



Australian Government  
Department of Education, Science and Training  
National Skills Shortages Strategy



AUSTRALIAN  
INDUSTRY  
GROUP

# A Guide to Managing the First 100 Days of an Apprenticeship

A PRACTICAL APPROACH ■ AUGUST 2007



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**Department of Education, Science & Training**

This project was funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) under the Strategic Intervention Program which supports the National Skills Shortages Strategy. It was managed by the Australian Industry Group and implemented by its Group Training Company, Australian Industry Group Training Services.



**The first 100 days are  
the most important  
to the welfare and  
development of the  
new apprentice**

Brian Kerwood, Chairman

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## Chairman's report



The Australian Industry Group engaged Australian Industry Group Training Services (AiGTS) through funding from the Department of Education, Science & Training (DEST) to research this significant project which examines and assesses the findings of the first 100 days of an Australian Apprenticeship.

In the current employment climate, many trades face difficulties in terms of skill shortages and in particular the ability to attract suitable apprenticeship applicants who are both keen to participate and whose interest in the industry will be sustained over the long term. This project underlines the importance of maintaining critical employment practices, to not only match the apprentice and company; but most importantly to mentor and retain that apprentice.

There is no doubt that many young people entering an apprenticeship are vulnerable to making an incorrect choice or entering a trade without an underpinning knowledge or understanding of job expectations, for a variety of reasons. These issues can be addressed through careful employment processes and support. This guide offers researched results relating to these matters.

This Best Practice Guide is the result of a detailed interview process with both companies and apprentices, many of whom were employed under a Group Training arrangement. However the report is equally useful to companies who employ directly themselves.

The project has been driven through the dedicated efforts of the Project Manager (Sharon Murphy) and an industry led steering committee whose invaluable assistance has provided both useful insight and guidance. Two robust industry roundtable discussions held in Melbourne and Sydney provided important external input to the process.

The Best Practice Guide does not profess to be definitive in its findings and recommendations, but offers simple, clear and concise direction for all employers on how to engage and retain apprentices, by addressing elements of employment that relate to the most crucial period of an apprenticeship. Indeed, the first 100 days are the most important to the welfare and development of a new apprentice.

As Chairman of the steering committee, I recommend this report as an essential tool to personnel involved in the recruitment of apprentices.

Finally I would like to thank and congratulate all the companies, their staff and apprentices for giving so generously of their time to support this project.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Kerwood". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line underneath.

**Brian Kerwood**  
Chairman

## GLOSSARY

<b>AAC:</b>	Australian Apprenticeship Centre
<b>Ai Group:</b>	Australian Industry Group
<b>AiGTS:</b>	Australian Industry Group Training Services
<b>DEST:</b>	Australian Government's Department of Education, Science & Training
<b>GTC:</b>	Group Training Company
<b>OHS:</b>	Occupational Health & Safety
<b>RTO:</b>	Registered Training Organisation
<b>SOP:</b>	Standard Operating Procedures
<b>GENERATION Y:</b>	People born between 1981-1997

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# Section One: The Project



## The Project

A persistent feature of the apprenticeship system in Australia is the high attrition rate: According to National Centre for Vocational Education Research around 30% of apprenticeships are terminated in the first six months and the majority of these are terminated in the first three months.

The so called ‘non-completion rate’ is a complex number, and it is often the preferred outcome for all parties that an apprenticeship is discontinued in its early stages, rather than some years into the apprenticeship. Most commonly, a basic mismatch occurs between the expectations of one or both of the employer and the apprentice. If an unsatisfactory arrangement is wound up sooner rather than later, it means the apprentice can move on to another employment or training position and will have wasted minimal time and resources pursuing an area that does not interest them, and the employer will have invested minimal time, money and effort in a person who is unable or unwilling to commit over the long term. This is one of the main purposes of the probationary period – for both parties to be in a position to make an informed decision at an early stage.

