



CENTRAL FORCE
CREATIVE INSIGHTS &
AUDIENCE ANALYTICS

2026 INSIGHTS REPORT

THE JOHOR-SINGAPORE SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE (JSSEZ)

**Public Sentiment and
Lived Perspectives**

**Part 3: Workforce in Focus
Talents, Personas and Readiness**



Where people power progress.

Welcome to Part 3 of Central Force's *2026 Insights Report: The Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone (JSSEZ): Public Sentiment and Lived Perspectives*. Building on the foundations set out in Part 1 and 2, which explored the JSSEZ awareness and expectations, this report focuses on workforce realities – how talents, personas and its varying levels of readiness shape Johor's capacity to translate ambition into action and execution.

This is a very important moment in Johor Darul Ta'zim's history, where progress occurs in leaps and bounds. We welcome you and hope you enjoy deeper insight into the JSSEZ through this insights report.

Each publication in this series is designed to be read independently, while together they provide a fuller picture. Part 1, which includes the introduction, CEO foreword, executive summary, and methodology, can be accessed by scanning the QR code on the right.



The Central Force Insights Team

SO WHAT? CF INSIGHTS SAYS

Look for *SO WHAT? CF INSIGHTS SAYS* panels, which offer interpretive context and practical considerations to support clarity, reflection, and engagement in decision-making and strategic planning.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

This publication represents **Part 3** of a multi-part exploration of Johoreans' public sentiment and lived perspectives surrounding the Johor–Singapore Special Economic Zone (JSSEZ). Future parts in this series will be released progressively.

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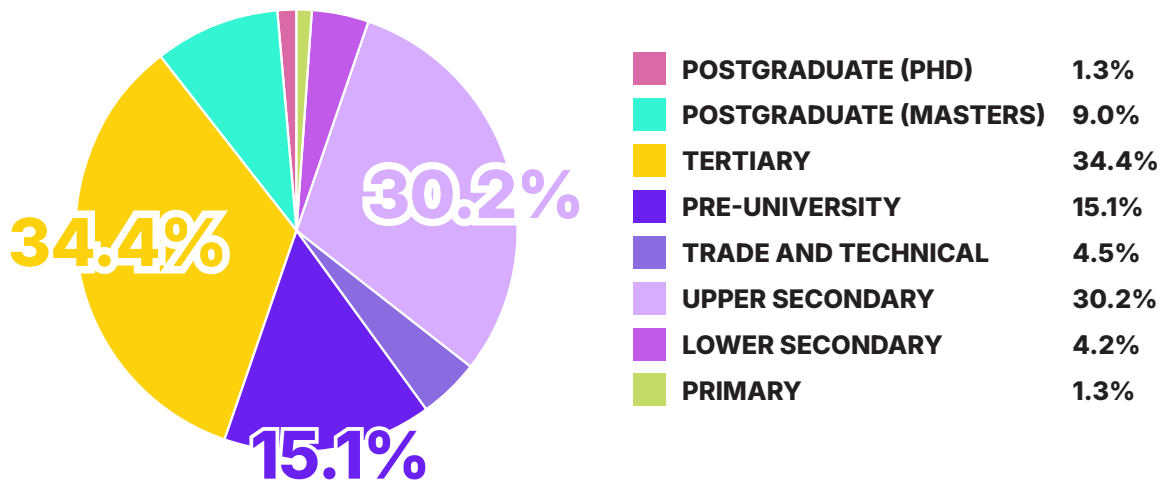
- Part I – Clearing the Fog: Perception, Awareness and the Narrative Landscape**
- Part II – Conditional Support: Growth, Trust and Expectations**
- Part III – Workforce in Focus: Talents, Personas and Readiness**
- Part IV – Getting Around: Transport, Connectivity, and Urban Mobility**

3.0

Highest levels of education

Johor's workforce is broadly mid-skilled and technical-oriented.

More than one-third of respondents hold tertiary qualifications. A further 30% completed upper secondary education. Postgraduate qualifications account for just over one in ten, while a smaller proportion come from trade or technical institutions.



SO WHAT?

CF INSIGHTS SAYS

Johor's education profile is more than a set of statistics, it literally shapes how businesses should strategise and position themselves for talent attraction, business development, and deployment. Employers considering investment or expansion in the state should assess not just qualification levels, but also how workforce capability is evolving in response to government policy, industry demand, and future sector focus.

BROAD EDUCATION BASE SUPPORTS OPERATIONAL ROLES

Johor's workforce is **ready to participate in sectors that depend on technical proficiency and reliable execution**. For businesses rooted in manufacturing, logistics, and business services, this translates into a dependable pipeline of talent capable of supporting core operational functions.

