



**MASTER BUILDERS  
AUSTRALIA**

# **THE FUTURE OF THE WORKFORCE: APPRENTICES IN BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION**

**JUNE 2024**

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**Apprentices are the future of the building and construction workforce.**

**At Master Builders Australia, the aim is simple: to bring more apprentices to the industry, provide them with high-quality training, education and on the job experience, give them support, help them thrive and provide them with a rewarding, financially viable and satisfying career.**

**This is and will always be the priority of the building and construction industry.**

# **MASTER BUILDERS AUSTRALIA**

Master Builders Australia (Master Builders) is the nation's peak building and construction industry association which was federated in 1890. Master Builders' members are the Master Builder State and Territory Associations.

Over 130 years, the Master Builders network has grown to more than 32,000 businesses nationwide, including the top 100 construction companies. Master Builders is the only industry association that represents all three sectors: residential, commercial and civil construction.

# THE BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY



**1.32 million workers**  
(February 2024)



**About 450,000 businesses,**  
of which 98.7 per cent  
are small in size  
(31 March 2024)



**13.8 per cent of**  
those working in the  
industry are women  
(February 2024)



**One in 11 Australians are**  
employed in building  
and construction  
(February 2024)



**Construction businesses**  
paid \$77.2 billion in wages  
during 2021–22



**2.7 per cent of tradespeople**  
are women  
(February 2024)



**Fourth largest industry**  
employer in Australia  
(February 2024)



**More than 319,200**  
independent contractors  
(August 2022)



**116,560 apprentices**  
in training  
(end of December 2023)



**\$132.6 billion worth of**  
civil engineering  
construction done  
(during 2023)



**55 per cent of businesses**  
turn over less than  
\$200,000 per year  
(30 June 2023)



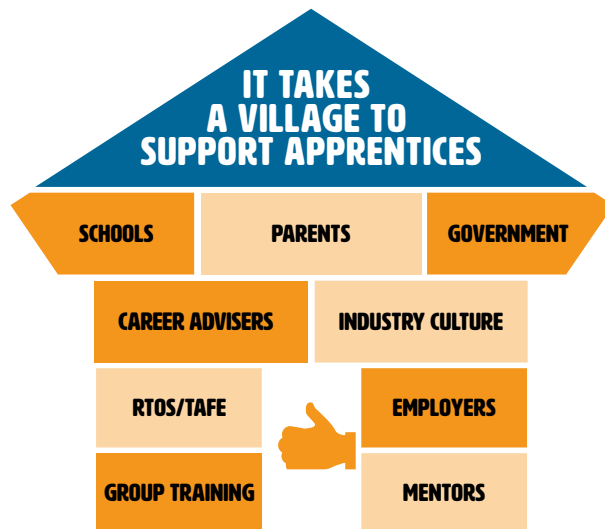
**21,415 apprentices**  
completed their training  
(year to December 2023)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Australia's building and construction industry faces the enormous task of building enough homes, commercial premises and infrastructure to meet increasing demand and a growing population.

Labour shortages are the biggest source of pressure on and disruption to delivering against these goals. Despite a sizeable workforce of 1.35 million, the industry has an annual exit rate of eight per cent and is currently only replacing about half of those losses.

Apprentices are the main source of new industry entrants. One in 10 industry workers are currently undertaking an apprenticeship, making up a third of the total apprentices in Australia.



**While this is significant, it is still not enough. There are a range of factors that impact the industry's capacity to attract and retain apprentices.** These include but are not limited to:

- > The influence of parents advocating for a university education.
- > Under-resourced careers advisers.
- > A lack of exposure to trades as part of the school curriculum.
- > The perception that vocational education and training is subpar to a university education.
- > A limited understanding of career pathways into and within the industry.
- > High costs of employing an apprentice.
- > Cost of living barriers, particularly for mature aged apprentices.
- > Low female participation numbers.
- > Inadequate mentoring and support services.

**These barriers can be overcome with a holistic and concerted effort by governments, industry, schools and the broader community.** These include:

- > Promoting varied and rewarding pathways to school-aged students, their parents and careers advisers.
- > Overhauling the funding for and quality of careers education in schools.

- > Investing in programs that provide clear and practical information on what an apprenticeship and future career pathway in the industry could be.
- > Supporting schools to adopt better integrated vocational education and training into the school curriculum especially in early high-school years.
- > Encouraging secondary school students to undertake their White Card training.
- > Expanding support for women in building and construction programs.
- > Reintroducing an incentive system with commencement and completion bonuses to apprentices and employers.
- > Introducing a tiered wage subsidy that better supports mature-aged apprentices and reflects existing skill levels.
- > Funding the cost differential for Group Training Organisations to host an apprentice and provide vital pastoral care services.
- > Introducing incentives to encourage industry upskilling from a Certificate III to a Certificate IV.
- > Ensuring funding is proportionally distributed between TAFE and industry-led Registered Training Organisations.
- > Reviewing the restrictive nature of Modern Awards and pattern Enterprise Bargaining Agreements on flexible work arrangements.

# THE WORKFORCE IN 2024

The Australian building and construction industry needs more workers.

With an ageing workforce and increasing demand for housing and infrastructure, Master Builders anticipates that more than half a million new workers must enter the sector by 2029. This is simply to maintain business as usual and replace the eight per cent of the workforce lost each year to natural attrition. To achieve the Housing Accord goal of 1.2 million new houses by 2029, and net zero by 2050, that number is even higher.

[BuildSkills Australia](#) noted recently that the building and construction industry needed 90,000 new trades workers by the end of June 2024. A task that was essentially impossible.

Master Builders anticipates that more than half a million new workers are needed in the building and construction industry over the next five years – and no less than two thirds of those will need to be skilled tradespeople.

In May 2024, Master Builders released [The Cost of Letting Productivity Slip](#), a paper which analysed the impact of four economic scenarios on the performance of the Australian building and construction industry and the wider economy over the five-year period from 2023–24 to 2027–28. One of these scenarios was prolonged labour shortages.

The research measured the impact on:

- > the number of homes built.
- > the total volume of construction industry output.
- > the total size of Australia's economy or GDP and the final price of building and construction output.
- > building and construction industry employment outcomes.

The analysis showed that a continuing labour shortage would result in:

- > 73,000 fewer people in the building and construction industry by the end of the shortage's fifth year.
- > the loss of 13,175 new home building starts.
- > a decrease in building and construction output totalling \$7.72 billion.
- > a \$57.0 billion reduction in GDP.
- > average building and construction output being over 3 per cent more costly.

**In a survey of members of the Master Builders network in April 2024, 66 per cent of respondents said that sourcing workers was the biggest issue facing the industry.**

When asked if it is a struggle to find suitably qualified workers, 85 per cent of respondents said it was.

Of the reasons given for this 68 per cent said the cost of employing people is getting too expensive, 53 per cent said they are not appropriately skilled but 72 per cent said the workers simply are not there.

There are not enough workers to meet demand.

**Australia needs more building and construction apprentices.**

## BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION IS THE #1 APPRENTICE EMPLOYER IN AUSTRALIA

There are:



**41,935**  
New starts



**116,560**  
In-training



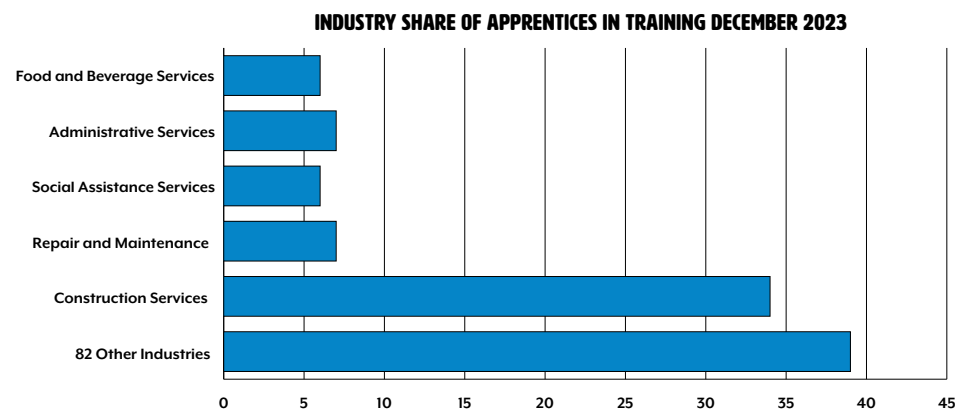
**21,415**  
Graduates

*In the year to December 2023*

*Source: NCVER apprenticeships data builder*



Building and construction is the largest employer of apprentices in Australia. There were 116,560 apprentices in training in this industry at the end of December 2023 – representing a third of all apprentices.