Nevertheless, it is in the best interests of employers and apprentices that both parties avoid a situation that calls for the apprenticeship to be terminated. For this reason, the Australian Industry Group was concerned to see such high attrition rates. The organisation raised this issue with the responsible Australian Government Department’s Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), seeking support to undertake an industry study that might reveal practical insights and shed light on what constitutes best practice in the first 100 days of an apprenticeship. In 2006 DEST funded the Australian Industry Group to undertake the project with a focus on apprenticeships in the traditional trades. It is hoped that by better understanding what lies behind the statistics, namely why young people leave their apprenticeships, practical measures can be taken by individual employers and by the training system to reduce non-completion rates.

The project tracked the progress of 70 apprentices who commenced their apprenticeships between October 2006 and February 2007. The apprentices were placed in a broad range of companies and the majority were employed by the Australian Industry Group’s group training arm, Australian Industry Group Training Services. These 70 young people and the companies in which they worked were in effect case studies for the project.

They were interviewed and observed over the course of the project and their experiences have been documented and drawn upon to develop this Best Practice Manual which will assist other employers of apprentices in the traditional trades.

Initially the project identified a need to further explore:

- the current reasons for early cancellations; and
- strategies which workplaces are adopting to prevent early cancellation.

Much of the available research carried out in the past, which looks at apprenticeships more broadly, did not seem to apply to the participants of this study. We were keen to build a detailed understanding of the incentives and disincentives for this particular group of apprentices and employers.

Throughout the project individual companies and industry, employment, training and education representatives demonstrated a willingness to share their experiences and strategies. Industry roundtable discussions were held in Melbourne and Sydney and these proved to be an excellent way of exploring the views of supervisors, employers, TAFE representatives, career advisers, and Apprenticeship Centre and other trade representatives in relation to the employment of first year apprentices.

All attendees welcomed the opportunity to hear what other companies are doing to address the high cancellation rate in the first 100 days of a new apprentice. Successful strategies adopted to increase apprenticeship retention rates were presented through case studies.

The roundtables confirmed that there is a real need to provide a better understanding of what the apprenticeship will involve in the first 100 days. Opportunities for improvement include:

- on-the-job training and coaching;
- effective supervision at tradesman level;
- marketing apprenticeships through schools;
- interviewing and selection processes;
- clarity on work to be performed in the first 100 days; and
- expectation of what out of hours study may be needed.

It was raised repeatedly at the roundtable discussions that Generation Y members have expectations that do not match those of the current workforce. It was also clear that members of the roundtable discussions were passionate in their commitment to find ways to improve the communication between the two groups so that the expectations of both parties are better aligned.



The project was overseen by a Steering Committee made up of employers, and included a TAFE representative involved in training apprentices in one of the industry areas covered by the study. Steering Committee membership details are listed on page 31.

