

Submission to Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training`` Enquiry into School to Work Transition

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Specific Area of Concern.

Apprenticeship Completion rate

A significant number of apprentices abandon their trade training because of poor workplace culture resulting in the breakdown of the master-student relationship. We need to make the tradesmen better on the job instructors and better mentors.

Recommendation:

To train master tradesmen who are taking on apprentices in the fundamentals of managing and guiding youth in their charge and to help them be better trainers in order to assist in retaining apprentices throughout their apprenticeship.

Overview

The current House of Representatives enquiry relates to School to Work Transition, however, in relation to the [dismal apprenticeship completion rate](#) (56.1 percent) perhaps a substantial support would be to broaden the understanding of those trades-trainers responsible for “on the job” training by focusing their attention on the training and mentoring skills required to welcome young people to their trade. Transfer of trade skills has since medieval times relied on

1. economic need for (cheap) young workers in a business,
2. natural (rarely remarkable) training instincts of employers, and
3. traditional (passed on) notions of training methods.

It does not follow that a good tradesperson is automatically an effective trainer and mentor.

A recent social commentator suggested 3 reasons for the poor current and historic completion rates of apprenticeships in Australia.

1. Personal
2. Economic
- 3 Workplace culture.

The first two issues are both enduring and for comment by others. Workplace culture however can be addressed by relatively cost-effective training and support of Employers of Apprentices (EOA). While significant and only [partially effective support mechanisms](#) have been made available to apprentices themselves, little focus has been placed on assisting these Employers in the training and mentoring role of young people that they undertake who are embarking on a trade career.

In their first years on the job young people often experience self-doubt as a result of workplace bullying, the effect of new literacy demands, their own unsure motivation and uncertain ambition, offended vanity, even poor physical fitness. They also have to learn to deal with the inevitable adult social issues such as money management, drugs and alcohol

and relationships. Not the business of “tradies” but these could all become issues causing them to drop out. All too frequently, trades trainers are forced to rely on their own limited experience of years ago as apprentices themselves, dubious advice from colleagues or their own fraught, subjective experience as parents managing teenagers, to advise and guide their charges.

Recommendation

Support be provided in the form of mentor training to trades trainers in a series of financially supported sessions in

1. Mentor training
2. Managing youth at risk
3. Teaching and learning strategies

All three sessions would focus on providing additional resources and recommended experts, sharing experiences in active group learning through role-based training and access to personal resources for further personal professional development.

Budget parameters

The budget for the recommendation would be

1. Cost of programme development liaising interstate VET programmers and major industry bodies.
2. Cost of 6 days training for groups of 12 employers including venues teaching and resources in rollout.
3. Reimbursement of lost productivity for each participant Employer for the 6 days of training
4. Roll out of programmes, after successful pilots throughout Australia

After a pilot programme this outlay may be extremely cost effective in light of Industry demand for trade skills and the alarming cost of wasted training not to mention the personal development and perhaps mental health issues related to the “failed” apprentices themselves.

Background

In a brief letter to the Minister for Vocational Training following his appearance on the ABC *Insiders* programme, I submitted a brief letter with the above recommendations to him through his department. This was responded to positively with the suggestion that I provide a brief submission to your committee. As a qualified (retired) TAFE literacy teacher I have developed experience with training in a number of workplace fields most importantly in a Mentor training programme my colleagues at SBIT developed for the Queensland Ambulance Service. They were at this time in transition to employing University Graduates into a profession that had traditionally been certificate and on the job training with a heavy reliance on staged professional development to cater for the fast-changing emergency service-related technology. This then required long experienced officers to mentor young graduates into the practical side of the job involving driving, QA, scene management, safety, emergency trauma, as well as the more medical side of attending patients.

The mentor programme was and is an extremely effective way to teach negotiation and training skills to older workers managing people who lack experience with the day-to-day

role of the job. Overwhelmingly these older officers responded well to the programme and appreciated particularly the aspects of:

1. Clarifying roles and responsibilities in the mentoring relationship.
2. Negotiation and setting limits to the mentoring relationship
3. Giving directions and advice
4. The language of instruction
5. Seeking and responding to feedback
6. Mutual empathy and respect for each role in the relationship including confidentiality.

In relation to apprentices,

we could also add for youth:

7. The apprentice as an individual, (social, learning styles, peer influences, motivations, personal risk taking (i.e. drugs, alcohol, driving))

My experience has for the most part been as an ESL and a teacher of youth and young adults. I have also had considerable experience as a Leading Vocational teacher and Educational Leader (EAL) responsible for assisting TAFE Trade teachers in a number of settings most notably in Printing, Enrolled Nursing and Indigenous studies. I say this as a background to the following recommendations as the type of technique for inclusion in training sessions for EOAs. I am sure more qualified, up to date and expert programme developers than I exist in each of the state Voc. ED. programme development and innovation centres. Participation of Industry Bodies on a State and Federal Level would be paramount. (ITABS)