In the year to December 2023, 41,935 building and construction apprentices commenced their studies, and 21,415 completed. Apprentices make up about 10 per cent of the 1.3 million people employed in this industry.

That said, there are not enough apprentices in training, nor are they waiting in the wings to commence their studies.

The number of apprentices in training in building and construction has decreased. In December 2022 there were 118,615, and in December 2023 there were 116,560 (-2 per cent).

The number completing their studies decreased from December 2022 from 25,095 to 21,415 in December 2023 (-15 per cent).

Commencements also decreased with 54,035 in December 2022, compared with 41,935 in December 2023 (-22 per cent).

There was a slight decrease in cancellations and withdrawals between December 2022 (33,460) and December 2023 (33,290).

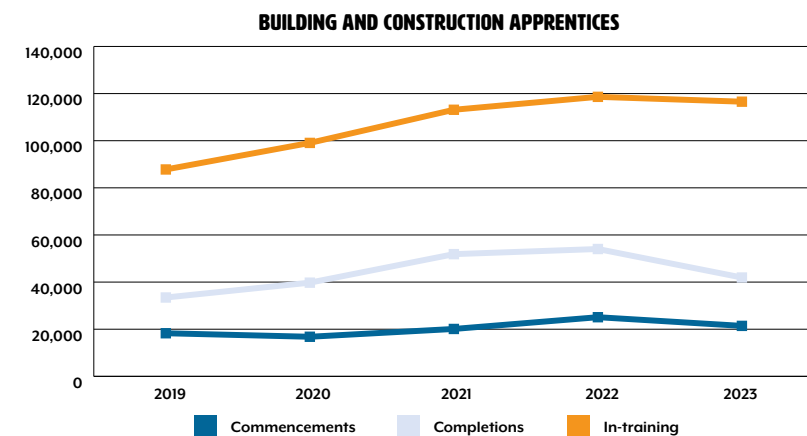
## Apprenticeship Snapshot

	12 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2022	12 MONTHS ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2023	DIFFERENCE	%
Completions	25,095	21,415	-3,680	-15%
Commencements	54,035	41,935	-12,100	-22%
In-training	118,615	116,560	-2,055	-2%
Cancelled/withdrew	33,460	33,290	-170	-1%

Source: NCVET 2024, Apprentices and trainees 2023 - December quarter DataBuilder

In December 2023 there were 5,530 women in training as building and construction apprentices. This represents 4.7 per cent of all building and construction apprentices in Australia. There has been a slight decrease in female apprentices in building and construction since December 2022 when there were 5,940 in training (5 per cent of the total).

The decline in apprenticeship commencements and completions is not new. Although the COVID-19 pandemic saw a spike in both commencements and completions, the downward slope of people undertaking building and construction training is regaining its momentum as COVID-19 related incentives are wound back.



Source: NCVET 2024, Apprentices and trainees 2023 - December quarter DataBuilder

# APPRENTICE SPOTLIGHT

## ZAC SMITH



Zac Smith's journey to becoming an apprentice is a story of how passion, determination, and a can-do attitude can lead to a rewarding career in building and construction.

Despite not knowing what he wanted to do after leaving school, Zac found his passion for building when he was offered a labouring job by a part-time builder who happened to be a member of the surf club where Zac spent his free time.

From that initial job, Zac's enthusiasm grew and he landed an apprenticeship with Vos Construction.

Throughout his apprenticeship, Zac showed maturity and a willingness to take on new challenges. He was given increasingly complex jobs. His hard work and dedication earned him the respect of his colleagues and management team.

One of Zac's major achievements as an apprentice was working on the Hellyers Road Distillery project in Burnie, which went on to win a Master Builders Excellence Award. Zac stepped up hugely on this project and worked tirelessly to help the team make the project a reality.

Throughout his apprenticeship, Zac volunteered as a surf lifesaver, showcasing his commitment to community service and leadership skills. Zac was awarded the Master Builders Tasmania Apprentice of the Year 2022 and the Master Builders Australia Apprentice of the Year 2022.

In the years since Zac started his apprenticeship, he has seen significant changes in the building industry, particularly with the use of technology to improve job efficiency and access to information.

Zac is a great example of how apprenticeships can provide opportunities for individuals to gain valuable skills and build successful careers in industries they may not have previously explored.



# CHANGING THE PERCEPTIONS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is central to skills and knowledge development in the building and construction industry. A VET qualification is the highest level of education attained for around half of the 1.35 million people in this industry.

Ensuring the VET sector delivers high quality training that is occupation- and industry-relevant and valued by employers is critical to meeting workforce needs in the building and construction industry.

## **VET pathways are undervalued.**

Government is promoting university pathways more than ever and aiming to double the number of students commencing higher education degrees. This comes at the cost of students undertaking VET qualifications. Furthermore, there are problematic cultural issues surrounding students who leave school before year 12. They are counted in the cohort of students who 'drop out' of school, rather than considered to be students who have chosen a different educational pathway.

## **The number of people seeking to study is finite.**

Pushing them towards one stream of education naturally depletes the other.

When children are young the roles they explore do not discriminate based on the education pathway they would be required to follow. Ask any preschooler what they want to be when they grow up and they will say builder, teacher, police officer, nurse.

As they grow however, they are diverted by what their parents, teachers, careers counsellors and schools say they should do.

Academically gifted children are pushed towards university and those who are not so savvy in a classroom towards a trade.

At a recent career talk at a school in Canberra, Master Builders noted the number of year 10 students who simply did not have an answer when asked, 'what do you want to do when you finish school?'. They were embarrassed by this, by not having plotted out every step of the next decades of their life at 16 years old.

Instead, it is the education system that should be embarrassed that it is not more forgiving of this, but also that it has not well-enough equipped young people with choice.

This must change. VET and higher education are both integral parts of Australia's tertiary education system and should be viewed as equally excellent pedagogical pathways.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

To level the playing field Government must address the bias toward university, and invest in campaigns that overcome misconceptions, and overhaul the quality, funding and availability of careers education in schools.

# TELLING THE APPRENTICESHIP STORY



To attract more people to building and construction apprenticeships, it is important to keep telling the apprenticeship story.

In recent decades a concerning cultural view of apprenticeships has emerged with the career pathway being perceived as only for young men, particularly those who were not going to go to university. However, change is coming and there has been a concerted effort to challenge this perception and showcase the rewarding, financially viable and satisfying career pathways in building and construction. More change is needed though.

An apprenticeship in building and construction represents a rewarding, financially viable and long-term career option for all genders, juniors, adults, people living with a disability, Indigenous people and people in remote or regional areas alike.

The industry is more diverse than ever and it is getting better every day.

Telling the apprenticeship story is vital, because you cannot be what you cannot see.

## **Take Ellsie Mead for example.**

Ellsie was the Master Builders Australia National Apprentice of the Year in 2023 and featured in Florence magazine in April 2024 to tell her story.

# ELLSIE MEAD: A TRAILBLAZER IN CONSTRUCTION

In the realm of construction, where tradition often reigns supreme, a new wave of talent is emerging, challenging stereotypes, and reshaping the industry's landscape. Among these rising stars stands Ellsie Mead, a beacon of inspiration whose journey embodies resilience, determination, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. As the recipient of the prestigious Master Builders Australia 2023 National Apprentice of the Year award, Ellsie's journey is not just one of personal achievement but a testament to the evolving landscape of the industry.

