Final report – Fact sheet for Apprentices

Apprentices value the opportunity to earn while they learn and appreciate the training they receive both off and on the job. However, apprentices experience challenges with cost-of-living pressures, dealing with safety, bullying and disrespect in the workplace, and in adjusting to the transition from high school. They need increased financial support (i.e. incentive payments and travel subsidies) and to be better connected with non-financial support (i.e. mentoring and assistance with foundational skills).
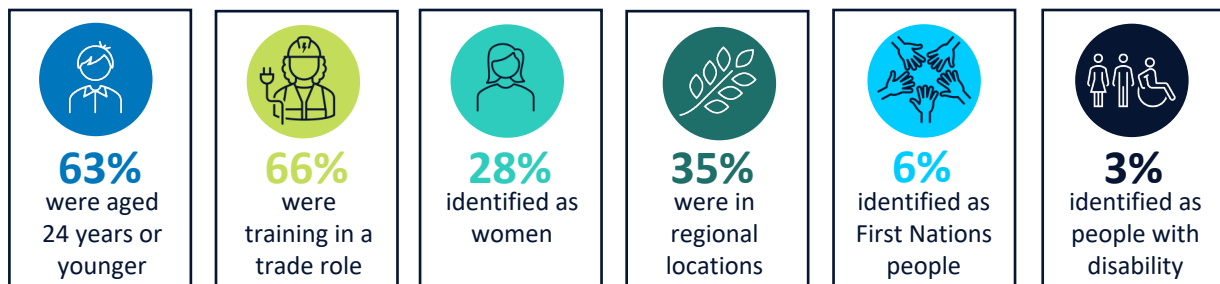
Background

The Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System, led by Dr Iain Ross AO and Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, considered the effectiveness and efficiency of the current incentive system in supporting the uptake and completion of Australian apprenticeships. In particular, it considered the incentive system with regard to addressing Australia's skills needs and its ability to deliver on economic priorities and social equity objectives.

For more details on the review as a whole, please refer to the Overview fact sheet.

The number of people starting an apprenticeship has been in decline since 2012. While wide ranging COVID recovery measures saw some of the highest numbers of new apprentices since 2013, overall the end of these measures has resulted in only slightly more new apprentices than in 2019.

As of 31 December 2023, there were around 343,600 apprentices in training (NCVER 2024), of which:

| **63%** were aged 24 years or younger | **66%** were training in a trade role | **28%** identified as women | **35%** were in regional locations | **6%** identified as First Nations people | **3%** identified as people with disability |

Key Issues

The review identified the following issues that affect apprentices:

- Apprentices, like many workers, are struggling to meet cost-of-living pressures. Low training wages can deter people from taking up an apprenticeship and impact on their ability to afford to follow it through to completion.

- Many young people are dissuaded from taking up an apprenticeship and instead they are pushed towards university. Women in particular are deterred from taking up trades such as plumbing and carpentry based on gendered assumptions of their ability to do the work and to work in the sector.

- Apprentices expect good on-the-job training, a safe workplace and to be respected by their employer. However, three-quarters of apprenticeships end due to workplace related issues, with apprentices ending the arrangement in 80% of cases. Many report unsafe workplaces, a toxic work culture or being treated as simply 'cheap labour'.

- Many young apprentices experience challenges in the transition from school to an apprenticeship. They often require additional support to manage their mental health and the expectations of their job.

- Women apprentices in male-dominated trades, First Nations apprentices, apprentices from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, apprentices with disability, and apprentices in regional and remote Australia each experience barriers to access an apprenticeship and in getting through the apprenticeship.

- Those considering an apprenticeship later in life are often deterred by the lack of recognition for their experience.

Recommendations

The final report made 34 recommendations that aim to address the key issues identified through the review. The following is a summary of recommendations relevant to apprentices:

- Address the behaviour of employers who are not providing an appropriate working environment for their apprentices.

- Provide more financial support to apprentices through subsidies for their travel expenses, purchasing tools, and reforms to apprentice support payment to increase the amount and frequency of payment.

- Utilise the Australian Government's procurement policies to improve workplaces for women.

- Deliver a national campaign to promote apprenticeships and improve information about apprentices provided in schools and to the general public. Celebrate apprentices' achievements through graduation ceremonies.

- Use existing apprentice data systems to better connect apprentices with support services. Review the systems to make them easier for apprentices, employers and other users to use and navigate.

- Work with industry stakeholders to address workplace culture issues and improve the working environment for apprentices.

- Improve the assessment of apprentices language, literacy and numeracy skills, to better assist apprentices who may experience challenges with coursework.

- Provide supports targeted at priority cohorts such as:
  - Creating more opportunities for women to enter male-dominated trades
  - Improving the cultural competency of training providers to better support First Nations Apprentices
  - Expanding programs facilitating pathways to apprenticeships for people with disability and increase support payments directed at apprentices with disability.

- Develop ways to recognise previous experience and fast-track apprenticeships to make apprenticeships more appealing to those entering an apprenticeship later in life.

- Develop means for apprentices to demonstrate the transferability of the skills they develop in their training between different employers and occupations.

References

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) (2024)
Apprentices and trainees 2023: December quarter, NCVER.