



National Apprenticeship Employment Network

Submission to the
Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship
Incentive System

May 2024

Who we are...

The National Apprentice Employment Network (NAEN) is Australia's largest employer network of apprentices and trainees. Across metropolitan, rural, regional and remote Australia, the network employs some 25,000 apprentices and trainees in a diverse range of industries.

The NAEN employer network is unique, as it represents the practice of group training under which registered Group Training Organisations (GTOs) directly employ apprentices and trainees and place them with host businesses.

Under this arrangement, registered GTOs are responsible for selecting and recruiting apprentices and trainees, matching them to host businesses, meeting all employer obligations including paying wages and entitlements, and arranging formal training and assessment.

Importantly, apprentices and trainees may be rotated across host businesses when, for example, work has finished with one host, or new skills are needed by the apprentice or trainee.

Predominantly not-for-profit registered GTOs have been undertaking this skills development and job generating role for some 40 years, equipping an estimated one million apprentices and trainees with vital employment skills. There are approximately 130 registered GTOs nationally.

Registered GTOs occupy a pivotal role in many communities through their links with enterprises, training providers and schools, as well as in Indigenous and remote communities where they play a central role in careers and training.

Registered GTOs have played a significant part in promoting women in non-traditional trades and creating jobs and training for First Nations people through partnerships with local communities, employers and training providers.

Overview

The National Apprentice Employment Network (NAEN) is pleased to provide this submission to the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System.

NAEN believes the review is a most important step in addressing some fundamental shortcomings in the apprenticeship system and holds great potential to examine options that can place the apprenticeship system on a positive trajectory.

NAEN shares the concerns of others in the broader vocational education and training (VET) system that the current arrangements for attracting and retaining apprentices are not working at their best and need to be addressed.

NAEN, representing 130 group training organisations (GTOs) around Australia, brings considerable experience to this issue.

GTOs play a key role in attracting, promoting and seeing apprentices through to completion. They do this through their links and active engagement with employers, schools, registered training organisations (RTOs) and the communities in which they operate.

GTOs have been undertaking this role since their inception in Australia more than 40 years ago. More than a million apprentices and trainees have been engaged through group training over this time.

The experience and the achievements of group training are borne through their 'skin in the game' – every apprentice and trainee engaged is linked to a job and an employer. There is no 'training-for-training's sake'. GTO success is directly linked to the apprentice or trainee succeeding in the employment relationship.

NAEN has held the view for some time that the current approach to supporting apprentices through the Australian Apprenticeships Support Network (AASN) is not working as intended (bearing in mind that at the time of writing, a new group of providers is yet to commence their contracts).

While there are many highly professional and experienced individuals and organisations among the AASN, there is a weakness in the way that the support is structured and financed. This means that services are often uneven, and do not always reach those in most need at the time when they are required.

Accordingly, NAEN sets out a number of suggested approaches to improving the apprenticeship incentive system.

Improving apprentice completions

One of the chronic issues with the apprenticeship system is the inadequate rate of completions.

In the past, some of the organisations responsible for overseeing apprentice support have not had the experience to undertake this task adequately. Also, some of the incentives attached to the system have focussed on enrolments and failed to adequately address retention and completions.

However, there are a number of aspects to the issue of 'completions' that warrant closer attention.

A specialised role - apprentice and trainee support is a specialised role that is not readily able to be taken on by organisations that are not experienced and capable. The issue of completions should be seen in the context of the full range of services and supports that are needed to ensure a well-rounded and successful experience.

Selection and recruitment - the process of selection and recruitment is a critical first step in apprentice engagement and is a feature of the way group training operates. This entails ensuring that the prospective apprentice or trainee understands the industry and is assessed for suitability. It's also important that apprentices understand the life changes they will experience when transitioning from a (mostly) school environment to a work environment. Getting this right from the start is important and is a step that GTOs do regularly.

High quality mentoring - the provision of apprentice mentoring and support is a specialised task that needs to be undertaken by professionals that are skilled in this area. A frequent cause of non-completion is a breakdown in communication between the apprentice and the employer. One of the many benefits GTOs bring is that they are not seen by the apprentice as their direct employer. Apprentices typically feel comfortable reaching out and opening up with the GTO if issues arise. There is also the question of whether there should be a register of those qualified to undertake mentoring, with a minimum standard or qualification required.

