



Narrabri Shire Council 2025 Business Survey Summary Report

28 May 2025

Prepared by Small Business Liaison Officer - Gillian Goddard

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Key takeaways	2
Project delivery	3
Survey results and discussion	4
Business challenges and outlook.....	4
Workforce.....	8
Economic development priorities	12
Business support.....	13
Next steps	14

Introduction

Narrabri Shire has 1877 business ABNs registered employing 6,949 people. The aim of this survey is to further understand how these businesses operate, their confidence levels, support and business development needs.

The information provided by local businesses is invaluable and helps Council understand some of the challenges and opportunities for businesses in Narrabri Shire and better guide the work Council does to facilitate a healthy and sustainable economy. The information gathered helps us to understand business sentiment and identify trends, training gaps, and key issues.

The survey data is key in shaping Council's approach to economic development, including how we attract and facilitate new investment, support our existing businesses, how we better prepare our local workforce and a range of other initiatives that will be considered as part of our Economic Development Framework. The survey was established in 2021 and is conducted annually to track business trends.

Key takeaways

- Survey conducted from 16 April to 16 May 2025, with 61 responses received.
- Respondents primarily work at a permanent business location, and 61% have been operating for 11 years or more.
- Top development and training needs in order of priority include AI - Artificial Intelligence for Business, Marketing (digital, social and general), information technology (website development, eCommerce sales platforms, cybersecurity), Succession planning followed by networking.
- Notably, the demand AI - Artificial Intelligence training has doubled since the 2024 survey.
- Businesses are experiencing challenges recruiting and retaining staff, with 37% currently not having skill needs required within their current workforce.
- 72% of respondents indicated they need workers to fill their immediate needs. This result is similar to result seen in 2024, and reflective of low unemployment rates (currently 2.2% Dec 2024 quarter) observed in Narrabri Shire over the last 12 months.
- A stabilisation in business confidence observed during the past 12 months, in line with inflation easing on a national level and RBA interest rate cut observed.
- 53 % are looking to expand business (minor or major expansion) in the next 5 years. (A 6% decrease since 2024)
- 51% are confident or very confident their turnover will increase within the next 5 years. (the same results observed in 2024.)
- Respondents of the survey indicated the top 3 biggest barriers for business expansion, improved trading and innovation include employment of suitable skilled staff, costs impacting on profitability, freight and logistics.

Project delivery

Council used an online survey platform, Survey Monkey to engage the business community, with the survey being open from 16 April to 16 May 2025. A stakeholder engagement and communication strategy were developed to promote the survey to local business groups, businesses, and industry leaders during this period.

Two \$200 Narrabri Shire Why Leave Town gift cards were used as an incentive to encourage and thank local businesses for participating in the survey.

A total of 61 respondents completed the 2025 Narrabri Shire Annual Business Survey. This is the fourth Narrabri Shire annual business survey, with 71 responses garnered in 2024, 21 in 2022/2023 and 78 in 2021.

2025 Annual Business Survey Promotional Documents



The survey was promoted via several marketing and communications channels. This included:

- Inclusion in three eNewsletters during April and May 2025. 132 unique user clicks to survey via eNewsletter.
- Organic social media on Narrabri Shire Council Facebook and LinkedIn pages - 5 posts each.
- Direct emails to business enquiries during the open period.
- Poster with QR code to survey distributed to businesses and local chamber meetings.
- Posters displayed at predominate locations including Coles community notice board.
- Shared with local business and industry associations to share with members.
- Your Council – The Courier Newspaper.

Survey results and discussion

Business challenges and outlook

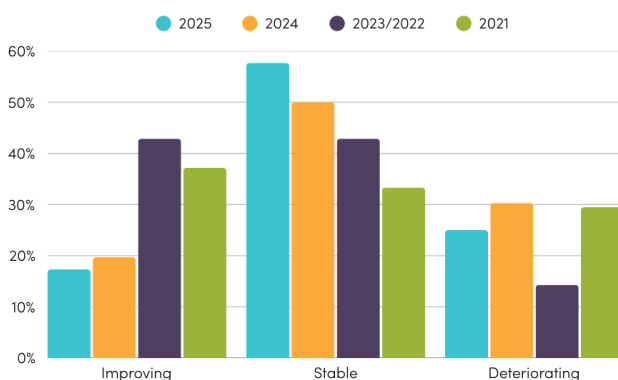
Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their business confidence and profitability.