### **Purpose of the Best Practice Guide**

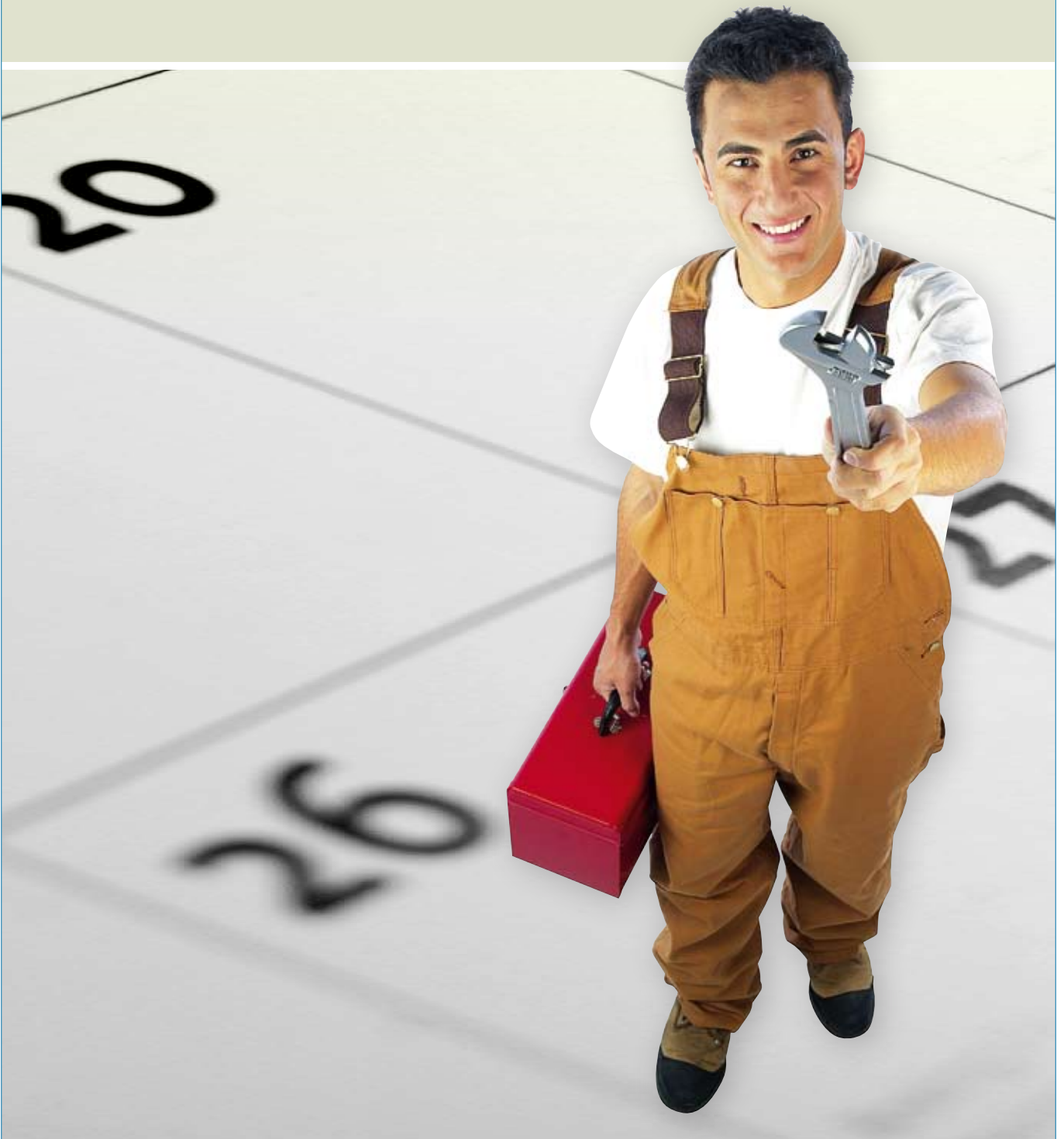
This Best Practice Guide has been developed for recruiting, inducting and retaining apprentices based on the findings of this study and supplemented with information drawn from other companies who have demonstrated success in this area. The guide focuses on the first 100 days of an apprenticeship and explores the motivators and inhibitors to a successful program. It includes practical strategies employers can use to improve outcomes for their business when employing apprentices.

In summary, the Best Practice Guide will:

- better prepare employers taking on a new apprentice;
- assist industry and the community in better preparing new apprentices for the world of work; and
- build on and extend existing resources to better prepare applicants.



## Section Two: Project Findings – First 100 Days of an Australian Apprenticeship



## Section Two: Project Findings

### Case Study Findings

The 30% non-completion rate is an enormous cost to companies and increasing the retention rate of apprentices would make a significant contribution to addressing skills shortages. This study identifies what new apprentices and their supervisors had to say about why apprenticeships are cancelled in the first 100 days.

### Project participants

Seventy new apprentices and a mixture of small (10%), medium (50%) and large companies (40%) were involved in the project.

The apprentices had commenced their employment between 9 October, 2006 and 28 February, 2007. Face to face interviews were carried out during March 2007 at the apprentices' workplace by a project team member.

The 70 new apprentices were all engaged full-time on a Certificate III or IV qualification in one of the following streams:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Fitter &amp; Machinist</li><li>● Fitter Mechanic</li><li>● Sheetmetal</li><li>● Boilermaker</li><li>● Fitter &amp; Turner</li><li>● Maintenance Fitter</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Auto Body Building</li><li>● Automotive</li><li>● Refrigeration</li><li>● Toolmaking</li><li>● Pattern Making</li></ul>
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All of the apprentices participating in the project were male. Approximately 60% were employed full-time at least for a short period before starting their apprenticeship and the remaining 40% were either early school leavers, existing students or unemployed. 80% of new apprentices were 21 years and under and half had completed Year 12 prior to joining the workforce.