A focus on employers, as well as apprentices – there is a focus in much of the discussion (understandably) on support for the apprentice, but little attention to the suitability of the employer. Employers – particularly first-time apprentice employers – need to be supported in how to successfully onboard and mentor their apprentices. There will be some employers that need additional assistance, and some that are not suited to employing an apprentice. Getting the right fit between the apprentice, employer and mentor/service provider will be critical. One of the differentiating features of GTOs is that they work closely with both the apprentice and the host employer.

Higher completion rates through group training

GTOs consistently achieve higher completion rates compared with direct employment and compared with small businesses, according to NCVER's 2019 report, ['Completion rates for group training organisations and direct employers: how do they compare?'](#)

The vital importance of mentoring

At the crux of much of the discussion about apprentice success is the issue of mentoring.

It is worth stressing that the outcomes from mentoring will only be as good as the providers that deliver the service. Only providers with an established record of achievement and with the required expertise should be involved.

It is a specialist role and needs to be undertaken by people who are trained and qualified.

Under current arrangements, there appears to be only limited initial assessment of apprentice suitability. This is a step that is routinely undertaken in group training.

Also, there is now added focus on the relationship between the supervisor and the apprentice. However, in some cases, the supervisor may not be ideal.

One of the key elements of the group training approach is the use of a dedicated staff of professional field officers whose job it is to work as intermediaries to support both the apprentice and the supervisor.

Field officers engaged by GTOs ensure that employers are aware of their responsibilities in regard to facilities on-site, physical safety, and health and wellbeing.

They are particularly aware that first time employers and those in many small businesses need additional support.

The focus of mentoring should specifically be in the first 12 months when apprentices are at most risk of attrition. This focus will help protect the significant investments made by employers, and state and federal governments during this initial recruitment, induction and training period.

NAEN's perspective on mentoring is outlined as follows:

- While the focus will be primarily on the apprentice, it is important that consideration be given to employers, as a key partner in the relationship.
- Small and medium-sized businesses should be a priority as they typically have less formalised structures and resources for apprentice recruitment, compared with larger businesses.
- The first 12 months are critical, since this is when apprentices are at most risk of dropping out.
- Those in regional and remote areas, including Indigenous apprentices face additional risks in completing and will benefit from mentoring services, as will those with a disability and school-based apprentices.

Targeting assistance for greatest impact – small business and the ‘first apprentice’

One of the greatest areas where support can be optimised is through addressing the needs of small businesses and, particularly, those employers taking on their first apprentice.

Small businesses typically face a number of challenges when they take on an apprentice or trainee for the first time, particularly if they directly employ the trainee or apprentice without the safety net and support of group training.

Many small businesses operate without HR expertise and can experience a substantial drain on their time and resources when managing and supporting apprentices and trainees.

Common challenges include selection of the right candidate, complicated engagement and sign-up processes, arranging appropriate formal training and taking care of all of the HR responsibilities, such as workplace health and safety and proper industrial arrangements.

The early experiences of apprentices, trainees and employers can heavily influence the success of a training and employment outcome. A negative experience often leads to hesitation in further engagements, which ends possible future employment opportunities.

Similarly, an apprentice or trainee with an unsatisfactory early experience may not complete and withdraw with a poor impression of the traineeship and apprenticeship pathway.

NAEN recommends the adoption of a small business ‘first apprentice’ program which would encourage and support small businesses to provide host employment for their first apprentice or trainee through a group training arrangement.

A GTO would legally employ the apprentice or trainee and provide recruitment services and pastoral care in the first year to encourage retention and completion of their full qualification.

In short, the first apprentice initiative would leverage the nationwide group training network to support small businesses to provide host employment for their first apprentice or trainee, thus providing the best chance of success for host businesses and their apprentice or trainee.

Supporting women in apprenticeships

GTOs tackle the barriers to women in VET careers through a range of programs.

GTOs have been able to address specific issues that will impact women entering VET careers, women starting in male-dominated industries, and women returning to the workforce or caring for children.

Solutions can address the provision of childcare services, flexible work hours, and the use of the nationwide GTO women’s network as a means for collaboration and resolution of key issues affecting women in the workplace.

NAEN's national network of group training organisations has successfully used a number of strategies to encourage more women into apprenticeships and traineeships, including:

- Pre-apprenticeships to promote VET choices to female students and their families.
- Industry worksite tours targeted to female school students interested in VET careers.
- Encouraging multiple women apprentices (not just a sole woman) in non-traditional trades.
- GTO field officers who work with host businesses to address on-site facilities and respectful attitudes to women.

