



Australian Government
**Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations**

Future Directions

Apprenticeship Support Services Consultation Paper



April 2023



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The document must be attributed as the *Future Directions for Australian Apprenticeship Support Services Consultation Paper*.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) acknowledges the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia on which we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all traditional custodians, their Elders past and present, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea and water.

Have your say

In late 2022, the Australian Government released the *[Australian Apprenticeship Services and Support Discussion Paper](#)* to examine the effectiveness of Commonwealth support services and non-financial supports, and seek stakeholder views on ways to improve these services and strengthen the system.

As a follow up to this discussion paper, the purpose of this *Future Directions for Australian Apprenticeship Support Services Consultation Paper* is to:

- Provide an update on what we heard from stakeholders in response to the key themes raised during consultations.
- Outline the Australian Government's proposed future directions for apprenticeship support services and on-financial supports, informed by stakeholder responses.

Key dates



Stakeholders are invited to provide feedback on the proposed model outlined in this Future Directions paper and propose ideas that would further strengthen the model. Responses will support the finalisation of the Australian Government's apprenticeship service delivery model and related non-financial supports. The Government especially welcomes suggestions that are focussed on supporting apprenticeship completions.

Stakeholders acknowledge that any feedback they provide becomes the property of the department upon submission and may be used, modified, retained and copied to inform the development of related procurement activities for the apprenticeship service delivery model's next contract period, anticipated for the third quarter of 2023. The commencement of the new model for apprenticeship support services is anticipated to commence in mid-2024.

Subject to the exceptions referred to below, the department will not publish and will treat as confidential any part of a stakeholder's feedback or comments that the stakeholder clearly identifies as 'Confidential Information' by marking each page that contains confidential information with the word 'CONFIDENTIAL'. If a page is not marked with the word 'CONFIDENTIAL' the department will treat all information on the page as being not confidential. The department is not required to keep feedback and comments provided by stakeholders confidential to the extent that the information is:

- Disclosed by the department to its advisers, officers, employees, contractors, or subcontractors in connection with the Australian Apprenticeship Support Services Program (including the future development of the Australian Government's apprenticeship service delivery model);
- Disclosed by the department to the responsible Minister;
- Disclosed by the department in response to a request by a House or a Committee of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia;

- Shared by the department within the department's organisation, or with another government department or agency, where this serves the government's legitimate interests;
- Authorised or required by law to be disclosed; or
- In the public domain otherwise than due to a breach of the relevant obligations of confidentiality.

The proposed model for apprenticeship support services and non-financial supports in this paper is intended to rebalance and improve the focus of the current delivery model by putting apprentices' needs at the heart of service delivery and ensuring these services provide societal value in delivering the pipeline of skilled workers that Australian industry needs.

The model proposed in this paper takes into account stakeholder feedback that support services should be better tailored to the needs of individual apprentices and support their success by:

- Rebalancing apprenticeship services and supports over the life of the apprenticeship.
- Identifying barriers early, such as shortfalls in foundation skills, and providing pathways for apprentices to improve foundation skills where needed.
- Addressing the specific needs of those apprentices who face other barriers to completing their apprenticeships.
- Providing opportunities for women, First Nations apprentices, apprentices in remote Australia, people with disability and other groups traditionally underrepresented to undertake apprenticeships and succeed.
- Supporting inexperienced employers to develop skills and a workplace environment that supports apprentices to succeed.
- Improving the transparency of apprenticeship services to improve the quality of service provision, and driving provider performance.

You can make written submissions to the department in response to this Future Directions paper by **5.00pm (Canberra time) on Monday 22 May 2023**. You can register your interest to participate in a discussion with the department via email, or send your written submission to the department at AustralianApprenticeshipPolicy@dewr.gov.au.

The department may conduct discussions with interested organisations upon request, for the purposes of discussing any feedback organisations may have on this Future Directions paper. While the department will endeavour to accommodate all such requests, the department does not guarantee that every request will result in a discussion with the department.

Introduction and context

Current landscape

Currently seven Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers are contracted by the Australian Government to offer national coverage for Australian Apprentices. These AASN providers deliver support services, including facilitating the sign-up process, providing advice on Australian Apprenticeships, explaining roles and responsibilities, offering in-training support that can include mentoring, counselling, and pastoral care as required.