Example of Training Focus

1. Basic traditional teaching strategies (Old way new way) (Show not tell) KKK (Kiss Kick Kiss)
2. Socratic dialogue techniques. (And when this happens what...?)
3. Practicing reflection habits. (What went well this week and what didn't?...)
4. Explicit instruction. First you take...then)
5. Effective questioning techniques. (What other ways might...)
6. Goal setting and monitoring.
7. Supporting self-esteem and independent thinking through empowerment.
8. Developing Metacognition skills
9. Constructivism as a way of understanding learning.
- 10 Communication skills (Active listening, Body language, Open ended questioning)

Major references

1. Understanding the non-completion rate of apprentices Alice Bednarz NCVER
[https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/understanding-the-non-completion-of-apprentices#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20completers%20\(80,an%20apprentice%20stays%20or%20goes.](https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/understanding-the-non-completion-of-apprentices#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20completers%20(80,an%20apprentice%20stays%20or%20goes.)
2. What is the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network
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<https://medium.com/this-working-life/the-reason-50-of-apprentices-dont-finish-f8d9a3c48708>
10. Record number of apprentices begin training – but fewer are completing it
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11. Completion and attrition rates for apprentices and trainees 2021
<https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/publications/all-publications/completion-and-attrition-rates-for-apprentices-and-trainees-2021>
- 12 Apprenticeship Services and Support 2022
<https://www.australianchamber.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/22.12.2022-Apprenticeship-Services-and-Supports.pdf>

Following is a letter to and his department response from The Rt. Hon. Brendan O’Conner following his interview on the ABC Insiders Programme in September last year in relation to Apprenticeship training.

To: Hon Brendan O'Connor

Issue

The ongoing low apprenticeship completion rate is in some part due to the lack of mentoring skill in many well-meaning tradesmen who undertake the role of on-the-job instructors. This results in a lack of commitment and low job satisfaction among apprentices and in some cases workplace bullying and mental health issues. Although not the only issue in this nuanced phenomenon these are significant factors in the costly failure to complete training.

Recommendation

To upskill master tradesmen in communication techniques, principles of mentoring, education and training approaches to giving on the job instruction, correction and criticism and perhaps even some fundamentals of adolescent psychology by:

1. Preparation and development of appropriate training materials
2. Offering subsidised Professional development training sessions through Educational Leaders at TAFE to master tradesmen undertaking apprenticeship training.

Strategy

1. A “virtual” expert panel of VET staff be established to advise on the technical aspects and implementation of the training resources
2. Consultation to be held with State representatives to manage development and pilot models and costings.
3. A Pilot program with indicative training material to be jointly developed by participating VET Educational Staff from 2 States for a 6-month trial, assessment and evaluation period.
4. Participant feedback particularly in the form of indications of potential impact on completion rate with a view to determine ongoing viability.

Benefits

1. Completion rates would increase
2. The program need be relatively inexpensive and have media appeal.
3. There would be an accumulation of training skills over the years that should have long term benefit.
4. Relationships at the worksite should improve resulting in lower financial costs from disputes and absences.

Discussion

- ☐ It is never intended to turn tradesmen into teachers. While some have outstanding natural teaching talent and able to relate to apprentices with authority and empathy and inspire learning, this is often not the apprentice experience on the job.
- ☐ A collaborative approach where successes are shared, and problems discussed is envisioned.



Australian Government
Department of Employment
and Workplace Relations

Our Ref MC22-038773

Francis Doherty
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Dear Mr Doherty

Thank you for your correspondence of 8 September 2022 to the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Skills and Training. The Minister has asked me to respond on his behalf regarding your proposal for a pilot program to upskill supervisory tradespeople.

I appreciate your commitment to the apprenticeship sector and thank you for your proposal. Investing in the skills Australia needs is a key priority for the Commonwealth Government. Apprenticeships play a critical role in creating a pipeline of skills in the Australian workforce, helping businesses to meet their skills needs and realise economic opportunities.

The Australian Apprenticeship system includes shared responsibilities across the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. State and Territory Governments support Registered Training Organisations (including with respect to the quality of training delivery), apprentices, employers and the community on Vocational Education and Training issues in their respective jurisdictions. In Queensland, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) manages these functions. It would be worthwhile for you to share your proposal with DESBT, if you have not done so already. If you are aware of instances of poor instruction and workplace bullying, I also encourage you to report this to DESBT, on 13 74 68 or via email to info@desbt.qld.gov.au for further investigation.

The Commonwealth Government funds the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN), a contracted national network of service providers who support apprentices and their employers at all points of the apprenticeship cycle. This includes providing In-Training Support (ITS) to apprentices at risk of cancelling their apprenticeship. This personalised assistance may include workplace conflict resolution, career advice, mentoring or referrals to other support services. ITS also helps apprentices who leave their employer for any reason to recommence their training with another employer, ensuring they can continue towards a rewarding career pathway. You may like to reach out to an AASN in your area to find out more about the services and support they provide. You can find your local AASN here: <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/search-aasn>.

As an outcome of the recent Jobs and Skills Summit, the Government has committed to work with stakeholders to explore options to improve the apprenticeship support system. This research will be framed around a Discovery Paper that investigates the services currently being delivered, to better understand what services we should provide to improve the apprenticeship sector. I welcome your contribution to this process, which will be publicly available on the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations website, www.dewr.gov.au/skills-and-training, from mid-October 2022.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]
Belinda Campbell
Assistant Secretary
Apprenticeship Policy Branch
29 September 2022

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