Barriers to achieving these goals include:

- Often poor encouragement at the level of school careers advisers.
- Unacceptable behaviour by some smaller employers.
- Views of parents who often discourage women entering non-traditional trades.

NAEN believes that its female field officers and managers spread across the country could provide an enhanced network for discussion, collaboration and feedback on some of the critical issues facing women in VET-related careers and workplaces.

They would be able to offer specialist, real-world advice, accept referrals from women seeking support, and participate in webinars and face-to-face engagement with both women who might be seeking help, and employers who need advice and support.

A women's network of GTO field officers would also be able to bring informed and authoritative advice to employers and employees across key industries and all parts of Australia, including among First Nations communities.

An allocation of funding for the GTO network should facilitate a peer support program for all women placed into non-traditional trade apprenticeships to encourage retention and a positive community that encourages success and additional support. Such a program could be facilitated through NAEN.

SA GTO Boost scheme – an avenue for extending apprentice support

The GTO Boost scheme in South Australia, also known as [Charge-Out Rate Reduction](#), is a state government initiative that provides additional support for GTOs, apprentices and host employers with a focus on attraction, retention and completion.

The GTO Boost enables GTOs to offer a reduced charge-out rate of \$100 per week per apprentice or trainee for a period of 12 months, totalling \$5,200 per new Training Contract commencement.

The GTO Boost is available only for GTOs that are registered against the National Standards for Group Training Organisations in South Australia.

The program provides a significant benefit to GTOs since it funds the component of the GTO charge-out rate that accounts for the additional mentoring and support provided by GTOs, compared with direct employment.

Since GTOs pass on the charge-out rate reduction to host employers, the initiative effectively removes the price disadvantage that GTOs face in the market for delivering enhanced support.

South Australia has the highest rate of adoption of group training as a share of total apprenticeships and traineeships, and one of the highest apprentice/trainee completion rates.

Ensuring participation by high quality GTOs

As noted above in the case of the SA GTO Boost scheme, an important element in any extension of support through group training lies in ensuring only high-quality GTOs are engaged.

Group training has a long record of activity and achievement in the apprenticeship sector. It is perhaps not surprising that some organisations that only deliver apprenticeships as a minor part of their offerings, have sought, at times, to capitalise on the GTO reputation.

Firms that are predominantly labour hire providers have often sought to align themselves with group training and market themselves as GTOs. NAEN has sought to differentiate quality GTOs from such firms.

In the case of SA GTO Boost, only GTOs that are registered against the National Standards for Group Training Organisations in South Australia are eligible.

NAEN suggests that any extension of support through group training should apply the same standards at the national level. That would mean that only those GTOs registered the National Standards for Group Training Organisations should be eligible.

Registered GTOs operate under [National Standards](#) for GTOs. These standards promote national consistency and quality for group training. GTOs on the National Register are audited by state and territory training authorities.

Expanding opportunities for First Nations apprentices and trainees

The group training network is the largest employer of Indigenous apprentices and trainees. A key element in this record of achievement has been the partnerships built with Indigenous communities, local businesses, job agencies, schools and training providers.

GTOs place the highest priority on cultural safety, diversity and trauma-informed empowerment for Indigenous communities. GTOs frequently employ Indigenous staff and place a premium on

recruitment and pastoral care. Many GTOs engage Indigenous mentors and provide other wrap-around support services.

NAEN has a record of capacity building with Indigenous organisations. This is embodied in the 2002 'Partners in a Learning Culture' guide for employing Indigenous Australians, and the 2011 Indigenous Action Plan. In 2013 NAEN, then as GTA, collaborated to develop 'Everybody's Business; A Handbook for Indigenous Employment'.

Indigenous employment through apprenticeships should be expanded. It will require exposure and promotion through school careers advice and opportunities through pre-apprenticeships.

NAEN has a long history of brokering funding to registered GTOs to support the employment of Indigenous apprentices and trainees nationally. This federal funding is no longer available, and GTOs no longer have access to funds through NAEN's brokerage to support targeted recruitment and mentoring for Indigenous apprentices and trainees. Targeted funding should be re-introduced. The NAEN brokerage is a successful model to work on a collective strategy to engage many GTOs.