AASN providers are responsible for the sign-up of every Australian Apprentice across the country. This includes ensuring the apprenticeship arrangement is genuine and appropriate and that the employer and apprentice both understand their roles and responsibilities as outlined in the Training Contract, and in accordance with the varying legislation, requirements and IT systems that apply across each jurisdiction.

Recent updates to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System better align the program of incentives to skills in demand, but the service delivery model that underpins apprenticeship support has remained largely unchanged since 2015. There is now an opportunity to reform the existing model to emphasise better quality support over the life of the apprenticeship; to offer individualised and more accessible services; and to better encourage and educate employers in relation to positive workplace cultures that are necessary to support the success of apprentices.

Commitment to strengthening services, in partnership with stakeholders

As an outcome of the September 2022 [Jobs and Skills Summit](#), the Australian Government committed to work in partnership with states, territories and other key stakeholders to explore options to improve the Australian Apprenticeships system, increase the diversity of the apprentice workforce, and drive-up apprenticeship completion rates. This commitment underpins this process.

Engaging with stakeholders to inform policy direction - background

On 16 November 2022, the department released the [Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper \(the discussion paper\)](#) to explore existing services and non-financial supports. The discussion paper was supported by a two-month consultation process seeking stakeholder views on how the apprenticeship system could be improved to build diversity in trade and non-trade apprenticeships and to drive-up completions. Stakeholders were asked to focus on three key and long-standing questions facing the apprenticeships system, specifically focused on non-financial support services:

- What changes are needed to drive up apprenticeship completion rates?
- How can the services delivered better encourage and support apprentices from diverse backgrounds?
- How can support services be optimised to meet the current and future needs of apprentices and employers?

Consultations included apprentices, employers, state and territory governments, unions, industry, registered training organisations (RTOs), group training organisations (GTOs) and Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers. In addition, advocacy groups focused on women, apprentices with disability and First Nations apprentices, including the Coalition of Peaks, were engaged. Stakeholders participated in this process through six targeted roundtables, 23 bilateral meetings, seven site visits, and the department received over 100 survey responses and written submissions.

Consultations also canvassed views on the design and implementation of the Australian Skills Guarantee and initiatives to support women in vocational education and training (VET), which were explored through the [Australian Skills Guarantee Discussion Paper](#) released on 23 November 2022.

What we heard: A summary of stakeholder views

Overall, different stakeholders focused their responses to the discussion paper on different elements of the apprenticeships system. However, responses universally emphasised the importance and value of Australian Apprenticeships and provided feedback centred around enhancing existing service provision and systems. A summary of key themes from stakeholder consultations, and proposed future directions, are outlined below.

Apprentices who experience additional barriers need more support, and often more specialised support, to succeed

While apprenticeship completion rates have been declining across all groups, completion rates are particularly low for women, First Nations people, people with disability and people living in remote Australia. Stakeholders recognised that supporting these apprentice cohorts—which often experience additional barriers to completion—requires a different approach that recognises their specific needs.

When considering supports for apprentices, it is important to consider intersectionality, and understand the multiple identity dimensions that can compound barriers for individuals.

Women apprentices, including women in male-dominated trades

To achieve better outcomes for women in Australian Apprenticeships, particularly women in male-dominated trades, stakeholder feedback centred around the need for existing wraparound supports to be more readily accessible and provided on a more regular basis.

Stakeholder feedback from women's advocacy groups and women apprentices agreed that workplaces need to be welcoming, and culturally safe, to attract and retain women.

Many women apprentices generously shared their lived experiences. There was a strong interest for changes in workplace culture in traditional trades, including the need for women to be able to access peer-to-peer networks across worksites, other women students and role models as trainers and advisors. This access would improve workplace practices and help overcome barriers for women entering and being retained in traditional trades. Feedback was clear that mentoring of this apprenticeship cohort must also be personalised and targeted.

Stakeholder feedback suggested cultural and structural workplace changes together would drive better outcomes. For instance, one union stakeholder noted that while support services can play a role in retaining women in the industry, substantial changes to the retention of women apprentices will only occur when industry makes fundamental changes to the ways in which work is organised and to the work environment. For example, employers of apprentices need to do more to support caring responsibilities, such as childcare facilities' being provided on site or aligning shifts with childcare opening hours. Stakeholders noted these changes benefit everyone in the industry not just women.