When asked 'How would you describe trading conditions over the past 12 months', 57.69% of respondents indicated stable conditions, 25.00% deteriorating, and 17.31% improving conditions.

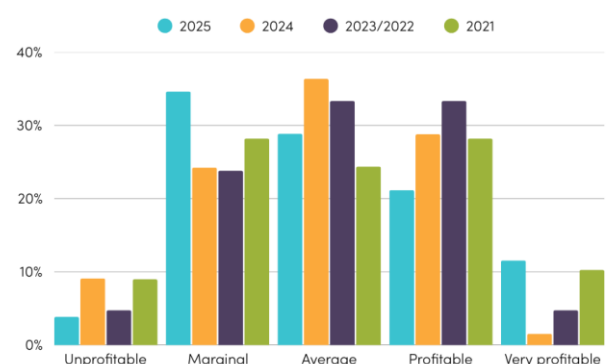
The 2025 Narrabri Shire Annual Business indicates a slight decrease in deteriorating conditions and increase in stable conditions from responses received in 2024. This is inline with national trends, as indicated by NAB Monthly Business survey¹, with easing of conditions and confidence at similar levels seen in 2024.

Business profitability has softened in comparison to previous years, with a sharp uplift in marginal profitability and decreases seen in average and profitable conditions in the last 12 months. These weaker conditions are aligned with declined in profitability and higher purchase costs observed in NAB Business Survey April 2025 report.

How would you describe trading conditions over the last 12 months?



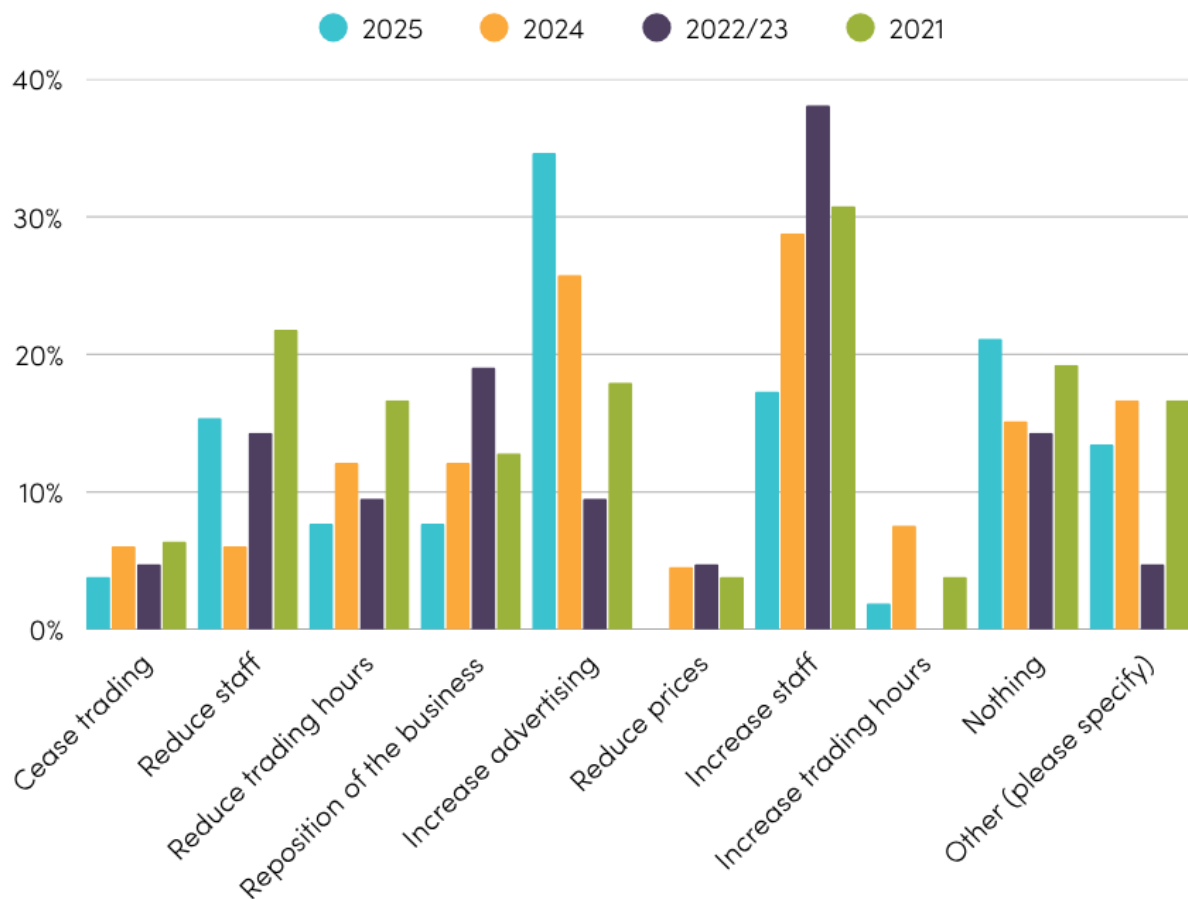
How would you describe overall business profitability over the last 12 months?