Cultural awareness plays a large part in attracting and recruiting young Indigenous people into employment. It requires industry experts and support staff with specialist skills and practical knowledge of local Indigenous communities and the labour market, including projects, skills gaps and areas where pre-employment or other programs can enhance employment.

Pre-apprenticeships with work placement are also valuable for people from CALD backgrounds as they provide a glimpse into the industry, expose participants to like-minded peers and give participants an idea of the career opportunities that are on offer.

NAEN has significant experience as an Australian Apprenticeships Access Program provider, which provided vulnerable job seekers who experienced barriers to entering skilled employment with nationally recognised pre-vocational training, support and assistance.

The Access Program was delivered across Australia to eligible job seekers by Access Program Brokers and Providers who worked closely with employers to deliver training that met local industry needs. The Program was provided at no cost to participants and assists them to gain and maintain an Australian Apprenticeship leading to skilled employment, particularly in priority occupation areas, and in response to labour market needs.

Other types of employment, further education or training were also possible outcomes for participants. This was a pre-apprenticeship program that engaged the national group training network through NAEN's brokerage. A similar program for today's skills needs would harness the entire group training network as active participants.

School-based apprenticeships and traineeships

Group Training already plays a key part in the secondary school system in promoting apprenticeships and assisting in pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programs to senior secondary students.

There has more recently been support for additional measures to support industry partnerships in schools to enable students to get exposure to different job possibilities and to be able to connect these ideas with their studies.

One of the challenges is that many schools and industry partners don't know where to start, while each state and territory has a different approach.

Group training's existing involvement with schools and local industry means it is in an ideal place to advance this initiative, by assisting with the coordination and resources to enable teachers and industry partners to work effectively, overcome barriers and present information and materials for maximum benefit.

GTOs have had great success in running school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, particularly in the regional health sector leading to real job with hospitals. Successful programs targeting Indigenous candidates have gained momentum over recent years.

With the unique engagement that GTOs have with their extensive local communities and industry sectors, with "boots on the ground" with their field officer network, GTOs should be funded to work more directly with schools to better facilitate industry engagement and pathways into apprenticeships or traineeships as a real alternative to university.

School based apprenticeships and traineeships should be a normal part of career options presented by all career's advisors, and GTOs should be funded to provide additional support to careers advisors, so that a seamless service makes this easier for schools and advisors. VET can be more complex for careers advisors, and GTOs should be better equipped to support them through resourcing by government.

Apprenticeship incentives for school based apprenticeships and traineeships should be safeguarded so that momentum in this area is maintained and increased.

Foundation skills

Foundational skills play an important part in apprentice selection and recruitment.

The experience of GTOs over a number of years is that many young people are poorly prepared for work and further learning.

Often the mathematical and problem-solving skills required for many trade apprenticeships is underestimated. Literacy is important in all roles and many candidates will need additional development in this area.

Some GTOs adopt rigorous testing of applicants for basic literacy, numeracy and aptitude in the knowledge that those deficient in these areas are likely to struggle and that, ultimately, these requirements are essential for completion.

GTOs could be funded to broker referrals to SEE (Skills for Education and Employment) providers so that there is a coordinated pathway for applicants into an apprenticeship or traineeship. Maintaining connections between referrals and employment would be key to this initiative.

There is often a belief that some students leave secondary school without the basic requirements for starting an apprenticeship. Some of this could be addressed by improved careers advice through years 7 – 12 where more information about VET requirements and standards could be offered.

Too often students considering VET choices are not offered the support, guidance or the detailed subject advice that is offered to those choosing university pathways.

We encourage promotion of trades careers as a first option, not as a “Plan B”. Improved matching of trade aspirations with subject selection in years 9 – 10 would also help.

Reports from some GTOs suggest that in some schools, students who pursue a VET pathway can be encouraged to drop ATAR-relevant subjects including English and mathematics, leaving them without the required level of education for most vocations. This needs to be addressed.

The way ahead

Reforming and improving Australia’s apprenticeship system is a vital task but it does not require a revolution, so to speak. The apprenticeship system has many great qualities, and it has been the mainstay of skills development for decades.

The group training network has been centrally engaged in the system for the past 40 years and seen many changes, good and not-so-good.

The view of NAEN is that Australia has a well-established national network of group training organisations that have a significant record of achievement. This network is able to do much more.

It has geographic spread across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia.