Women apprentices, including women in male-dominated trades - continued

The department also sought feedback on the supports needed to enable more women to enter and thrive in traditionally male-dominated workplaces. Stakeholders raised the need for a number of supports, including education campaigns explaining what is involved in different trades; improving career advice for school students, including opportunities across all trade occupations, packaged prevocational training for women not currently in the labour force; cultural change programs; respectful relationships and behavioural training; and support for employers to better encourage and educate them to build positive workplace cultures that support the success of apprentices.

Employers raised concerns about getting the basics right, particularly employers yet to engage a woman apprentice in a male-dominated occupation—they spoke of nervousness in knowing how to talk to women apprentices or provide feedback and facilities not always being appropriate for women which at times is out of their control, due to the worksites for tradespeople often not being owned or run by the supervisors of the business employing the apprentice. Some employers also spoke about the practicalities of managing logistics and had concerns about providing maternity leave and making a loss on a van if a female employee had to come off the tools in the last trimester and during maternity leave.

Other important stakeholder feedback related to women apprentices included:

- Career advice needs to encourage women to consider trades. Many stakeholders spoke about the need to remove gender stereotypes, conscious and unconscious bias around acceptable career choices for women, and the critical need to start messaging at primary and secondary school levels.
- Good examples of stakeholder outreach include industry reaching out to schools, trial sessions demonstrating practical experience, and information sessions for daughters of industry members.
- Emphasising the role that industry plays in building a positive culture and selling the benefits of diversity across their sectors.
- The need to provide advice and guidance to students and parents separately about career pathways. Families play an important role in students' decision making and need to be considered as key influencers. Often women apprentices in trade apprenticeships had brothers or fathers as positive role models, while others were actively discouraged by their parents to pursue trade roles, and as a result waited until their early twenties to take up a trade.

Supports for women apprentices will require deliberate steps to improve gender equality and address the gender pay gap, accelerate women's economic participation, and reduce gender segregation in occupations dominated by men.

First Nations apprentices

The need for cultural awareness and cultural competency training for apprenticeship stakeholders to achieve better outcomes for First Nations apprentices, was a primary concern in several submissions.

Feedback suggested that this could include, place-based, culturally appropriate service delivery providers, and could also extend to apprentice employers and training providers undertaking cultural awareness training to support a safer and more culturally appropriate work and training environment. More First Nations trainers and supervisors are needed to support apprentices as stakeholders noted the lack of First Nations trainers in VET.

Intensive ongoing mentoring by First Nations community organisations—and not just specialists in the apprenticeship system—was acknowledged as critical to supporting First Nations apprentices over the life of the apprenticeship, particularly where apprentices may face additional disadvantage or be at-risk of disengaging from their employers.

Feedback also centred on the need to deepen engagement with First Nations communities to help grow the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other First Nations corporations and businesses within communities, including RTOs, to increase the number of First Nations apprentices and improve completion rates.

Other important feedback related to First Nations apprentices included that:

- Additional support to address gaps in language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills can help all learners. However, more can be done to identify foundation skills needs for First Nations apprentices and provide additional support, where required.
- Some stakeholders suggested that, where possible, employers may wish to consider broadening apprentice recruitment practices to employ more First Nations apprentices, noting that isolation can be a barrier to retention.
- Some GTOs reported success in offering specialised services including training, mentoring and cultural awareness support for First Nations apprentices and their employers.
- RTOs can better inform their training and assessment practices, including through the direct employment of First Nations support staff and educators.

Apprentices with disability

Stakeholders noted apprenticeships are seen as a valuable pathway to support the transition from school to employment for students with disability. To support this transition, it was acknowledged by advocacy groups that apprentices with disability often need additional support, particularly prior to sign-up, to ensure they are matched with the right employer and have the necessary assistance to succeed.

Further, stakeholders advised that while employers want to employ and support apprentices with disability, accessing supports is often an administratively burdensome process, which can present barriers to commencements. A mix of advocacy, industry peaks and employer groups noted the Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy (DAAWS) application process could be simplified and made more accessible.

Feedback aligned with [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#), and particularly focused on employment and financial security and apprenticeship supports being accessible to help people with disability to achieve their full potential through education and learning.

Apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas

Stakeholders noted that apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas can face additional geographic barriers when it comes to sourcing an apprenticeship pathway. When they do commence an apprenticeship, it is often difficult to access and stay motivated to complete the off-the-job training component due to the financial and social costs of travelling or living away from home.

