

Submission to the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL) Consultations

Submitted by: Silver Fleece Est. 1951

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Executive Summary

Silver Fleece is a South Australian owned vertically integrated textile and knitwear manufacturer with a 74-year legacy. We operate Australia's only combined textile mill and dye house of this kind, producing fashion, uniform, medical, defence force, and technical textiles.

While demand for our garments and textiles is strong, **our ability to meet this demand is constrained by severe workforce shortages across critical occupations**. We are able to secure orders but consistently struggle to recruit enough skilled machinists, knitters, programmers, and technicians to produce garments to the required quality and in a timely manner.

This submission highlights the specific occupational gaps and urges Jobs and Skills Australia to prioritise these roles in the 2025 Core Skills Occupations List (CSOL), and to provide migration pathways and support for relocation costs.

1. Workforce Gaps and Recruitment Challenges

Despite national recruitment campaigns and engagement with RTOs, TAFE, and employment providers, **Silver Fleece is unable to source experienced staff locally**. This has a direct impact on production capacity, growth, and innovation.

The following roles are in critical shortage:

- **Industrial Sewing Machinists** – Experienced machinists with stretch and knit expertise to deliver consistent, high-quality garments at scale.
- **Circular Knitters** – For fashion, medical, defence, and technical fabrics; specialist knowledge is extremely rare domestically.
- **Shima Seiki Programmers & Mechanics** – WholeGarment and flat-bed knitting machine specialists are essential to operate and maintain advanced Japanese knitting technology.
- **Patternmakers / Garment Technicians** – To translate design concepts into accurate, efficient production.
- **Dye Lab Manager** – Skilled in managing dye houses, formulations, and colour-fastness testing.

- **Textile Mechanics** – With expertise in operating and maintaining stenters, dye vats, splitters, and associated finishing equipment.
 - **Textile Quality Assurance Specialists** – To ensure compliance across fashion, medical, and defence textiles.
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2. Why These Skills Are Critical

1. **Sewing Machinists & Circular Knitters** – Core to producing garments that meet domestic and international standards for quality and speed. Shortages delay delivery and increase costs.
 2. **Shima Seiki Specialists** – Australia is investing in advanced knitting technology, but without trained programmers and mechanics, these multimillion-dollar machines cannot be fully utilised.
 3. **Technical Textile Roles (dye lab, mechanics, QA)** – These underpin innovation in medical textiles, defence contracts, and sustainable manufacturing. Without them, Australia risks losing sovereign capability in technical fabrics.
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3. Barriers to Workforce Development

- **Limited Domestic Training** – Very few RTOs or TAFE programs offer advanced training in knitting technology, dye house operations, or textile QA.
 - **Aging Workforce** – Many skilled machinists and textile workers are retiring with limited succession planning in place.
 - **Relocation Costs** – International workers with the required experience often face prohibitive costs to relocate to Australia without support.
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4. Why Inclusion on the CSOL Matters

- **Migration Pathways:** Including these roles in the CSOL will enable access to the Core Skills Stream of the Skills in Demand visa, allowing employers like Silver Fleece to bring in urgently needed skilled workers.
 - **Industry Resilience:** Recognition of these occupations is essential for Australia's sovereign capability in textiles for defence, medical, and technical applications.
 - **Cost Support:** Assistance with visas and relocation costs would make it viable for SMEs like ours to attract skilled migrants.
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5. Recommendations

Silver Fleece recommends that the following occupations (or their equivalents in the new OSCA framework) be included in the 2025 CSOL:

1. Industrial Sewing Machinist / Garment Machinist
2. Circular Knitter (fashion, technical, and medical)
3. Shima Seiki WholeGarment and Flat-Bed Knitting Programmer
4. Shima Seiki Knitting Machine Mechanic
5. Patternmaker / Garment Technician
6. Textile Dye Lab Manager
7. Textile Machinery Mechanic (Stenter, Dye Vats, Splitters)
8. Textile Quality Assurance Specialist

6. Conclusion

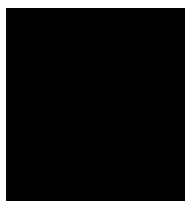
Silver Fleece represents a case study in the urgent need for skilled migration in Australia's textile sector. Without targeted visa pathways and recognition of these occupations, our industry cannot meet demand, grow exports, or sustain sovereign manufacturing capacity.