It has a dedicated resource of some 500 specialist field officers that deliver the mentoring and support that helps to give group training its superior rate of completions.

Many of the services already delivered by group training have sought to be replicated in recent iterations of the apprentice support arrangements. This duplication is unnecessary and adds to confusion in an already cluttered space.

GTOs are intermediaries that should be funded directly for the services that are to be purchased through the new AASS contracts, including pre-commencement assessments, engagement, and apprenticeships technical support services - for essential marketing, administrative, payment support, stakeholder support and engagement functions, and particularly for mentoring and

personal support services. There is a case of “too many cooks” when GTOs are designed to provide a seamless service to both apprentices and employers.

The existence of the group training network, its success and longevity make it an ideal vehicle to scale up its successful offerings, rather than developing new delivery mechanisms and bodies to oversee them.

As well, because of group training’s extensive footprint across the country and across industries, it is an ideal platform on which to run pilot or trial projects to gauge success.

NAEN believes that the group training network, with its established, trusted and proven record of achievement should be better utilised to deliver services along the lines that it has suggested.

NAEN also proposes that the national association work in partnership with government to meet new objectives for the group training network. This could better assist in meeting skills shortages, address workforce planning, and continue evolve group training services for our skills system. The uniqueness of the group training safety net can support new and innovative work-based learning into the future.

NAEN extends its appreciation to the Reviewers and the Secretariat for enabling the voice of group training to be heard in this important consultation.

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A showcase of group training achievement

NAEN is pleased to provide a number of case studies that showcase the outstanding record of group training organisations working with diverse communities in a range of industries around Australia.

Advancing women in the trades with BlueScope

NSW GTO, Zeal Futures, has provided the apprenticeship and traineeship program for BlueScope within the Illawarra Region for over 16 years, with BlueScope currently hosting over 110 apprentices and trainees at its Port Kembla Steelworks.

Completion rates for the program are currently sitting at 90%, with 33% of the current participants being women in non-traditional trades.

Zeal Futures has provided a holistic approach for the management of the BlueScope apprenticeship program by developing additional training schedules to not only manage and support the training requirements of the apprenticeship and traineeship, but the needs of the industrial environment and additional skills required to perform work which is supporting a culturally diverse workforce for the future.



From the initial Trade Readiness Introductory Skills Program, the apprentices attend Wollongong TAFE, receive extra training and induction programs, and are rotated through the BlueScope facility to ensure thorough exposure to the appropriate skills and experience.

BlueScope provides flexible, high-quality training and is recognised locally as a major contributor to the development of Illawarra training and talent. BlueScope encourages diversity in all its programs, so each workshop has representatives from different backgrounds, genders, and work disciplines. Zeal Futures also provides training in diversity, inclusion and cultural awareness via dedicated Indigenous and Diversity Mentors and through the support of the Workforce Solutions Specialists. Zeal Futures holds an exemption with the Anti-Discrimination Board which permits it to specifically advertise and recruit for Women in Non-Traditional Trade roles, and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander roles.

The team also follow up with support and guidance for their host employers to ensure they are culturally ready by providing guidance to the supervisors onsite.

Both BlueScope and Zeal Futures promote work health and safety through a number of tailored training initiatives including an induction and onboarding program, ongoing health & wellbeing activities, peer support programs, and WHS initiatives such as the ‘Safety – it’s a Lifesaver’ campaign.

Zeal Futures' WHS team and Workforce Solutions Specialists, support host employers through Safety Alerts, Tool Box Talks, safety training pertinent to the workplace, Quarterly Safety Focus activities. Due to the success of the partnership between Zeal Futures and BlueScope in the Illawarra region, the program has been expanded to BlueScope and Orrcon business units in Western Sydney and South-east Queensland.

Kate makes a life changing transition to construction through group training

After her 40th birthday and the birth of her first child, Kate began to wonder what the next step in her life would be.

With extensive experience in the Community Services sector, Kate decided it was time to make a change. Whilst on maternity leave, Kate noticed an advertisement for a 'Building Lady Tradies' course being run by Central Coast Group Training in NSW, in partnership with the RTO, Construction Trade Qualifications.

The course was being run across only a few days of the week, with the ability to be flexible with various catch-up opportunities that would allow Kate to continue family-related commitments.

One of Kate's biggest concerns was around entering a room with people she didn't know and making a start in an industry she had never been in.