¹ <https://business.nab.com.au/nab-monthly-business-survey-april-2025/>

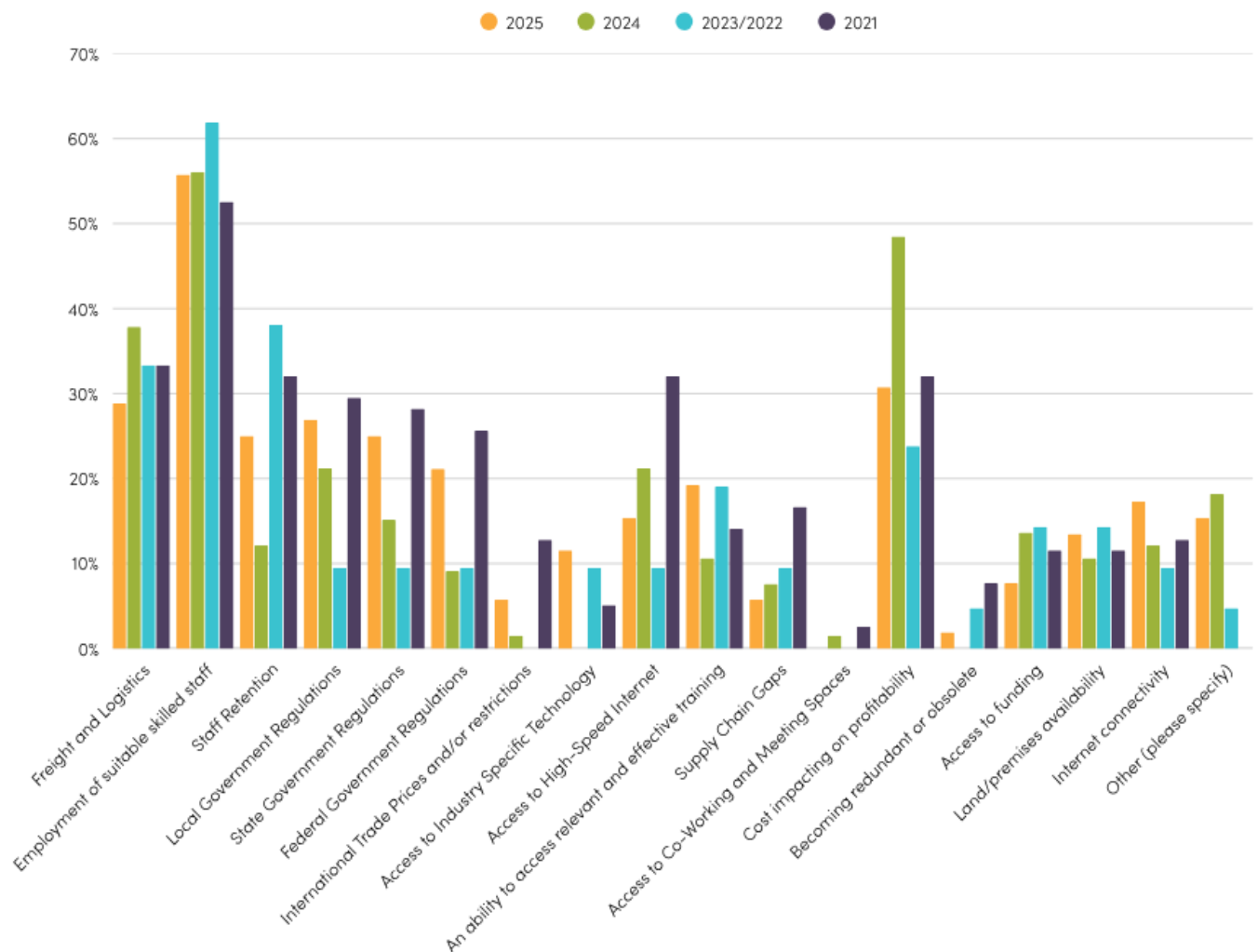
In response to these conditions, respondents indicated the following decisions they look to undertake in the next 12 months. Largest changes in 2025 survey indicates increased marketing and advertising by businesses and reduction in recruitment and existing staff numbers.