Ellsie's path to prominence wasn't paved with ease. As the daughter of industry stalwarts, she could have easily coasted on familial connections. Yet, from the outset, Ellsie set her sights on carving her own legacy, showcasing a remarkable blend of self-reliance and dedication, propelled by an unwavering passion for carpentry. Her performance, as noted by Master Builders Australia's judging panel, was exceptional in every aspect. Confidence, passion, and eloquence were not mere attributes but defining characteristics that set her apart from the other nominees vying for the 2023 National Apprentice of the Year title.



"I entered my apprenticeship with a really positive mindset," Ellsie reflects. "I wanted to be a carpenter, and I wanted to be successful." This determination proved pivotal as she navigated the challenges of being the boss' daughter, a hurdle she overcame with grace and grit. One of Ellsie's most striking qualities is her profound industry knowledge. Her decision to upskill and pursue the WHS Cert IV underscores her commitment to continuous learning and pursuit of excellence. Her journey was not only about mastering her craft but also about challenging norms and paving the way for future generations. But it's not just about qualifications; Ellsie's understanding of the industry is comprehensive and forward-thinking, positioning her as a leader among her peers.

"I was the first girl," Ellsie recalls, reflecting on her early days in the trade. "When Georgie, our second female apprentice came along, it was just natural. Everyone accepted it." Indeed, Ellsie's presence has catalysed a shift in attitudes within her workplace, fostering an environment where diversity is not only embraced but celebrated. Her ascent has not only shattered glass ceilings but also paved the way for others to follow suit.

"My proudest moments are when we welcome new apprentices," Ellsie shares. "Especially when one of them is a female. It's a testament to how far we've come." Beyond her undeniable skill with a hammer and saw, Ellsie's impact transcends the confines

of her trade. As a confidante and mentor, she has become a trusted ally for her colleagues, fostering open dialogue and driving positive change within the industry.

"The conversations have changed," Ellsie notes. "The impact women can have is irreplaceable." Looking to the future, Ellsie sees endless possibilities within the construction industry, where the path from apprentice to leader is well-defined for those willing to seize it. "The opportunities are never-ending," she asserts. "The transition from trade to managerial roles is paved out for you. If you want that natural progression, it's there, and you can take it."

Ellsie Mead is more than just an apprentice of the year; she is a trailblazer, a leader, and a visionary. Her journey serves as a testament to the boundless potential within us all. Through her tenacity, passion, and unwavering commitment to excellence, she has not only earned accolades but also inspired a new generation of trailblazers to defy expectations and forge their own paths.

In the story of Ellsie Mead, we find not only a tale of triumph but also an example where tradition meets innovation, and barriers crumble in the face of unwavering determination. As construction evolves, so too does its cast of characters, with Ellsie Mead joining a rising cohort of strong women in the industry.



Despite apprenticeships being a well-established pathway into rewarding building and construction careers, employers are increasingly struggling to recruit suitable candidates and Group Training Organisations (GTOs) are reporting unprecedented numbers of employers waiting to host an apprentice.

Introductions to building and construction careers must start early. Most people do not know what a career in building and construction in 2024 looks like – and many parents and teachers are ill-equipped to help young people in this space unless they have a connection to the industry. For some, these jobs conjure images of hard labour in the hot sun, rapidly ageing bodies and long hours for low wages.

Things are changing. Building and construction is becoming more scientific and technology-based. There is still labour and on-site skill required – and always will be – but there are also drones, modern methods of construction, pre-fabricated modular buildings constructed in warehouses and factories, 3D printing, and design software.

Traditional trade skills and methods of construction underpin the sector’s capacity to deliver the building and infrastructure needed today and into the future. Skills and training pathways will change in the years ahead as technology innovation and the regulatory framework expects more from the industry.

Wages are on par or surpassing many white-collar roles with the average taxable income for tradespeople at \$81,608 per year (including apprenticeship wages).

### Average Taxable Income by Occupation (including apprenticeship wages)

	AVERAGE TAXABLE INCOME PER PERSON
3311 Bricklayer or stonemason	\$63,131
3312 Carpenter and joiner	\$71,716
3321 Floor finisher	\$59,993
3322 Painting trades worker	\$54,828
3331 Glazier	\$65,836
3332 Plasterer	\$62,347
3333 Roof tiler	\$57,062
3334 Wall and floor tiler	\$55,778
3341 Plumber	\$79,156
3411 Electrician	\$100,611
3421 Air conditioning and refrigeration mechanic	\$85,252
3422 Electrical distribution trades worker	\$119,432
3423 Electronic equipment trades worker	\$85,965
3424 Telecommunications trades worker	\$77,175
<b>Average</b>	<b>\$81,608</b>

Source: Master Builders analysis of Australian Tax Office Average Income data

Apprentices are paid to learn, unlike their higher education counterparts who pay to learn.

As is made clear in the table below, apprentices come out ahead and their capacity to earn increases year on year.

**For an apprentice who is passionate, keen to learn and self-driven, the opportunities in building and construction are endless.**

### Apprentice Wages Compared with University Fees

	CARPENTRY APPRENTICESHIP*	BACHELOR OF BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION (HONOURS)**
1ST YEAR	\$32,881	-\$8,948
2ND YEAR	\$38,055	-\$8,948
3RD YEAR	\$43,229	-\$8,948
4TH YEAR	\$50,990	-\$8,948
GRADUATING POSITION	\$165,156	-\$35,792
QUALIFIED STARTING SALARY	\$70,000	\$65,000

\* Base wage for a full-time carpentry apprentice under the Building and Construction General On-Site Award (MA000020) who is not in Queensland nor an adult apprentice and who completed year 12, but is not required to work underground. No allowances are included in this calculation.

\*\* Student contribution for a full-time Commonwealth Supported Place at the University of Canberra

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders recommends governments, with input from industry and employers, research, develop and fund the implementation of a rolling apprentice commencement and retention strategy.

To promote the value of Australian apprenticeship pathways to young people, their parents and careers advisors Master Builders advocates for a coordinated national apprenticeship campaign that focuses on bringing more people into building and construction training.

Australia is behind the eight-ball and must work hard to show people how rewarding a career in building and construction can be. BCITO in New Zealand presents a valuable case study through its successful [YouTube campaigns to attract more apprentices](#).

**Australia needs to get better at telling the apprenticeship story.**



# APPRENTICE SPOTLIGHT

## BECCA HIGGINS



Becca Higgins originally wanted to be a helicopter pilot, but when that did not eventuate, she travelled to Melbourne to work at a FinTech company. There, she volunteered to help rebuild a school in Nepal that had been destroyed by an earthquake.

This experience ignited Becca's passion for building, and she knew that she was not suited to working in an office. She decided to explore trade options and found the Trades Institute Victoria, which offered an 18-month full-time Certificate III in Carpentry apprenticeship.

Becca's apprenticeship was different.

She studied three days a week for 12 months in the classroom. Becca was fortunate enough to find a part-time job working for Timberset, an eco-driven prefab residential builder, on the two days a week she is not in the classroom. The hours she worked counted towards her 800 hours, which meant she could become qualified in less than 18 months.

Becca admits that the work is fast-paced, and she struggles with feeling like she is not quick or knowledgeable enough. However, she sees this as part of the learning process. As an apprentice, Becca is usually the one to unload all the material and get the site set up, ready to work with power, drop saw bench, sawhorses, etc. She says she is lucky to be part of a team where she gets to do skilled work too, which can be anything from building subfloors, walls, and roofs to cladding and fix work.

Becca sees her carpentry apprenticeship as just the first step of many she wants to take in the building industry. As she says, "don't be afraid to get started!"



# BETTER CAREERS ADVICE



Master Builders has been advocating for a system that provides comprehensive career advice to young people early in their school journey, as well as to their parents.

**By the time a young person is in year 11 or 12, it is too late. Career guidance must happen earlier.**

Careers advisers must have access to up to date and useful information that helps them explain to people interested in a building and construction career how they can pursue that interest.