### Finding an apprenticeship

While the majority of new apprentices had first heard about apprenticeships through their school, a family member or a friend, most found their jobs through the internet (50%), newspaper (20%) and TAFE (15%). The remaining 15% found their apprenticeships through other employers, Job Network members, Australian Apprenticeship Centres or trade shows.

65% found their apprenticeship in less than 6 weeks.

### Motivators

The most common motivators for the young people taking part in this study to take on an apprenticeship were:

- Family influence;
- University plans didn't work out; or
- Didn't want to go back to school.

Other motivators apprentices expressed for taking on an apprenticeship were:

- Positive career prospects within the field or industry;
- Certainty about future job opportunities through recognition that there is a skills shortage;
- Interest and appreciation of the work gained through completion of a pre-apprenticeship program;
- Desire to gain a qualification;
- Enjoyment of practical work; and
- Interest in the industry.

The main reasons cited by employers for taking on an apprentice were:

- Youthfulness regenerates the workforce;
- Apprenticeships address the trade and skills shortage;
- Apprenticeships address an ageing workplace;
- Apprenticeships create tradesmen for the future;
- Trades will disappear without training in the trades;
- It is worthwhile to invest in an apprenticeship;
- Enthusiasm for training young people; and
- Company policy.

### Transport

Majority of apprentices have their own car, 40% depend on other means of transport (lift from a fellow worker, family member or friend; public transport; bike or walking) to get to and from work.

## Discrimination, bullying and antiharassment

When asked whether the apprentice had received any basic training and information on discrimination, bullying and anti harassment, responses were:

- 95% had received training through an induction program run by the employer/host company (no discrimination, bullying or harassment was reported by study participants);
- 5% did not recall receiving any training during their induction from their employer.

## Expectations

Apprentices' expectations of a supervisor were patience, knowledge, demonstration, guidance, clear instructions, respect, fairness and good understanding in training.

Apprentices' expectations at the end of apprenticeship were:

- To obtain a qualification/trade;
- To obtain a permanent job;
- To be fully trained & understand the trade terminology.

Supervisors outlined what they thought apprentices should expect in the early stages of their apprenticeship:

- Get a feel of the trade;
- Learn the basics;
- Become familiar with the manufacturing environment;
- A reasonable level of responsibility; and
- To be given tasks which are checked and results discussed.

Supervisor expectations of apprentices in the early stages were as follows:

- Listen and learn;
- Be reliable;
- Follow basic instructions;
- Don't expect too much at once; and
- A positive attitude.

## Management practices

Supervisors of the apprentices (eg. tradesmen, leading hands, section heads, team leaders) had experience in the trade ranging from 7- 40 years, and 70% of the supervisors had more than 12 months supervisory experience.

Supervisors outlined the following steps taken to ensure their apprentices are focused and motivated:

- Ask them questions and encourage interaction;
- Make sure instructions are clear;
- Rotate jobs;
- Keep them involved so they understand and relate the job to the business.;
- Include them in staff meetings;
- Allow them to do useful things;
- Provide help and make sure apprentice is clear on tasks including safety criteria;
- Carefully select supervisors to match apprentice;
- Give them feedback and positive encouragement; and
- Give them individual projects.

Supervisors outlined the following general management practices:

- Toolbox talks (regular meetings with the whole team);
- Leading hands and designated tradesmen are trained to supervise apprentices;
- Job rotation so they learn new tasks and to work with other people;
- Encourage participation; and
- Discuss what and how to do specific tasks.

## Cancellations

11% of apprentices in this study had their apprenticeship contract cancelled in the first 100 days. All were under the age of 21 years and three were under 18 years. These cancellations were due to:

- A mismatch of expectations;
- Misconduct (excessive absenteeism without any notice and abuse of facilities); and
- Medical reasons (results of the pre-employment medical which showed the candidate to be medically unsuitable were not received before the apprenticeship was offered).

All cancellations were of apprenticeships in medium to large size companies.

The reasons why the apprenticeships in the study were cancelled in the first 100 days are described in the responses to the interview questions collated and presented below.

Approximately 30% of apprentices said they had doubts about their decision before they started their apprenticeship.