What business decision(s) are you planning to make in response to these conditions within the next 12 months?



Employment and retention of staff, costs impacting profitability, freight and logistics were again the key barriers to improved trading conditions and expansion, this trend continues from results garnered in 2024, 2023/2022 and 2021.

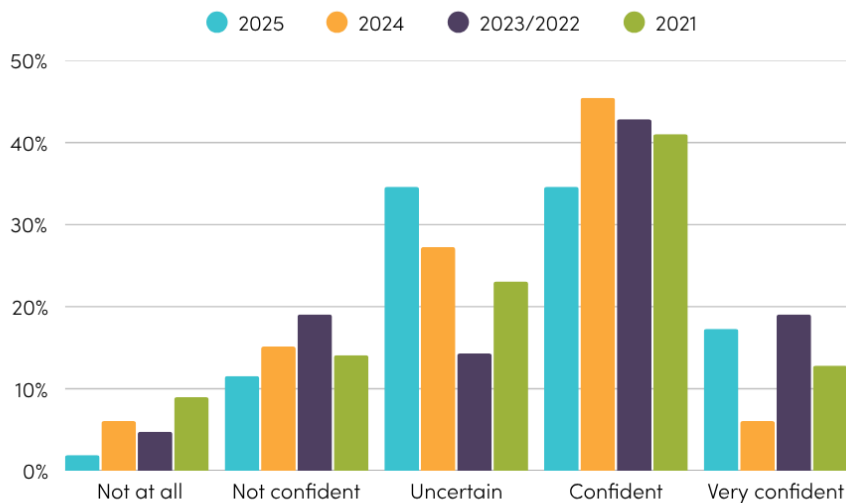
Please identify significant barriers to your business' ability to improve trading, expand or innovate. (tick all that apply)



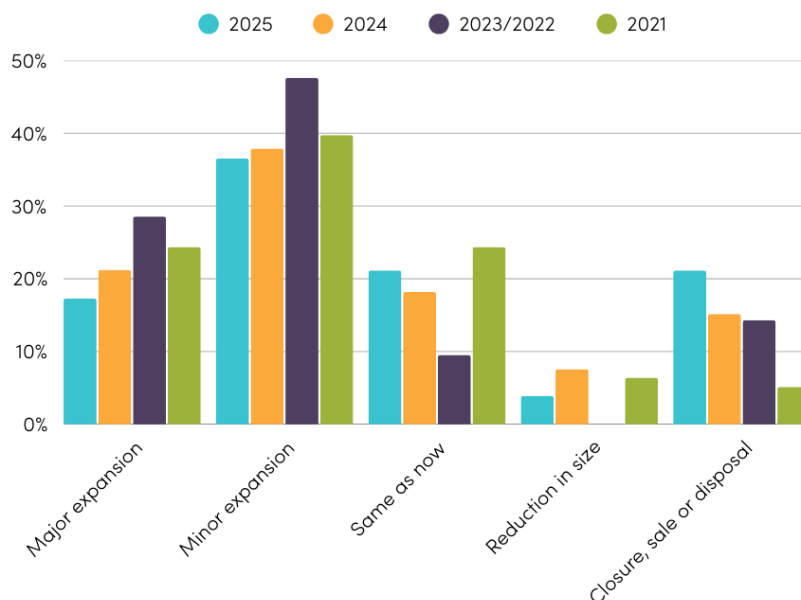
Despite these challenges, local businesses are resilient and encouraged for growth.