The [\*Women Building Australia Jobseeker Handbook\*](#) has been particularly useful for young women seeking a trade career but it has application for all people interested in building and construction.

**Early, comprehensive, realistic and relatable careers advice is invaluable.**

Allowing young people to see building and construction in action – whether it is through site visits or ‘try a trade’ experiences – reduces withdrawal and cancellation rates and lifts completions.

Many apprentices leave their studies because their expectations have not been appropriately managed – that is, they did not know what their apprenticeship would entail.

Giving them a taste of what is to come and managing their expectations early is vital to reducing the national 50 per cent non-completion rate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders recommends that Government invests heavily in programs that give potential apprentices a clear and practical understanding of what their apprenticeship, and future career pathways could be like.

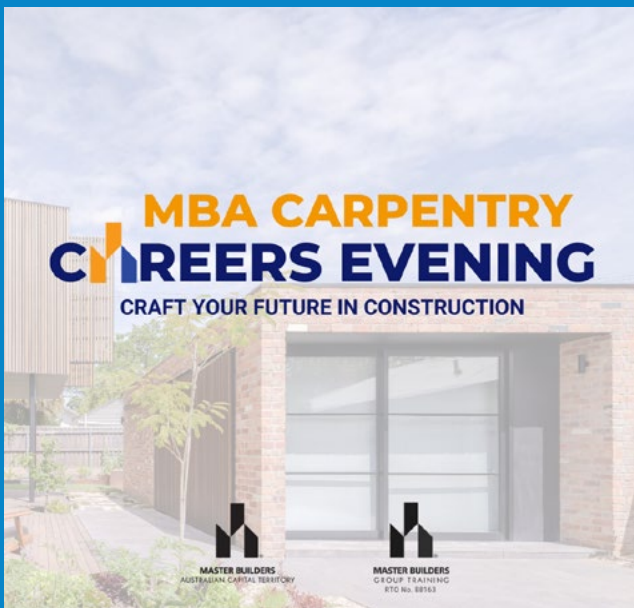
Industry already does this well, with Master Builders ACT a prime example of the type of programs that exist across the Master Builders network. However, government investment, support and promotion are vital to increase the number of potential apprentices who are exposed to these programs.

Programs must target young people – in years 7, 8 and 9 – and should give them valuable work experience opportunities alongside theoretical advice and career guidance.

Parents must also be along for the journey, with better access to guidance, support and information.

# CASE STUDY:

## MASTER BUILDERS ACT CARPENTRY CAREERS EVENINGS



Master Builders ACT has mastered the art of managing the expectations of all three stakeholders: parents, apprentices and employers. To do this, they run biannual Carpentry Careers Evenings at their training facility in Fyshwick.

Master Builders ACT CEO Michael Hopkins says the success of these events is all about preparation.

“We work closely with schools in Canberra and its surrounds to help careers advisers connect us with students who might have an interest in an apprenticeship. From there, we provide lots of information on how a career in building and construction could look, what you need to do to secure an apprenticeship, what kind of subjects you’ll need to be doing at school, how to write a short CV, presenting yourself to an employer and even how to get your white card or asbestos awareness qualification.”

The work Master Builders ACT does with prospective apprentices up front – through their schools, careers advisers and directly – means when the Carpentry Careers Evening comes around, the student is prepared with questions, information and arrives ready to engage.

Master Builders ACT invites employers from the region to attend and makes sure to facilitate a fruitful networking environment. There is pizza and soft drink out in the workshop for the potential apprentices and employers. They network, get to know each other, and spend a few hours together chatting. Some of them organise work experience or start the apprenticeship process.

While this is happening, their parents and guardians are inside in a large training space with the Master Builders ACT executive, the Training Director, trainers, previous apprentices and other industry representatives learning about how to guide their child through the apprenticeship process.

“For parents we are aiming to provide comfort, information and practical ways they can support their child. We show how rewarding a career in building and construction can be and that their child will be safe, well paid and taken care of throughout their apprenticeship,” says Michael.

“We want to facilitate success in the apprentice/ employer relationship so we can get great, qualified tradespeople out into the industry. This is why our completion rates at Master Builders ACT are so higher than they are at non-industry RTOs and TAFEs.”

Leigh Southwell, the Careers Adviser at Marist College Canberra said, “the Carpentry Careers Evenings provided by Master Builders ACT are a valuable way for our students and parents to learn more about the wide range of opportunities available to them in the construction industry. It is a great way for students to gain information, ask questions straight to trainers and people working in the industry and for parents to support their children exploring future pathways. Master Builders ACT attending career events that I offer at my school is also invaluable as these personalised presentations and workshops broaden our students’ knowledge of their possible future. The information provided to students before they embark on their apprenticeships is very important to all Careers Advisers in Canberra and surrounds.”



# APPRENTICESHIP INCENTIVES

Apprentices are vital to the building and construction industry and the future of the workforce. Incentives to bring them to and keep them in the industry are important.

Similarly, subsidies for employers to help them with the cost of taking on an apprentice ensure that the system is not supported only by altruism.

The Master Builders network was asked as part of a national survey in April 2024, if they do not employ an apprentice, the reason for that decision.

“It’s all the time [needed] to train,” said a representative from a concreting business in NSW.

Asher Trounce from a civil construction company in the ACT said, “we would employ more, but it is hard to find people for the role. School leavers do not seem interested in trades.”

A representative from Wolfblaus Building in NSW said “I run a small business; apprentices are time consuming. I don’t have time to teach, I need qualified trades people.”

“We haven’t found the right person and also my tradesmen are too busy as we are short staffed to be training,” said Paul from SPS in the ACT.

The common theme? The time it takes to train an apprentice. It is a large commitment for a business.

Employing an apprentice comes at a cost. Not just their wage, but the man-hours spent teaching them, covering their training costs at an educational institution, driving them to site if they have no car or licence, managing the associated administration, fixing inevitable mistakes (which are part of the learning process) and helping them navigate the workforce, to name a few.

The majority of building and construction businesses (98.6 per cent) are small with fewer than 20 employees. Fifty-five per cent of all businesses turn over less than \$200,000 per year and 37.2 per cent turn over between \$200,000 and \$2 million per year. Expenditure on an apprentice is not insignificant. For those 55 per cent of businesses turning over less than \$200,000 per year, an apprentice could represent around 30 per cent of their total turnover in that four-year period.

This should be viewed in the context that half of all apprentices (61,566) in September 2023 were working for small businesses with fewer than nine employees.

A robust incentive system must provide assurance and minimise risk. It should mean that the employer does not shoulder the entire cost burden for the 50 per cent of apprentices who do not complete their studies. It should free an employer to focus on training and teaching: this is especially important in the first and second years.

A robust incentive system gives assurance to the apprentice. It helps them live comfortably on their Award Wage, allows them to purchase the tools and resources they need to be effective in their study and it compels them to finish their apprenticeship and seek a trade career. It gives them comfort that their employer will take time to train them properly.

An incentive system that recognises and actively seeks to expand the pool of potential workers, while meeting chronic skills needs is important.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders recommends an incentive system that makes commencement and completion bonuses to apprentices and their employers, as well as a wage subsidy throughout the apprenticeship. Master Builders suggests government should design different incentives for different cohorts of apprentice, noting that a mature-aged apprentice may have different financial barriers and support networks than a junior apprentice.

Master Builders recommends that all incentive payments are tax free, and a continuous employment bonus post-qualification might apply for apprentices and employers who continue their journey together.



# PASTORAL CARE AND SUPPORT

The value of apprentice pastoral care cannot be understated.

Providing support and guidance in the form of networks, mentors, pastoral care programs, field officers, touch points and career advice throughout the apprenticeship journey is proven to work.



# CASE STUDY:

## FAIRBROTHER: COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL CONSTRUCTION

Fairbrother is a commercial and industrial construction company based in Tasmania, but with offices on mainland Australia as well. The company employed their first apprentice in 1974 and since then have trained more than 450 apprentices. The Fairbrother Apprenticeship Program has been recognised on multiple occasions for excellence, including through a Minister's Award for Commitment to Australian Apprentices in 2008 and the Australian Apprenticeships Employer Award in 2020.