However, after making a start, and just 'showing up', she met like-minded women and built strong connections with them which left her feeling empowered to complete the course. Kate said that she learned so much during this short time, but really enjoyed learning about the right tools to use for each stage of the construction process.

As part of the project, the group of women built play-equipment for a local family day-care centre, and Kate noted that this really gave the course purpose, knowing that children would get hours of fun out of what they had built.

"To know it's going into a community centre that the kids can get hours of joy and fun from, that was just even better".

Once the course was completed, Kate enrolled in a Certificate II in Building and Construction with Construction Trade Qualifications and decided she would pursue a full-time apprenticeship.

In January 2023, Kate officially commenced her full-time apprenticeship. She is currently employed by Central Coast Group Training and is hosted by Pluim Commercial Contractors.

Kate's journey shows the success and impact a successful, collaborative short course can have when it comes to a life-changing career decision and the impression it can leave on someone, in particular a woman considering a career in the trades.

High-quality job outcomes through School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeships (SBAT)



In collaboration with NSW Department of Education and Training, HunterNet Career Connections proudly prioritises empowering students with by actively championing the School Based Apprentice and Trainee (SBAT) Program and the Educational Pathways Program (EPP), cultivating a future-ready workforce.

Two standout success stories from these programs are Jaycob and Mariah, who have seamlessly transitioned into a full-time Apprenticeship and School Based Apprenticeship at HunterNet Career Connections Host Employer, R&R Murphy. Their journey underscores the effectiveness of the SBAT Program and EPP in identifying and nurturing talent among participants. Jaycob started his journey with SBAT participation and Mariah successfully completing the EPP.

HunterNet Career Connections has experienced a remarkable 550% increase in its SBAT employee base over the past year, indicating the success of its apprenticeship and traineeship programs. This growth reflects effective support structures, promotion efforts, positive experiences, and increased stakeholder investment. Overall, it highlights the commitment to nurturing talent and providing valuable career opportunities.

R&R Murphy Operations Manager Clay Skinner spoke with HCC about the success of both the SBAT and EPP programs which have provided R&R Murphy with new Apprentices.



“For employers like us at R&R Murphy, programs such as these help to prepare and build our future workforce for many years to come. Mariah and Jaycob will work at R&R to go on and achieve a Nationally recognised qualification whilst gaining on the job experience, all while being paid.” “In the current employment climate, the opportunity to find and develop excellent staff is a ray of light for many businesses.”



Cassie Stevens from NSW Department of Education and Training spoke with HunterNet Career Connections on the EPP Program which also offers a female only option “It’s a soft introduction where the participants are in a comfortable and supporting environment with likeminded females to start building knowledge of the industry.”



HunterNet Career Connections Workforce Development Manager Renee Harris has seen the programs deliver outcomes first hand. “We are proud to have supported these individuals, the program is showing tangible outcomes and provides real world experiences, we will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the future workforce by advocating for impactful programs that deliver outcomes for students.”

The success of Jaycob and Mariah serves as a testament to the programs fostering talent and creating meaningful career opportunities.

Amelia's apprenticeship journey keeps on evolving

Amelia Blowes' journey began with a spark of interest during her Year 10 work experience with a local painter. Unfortunately, despite the initial promise of an apprenticeship, circumstances changed, and the opportunity slipped away. However, Amelia didn't lose hope. She reached out Skillset after being referred by her careers advisor at Orange High School, where she was seeking



assistance in securing a new host employer to begin her apprenticeship journey.

Skillset connected with Amelia through its Connecting Women to Trades program which is aimed at supporting women of all ages with career guidance in pursuing trade careers. Skillset recognised her enthusiasm and determination to pursue a career in painting. The team commenced assistance immediately, leveraging its host employer network and

expertise to find her a suitable placement.

Skillset ensured Amelia was fully equipped to commence her apprenticeship by providing her with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and a Training Support Kit. Understanding the importance of starting off on the right foot, Skillset made sure that Amelia had everything she needed to get the best start in her new role.

Skillset's Recruitment and Group Training Teams identified Chris McLean Painting as the perfect host employer for Amelia's painting apprenticeship. It took into account her interests and aspirations, ensuring a strong match that would provide the support and mentorship she needed to excel in her chosen trade.

Now, as Amelia has recently commenced her apprenticeship journey with Chris McLean Painting, Skillset offers ongoing support and guidance – proud to be a part of her story and seeing her grow and succeed.

