newcomers.
- STAY is a Connection Retention Service that:
  - Provides comprehensive support beyond the workplace to ensure the well-being of employees.
  - Offers relocation planning assistance.
  - Facilitates networking opportunities.
  - Provides ongoing check-ins and support for up to 24 months after relocation.
- Councils should try to identify leaders who can effectively place migrants into suitable positions, emphasising the importance of personal connection and understanding.



# Council Strategies to Attract and Retain Staff

## Inner City Perth Mentoring Program

**Nathan Stokes – City of Vincent, WA**

**Pele McDonald – City of South Perth, WA**

- Joint mentoring program established between 4 councils in Perth in 2020 with multiple aims:
  - Build leadership capability of mentors and mentees by focusing on communication, collaboration and connection.
  - Support those without council experience to better understand the local government landscape
  - Build networks
- The program has experienced growth in participation, attraction, and positive feedback, with 94% of participants reporting that the mentor program provided valuable guidance and 78% willing to recommend it to others.
- The program is 6 months long and offers a structured process, training for mentors and mentees, networking opportunities, workbooks and resources, and HR support.
- Participant numbers (mentors and mentees) have been steady at 56 in 2021, 90 in 2022, 49 in 2023, and 52 in 2024.
- Participants come from a variety of teams and include CEOs, Directors, Managers and employees.
- The mentoring program has generated ideas about further collaboration on:
  - A federated service model for pool inspectors, and potentially other regulatory roles
  - Combined training and development programs
  - Inner City Group Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Career Expo
  - Sharing learnings from industrial bargaining under the State IR system

# Council Strategies to Attract and Retain Staff

## Supporting employment of veterans

### **Sarah McAskill – City of Parramatta, NSW**

- Local government and veterans share a common purpose - to serve and enhance the well-being of our community.
- Council established an Employee Resource Group (ERG), a voluntary group of employed veterans, to determine priorities and actions. Its key themes are awareness, education, advocacy and support.
- Veterans now make up 2% of the workforce compared with 0.8% in LGA.
- The greatest challenges have been addressing misconceptions about veterans, so internal education campaigns have been conducted.
- Council provides veteran support on panels and gives feedback to applicants
- Lessons Learned:
  - o Invest time in tailored mentorship and networking opportunities for veterans.
  - o Implement inclusivity policies to better accommodate veterans' needs.
  - o Evaluate and adapt onboarding processes to effectively integrate veterans into our organisation.

# Council Strategies to Attract and Retain Staff

## Employment of people with disabilities

### Vi Dinh – Inner West Council

- In 2023, 4.92% (or 9,259 employees out of 188,325) at Inner West Council reported having a disability (including mental health conditions and diseases) which was an increase from 2.94% in 2021.
- The social model of disability recognises that “disability itself is not a barrier to participation but rather it’s the external barriers such as built environment, systems and processes, communication, and attitudes that impact the participation of people with disability”.
- Strategies that are effective in increasing employment of people with disability include:
  - Partnering and collaborating with disability specialists, including organisations like Job Access, Australian Disability Network, Diversity Council Network, Get Skilled Access, and Ability Advocate.
  - Tailoring positions to match the needs of individuals through school leaver employment support providers.
  - Fostering an open and consistent community wellbeing approach within people and culture initiatives.
  - Implementing learning and development programs like mentoring schemes and the Hidden Disability Sunflower Scheme.
  - Cultivating a culture of accessibility and inclusion throughout the organisation.
  - Leveraging recruitment platforms specifically targeted toward individuals with disabilities (e.g theField.jobs).
  - Offering work experience is good for all parties to understand any limitations.
  - Adopting inclusive language and avoiding stigmatising terms like “issues.”
  - Providing ongoing additional support and resources to managers.
  - Engaging in discussions with parents to better understand and address specific needs.
  - Educating about disability support pension and other relevant support schemes.
  - Need to broaden thinking beyond qualifications and past industry experience.

# Innovative ways to use industrial instruments to attract and retain staff

## **Peter Bell, Local Government NSW**

- Key Drivers of Attraction and Retention:
  - While pay may attract employees initially, organisational culture is often the key factor in retaining talent.
  - Fostering a learning culture through structured salary progression.
  - Emphasising leadership development within the employee development process.
  - Implementing a comprehensive salary system policy that guides the process and integrates other system elements.
- Potential Attraction and Retention Initiatives (non-award):
  - Offering additional leave entitlements.
  - Supporting remote working arrangements.
  - Providing retention and sign-on bonus payments.
  - Organising catered lunches.
  - Offering concessional rental accommodation options.
- Consistently differentiating positions into salary grades using job evaluation methods.
- Implementing salary steps and ranges within each grade to reward capacity building and development.
- Progressing employees based on their capability development, assessed through structured evaluation processes.

# An effective Talent Marketing Strategy is not just about attraction

## Mary Curran – NeonLogic

- Workers who have made an internal move at their organisation at the two-year mark have a 75% chance of remaining with the company. 44% of workers who have only one role will leave.
- To create a positive candidate experience, you need to:
  - Highlight top benefits and learning opportunities associated with the role.
  - Emphasise career growth potential, including flexibility, location options, and training opportunities.
  - Address common application barriers such as lack of salary information, complex selection criteria, and negative reviews.
  - Streamline the interview and acceptance process.
- Content and Messaging Strategies include:
  - Creating employer brand videos, social posts, campaigns and blogs to showcase your organisation's culture and values.
  - Information sessions to engage potential candidates.
  - Employee stories that highlight career progression and experiences.
  - Keeping careers websites updated with current job listings, utilising platforms like "Careers at Council."
  - Simplifying the application process to encourage more candidates.
  - Providing transparency about interview processes and timelines.
  - Offering a structured onboarding program for new hires.
  - Emphasising learning and development opportunities within the organisation.
  - Utilising authentic employee testimonials to showcase the positive aspects of working with your organisation.

# Impacts of new technology on jobs and employees in local government

**Kylie Lunson – Devonport City Council, TAS**

- Large-scale implementation of new technologies has not affected employment size at the council (150).
- It has contributed to significant efficiencies and the capacity of employees to focus on other areas of work.
- Some new roles have been created, including a position to identify how AI can be applied to jobs across council.
- The introduction of new technologies have contributed to a more positive workplace culture, with employees learning new skills, and reducing many repetitive and less interesting aspects of their jobs.
- Communication with employees is critical at all planning and implementation stages.