We strongly urge Jobs and Skills Australia to recognise these occupations in the CSOL and provide mechanisms to reduce the financial burden of skilled migration, ensuring that Australia's textile sector remains viable, innovative, and globally competitive.

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Silver Fleece Workforce Development and Recruitment Pathways for Advanced Textile and Garment Manufacturing

Introduction

Silver Fleece is embarking on a transformative journey to position South Australia as a national leader in advanced textile and garment manufacturing. Following its successful revival under new ownership, the company is investing heavily in next-generation technologies including Shima Seiki WHOLEGARMENT knitting, CLO3D digital garment simulation, and APEX4 AI-powered design systems. These innovations are reshaping how garments are designed, sampled, and produced, allowing South Australia to showcase world-class manufacturing capability.

The challenge and opportunity now lies in building a workforce that can deliver on this vision. To achieve this, Silver Fleece is creating a structured workforce development program that recruits, trains, and retains new employees from diverse backgrounds. The program is inclusive by design, prioritising culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, mature workers over 45, and young people under 24 who may not have previously considered careers in manufacturing. By coupling internal training with accredited education pathways, this program will establish South Australia as a hub for modern, digital garment production.

The Northern Adelaide Regional Jobs Coordinator has formally endorsed this program, recognising its strong alignment with regional workforce priorities and its potential to deliver lasting benefits to both individuals and the local economy.

Program Vision

The vision is to deliver a new workforce model that combines inclusive recruitment with future-focused training. It is built on two objectives:

1. Inclusive Employment Pathways – To create structured recruitment channels that bring CALD workers, mature-aged participants, and younger jobseekers into secure manufacturing roles.
2. Future Manufacturing Skills – To embed advanced digital technologies such as CLO3D, 3D knitting, and virtual garment sampling into training and development. This equips participants

with skills that align with Industry 4.0 and national strategies like the Future Made in Australia agenda.

This program is not only about jobs. It is about designing a sustainable future for the manufacturing sector in South Australia, developing a workforce that is resilient, adaptable, and globally competitive.

Internal Training Program

Silver Fleece's internal training program is the backbone of this initiative. It provides structured learning for all new recruits, covering:

- Workplace readiness, including health and safety, teamwork, and communication skills.
- Technical foundations such as fabric handling, sewing machine operation, garment finishing, and quality assurance.
- Exposure to cutting-edge digital systems including Shima Seiki APEX4 for AI-powered design and CLO3D for garment simulation.
- Problem-solving, adaptability, and resilience as part of day-to-day learning.

The program is delivered through hands-on mentoring and practical experience, with support tailored to participant needs. Transport vouchers, interpreters, and appropriate work gear are provided to remove barriers for CALD communities and disadvantaged jobseekers. Recruits showing capability are then offered progression to accredited qualifications through TAFE SA, ensuring their learning is recognised within the wider training system and aligned with industry standards.

Recruitment Pathways

Recruitment is designed to be proactive, inclusive, and aligned with regional priorities. Pathways include:

- CALD Communities: Partnering with multicultural organisations, migrant resource centres, and settlement services to recruit from migrant backgrounds. Support will include interpreters, cultural mentoring, and flexible rostering.
- Mature Workers: Outreach to workers aged over 45 who may have transferable skills. This includes opportunities for retraining and progression into supervisory or mentoring roles.
- Young Workers: Engagement through schools, TAFE, and youth employment services to provide entry-level opportunities, apprenticeships, and exposure to advanced technologies.
- Women in Manufacturing: A proactive focus on gender diversity, ensuring women are

supported into roles across both digital and traditional areas of textile production.

The Northern Adelaide Regional Jobs Coordinator will coordinate recruitment partnerships to ensure alignment with workforce development objectives and service providers.

Program Structure

The program is structured as a 12-month cycle commencing in 2026, divided into phases:

1. Outreach and Engagement – Industry open days, workplace tours, school engagement, and recruitment events.
2. Pre-Employment Training (4–6 weeks) – Workplace readiness, WHS, team culture, and introductory digital training including CLO3D.
3. Paid On-the-Job Training – Supervised roles in production, with structured mentoring and skills development.
4. Capability Assessment and Progression – Evaluation to identify participants for progression into TAFE qualifications.
5. Technology Integration – Direct training in CLO3D, 3D knitting, and digital sampling to prepare participants for global opportunities.
6. Evaluation and Legacy – Ongoing reporting and refinement, ensuring the program remains relevant and sustainable beyond initial funding.