A game-changer for women in electrical apprenticeships

NECA Education & Careers' (NECA E&C) Women and Their Trade (WaTT) project has successfully addressed the decline in female apprenticeship numbers in the electrical industry. Through a partnership with Apprenticeships Victoria, NECA E&C identified funding opportunities specifically for women in the construction industry.



The project began in September 2021 and by May 2022, 26 women were employed as electrical apprentices and placed with partnering contractors.

The WaTT project aimed to break down barriers that hindered female participation in electrical apprenticeships. One of the major obstacles identified was the lack of exposure to trades as a viable career path

for women, resulting in most female apprentices entering the trade as mature-age apprentices.

Additionally, the rate of pay was a significant concern for adult apprentices. To address these issues, NECA E&C received funding for the wage gap between junior and adult wages for the WaTT apprentices, enabling women seeking a change in career or returning to work to enter the industry without being outpriced in the market.

Since the implementation of the WaTT project, the percentage of female apprentices at NECA E&C has increased from below 10% to 17%. The apprentices have gained valuable experience by working on various sites, both small and large, while progressing towards obtaining their A-Grade License.

One notable advantage of the WaTT program is the support network the apprentices have formed among themselves. They share the same schooling, embrace similar worksites, face common challenges, and provide mutual support. Emotional intelligence training, social gatherings, team-building activities, and events have fostered this sustainable support mechanism.

The WaTT apprentices have made significant contributions to the electrical industry in Metro Melbourne. Their success demonstrates the potential for women to shape the future of the industry and highlights the importance of initiatives that encourage and support female participation in traditionally male-dominated fields.

NECA E&C's WaTT project serves as a game-changer in increasing female representation in the electrical apprenticeship sector and creating a more inclusive and diverse industry landscape.

Defence Industry Pathways Program streamlines defence employee placements

Australia's defence industry demands skilled professionals capable of adapting to dynamic environments.

The Defence Industry Pathways Program is a collaboration between MEGT, Defence, and South Metropolitan TAFE (WA) that aims to meet this demand by providing trainees with hands-on experience through strategic placements.



Traditionally, coordinating multiple placements for trainees within defence contractors poses logistical challenges. With a duration of 3 x 12 weeks, organising these rotations efficiently becomes cumbersome. Direct engagement with defence contractors without an intermediary employer results in administrative complexities and increased operational overheads.

MEGT's role as a GTO streamlines the process by acting as a central point of contact between Defence, South Metropolitan TAFE, and defence contractors. By leveraging MEGT's extensive network and expertise in workforce development, the program efficiently places trainees in diverse environments, ensuring comprehensive skill development. Through strategic partnerships with defence contractors, MEGT facilitates seamless transitions between placements, optimising the trainees' learning experience. The benefits include:

- **Enhanced Efficiency:** MEGT's centralised coordination simplifies the placement process, minimising administrative burden for all stakeholders involved. This efficiency allows trainees to focus on skill acquisition rather than logistical arrangements.
- **Diversified Exposure:** Trainees benefit from exposure to multiple defence contractors, gaining insights into various facets of the industry. Rotating through different placements broadens their skill set and fosters adaptability, essential qualities in the defence sector.
- **Quality Supervision:** MEGT ensures each placement adheres to stringent quality standards by providing ongoing support and supervision. This proactive approach mitigates risks associated with inadequate supervision, ensuring trainees receive optimal guidance throughout their rotations.
- **Seamless Transitions:** With MEGT's facilitation, transitions between placements are seamless, minimising disruptions to the trainees' learning journey. This continuity fosters a conducive environment for skill development and promotes professional growth.
- **Cost-Effective Solution:** Engaging MEGT as a GTO offers a cost-effective alternative to direct engagement with defence contractors. By consolidating resources and streamlining processes, MEGT optimises operational efficiency, maximising the program's value proposition for all stakeholders.

The Defence Industry Pathways Program, facilitated by MEGT as a GTO, exemplifies the efficacy of collaborative partnerships in addressing industry-specific challenges. By harnessing MEGT's expertise, trainees gain invaluable experience while contributing to the defence sector's workforce development initiatives.

Expanding opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce

IAHA Group Training is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and operated GTO. It was initially developed in response to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees and apprentices in the Northern Territory, and now operates across three jurisdictions.