Struggles with living expenses—including high fuel costs, and dependence upon maintaining a driver's licence to travel extensive distances between home, workplaces, and/or off-the-job training, can present increased logistical complexity for apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas. Concerns were also raised about the timeliness of service provision for rural and remote apprentices. Some stakeholders noted that apprentices from rural and remote areas—and their employers—could benefit from being able to access virtual or self-service options, including virtual sign ups.

Apprentices and employers need to know how to access support when they need it, right from the start

Stakeholders emphasised the services and supports for apprentices need to be less complex so that apprentices and employers clearly know what supports are available and how to access them. The split of responsibilities between the Australian Government, represented by AASN providers, and state and territory governments can cause confusion for employers and other users of the system. Some stakeholders noted there can be difficulty distinguishing between the different field officers and their offerings, which can contribute to uncertainty about apprenticeship administration and advice. Stakeholders noted that clarity around roles, responsibilities and increasing the visibility and awareness of apprenticeship service providers, could ameliorate this issue.

Stakeholders acknowledged the process conducted by the AASN provider to sign-up apprentices and employers is helpful. Apprentices noted that while the sign-up process could be described as lengthy and intensive, they were provided with a lot of information relevant to their apprenticeship and related program eligibility that was useful and necessary.

Upfront assessment and job matching is critical and should include language, literacy, numeracy, and digital skills assessment prior to commencement

Stakeholders suggested that to support better completion rates, apprentices and employers should be appropriately matched to offer both parties the highest likelihood of success. However, stakeholders also noted this does not always happen, particularly in small businesses who may engage younger people who are friends, family or neighbours not knowing whether the apprentice has the skills, interest, and capability to pursue the apprenticeship pathway they are signing up to.

In addition, stakeholders noted that, at times, employers take on apprentices prior to the involvement of AASN providers, which reduces the opportunity for pre-screening and matching of an apprentice with the right employer for their needs.

One of the key issues stakeholders raised relating to commencement, was the value to be gained by assessing the interests and skills of apprentices upfront. In addition, early support where needed with language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skill levels can be addressed to support the apprentice to succeed. Stakeholders reported widespread issues with literacy and numeracy across apprentices, noting the issue can be particularly acute in certain industries, such as construction. Stakeholders also noted that apprentices with LLND skills gaps would need access to support over the life of their apprenticeship.

Experienced trainers spoke of the disruption to the final years of school for some students since 2020, making it more difficult to transition into some of the more technical apprenticeships such as electrical. Differences in approaches to screening apprentices across jurisdictions was also raised, indicating that a new and better tailored approach may be appropriate.

Proactive engagement by apprenticeship support services can support better awareness of the supports available to employers and apprentices

Consultation identified a consistently low level of awareness amongst apprentices that the AASN providers were there to support them and across many stakeholders there was minimal understanding of what help an AASN provider could offer. Apprentices advised they would benefit from early contact from their AASN provider to support them with information on where to go and how to access support for the challenges they face at work, at off-the-job training or with payment issues. Apprentices who received support throughout their apprenticeship provided overall positive feedback on their experience. Stakeholders, and particularly regional advocacy groups, highlighted that supports need to be more visible for regional and remote apprentices who face additional challenges either living away from home or travelling to attend the off-the-job component of their training.

Apprentices and employers noted, ideally, communication from AASN providers would suit the level of intervention and support required. Stakeholders noted that texts and emails should be complemented by face-to-face or face-to-screen engagement to build relationships and ensure apprentices feel comfortable connecting with their AASN provider to raise concerns or access direct support when they need it.

Stakeholders engaged through the GTO model reported effectiveness in engaging and retaining apprentices. Under the traditional GTO model, the GTO employs the apprentice and places the apprentice with a host employer. Host employers pay fees to the GTO who is then responsible for meeting the employer obligations in the Training Contract, including paying wages and managing other employment benefits. While employing only 6 per cent of the current apprentices in-training, GTOs include targeted local organisations, industry bodies, for profit, not for profit, as well as large national businesses.