- 51% are confident or very confident their turnover will increase within the next 5 years. (same result observed in 2024.)
- 53% are looking to expand business (minor or major expansion) in the next 5 years. (6% decrease since 2024, and 23% decrease since 2022/23)

How confident are you that your turnover will increase over the next 5 years?



Where do you see your business in 5 to 10 years?

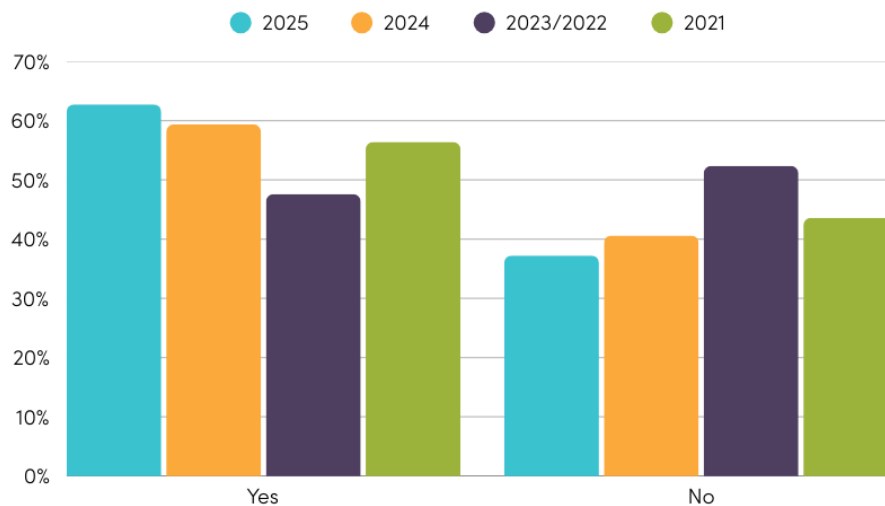


Workforce

Employment of suitable skilled staff remains the biggest barrier for improved trading, expansions and innovation for Narrabri Shire businesses. This is consistent with previous survey results in 2024, 2023/2022 and 2021, and in line with downward trend in unemployment rate figures observed in Narrabri Shire since 2020.

- 72% of respondents indicated they need workers to fill their immediate needs.
- 37.25% of respondents indicated their skill needs are not met within their current workforces.
- 17% of respondents indicated they employ VISA holders, such as primary temporary skill shortage subclass 482 or temporary work skilled subclass 457 visa holders or working holiday makers.

Are all your skill needs met within your current workforce?