Matthew Scrimgeour is the Apprenticeship Program Manager and he says that a driving factor in the success of the Fairbrother Apprenticeship Program is managing expectations early and up front.

"It is vital to show young people what a trade career looks like, the kind of career pathways they can follow and what educational requirements they need to get there. This is what helps them to be job ready when they start their apprenticeship with us. They have focussed on their numeracy and literacy, and they are here, ready to learn, feeling passionate about their trade," says Matthew.

Fairbrother employs an average of 18 apprentices each year, and currently has 71 apprentices from first to fourth year in carpentry and cabinetmaking trades.

The organisation does a lot in the pre-apprenticeship stage to offer work experience, try a trade experiences, school talks and career expo appearances. This means most of their apprentices are recent school leavers, with some starting with the organisation after completing year 10.

Matthew says, "the reason we put so much energy into the recruitment process and work experience is so we can manage expectations early and ensure we are taking on apprentices who fully understand what they're signing up to. This really helps with our retention and completion rates."

Throughout a four-year apprenticeship with Fairbrother, apprentices have mentors on site who they can go to for help, guidance and support. They also have monthly appraisals where they can provide feedback, seek advice and track their progress within the company.







If an apprentice is struggling, or their mentor thinks they might need extra support in certain areas, Fairbrother works hard to facilitate this and help them flourish.

“This might mean moving them to a smaller site, giving them some extra support, pairing them with someone who can teach them a particular skill. Whatever it is, we try hard to make it happen. We want to get the best out of our apprentices because we invest a lot in them. We are training them to be the next generation of leaders and their success is our success,” says Matthew.

When asked what they like about their work with Fairbrother, this is what some of the apprentices had to say:

Angus said, “I’m learning new things every single day, and I love what I’m doing.”

Brooke likes “that every day is going to be a different challenge on worksites. You get a variety of so many different tasks through the course of a project.”

Kobe said he likes “the versatility. Doing a lot of different things, meeting a lot of new people, getting to know different trades, and travelling to different areas of the state for work. A key attribute for success as an apprentice is a great attitude and a willingness to have a go, putting yourself out there, because you never know where it might lead.” For Jack, “going through work experience was a real eye-opener, showing me exactly what I wanted to do.”

Finally, Kynan says, “I really enjoy the satisfaction of finishing a job and seeing the end product of what you’ve done. I like the quality of work at Fairbrother.”

The proof is in the pudding.

The focus on managing expectations pre-apprenticeship, and providing dedicated pastoral support throughout the journey work. Fairbrother has a completion rate of just over 90 per cent – far above the national average.

Around 75 per cent of the apprentices trained by the organisation remain employed after they qualify.

# GROUP TRAINING ORGANISATIONS

A GTO hires apprentices and places them with host employers. They take on all the responsibilities of an employer so the host does not have to.

GTO-employed apprentices have a higher chance of completing their studies than their directly employed counterparts.

Within the Master Builders network there are four GTOs. They are in Newcastle, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania. Within those organisations are almost 1,000 apprentices hosted by around 500 employers. Apprentice completion rates in the Master Builders network hover between 60 and 70 per cent.

## **The main benefit of the GTO model is pastoral care.**

The first year of an apprenticeship in particular is critical. It is when the largest number of apprentices discontinue their studies. For many, this is because their expectations were not managed prior to commencement, or they did not gel with their employer. A lot of them do not have anyone they can turn to for support, guidance, re-employment or advice. They simply leave the industry.

## **In the GTO model, this is less common. The GTO is a safety net to catch the apprentice before they fall away.**

According to the Apprentice Employment Network NSW and ACT<sup>1</sup>:

- > GTOs in NSW are achieving up to 15 per cent higher completion rates than direct employers.
- > 94 per cent of all trade apprentices find a permanent job after their apprenticeship.
- > 76 per cent of trade apprentices are employed in the same occupational grouping as their apprenticeship.

At Master Builders Tasmania, more than two thirds of their apprentices go on to complete their journey with the GTO. Of those who resign, the most common reasons are because they have decided to become directly employed, or they have moved to mainland Australia to complete their apprenticeship.

## **The success of the apprentice is the success of the GTO.**

Their sole purpose is to help apprentices succeed in their chosen trade to become fully qualified. This might mean pairing them with a different employer, moving them to a different type of business, providing them with learning or digital literacy support or assisting in resolving conflict.

Wes Parker, of Parkwood Modular Buildings, a GTO host employer, says, “we provide the workplace but Master Builders looks after them and mentors them. They have site visits, they assess their progress, both academically and mentally as well. We submit time sheets and they submit an invoice. They take care of everything else.”

Nathan Brown, another host employer from Newcastle says, “I know, 100 per cent that if anything happens to one of the apprentices, they’re covered. Workers’ compensation is covered, superannuation is covered, their tax is paid, and everything is done for you. It just makes sense.”

Michael Wright is a host employer with Master Builders NSW:

“The amount of administration work that Master Builders takes off our hands frees up a lot of time, so we can be onsite a lot more. The fact that we simply get an invoice every week from Master Builders is amazing. We do not have to worry about processing sick pay, holiday leave, superannuation entitlements, or workers’ compensation. Master Builders does it all for us. This makes it a lot easier for us to focus on the apprentices to teach them on-the-job skills and grow into quality tradespeople.”

– Michael Wright, Co-Director, Wright Construction Sydney

<sup>1</sup> Australian Employment Network (May 2022) The GTO Advantage at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XpflU5cT6F7obbsfllliiQD7O-vJIM2NR/view>.

In addition to managing the relevant financial, legal and pastoral support elements of an apprenticeship, the GTO model brings another significant benefit: it reassures parents.

### **Parents remain the biggest influence on a young person's career decision.**

Felicity is a mother of a third-year carpentry apprentice with Master Builders NSW. [She talks in this video](#) about her concerns with safety before her son started his apprenticeship. Felicity said, “with his apprenticeship, my son is taught all the safety features and they’re not allowed on site without the safety equipment, and they are very strict. They do look after their apprentices, even as far as sunscreen! They make sure they put sunscreen on in the morning!”

For a young person – say 13 or 14 years old – considering a career in building and construction, their parents and guardians will be the most influential figures in deciding whether to pursue it or not.

Industry and governments must ensure that parents and guardians are informed, prepared and have their expectations managed so they can support their child in their career aspirations. Programs and information directed at parents are vital to increasing participation and retention rates.

### **Master Builders GTOs do this well.**

For example, [Master Builders NSW has minimum safety standards that all host employers must meet.](#)

Master Builders NSW provides a safety service to ensure host employers are meeting their legislated, regulated and industry standards and a safety coordinator is on call to assist with this.

The GTO model brings comfort to parents and guardians that their child has someone watching out of them. It gives them someone to talk to if they are concerned and it ensures their child has a support system in place outside of the home. This is invaluable.

The cost of using an apprentice through a GTO hovers around \$5,000 more per apprentice, per year more than the cost of employing directly. For some, this is not financially viable across the entire apprenticeship journey.

Master Builders welcomed the announcement in the 2024-2025 Federal Budget for \$1,500 per apprentice, per year paid to GTOs in the building and construction industry that would pass that cost saving on to host employers of priority occupation apprentices. The recognition of GTOs as a valuable and successful model for apprenticeship support is an excellent step to increase the number of apprentices and host employers using these organisations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Master Builders recommends that Government fund the cost differential so hosting an apprentice through an industry-run GTO like those in the Master Builders network costs the same as employing directly.

Funding industry-run GTOs like those in the Master Builders network would incentivise more employers to use the model, which has been proven to increase completion rates and provide valuable and necessary pastoral care to apprentices.

# CASE STUDY: NEWCASTLE MASTER BUILDERS APPRENTICES

Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices is a GTO that currently employs 180 apprentices, with around 10 more host employers looking to take someone on.