Off-the-job training is sometimes also delivered by the GTO with pastoral care and support workers regularly available on site to provide a level of care unavailable through the current service provider model. Depending on the business model used by the GTO, this model can lend itself to regular engagement with apprentices, reflecting the additional services GTOs are contracted to deliver. However, it was acknowledged that the GTO model is not accessible to all employers, due to the additional financial costs associated with engaging a GTO. At roundtable meetings there was some discussion about subsidies to assist employers with the cost of engaging an apprentice through a GTO, including the SA Government's GTO Boost initiative.

Overall, stakeholders suggested that improving the visibility, and presence, of AASN providers, and boosting apprentice and employer understanding of the range of financial and non-financial supports available, would go a long way in supporting the apprentice and their employer through their apprenticeship journey.

Better connected services and information sharing can identify issues as they emerge

Key stakeholders including employers, unions, state and territory government representatives, AASN providers, GTOs and RTOs acknowledged there needs to be greater capacity and capability for information sharing to ensure better targeting of supports for apprentices at risk of disengaging. This would help to ensure assistance is directed where it is needed most when issues emerge with an apprentice's training, such as difficulty completing the off-the-job training component. A range of stakeholder groups noted that a 'one-stop-shop' approach could be helpful to connect the full range of available supports and provide the apprentice and employer with the right kind of supports at the right time.

Mentoring and pastoral care supports are vital to supporting better apprentice outcomes

Advocacy groups, along with apprentices and employers, advised that a combination of diversity-specific and industry-specific mentoring programs could be introduced to help mentors to effectively work with First Nations apprentices, women in male-dominated trades and other groups of apprentices that have different needs and supports.

Additional feedback concerning improvements to mentoring and pastoral care supports included:

- Mentoring and personalised assistance should be offered at the early signs of emerging issues, be available over the life of the apprenticeship, and be provided by mentors with detailed knowledge and understanding of the industry the apprentice is working in.
- Stakeholders noted that personalised assistance needs to allow flexibility to address the needs of the whole individual, including pastoral care services to support apprentices with mental health issues, disability and complex life events, as well as providing mediation between the employer and apprentice, if needed.
- Stakeholders provided positive feedback on the effectiveness of the In-Training Support program (ITS) when accessed by apprentices or employers. Under the current support delivery model, ITS is provided to apprentices after an assessment of need. ITS is tailored to the needs of the individual and may include career and industry mentoring, counselling, mediation, and referral to specialist services. An apprentice or employer needs to seek support to receive this service.
- Stakeholders noted the success of ITS is based in its accessibility, and individualised nature, focussing on removing roadblocks to completion specific to each apprentice. However, they suggested this service should be expanded and if delivered more proactively it could help issues be resolved more effectively.
- To improve overall apprenticeship outcomes for apprentices, stakeholders suggested training programs and supports could be implemented for workplace supervisors. This was raised as a possible way to help supervisors to understand the challenges apprentices may face and assist in finding practical solutions to supporting First Nations apprentices and women in male-dominated trades.
- Both apprentices and employers noted that while supervisors may be experts in their fields, they can sometimes lack the necessary skills to take on the role of supervising an apprentice. For small and micro businesses taking on an apprentice, it may be the first time some employers take on the role of supervisor. The quality of relationship can have an impact on whether the apprentice feels comfortable in the workplace and can influence the likelihood of the apprentice remaining and completing their apprenticeship.
- Unions flagged they have well-established networks able to deliver mentoring across a range of workplaces and industries, with industry connections to assist them to identify poor employers and reconnect apprentices who need to switch employers.
- Unions and industry bodies also noted that understanding the apprentice's industry and training can facilitate more effective support services, particularly where issues are raised on site.
- Stakeholders noted issues with out-of-trade registers, and raised the need for better connected support for apprentices who are let go by their employers. They suggested ongoing pastoral care by apprenticeship service delivery providers could identify apprenticeship issues earlier and allow for more timely support, reducing the risk of apprentices disengaging from the system.

A positive relationship between the supervisor and apprentice is key to a successful apprenticeship outcome

The importance of the relationship between the apprentice and supervisor was echoed by each stakeholder, noting that it is key to the apprentice staying and completing their apprenticeship. Getting the relationship right early on, and ensuring each party is provided with necessary supports throughout the apprenticeship, will go a long way to supporting the apprentice from commencement through to completion.

A mix of industry peaks and advocacy groups reported being told by employers that more needs to be done to support small to medium sized businesses, and employers hiring an apprentice for the first time.