Most common doubts expressed:

- The whole interview process was confusing and very unclear. There were rounds of interviews with different people and the applicant didn't know what to expect or what the interviewer's expectations were;

- The applicant didn't know about the wages;
- The applicant didn't really understand the role; and
- The apprenticeship was a second choice option and there wasn't a strong commitment.

## Apprentice issues with the employment process

Around 60% of apprentices suggested the following issues may jeopardise their apprenticeship contract in the future:

Most common issues

- Finance, such as low pay in first year of apprenticeships;
- Travel (site location / transport).

Other issues

- Having to work overtime in the first 100 days;
- Family commitments/plans;
- Poor relationship with other employees;
- Concern with the quality of training delivery;
- Relationship with other staff;
- Concerns about entering the wrong apprenticeship; and
- Lack of personal motivation to complete apprenticeship.

Apprentices felt there was a lack of information given to them before they were expected to make the decision to accept the apprenticeship:

- Approximately 30% do not recall their wages before they accepted the offer;
- Approximately 20% were not given a site tour of the workplace; and
- Approximately 20% were not given a general job outline of the position.

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**30% of apprentices say their tasks and jobs are not related to their apprenticeship.**

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**45% of apprentices felt they could have had more contact with their employer.**

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## Supervisor issues with the employment process

As the decision to employ an apprentice often happens somewhere else within a business, supervisors and tradesmen are often outside the recruitment process and therefore unprepared for the arrival of an apprentice. In fact, many supervisors do not find out until the day or day before the apprentice arrives. This lack of preparation and participation in the recruitment

process can have serious implications for the success of the new apprenticeship.

Approximately 75% of supervisors who worked with the apprentices said they did not have any input or participate in the following:

- Determining the need for an apprentice;
- Preparing a job outline for the new apprentice;
- Conducting a site tour of the work area where the apprentice would be placed; and
- Selecting the apprentice.

Additional challenges experienced when supervising a new apprentice compared to supervising other tradesmen or other workers included:

- Proper monitoring of attendance at Trade School;
- Close monitoring of apprentice reliability and general attitude to the job;
- Language, literacy and numeracy issues which can be problematic if initial assessments are not made;
- Lack of communication skills which can have a negative impact on team effectiveness; and
- Monitoring initial overall job performance to prevent OHS risks that arise through failure to follow basic instructions.

## Occupational Health and Safety Issues

80% of new apprentices use machinery in addition to hand tools. Approximately 30% of them use machinery all the time.

Approximately 11% of new apprentices believe they were not adequately shown how to use machinery properly.

## Medical Testing

One of the apprentices in the study group commenced his apprenticeship before the results of his medical were finalised. The apprentice was found to be colour blind, a condition he was unaware of. Out of concern for the apprentice's safety in the workplace his apprenticeship was withdrawn.

## Misconduct

Another of the apprentices in the study group was terminated on the 21st day of his apprenticeship. Despite all of the initial screening, interviewing and testing, the young man did not have the temperament for the trade and demonstrated this through an abuse of the facilities and other inappropriate behaviour.



## How would you like to see the Apprenticeship System improved?

Apprentices and supervisors were asked to outline the changes they would like to see made to the apprenticeship system.

### Apprentice Responses

- Change the attitude of people so that apprentices are no longer used as cheap labour;
- Employers should use Group Training arrangements – they make the whole process run better for every-one;
- Provide TAFE courses that are more specific and job related (employers/hosts should be encouraged to have a better understanding of competency based training (CBT) and should consult with the registered training organisation (RTO) regarding the availability of units);
- Schools need to better illustrate the overall outcomes of trades and include Year 9 and 10 students;
- It should be mandatory for apprentices/applicants to do a pre-apprenticeship first, so the basics are understood and applied earlier;
- Companies should be better organised for an apprentice and provide a 4 year structure;
- Improve apprentice wages; “at \$240/week – no wonder there is a shortage”;
- Workplaces need more training and guidance when appointing apprentices;
- Introduce Technical Schools offering trade subjects.