The relatively smaller postgraduate segment suggests that Johor's workforce **emphasises operational strength over research depth**. While this does not indicate a gap in readiness, it affects the efficiency and competitive nature at which highly specialized, R&D-driven industries can scale locally without complementary investments in advanced or outsourced talent.

ADVANCED SKILLS DRIVE HIGH VALUE OPPORTUNITY

Although advanced qualifications are concentrated within a smaller group of Johor's workforce, this makes it easier to identify where targeted upskilling and talent attraction efforts will further strengthen the workforce. Initiatives such as the Johor Talent Development Council (JTDC)'s *Skills4Johor* program are designed to align training provision with JSSEZ industry demand, strengthening industry-relevant certifications and specialisation pathways in priority sectors.

This initiative together with dedicated allocations by HRD (Human Resource Development) Corp under the Ministry of Human Resources, **signals an intentional push to expand the pool of talent prepared for higher-value roles**, particularly those linked to innovation, digitalization, and emerging technologies within Johor.

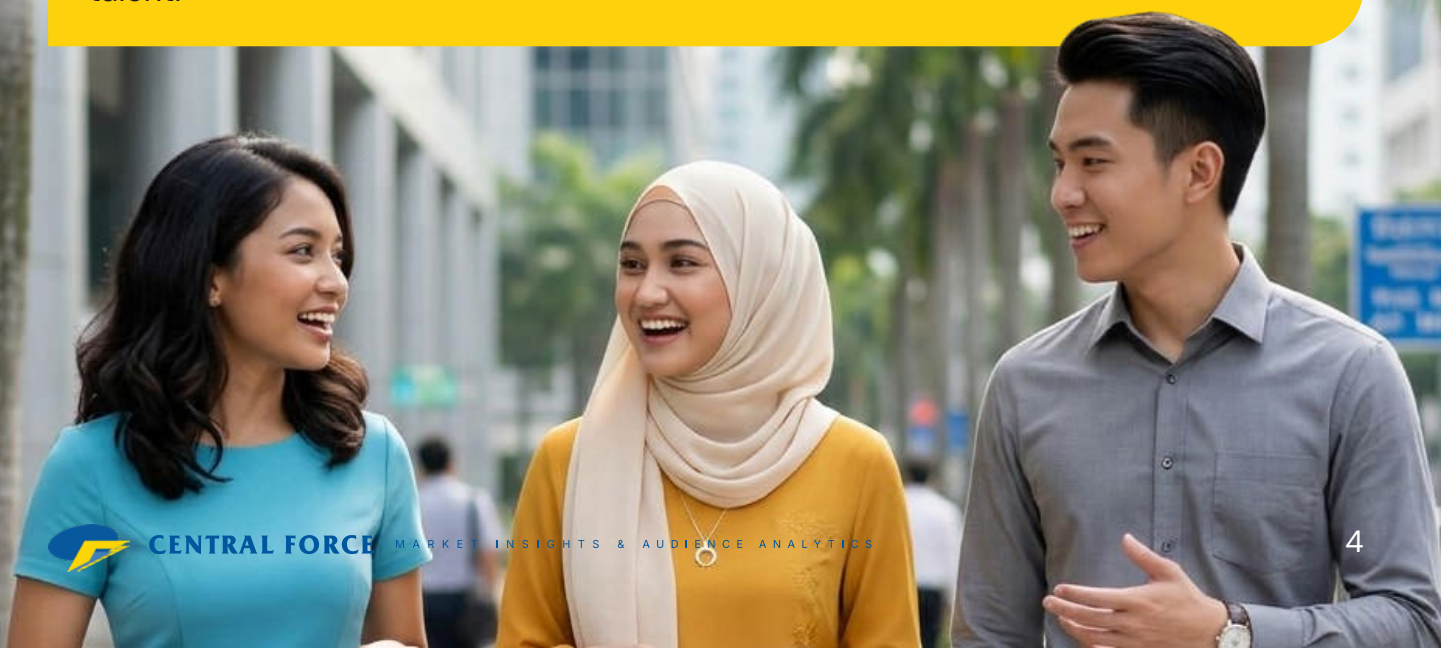
OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Opportunities for innovation and technology are positive and noteworthy. The Johor Economic Transformation Plan, which targets 200,000 high-skilled, high-income jobs by 2030, signals that workforce development is a paced and intentional endeavour. Areas like Johor Bahru and Kulai are explicitly positioned as hubs for AI, digital economy, and high-tech sectors, meaning **workforce depth will be progressively strengthened**, providing leverage and added advantages to businesses in these industries seeking to invest in Johor.

TALENT COORDINATION IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Plan for intermediary phases where upskilling and purposeful placement of talent are paramount. Johor's close proximity to Singapore further reinforces its position to complement – if not compete with – Singapore in attracting businesses to invest in Johor.