It was acknowledged that these employers are more likely to encounter issues taking on and training an apprentice and managing apprentice-employer relationships effectively. This is often because employers may not have the skills, resources or experience to effectively supervise an apprentice in the workplace or manage the administrative requirements of the apprenticeship arrangement.

Additional feedback in relation to this crucial relationship included:

- Apprentices flagged that difficult workplace cultures were a big contributor to leaving apprenticeships early.
- Conversely, apprentices reported that having an experienced supervisor to turn to for support and advice contributed to their retention and completion.
- Some state and territory governments noted programs offering supervisor training and guidance, although this is generally not mandatory, or offered consistently to all employers.

Proposed future directions

Stakeholders highlighted the need to strengthen the apprenticeship service delivery model to ensure that:

- All apprentices are set up to succeed and know where to get help when they need it.
- Apprentices who face additional barriers to completion have access to quality targeted mentoring and personalised assistance.

The proposed model for apprenticeship support services and non-financial supports will rebalance the focus of the current delivery model by putting the apprentice at the centre and ensuring the system continues to deliver the pipeline of skilled workers that industry needs. The future model is intended to be delivered on a regional basis and provide choice for employers and apprentices to select between at least two providers in each State except for of in the Northern Territory, where an expanded range of services will be procured separately on behalf of the Commonwealth and NT Government.

It will also back in the Australian Government's priorities, including the commitment to net zero emissions and the implementation of the Australian Skills Guarantee, by encouraging industry and specialist organisations to deliver apprenticeship services.

Recognising the constrained fiscal environment, the proposed model has been designed to fit within the existing forward estimates profile for apprenticeship supports. New and enhanced services will be funded by better using existing resources.

Proposed support measures

Focus support services on apprentices and employers to get the skills they need

- Conduct a structured pre-commencement assessment of the apprentice's skill levels, skills gaps and aptitude for a variety of occupations, focusing on language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) needs. This will enable service delivery providers to deliver personalised services, identify what additional supports are required and assist employers, RTOs and apprenticeship service delivery providers to collaborate to better support apprentices.
- Help apprenticeship candidates to find the right employer and apprenticeship pathway through pre-commencement assessments, including through identification of employers who need additional support, such as first-time employers of apprentices, or those with a history of low apprentice completions.
- Ensure that apprenticeship service delivery providers can provide more proactive support for apprentices at risk of not completing, including through working with the apprentice and employer to identify and address emerging issues.

Improve the support available for apprentices who experience additional barriers to completion

- Ensure that apprentices who experience additional barriers to completion receive proactive, inclusive, and culturally appropriate support, including for women in non-traditional trades, apprentices with disability, First Nations apprentices, and remote apprentices. These key cohorts will be guaranteed access to personalised assistance and mentoring to provide additional support from commencement through to completion. This will include more face-to-face contact.
- Facilitate specialist expertise to assist women in non-traditional trades, including through education, advice or support to reduce cultural barriers to women's participation and address workplace challenges.
- Ensure that apprenticeship service delivery providers demonstrate cultural competency through in house First Nations expertise creating opportunities for First Nations Australians to deliver services, and/or for non-Indigenous organisations to work in partnership with First Nations organisations to deliver culturally appropriate services.

Lift the profile of apprenticeships as a valuable career pathway

- Ensure that apprenticeship service delivery providers improve the visibility of apprenticeships, including through working with secondary schools to provide career advice to secondary students on the benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship pathway. This will include assigning providers to schools to ensure all secondary students have access to information about Australian Apprenticeships and the availability of support services.

Streamline administrative services to provide apprentices and their employers with better access to direct support

- Strengthen up front assessment at sign up to better identify apprentices needing more personal interaction, including more regular face to face contacts.
- Use direct messaging to apprentices and employers to build awareness of availability of supports and familiarity with the apprenticeship system.
- Streamline program administration, supporting apprenticeship service delivery providers to refocus efforts on the provision of personalised, meaningful support to apprentices and employers.

Collaborate with states, territories and industry to improve apprenticeship completions

- Explore opportunities for improving relationships between employers and apprentices, including through clear articulation of roles and responsibilities.
- Improve information sharing and collaboration between apprenticeship stakeholders, including states, employers, apprenticeship service delivery providers and RTOs, to support more timely responses to the emerging needs of apprentices.