Narrabri LGA Unemployment Figures

Narrabri

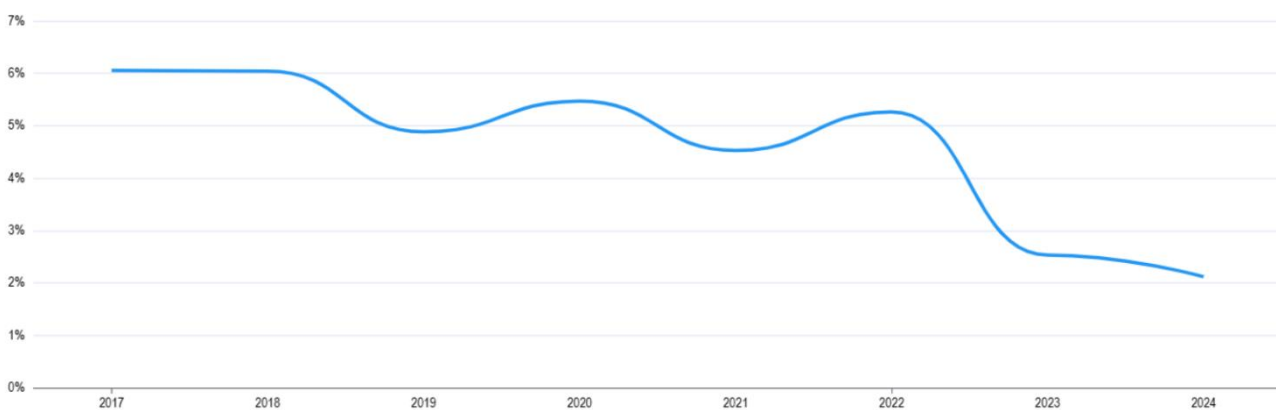
Unemployment By Quarter



Benchmarks: None

Narrabri

Unemployment By Year

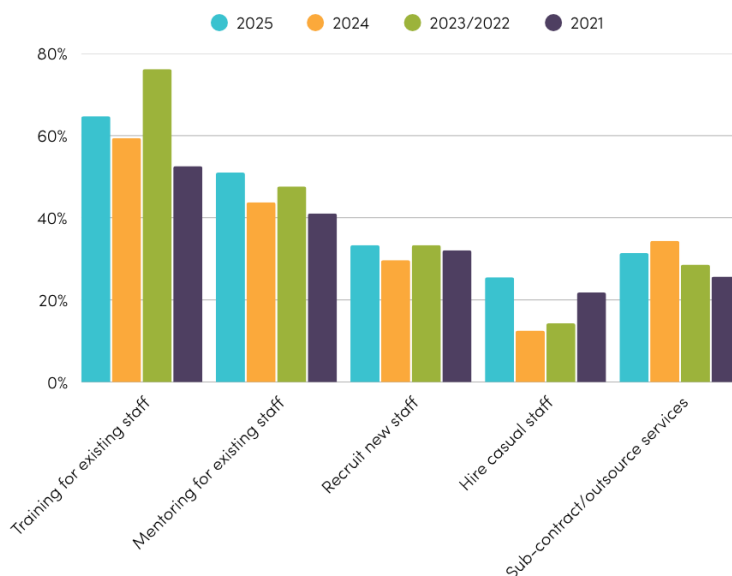


Benchmarks: None

Source: REMPLAN – Narrabri Shire Unemployment by Quarter and Year
<https://remplan.co/4c1tBld>

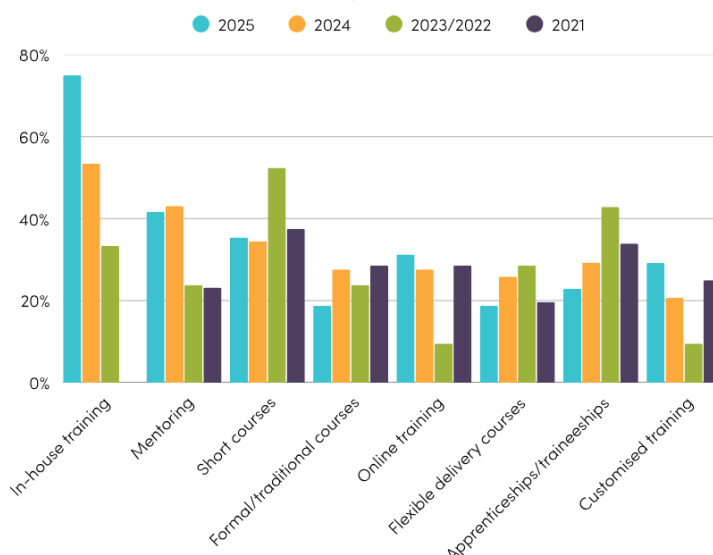
To overcome skills gaps within their workplaces, Respondents indicated their overwhelming support for training and mentorship of existing staff to overcome skills gaps within the workplace, highlighting local appetite for upskilling and support of existing workforce.

How do you currently overcome the skills gaps within your workplace?