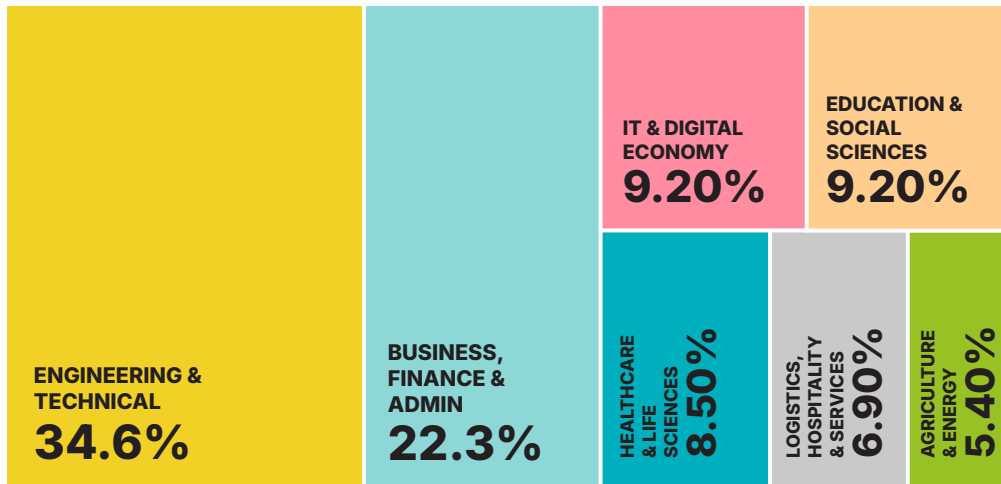
The establishment of the Johor Talent Development Council (JTDC) and its programs to upskill local talent and support premium wage pathways reflect an emerging ecosystem where workforce capability is being actively shaped. This suggests that the workforce pipeline is becoming more responsive to industry expectations, and that **demand for a high-skilled workforce will intensify** alongside Johor's clear intention of becoming a hub for technology and innovation, allowing businesses to attract and draw upon a steady stream of skilled local talent.



3.1

Main field of study

Johoreans' fields of study are concentrated in engineering and technical disciplines (34.6%), followed by business, finance, and administration (22.3%). IT and digital economy-related fields form a smaller but meaningful segment, alongside education, social sciences, and healthcare disciplines.



A significant share of Johor graduates pursue engineering and technical disciplines.

This distribution aligns strongly with Johor's manufacturing, logistics, services, and operational sectors. However, it also **suggests that while the state is well-positioned for industrial and business-oriented roles**, the immediate scalability of highly specialised or technology-driven industries may require a deeper, more specialised pool of digital- and innovation-driven talent.

SO WHAT?

CF INSIGHTS SAYS

ON ONE HAND, MANUFACTURING REMAINS THE STATE'S WORKHORSE

Prioritise sectors that leverage Johor's strong concentration in engineering and technical disciplines. With more than one-third of graduates rooted in technical fields, the state is structurally equipped to support advanced manufacturing, precision engineering, automation, construction, and energy-related operations at scale. This positioning is **further reinforced by Malaysia's Smart Factory 4.0 agenda under the National Policy on Industry 4.0 (Industry4WRD)**, which promotes automation, robotics integration, data-driven production systems, and smart manufacturing adoption across industrial clusters.

For businesses operating in manufacturing and industrial value chains, **Johor's technical talent concentration aligns well with this national push toward higher productivity, digitalised production environments, and Industry 4.0 readiness.**

Johorean's concentration in business, finance, and administration fields further strengthens enterprise support functions, enabling companies to establish both operational and managerial capabilities locally.

ON THE OTHER HAND, PLAN AND INVEST IN DIGITAL AND TECHNOLOGY-FOCUSED ENDEAVOURS

Meanwhile, digital and frontier technology sectors such as AI, big data, blockchain, and drones represent opportunities through phased investment and expansion. Federal and state-led initiatives – including the Johor Economic Transformation Plan and the National Industry 4.0 Policy (Industry4WRD) **represent clear direction toward smart manufacturing and digitalisation.** Programs under TalentCorp and HRD Corp also reinforce digital upskilling and industry certification pathways.

Consider strategic sequencing – entering through engineering-intensive operations while co-developing digital capability in parallel – to strengthen long-term positioning within the state's evolving ecosystem.