The cost of hosting an apprentice through a GTO is slightly higher for an employer, but the output is worth it.

Brett Lester is the Operations Manager at Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices and he says the GTO does the administrative work and provides pastoral care so builders can focus on teaching their trades.

“Our entire aim is to make sure the relationship is successful. That the apprentice and the host employer work well together and at the end we have another well-qualified tradesperson out in the industry,” says Brett.

Most of the host employers are small family businesses in the Hunter region of NSW. The support the GTO provides to these businesses is invaluable and provides them with a safety net. For example, if work slows down and the business cannot afford to carry the apprentice for a period of time, the GTO can place them with another host for that time.

“This means the host knows the apprentice is well looked after and still progressing in their studies and when work picks up again they can come back together,” says Brett.

Wes Parker, a host employer with the GTO says, “they effectively manage the apprentice, 100%. We provide the workplace, Master Builders looks after the apprentice, mentors them, they have site visits, they assess their progress both academically and mentally as well. The apprentice submits timesheets, and we pay an invoice – they take everything else.”

Brett adds, “it is also great for the apprentice because it is a reason so many people leave the industry. Their employer can’t afford to keep them on, so they lose their job and become so disheartened or confused about what to do next that they give up their trade altogether. This especially happens in that first year.”

The GTO model works. It has higher retention rates and happier apprentices.

Brett puts the success of Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices down to a few factors. Firstly, the GTO works hard to match new apprentices with host employers. Recruitment officers conduct interviews with hosts to get an idea of the kind of person they are looking for and would work well with. They then interview prospective apprentices until they find a match. There is usually a two-day trial period to make sure the fit is right.



After that, a Field Officer checks in with each apprentice and host every eight to 12 weeks. If there are any issues the Field Officer intervenes to provide support and solutions. This might mean helping an apprentice understand feedback, helping a host with their communication skills or – in the worst case – moving the apprentice to another host. The latter is rare.

The relationship between the GTO and their local RTOs is vital. The GTO is usually the first to know if an apprentice is struggling, not keeping up with their studies or even not showing up to class. In these instances, Brett says Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices intervene quickly and early. They provide whatever support they can to the apprentice to help them succeed in the theory side of their studies.

Each apprentice is given a ‘passport’ for their four-year journey where their host, Field Officer and teachers write notes, provide feedback and sign off on competencies. This is how the GTO tracks progress with the apprentice and can step in if there are signs of any issues.

On the host employer’s side, they are given early access to training on how to manage and mentor young people in particular, as well as how to communicate effectively and manage conflict.

Brett says the final piece to the puzzle is parents, and the GTO model is an excellent way to give them comfort that their child is taken care of.

“It is important for parents to know that there is always someone watching out for their child – we are there with their best interests at heart to support them to successfully complete their studies. And the apprentices know they can come to us for support. This makes parents feel comfortable, and when they feel comfortable they’re more likely to support their child’s trade career choice.”

“We also have a huge focus on the mental health of our apprentices and check in with them regularly. All of our staff are trained in Mental Health First Aid and we intervene early at the first sign of an apprentice who might not be okay,” says Brett.

At Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices, most apprentices stay with their host employer after they are signed off for qualification, even if it is only for six to 12 months. Brett says this is because they form solid relationships and they have gone through the apprenticeship journey together in a supportive and well-managed way. In fact, 25 per cent of the host employers currently working with the GTO are apprentices who went through the Newcastle Master Builders Apprentices program for their own studies.





# CASE STUDY:

## MASTER BUILDERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Troy Aitken, General Manager of Apprenticeships at Master Builders Association of SA says, “when you contact a GTO, you have access to unbiased information and assistance in finding the right apprenticeship or traineeship for you.

“GTOs have vast industry experience and connections. As an apprentice, you have more choice and opportunities. You receive ongoing mentoring and support by highly qualified and dedicated staff who are committed to ensuring the best fit between apprentices and host employers.

“GTOs can act as a mediator to resolve workplace disputes or issues and they can also provide an alternative placement if needed. As an apprentice, you get all of these services and you don’t have to pay a cent!”

One of the host employers in South Australia says, “Master Builders helps by providing apprentices when needed, quickly and efficiently. They are easy to deal with.



“Cascade Construct focuses on custom framing and custom cladding finishes. We like to work for builders who require perfection and work closely with their clients.

“We love seeing the young ones coming up through the ranks, as we were all like that once upon a time. Seeing apprentices who are keen and eager to learn the carpentry trade is great. We also like to be able to help apprentices by showing and training them on how to do things properly.”



Brad is a host employer who says, “having an apprentice through Master Builders is very rewarding. I enjoy the aspect of training and teaching them the ins and outs of the bricklaying trade.

“I also completed my apprenticeship with the MBA, so I can pass on my knowledge to the apprentices coming through. All the staff at Master Builders are a great help.”



# APPRENTICE SPOTLIGHT

## SOME OF THE MASTER BUILDERS NSW APPRENTICES SAY

“

I'm really grateful for the encouraging words and practical support I have received in my training so far.

Zach Ellis, 20 years old, 3rd year  
Master Builders Carpentry apprentice

“

No two days are ever quite the same. I love how I am learning new Carpentry skills and techniques every day.

Tarsha Wayne, 19 years old, first-year  
Master Builders Carpentry apprentice

“

It's important for me to forge relationships at work, so it's more than just work for me.

Duc Thanh Dinh, 30 years old, 2nd year  
Master Builders Carpentry apprentice

“

It's never too late to change careers. The great thing that I love about my apprenticeship is my work life balance and it provides for me and my family.

Candice Arnall, 38 years old, second-year  
Master Builders Carpentry apprentice.

# FUNDING THE GAP BETWEEN JUNIORS AND ADULTS

Hiring an adult apprentice is more expensive than a junior. There is a different award wage applicable to apprentices who are year 10 graduates, year 12 graduates or 25 years or older.

Of the 120,881 building and construction apprentices in training in September 2023, 85,905 (71 per cent) were 24 years or younger, while 35,976 (29 per cent) were 25 years or older.<sup>2</sup>

For a first-year carpentry apprentice on the General On-site Award who has completed year 12, the hourly rate of pay is \$16.95.<sup>3</sup> For a first-year adult apprentice in the same trade on the same award, the hourly pay rate is \$26.26. Over the course of that first year, the adult apprentice would cost approximately \$18,000 more than the junior.

## **This is a significant difference.**

Master Builders members overwhelmingly say adult apprentices are willing to learn and tend to work harder than their younger counterparts. Many of them come to a building and construction apprenticeship having held previous roles and their expectations of the industry are usually well-managed.

For many employers, an adult apprentice is worth the additional cost. But for some, it is simply not financially viable.

Employing an apprentice comes at a cost. Salary alone for a junior apprentice residential carpenter is around \$165,000 across the four-year period. Add onto this the other associated costs and some business owners calculate they spend between \$230,000 and \$250,000 on their junior apprentice across that four-year period.

The salary for an adult apprentice residential carpenter across that period is more like \$207,000. When associated costs are added, the total output over a four-year period for an adult apprentice of this kind is pushing \$300,000.

The majority of building and construction businesses (98.6 per cent) are small with fewer than 20 employees. Fifty-five per cent of all businesses turn over less than \$200,000 per year and 37.2 per cent turn over between \$200,000 and \$2 million per year.

## **Expenditure on an apprentice is not insignificant.**

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders recommends that Government fund the difference between employing a junior and an adult in an effort to incentivise more businesses to take on adult apprentices in building and construction.

Master Builders suggests that as a start, this could be done through the GTO model by providing funding to close the financial gap so the cost to the host employer is negligible.

For wider reach, this could also be done through programs that allow employers to access a rebate on the wages paid to their adult apprentice across the four-year apprenticeship period.

<sup>2</sup> NCVET Data Builder <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/databuilder> accessed 13 May 2024.

<sup>3</sup> This hourly rate includes tool allowance.