### Supervisor Responses

- Change the school system and bring back trade subjects at school earlier;
- Industry needs to become more involved in the schools;
- Pay apprentices more money;
- Supervisors need to know ‘what to expect from an apprentice and how to supervise, train and coach them’;
- Supervisors encouraging other leaders to make regular visits and contact with apprentices in the workplace;
- More on-the-job quality training;
- More site tours / trial periods before apprentices start;
- Communication from TAFE needs to be enforced to ensure workplaces and employers are fully updated with the apprentice’s development and progress alongside the training plan;
- Set clear expectations of supervisors – we need guidance on what we should be doing with apprentices;
- Employ apprentices for the right reasons, not just because the workplace is busy.





## Section Three: Employing a new Australian Apprentice



## PREPARATION

### Does the business need an apprentice?

There are some common but problematic factors which influence employer decisions to take on an apprentice:

**“My business is overloaded at the moment and I need cheap labour to ease the pressure.”**

**“The business is running well enough to sustain existing employees only. But as the principal of the company I am constantly being asked to employ an apprentice by relatives, friends and current employees.”**

The decision to employ a new apprentice should not be taken lightly. A careful, detailed, methodical analysis must be undertaken that is based not just on current, short-term needs but also future, long-term expectations. Moreover, the decision must involve careful consideration of the degree of financial and human resources commitment associated with employing and retaining an apprentice.

### Can the business afford an apprentice?

While this sense of social responsibility drives many apprentice employment decisions it is important that the business is able to afford the three – four year commitment and is able to meet the training and other contractual agreements that accompany this decision.

Some key questions for employers to ask when considering taking on an apprentice are:

- Can the business meet the costs of employing an apprentice for up to four years?
- Is the business able to provide the level of supervision required?
- Is the business able to meet the training obligations associated with an apprenticeship?
- Does the business have the capacity to pay wages and on-costs in good and lean times?
- Are they able to provide a safe working environment for the apprentice?

There are many considerations – depending on the type of business and industry. Information on what it will cost to employ an apprentice is readily available from industry associations,

apprenticeship centres and through government agencies to help you make those decisions.

### Obligations

The Apprenticeship Contract is a legally binding agreement between the employer and the apprentice which outlines the obligations employers have to apprentices.

The apprenticeship is usually a mix of off-the-job and on-the-job training and work. Employers are responsible for ensuring that the apprentice has access to the full range of work required to develop the skills and knowledge they need to complete the apprenticeship.

To be successful the apprenticeship needs the full participation and commitment of apprentices. While these things cannot be forced, they can be encouraged and developed and the sections below provide some advice on how this can be achieved.

### Building a training culture

While today's apprentices bring 21st century education and views to the job, supervisors and tradesmen bring a great deal of knowledge and experience to the workplace. The only way for an apprentice to be successful in the long run is to be given advice and mentoring from their more experienced colleagues. This requires good listening and a positive attitude about the job, the business and people.

Building a solid understanding in the workplace of the merit of taking on apprentices is an important contributor to the success of an apprenticeship. This starts with establishing a training culture in the workplace by demonstrating a commitment to training, including the training of apprentices. Companies need to recognise that investing in the training of an apprentice has the potential to help the business to improve, grow and remain competitive.

### Consultation with the Registered Training Organisation

Workplace supervisors should be involved with the RTO in the selection of the apprentices' competencies and oversight the implementation of workplace training to match the apprentices' learning outcomes.

The commencement of an apprenticeship includes the devel-

opment of a training plan between the employer and the RTO. Ideally, the competencies that are selected should suit the enterprise as well as the long term skills needs of the apprentice within the broad context of the industry.

Apprentices gain skills in their trade both at work and at the RTO, which is why it is very important that the employer and RTO consult closely with each other regarding the progress and welfare of the apprentice. The employer and RTO should develop a training agreement that includes reporting on apprentice learning progress and other issues such as absenteeism and lateness.

### Employer expectations of an apprentice

One of the most common reasons why apprentices leave their apprenticeships early on is that they do not fully understand what is expected of them. Below is a summary of what employers told us they expected of their apprentices:

#### Vision

Eye for their future and hunger for growth.

#### Initiative

Take charge of their job roles, get on with the job and work independently.

#### Teamwork

It is important to get on with the team as well as the tasks. Being able to follow and take an order is an essential part of every apprenticeship.

#### Attitude

A positive perspective, an openness to learn and a willingness to change.