Improve transparency, reporting and performance of providers

- Restructure the apprenticeship service delivery provider model to rebalance support between apprentices and employers over the life of the apprenticeship.
- Introduce a new performance framework, key performance indicators and clearer reporting requirements for apprenticeship service delivery providers to improve the transparency and quality of service provision, and drive provider performance.

Key elements of the new apprenticeship support system



Every apprentice will complete a structured assessment on commencement, to identify individual needs, deliver additional supports and set new apprentices up to succeed.

Assessment of skill levels, skills gaps and aptitude for occupations will be provided to all apprentices, focusing on language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skill needs.

Personalised services and LLND support will be offered across the apprenticeship to better support apprentices.

Mentoring services will be enhanced, to enable earlier access to support, including specialised services with a focus on improving outcomes for apprentices who experience additional barriers to completing their apprenticeship.

Apprentices with additional barriers to completion will have guaranteed access to the support they need through specialised mentoring, peer networking and pastoral care services.

Other at-risk groups will have access to additional capped mentoring and personal assistance places, on an as-needs basis.

Specialised women in trades support providers will ensure women have the best opportunity to succeed.

More proactive support will be provided over the course of the apprenticeship, with an increased focus on supporting completions.

Services will be restructured to rebalance support between the apprentice and employer for the life of the apprenticeship.

New KPIs will improve transparency and drive better performance.

Apprenticeship service delivery providers will play a greater role promoting apprenticeship pathways for secondary students and will actively support secondary schools with information and advice on apprenticeships.

In partnership with states and territories, opportunities to improve the workplace experience for all apprentices and their employers will be identified.

Employer and apprentice roles and responsibilities will be clearly articulated, to support strong working relationships.

Better sharing of information will give visibility of apprentice disengagement, leading to greater targeted retention strategies.

Targeted communications will ensure apprentices have access to the information they need during their apprenticeship and technology will be leveraged to streamline claims processing and program administration.

Enhancements to the Apprenticeships Data Management System (ADMS) will reflect changes to the service delivery model, and facilitate personalised, targeted communications to apprentices and employers.

Additional insights from consultations

While the focus of stakeholder consultations was on non-financial support services delivered by the Australian Government, stakeholders raised a variety of other issues as part of the process.

Whilst out of scope for this first phase of reforms, feedback on these areas is an important part of the ongoing conversation and may inform future policy directions. For example, there was significant commentary around the financial aspects of the apprenticeship system, which will be considered as part of ongoing policy development.

Other valuable insights from consultation include:

- Unskilled work is often better paid than apprenticeship wages due to the tight labour market. This can act as a deterrent to those considering an apprenticeship pathway.
- Several stakeholders raised the New Zealand Government's removal of the training wage as an area for consideration for Australian Apprentices.
- Mature-aged apprentices (over 21 years old) are typically paid more than apprentices under 21 years old. This can present a barrier to employers recruiting older apprentices despite general acknowledgement of the additional skills and experience mature-aged apprentices can bring to workplaces. Whilst the wage variations differ by award and industry, the wages difference is usually larger for the first year of the apprenticeship, which can discourage employers looking to hire. This issue was particularly raised in relation to women taking up trades in male-dominated occupations.
- There was also feedback on apprenticeship training delivery models, which included:
 - Many potential apprentices do not sign up as an apprentice due to the perceived inability of employers to offer part-time hours or other flexibility in the workplace.
 - RTOs need to offer different modes of training delivery to address the needs of equity groups, particularly women and apprentices from remote Australia, as well as the general apprenticeship cohort. This could involve providing a block-release training solution where apprentices attend off-the-job training for a full week or weeks at a time rather than one day per week to assist those where significant distance between home and training location, family or other commitments impact an apprentice's ability to otherwise attend training.
 - Flexibility in off-the-job training could also involve the RTO delivering some training components online to reduce the requirement for apprentices to always attend a physical training location to complete their training.
 - Support for cultural and gender diversity and apprentices with disability should be visible in the training environment. RTOs must provide a safe training environment for all apprentices and have trainers from diverse backgrounds.

How to have your say

The department welcomes any written submissions by **COB 5pm (Canberra time) 22 May 2023**. Alternatively, you can register your interest to discuss your views with the department. Please register your interest via email and/or send your written submission to the department at AustralianApprenticeshipPolicy@dewr.gov.au.