Since its establishment IAHA Group Training has partnered with IAHA's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Academy in the Australian Capital Territory, Greater Western Sydney, the Northern Rivers Region of New South Wales, and the Northern Territory, to provide employment services and holistic support for both trainees and host employers.



The National Academy program is an important placed-based strategy for growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, and future leaders, through a school-based traineeship model.



Bringing together culturally safe and responsive educational delivery, personalised support strategies, work readiness skill development, role modelling, mentoring, and meaningful work placement opportunities, the program is demonstrating a positive impact and showing the Success that can be achieved through working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

IAHA Group Training now employs 112 trainees nationally. The growth has been driven by high interest and a strong retention rate, with over 85% of the 2023 cohort either graduating or returning in 2024. Central to this has been the trainee experiences, with feedback from trainees including that:

92% reported feeling safe in their engagement with IAHA, 89% felt the learning environments responded to their learning needs, 86% agreed the program has increased skills to undertake further education and employment after finishing school.

IAHA Group Training work closely with trainees on aspirational thinking and lifelong learning, continuing to support trainees as they apply for university, enrol in further Vocational Education and Training and/or pursue career opportunities, including through our corporate and education partnerships and network of host employers across diverse sectors.

As a result, over 80% of graduates across all programs successfully transition into further education, tertiary studies and/or employment upon completion, and our trainees have been recognised for their excellence through training awards.

Dedicated group training field officers enable 75% completion rate in remote mining

MRAEL began working with Rio Tinto Weipa in 2017, after being successful in a competitive tender to provide Group Training Services. At commencement, MRAEL began supporting Rio Tinto's existing cohort of apprentices, which included priority cohorts, including Adult Apprentices, School-based Apprentices and Trainees and First Nations people.

In the six years that MRAEL has partnered with Rio Tinto Weipa, it has provided a combination of Apprentice Employment Program (traditional Group Training services) and Apprentice Management Program (managed services only, whilst Rio Tinto Weipa remains the legal employer).



The strategic combination of services is intended to address Rio Tinto's unique workplace needs. In total, MRAEL's collaboration with Rio Tinto Weipa has supported 201 apprentices and trainees, including an active cohort of 68 apprentices and trainees. **This has resulted in the achievement of a completion and retention rate of 75%.**

Due to the remote nature of Rio Tinto Weipa's operations, MRAEL's servicing strategy is based on core elements of:

- A dedicated Field Officer to provide mentoring, pastoral care and training management to apprentices and trainees;
- A Key Account Manager who facilitates centralised administrative and reporting functions aligned to service deliverables;
- A comprehensive support services structure to provide administration, payroll and work health and safety functions.

It is through this structure that MRAEL believes we have supported Rio Tinto Weipa to increase its apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates, a feat which is more valuable given the remote geographical location of the workplace.

In particular, the support approach employed by MRAEL's Field Officer contributes significant to the success of the joint apprenticeship and traineeship program. The Field Officer commutes between Cairns and Weipa, demonstrating commitment, adaptability, and community involvement. Covering a distance of 900kms, the regular journey underscores the transient nature of the Field Officer role, with Weipa being a base for intensive work periods. Weekdays are spent in donga accommodations, with operational hours stretching from early morning to late evenings, aligning with the demanding shift cycles of the Weipa mining operations. This schedule exceeds the typical Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 framework, reflecting the job's inherent flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of apprentices and the local communities.

Central to the GTO Field Officer role is the development of apprentice talent. In Weipa, morning often commence for our Field Officer with early meetings to mobilise apprentices for the day ahead,

ensuring they are equipped for the challenges of their respective work sites. He travels by ferry from 6 am to AMRUN Southern Operations to meet apprentices living and working in camp style accommodation.

In the community, collaboration with local schools underscores a commitment to empowering Year 10 students, equipping them with the skills and insights necessary for future vocational opportunities. This includes not only facilitating school-based traineeships but also supporting them with career counselling and advising them of local pathways available to continue their participation in Vocational Education and Training.

The Field Officer is an advocate for the quality of apprentices produced in remote communities like Weipa and is passionate about ensuring those apprentices are recognised for their outstanding skills and knowledge. To achieve this, he assists the Weipa apprentices with applications for various State and National apprentice and training awards. He is also integral to the organising and facilitation of the annual Western Cape awards, recognizing the outstanding apprentices from within the Weipa community.