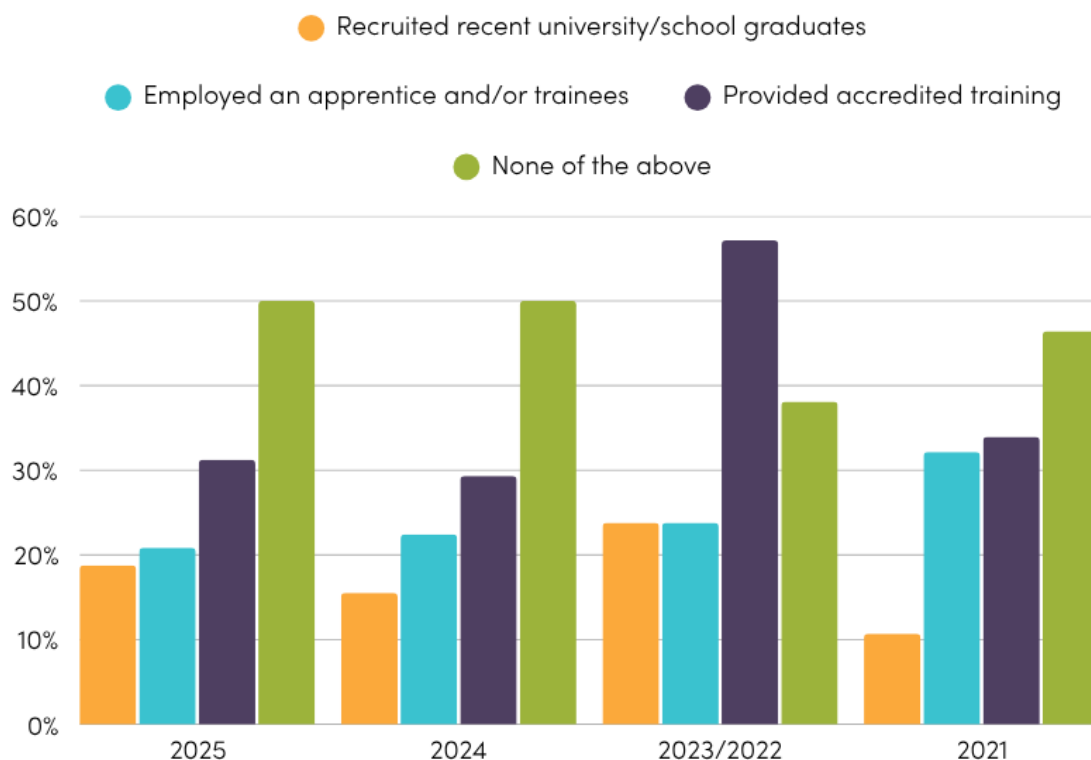
In 2025, Respondents indicated In-house training, mentoring would be most useful to ensuring current and future workforce skill needs are met. It is noted there has been a decline for trainees and apprentices in the last 2 years.

Which of the following education and training options would be most useful to ensure that your current and future workforce/workplace skill needs are met?



Within the last 12 months, 31% of respondents provided their workforce with accredited and career development training, 20% have engaged an apprentice or trainee and 18% have recruited a recent university or trade graduate, with less than

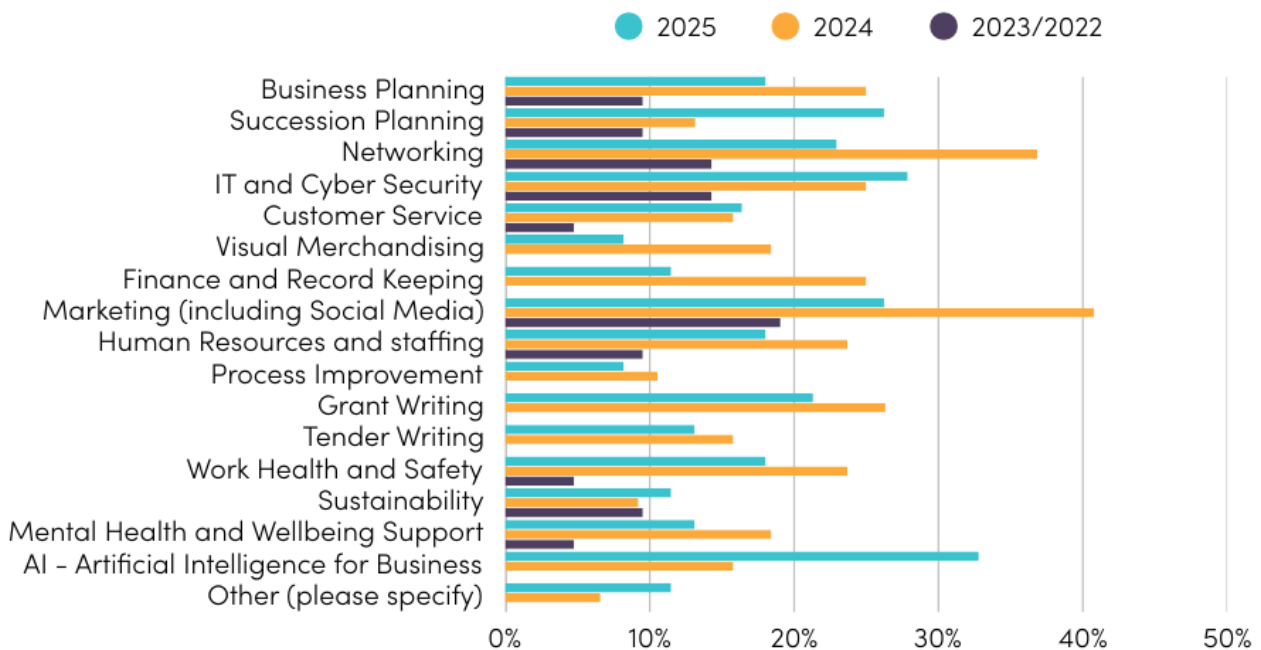
In the last 12 months, has your business: (Please select all that apply.)