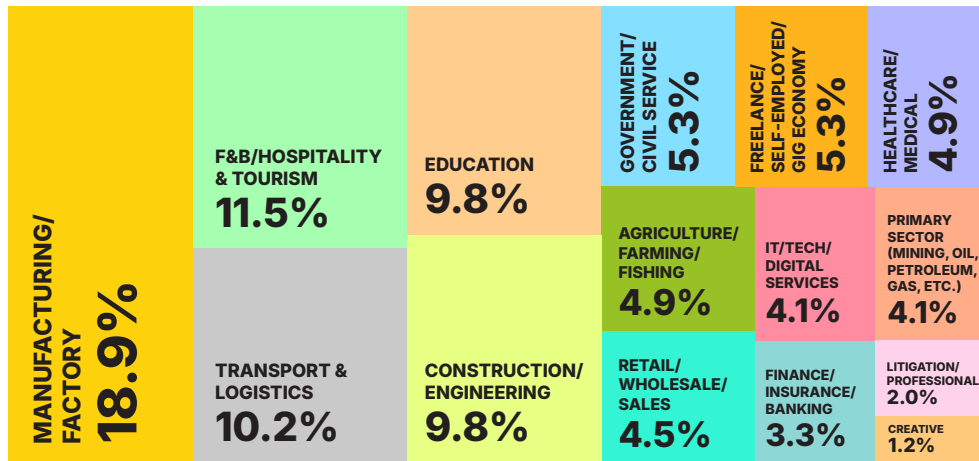


Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Skudai is known for producing technical graduates across engineering and technology, further cementing Johor's position as a key pipeline for industrial, manufacturing and technology-driven growth under the JSSEZ.

3.2

Existing workforce profile

Johor’s workforce is moderately educated, technically skilled, and distributed across diverse sectors, making it suitable for industrial, manufacturing, and service-oriented developments. However, highly specialised or digital-focused industries may face talent constraints, underscoring the need for targeted workforce development initiatives aligned with JSSEZ’s strategic growth plans which we have analysed in the earlier section.



Employment distribution across Johor reinforces this pattern. Manufacturing, construction, transport, business services, and hospitality dominate, while digital, finance, and creative sectors remain comparatively thin. Johor’s workforce is therefore well-suited to execution-heavy industries, but requires structured upgrading to fully support advanced, innovation-led ecosystems.

SO WHAT? CF INSIGHTS SAYS

Expanding upon our earlier insight relating to **strategic sequencing**, businesses will benefit from anchoring entry strategies around Johor’s existing employment density in manufacturing, engineering, and technical-related sectors before accelerating into highly specialised or digital-intensive verticals. With nearly one-fifth of the workforce concentrated in manufacturing alone, alongside strong representation across transport, construction, and service sectors, businesses can potentially draw upon a candidate pool that is execution-driven and operationally grounded.

In such a context, strategic sequencing offers a competitive advantage when approached with foresight. The current employment structure provides immediate breadth and accessible depth for industrial-scale developments, supply chain operations, and infrastructure-linked investments, particularly those progressively integrating technology and digitalisation. While JSSEZ ambitions towards upskilling and high-skilled roles and responsibilities are positive and forward-looking, businesses will derive the greatest value by scaling into these advanced sectors in a progressive manner that preserves business sustainability and competitiveness.

3.3

Johor workforce readiness and personas

Understanding workforce readiness is crucial for both government and businesses to gauge Johor's capacity to adopt new technologies and respond to evolving industry demands. By assessing confidence in AI, digital tools, basic electronics, and the willingness to learn new technologies through upskilling, we can identify strengths, potential skills gaps, and opportunities for targeted training or support initiatives. This enables policymakers to design effective workforce development strategies while allowing businesses to anticipate the readiness of local talent pools for technology-driven operations.

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The insights that follow will help guide workforce strategy. Workforce transformation cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, but must be calibrated to local readiness realities and the diverse personas that power Johor's progress.



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3.4

Johor-wide workforce overview

Understanding workforce readiness at an aggregate level is not sufficient. What determines whether JSSEZ ambitions can be executed is where different workforce personas are concentrated and which industries they are embedded in. This section examines how digital and technical readiness vary across districts and sectors, revealing structural strengths and constraints that are not immediately visible in headline skill averages.

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3.5

Persona distribution by district

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3.5

Persona distribution by industry

Differences are even more pronounced when viewed by industry.

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The long-term competitiveness of Johor under the JSSEZ will depend not only on innovation density in Johor Bahru, but on whether transformation pathways remain accessible across the backbone districts of manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, the services sector, and across all Johorean workforce personas.



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CENTRAL FORCE

MARKET INSIGHTS &
AUDIENCE ANALYTICS

CENTRAL FORCE INTERNATIONAL SDN BHD

199601024380 (396732-U)

A17-01, Level 17, EkoCheras Office Tower Jalan Cheras, Taman
Mutiara Barat, 56000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: +603-9078 3688 / +6011-5933 6808

Email: cforce@cforce-int.com

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