# GETTING ACROSS THE CERTIFICATE IV LINE

Master Builders is aware of many instances – particularly in non-licensed trades – where apprentices will complete their Certificate III and close the book on their studies, rather than undertaking a further year to graduate with a Certificate IV. For the purpose of having a well-skilled and highly qualified building and construction workforce, this is less than ideal. The industry needs more people completing their Certificate IV and becoming licensed tradespeople.

Of the 4,925 apprentices who completed their training in building and construction trades in September 2023, 4,625 (94 per cent) graduated with a Certificate III or below. Completing with a Certificate IV were 255 apprentices (5 per cent) and 45 graduates completed with a Diploma or Advanced Diploma (1 per cent).<sup>4</sup>

For Australia to meet its chronic and critical skills shortages in building and construction, more apprentices must graduate with at least a Certificate IV, in many cases this will enable them to seek relevant trade licensing in future.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders recommends that Government provide incentives to apprentices to encourage them to complete their Certificate IV.

This should be in the form of an incentive payment upon completion of a Certificate IV in a building and construction trade, and/or a complete fee subsidy for the final year of study.



# WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience is a vital part of helping people, especially young people, understand what a career in building and construction is like. VET, unlike higher education, is inflexible once you are enrolled. For example, if a student has completed two years of their plumbing apprenticeship, but decides they would prefer carpentry, the process for obtaining recognition of prior learning is lengthy and complex. The credit transfer is usually minimal and means an apprentice with two years' experience in plumbing effectively goes back to square one to start again in carpentry.

The reasons for this are understandable, given the intricacies of learning a trade. However, a lack of understanding of the career into which one is entering, coupled with inflexibility during training, means many students feel trapped. If they discontinue their studies, most are simply lost from building and construction apprenticeships.

## **Managing expectations early and upfront is key.**

Master Builders ACT presents a valuable example of how early and thoughtful career advice can make a huge difference to apprentice retention rates.

More can be done, however.

Industry can work closely with Government in this space to develop initiatives that help young people and people looking for a career change determine where they fit best. One such initiative could be a collaboration between Government and Master Builders to incentivise businesses to take on school-based work experience seekers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Master Builders recommends that Government fund a pilot partnership to support work experience placements. Through Master Builders, host employers and students could be matched to undertake work experience. Master Builders would require employers to meet certain standards and requirements that mean they could give the student a valuable on-site experience. Master Builders would work with schools, their students and careers advisers to pair students with appropriate businesses for a week of work experience.

A pilot program of this kind, run by an industry body that has both Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and GTOs within its network, would ensure quality.

Ensuring that work experience students have positive interactions with the industry early on is key to helping them determine the right role and pathway for them. A pilot program of this kind would ensure high-quality interactions.

# CASE STUDY: MASTER BUILDERS NEWCASTLE APPRENTICES



**NEWCASTLE  
MASTER BUILDERS  
APPRENTICES**

**2024 - 2025**

## CONSTRUCTION TRADE SCHOLARSHIPS

This Scholarship provides work placement opportunities with Master Builders Host Employers, commencing the last week of Term 1 2024 and the first week of the School Holidays, a total commitment of 10 weeks work placement over the two-year period. The intention is to assist students in gaining valuable on the job experience in the industry with mentoring and financial assistance.


**Scholarships valued at \$2,500 each - Carpentry, Plumbing & Electrical**

### ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to apply you must be:

- A full-time student commencing Year 10 or 11 in 2024 and undertaking/committed to completing the CPC 20220 Construction Pathways Cert II, UEE20220 Electrotechnology Cert II or Accelerated Construction Course.
- Able to demonstrate effective communication and numeracy skills.
- Work well in groups and as part of a team.
- Able to work independently.
- Be reliable and punctual.
- Exhibit problem solving skills.
- Students applying for the Scholarship will be required to attend an interview.
- Students that gain a position into the program must have reliable transport to and from local jobsites.

 EFTPOS Gift Card provided at the beginning of each onsite block to assist with travel for work placement or course expenses.

 10 weeks' of work experience over the two years - last week of school term and the first week of school holidays:

- 2024 Terms 1, 2 and 3
- 2025 Terms 1 and 2

 Provided with a selection of tools, clothing and safety equipment so you're ready to go on the job site.

**APPLICATION FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED BY:  
FRIDAY 15TH DECEMBER 2023**

\*Please contact Gabrielle Harden on 4979 0170 or gabrielleh@mbagtp.com.au if you have any questions or troubles submitting the form.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO APPLY:



Master Builders Newcastle started a scholarship program in 2020. The aim of the initiative is to provide work placement opportunities with Master Builders Apprenticeships GTO host employers. The program runs in the last week of school term and through school holidays with a total commitment of 10 weeks work placement over a two-year period.

The intention is to help students gain valuable on the job experience in the industry through mentoring and with some financial assistance.

Each year 10 scholarships are made available and in the early years of the program there were a large number of applicants. The scholarships cover all trades including carpentry, electrical and plumbing.

The program has been a success because it incentivises interested students to undertake work experience. They are paired with host employers who are keen to help young people learn about building and construction in the hopes they will undertake an apprenticeship when they finish school.

Megan Read, Office Manager for Master Builders Newcastle Apprentices says, “the program is great because we see a lot of the students who get the scholarship come through to do their apprenticeship with us after finishing school or they form a direct relationship with their host employer and do their apprenticeship that way. Either way, the scholarship is an excellent way for us to support future tradies and bring more young people into the industry.”

The program works but it needs to go further. In recent years, the number of applicants and host employers has decreased.

Megan says, “in recent years we have seen host employers dropping off a bit because the time it takes to really show someone the ropes is a big investment for a lot of tradespeople. Our scholarship goes to the student, not the builder and we are finding that we need to give the latter an incentive to take on work experience students too.

“It would be great if there was Government funding to help us cover the costs for the host employer too so they can really focus their attention on the student during the work experience period.”



# SKILLS OF THE FUTURE

The inflexible nature of VET and trade training must change to be able to adapt to the rapidly evolving building and construction industry. The training framework must be producing trade graduates who are fit for purpose and ready to work in the industry environment as it will be, not as it was.

The apprenticeship model ensures this happens, to an extent, but the educational framework should be adjusted to be more responsive and resilient. One example is ensuring training packages respond quickly to the changing regulatory framework that dominates building and construction. The National Construction Code (NCC) is amended every three years – but by the time the amendments have made it into the training package, then the classroom and then out onto a job site via apprentices, consultation on the next round of the NCC has commenced.

There are a number of areas in the educational environment that require review. These include but are not limited to nationally delivered silica awareness training that is fit for purpose and applies more broadly than the building and construction industry alone, nationally delivered asbestos awareness training, sustainability education and training on emerging construction systems and processes such as modern methods of manufacture.

Other future skills needs in the built environment include updated training on the building envelope (including weatherproofing, water-shedding, fire, insulation, thermal breaks and condensation management) as well as waterproofing. These areas have been included in recent NCC iterations and are expected to be expanded upon in coming years. The education system must be ahead of the curve and integrate them early into training packages and microcredentials.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Master Builders will work closely with BuildSkills Australia – the organisation tasked with ensuring building and construction training is fit for purpose – to make the VET system more responsive and flexible.

Government must ensure that, although TAFE is important, it is not the only beneficiary of funding or flexibility and, for example, should afford industry-run RTOs like those in the Master Builders network the benefit of self-accreditation.

Microcredentials offer a valuable life-long learning opportunity and should be properly funded and recognised by government.

# FLEXIBILITY IN THE AWARD

The primary industrial instruments that underpin the terms and conditions of employment in the sector are the Building and Construction General Onsite Award 2020 (Onsite Award) and Enterprise Bargaining Agreements (EBA).

Given the project-based nature of building works, estimates vary as to the proportion of the workforce covered by these instruments. However, it is reasonable to assume that approximately one third work under EBA conditions and the remainder have other forms of arrangements underpinned by the Onsite Award.