Capability Building Priorities

Top development and training needs in order of priority include AI - Artificial Intelligence for Business, Marketing (digital, social and general), information technology (website development, eCommerce sales platforms, cybersecurity), Succession planning followed by networking. Notably, the demand AI - Artificial Intelligence training has doubled since the 2024 survey and is now the top priority, surpassing Marketing which formerly was the top priority since this survey established in 2020.

Please select the learning opportunities that would be beneficial to your business and employees.

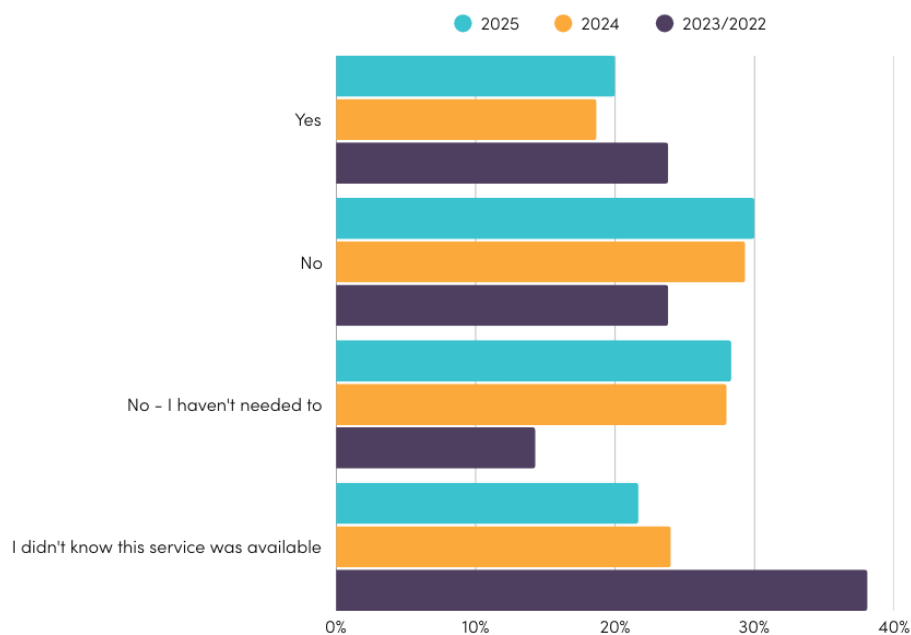


Business support

20% of respondents had engaged with Narrabri Shire's economic development team prior to completing this survey, an increase since 2024. 21% did not know that Council Economic Development team offered business support and information. This has decreased by 17% since the 2023/2022 survey following efforts to promote Council's Business concierge service through development of promotional resources and events.

Council's Economic Development team continue to see this as an opportunity for outreach and further community awareness campaigns regarding Council service delivery, in line with actions developed for the Narrabri Shire Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 2032.

Have you engaged or contacted Council's Economic Development team for information or business support?



Next steps

Development Area	Action	Channel	Expected completion
Business and Industry Engagement	Contact businesses that requested contact from economic development in business survey.	As requested in survey (visit, phone, email)	June 2025
Training and Development	Incorporate learning opportunities (AI, marketing, IT, succession planning) into the annual business support development and training calendar.	Industry development calendar	July 2025 – for delivery in 2025/2026 FY
Economic Development Framework	Consider survey results in delivery of Councils Economic Development Strategy 2023 – 2032	Economic Development Strategy Development	Ongoing
Training and Development	Promote workshops, grants, share tools and templates and link businesses to local programs.	Newsletters, social media, direct contact	Ongoing
Business and Industry Engagement	Promote Council programs and Business development support services to business community	Newsletter, social media, direct contact.	Ongoing