Training and Development Officer

At the heart of this program will be a dedicated Training and Development Officer (0.5 FTE, \$60,000). This officer will coordinate recruitment, oversee training delivery, liaise with education and government partners, and provide direct pastoral care for participants. They will also manage reporting obligations, monitor participant outcomes, and ensure the program aligns with Skills SA and Jobs and Skills Australia priorities.

The Training and Development Officer role ensures sustainability. Rather than relying on ad-hoc mentoring, Silver Fleece will embed a professional who can manage the program, support participants, and refine processes year on year. This ensures the outcomes extend beyond the life of the grant, creating a legacy of structured workforce development.

Participant Experience

The program is designed to create positive and life-changing experiences for participants:

- A young school leaver is introduced to textile careers through a workplace tour. They join the program, learn basic sewing and garment finishing, and quickly progress to digital design modules. Within a year, they are studying with TAFE while working part-time at Silver Fleece.

- A mature worker made redundant from another industry retrains in advanced knitting machine operation. With their reliability and experience, they become a mentor to younger recruits.

- A CALD participant who faced barriers to employment finds support through interpreter services, transport assistance, and mentoring. Within months, they are contributing to production, proud to support their family while learning new digital skills.

These experiences are not just about jobs – they are about building confidence, capability, and inclusion.

Policy Alignment

This initiative is strongly aligned with key workforce development strategies:

- Skills SA: Supporting industry training priorities and strengthening links between employers and training providers.
- Jobs and Skills Australia: Delivering pathways for underrepresented cohorts and addressing skill shortages in manufacturing.
- Industry 4.0: Embedding digital systems such as CLO3D and APEX4 into training, aligning with national priorities for advanced manufacturing.
- Future Made in Australia: Contributing to sovereign capability in textiles and garments by building a skilled workforce in Adelaide.

By aligning with these frameworks, Silver Fleece demonstrates how local industry can deliver on national priorities.

Community Impact

The program will have a significant community impact. It will:

- Provide pathways for disadvantaged communities to secure meaningful work.
- Strengthen the identity of Northern Adelaide as a hub for inclusive manufacturing.
- Create spillover benefits for other industries, with skilled workers transferable across sectors.
- Showcase diversity and innovation, inspiring young people and migrant communities to see manufacturing as a future career.

Silver Fleece is not only training workers – it is reshaping community perceptions of manufacturing and creating opportunities that transform lives.

Anticipated Outcomes

- Training and employment of at least 10 new workers in 2026.
- Establishment of a permanent training and workforce framework.
- Dedicated Training and Development Officer ensuring sustainability.
- Integration of TAFE qualifications into real-world industry settings.
- A workforce with globally competitive digital garment manufacturing skills.
- A replicable model for workforce development that can be scaled to other sectors.

Budget Summary

Cost Item	Amount	Funding Source
Recruitment & Outreach	\$15,000	Grant
Pre-Employment Training	\$30,000	Grant
On-the-Job Training & Mentoring	\$60,000	Grant + In-kind (\$10k)
Wraparound Support	\$15,000	Grant
Training and Development Officer (0.5 FTE)	\$60,000	Grant
Evaluation & Reporting	\$10,000	Grant
Consumables & Materials	\$3,000	Silver Fleece
Specialised Equipment & Materials	\$7,000	Silver Fleece
Total	\$220,000	\$180,000 Grant + \$20,000 Silver Fleece + \$20,000 In-kind

Conclusion

This program represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reposition South Australia as a hub for advanced textile and garment manufacturing. By combining inclusive recruitment, advanced training, and new technologies, Silver Fleece will create a workforce that is future-ready and globally competitive. The establishment of a dedicated Training and Development Officer ensures this initiative is not a one-off project but a long-term commitment to workforce development.

With the endorsement of the Northern Adelaide Regional Jobs Coordinator and alignment to Skills SA, Jobs and Skills Australia, Industry 4.0, and the Future Made in Australia agenda, this program demonstrates how local businesses can deliver national priorities while creating transformative opportunities for CALD communities, mature workers, and young people. Silver Fleece is ready to lead a new era of textile and garment manufacturing, powered by people, technology, and inclusive growth.