## EBA<sub>s</sub>

Building and construction EBAs comprise around one third of the total number approved by the Fair Work Commission (FWC) each year. These instruments:

- › Are predominantly ‘pattern’ arrangements to which unions are not only parties, but also relentlessly enthusiastic promoters;
- › typically involve conditions and arrangements that work to restrict or restrain any flexibility provided in the Onsite Award, resulting in set patterns and hours of work, standardised rates and conditions, and rostered days off (RDO) calendars which apply for the life of the agreement (meaning, RDOs for 2028 are set and known in 2024);
- › are conventionally adopted and used mainly in metropolitan and large regional areas, and commonly used by head-contractors or larger companies working at the ‘tier 2 or 3’ level (although, this is changing); and
- › are applicable to many subcontractors (irrespective of whether they are technically a party) when working for entities or on sites covered by EBAs (either through the use of enforceable ‘jump-up’ clauses since December 2022, or due various other forms of persuasive techniques as forensically identified in various Royal Commissions of Inquiry).

## ONSITE AWARD

Working arrangements underpinned by the Onsite Award represent almost all individual contracts of employment and/or arrangements which provide rates of pay which are significantly greater than the Onsite Award but retain its core terms and conditions.

Although the Onsite Award contains a range of provisions that encourage flexible working arrangements, these mainly exist due to National Employment Standards (such as the right to request flexible working arrangements, or consideration of family and caring responsibilities when determining if overtime is reasonably requested) or other Full Bench decisions adopted (or partly adopted) into the Award.

**Historically, the Onsite Award has been extremely restrictive and various attempts to relax this have made little practical difference or were rejected.**

For example, key provisions relevant to RDOs or agreement to work on arrangements other than the RDO cycle can be dependent upon agreement between the employer and the majority of employees.

## IMPACT OF INSTRUMENTS ON THE INDUSTRY

The impact of both instruments, either EBAs or the Onsite Award (historical or otherwise) is significant.

**It has created a culture in which industry retains restrictive practices, standardised conditions and terms of work, and comparatively unproductive arrangements.**

Regardless of the needs of individual workplaces, most accept this culture on the basis that it is how it has always been. Businesses are forced to adopt restrictive pattern arrangements which embed and spread poor culture.

The lack of an industry-specific industrial relations regulator with strong enforcement powers is also now seeing a return of cultural practices previously consigned to the past, such as 'no ticket, no start' and increased instances of unlawful and illegal industrial activity.

**There is no doubt that such perception creates a significant disincentive to many considering careers in building and construction.**

To bring more people into building and construction apprenticeships, this must change. There must be flexibility, work-life balance, a culture of diversity and inclusion and more scope of individualised working arrangements.

## RECOMMENDATION

Master Builders recommends that all Modern Awards enable flexible work arrangements and practices that are otherwise a barrier to, or disincentive for entry for apprentices.



# CAREERS ADVISERS NEED SUPPORT TOO

As part of its Women Building Australia program, Master Builders developed the Jobseeker Handbook. A digital version of this document [can be found here](#).

The Jobseeker Handbook gives details on the occupations available in building and construction. It is geared towards women seeking a role in the industry, but it is equally applicable to everyone else. It breaks down each occupation and lays out average salaries, how a typical day might look, what you need to be good at to succeed and what pathways into and around the industry can look like.

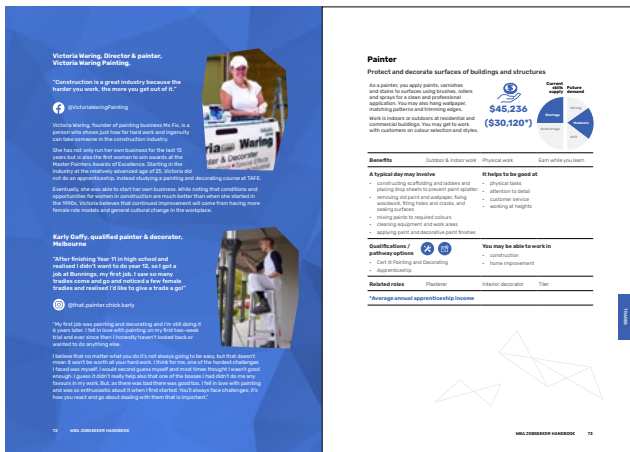
The Jobseeker Handbook has been an overwhelming success in the Women Building Australia program because it gives careers advisers the tools they need to help guide students considering a career in building and construction. Most careers advisers are former teachers, who are university educated. Some may have a VET qualification but few have an in-depth understanding of the building and construction sector.

To that end, many rely on industry to help them meet their students' needs. Many of the Master Builders Associations around the country attend careers expos, give presentations at schools and provide work experience. However, their reach is finite.

A resource like the Jobseeker Handbook is invaluable for careers advisers and parents. Since it was developed, Master Builders has distributed 18,000 printed copies and more than 2,000 downloads have been made. The Jobseeker Handbook is being viewed online at least once per day on average.

## RECOMMENDATION

Master Builders recommends Government invest in maintaining the Jobseeker Handbook but also developing an online, interactive resource that helps students, parents and careers advisers alike get an in-depth, realistic and relevant understanding of what a career in building and construction looks like.



# APPRENTICE SPOTLIGHT

## JAMI BROOKS



Jami Brooks was fast-tracked by his teachers because of his exceptional on-the-job experience and ability to excel in his studies.

Jami's work ethic is outstanding, and he consistently delivers quality work that goes beyond what is expected of him.

This dedication to his job, his company, and his projects is recognised by his peers, clients, and subcontractors.

Jami's work experience is diverse, ranging from constructing a solid shelter for a pool to renovating the Double-Tree Hilton in Alice Springs and the PepperBerry Restaurant at Hilton Darwin. Jami has been involved in numerous projects, including bathroom renovations, veranda installations and extensions, and has demonstrated his ability to lead and apply tradie knowledge at his discretion.

In addition to his training in carpentry, Jami has undertaken further study to expand his skill set, including first aid, elevated work platforms, working at heights, a truck licence, welding, and obtaining a chainsaw ticket.

Jami has also been involved in a voluntary program run by veteran golfers of the Darwin Golf Club to enhance the golf course by digging drainage trenches for the sand-bunkers. He has also been involved in the installation of sanitising stations, temporary barriers to assist with social distancing, and Territory check-in signage for COVID-19.

Jami's natural abilities in carpentry and his dedication to the job did not go unnoticed, and he was awarded the General Building and Construction Apprentice of the Year in 2020.



# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- › Master Builders recommends that Government address the bias toward university, and invest in campaigns that overcome misconceptions, and also overhaul the quality, funding and availability of careers education in schools.
- › Master Builders recommends an apprenticeship incentive system that makes commencement and completion bonuses to apprentices and their employers, as well as a wage subsidy throughout the apprenticeship. Master Builders suggests government should design different incentives for different cohorts of apprentice, noting that a junior male apprentice may have different needs to an adult or female apprentice.
- › Master Builders recommends that all incentive payments are tax free, and a continuous employment bonus post-qualification might apply for apprentices and employers who continue their journey together.
- › Master Builders recommends that Government fund the cost differential so hosting an apprentice through an industry-run GTO like those in the e businesses to take on adult apprentices in building and construction.
- › Master Builders recommends that Government provide incentives to apprentices to encourage them to complete their Certificate IV. This should be in the form of an incentive payment upon completion of a Certificate IV in a building and construction trade, and/or a complete fee subsidy for the final year of study.
- › Master Builders recommends that Government fund a pilot program to support work experience placements in building and construction.
- › Microcredentials should be properly funded and recognised by government.
- › Government must ensure that, although TAFE is important, it is not the only beneficiary of funding or flexibility and, for example, should afford industry-run RTOs like those in the Master Builders network the benefit of self-accreditation.
- › Master Builders recommends that all Modern Awards enable flexible work arrangements and practices that are otherwise a barrier to, or disincentive for entry for apprentices.
- › Master Builders recommends Government invest in maintaining the Jobseeker Handbook but also developing an online, interactive resource that helps students, parents and careers advisers alike get an in-depth, realistic and relevant understanding of what a career in building and construction looks like.





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