#### Leadership

Those who can work well with others and bring the best out in others will move quickly from being a worker to being a manager.

### Bridging the generation gap

There can be a mismatch of expectations between employers and supervisors on the one hand and the Generation Y (refer to glossary for definition of Generation Y) apprentice candidates being interviewed on the other. Employers sometimes perceive a lack of motivation or a negative attitude in young people and the young people view the three to four year apprenticeship on low

wages as an eternity when they are typically seeking short-term successes and rewards.

All workers, including apprentices in different age groups, see life differently. Today's employers went through a different apprenticeship to those in operation today. It is critical that today's apprentices understand the background of their superiors, leaders and other workers and that apprentice supervisors are equipped to bridge the Generation Y gap.

### Group Training

Group Training has proven to be a relatively easy way to take on apprentices. This arrangement eases the burden of paperwork for wages, allowances, workers' compensation and superannuation, which allows employers to invest more time in supervising and monitoring the performance and well-being of the new apprentice.

Group Training makes it as simple as possible for businesses and workplaces to take on apprentices and trainees:

- Apprentices and trainees are carefully selected;
- Paperwork and payroll is handled on the host's behalf;
- Continuous support is provided by a team of field officers for both the employer and the apprentice; and
- Apprentices are educated by the recruitment team to take safety issues seriously. All the necessary information, instruction and training to help them perform their work safely without risk to their health is provided.

### Engaging schools

There is a significant need for employers to engage schools and their students, and to foster an awareness in the community that there are excellent career opportunities available within the trades which will lead to ongoing employment at competitive remuneration levels.

In today's competitive market it's important for industry to get its message across and portray a positive image to careers teachers, parents and students about their excellent career prospects within their industry that are available.

## SCREENING

Choosing the wrong candidate is expensive for the organisation and disruptive and disappointing for the young person. There is a clear cost-benefit for the organisation in committing the time and resources to getting their recruitment and selection processes right.

Screening processes for new apprentices should include aptitude testing together with written application reviews, interviews and reference checking.

The following are some general guidelines for the recruitment and selection process:

- Establish a recruitment process that is fair, open and relevant to the apprentice;
- Determine the key competencies of the role to be filled by an apprentice;
- Use a proven, practical method of selecting the best candidate;
- Prepare interview questions to gain the best understanding of each candidate; and
- Demonstrate and practice interviewing techniques to finding the right apprentice.

## Aptitude testing

Aptitude tests are usually only one part of the overall assessment procedure. They are an important tool to be used to develop a shortlist of candidates and to understand the basic skills and orientations of those candidates.

Mechanical reasoning tests are the main aptitude tests used for apprentices in the traditional trades. The test assesses the candidate's understanding of the very basic principles of physics and mechanics, ability to visualise the movement of objects through space, and his/her understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships between mechanical components.

The test covers a wide range of content including wheels, gears, clamps, levers, sliding rods, shafts, pulleys, weights, conveyor belts, fixed and non-fixed pivots, and springs.

## Meeting expectations

It is important that skilled recruitment staff take the lead in interviews to ensure that their expectations of the successful candidate are clearly communicated and that the candidate's expectations are aligned with their own. For example, a candidate who is seeking a role involving high levels of creativity will not be happy for long in a position which is highly repetitive and predictable. Similarly, a young person who has always dreamed of being a pilot is unlikely to be satisfied in the longer term with an apprenticeship which has them working on aircraft maintenance – even though in the short term they may be attracted to the idea of working close to aircraft.

## Recruitment panel

A team interviewing approach produces more reliable results than relying on the findings of a single interviewer. Ideally there should be no more than three people on the interview panel. Exactly who should be on the panel will in some cases be determined by the size of the company. For smaller companies it is recommended that the most senior staff member chairs the panel and the immediate supervisor is also involved. There can be value in also including an appropriately qualified and experienced co-worker that interacts closely with the person in the position being filled.

There is no 'correct' number of interviews to hold. Some employers hold as many as three interviews:

- A screening interview to determine basic suitability. In many cases, this first interview is conducted over the telephone;
- A preliminary interview of a short-list of suitable candidates; and
- A final interview with the full selection panel, which should include the tradesperson who will be supervising the apprentice.

The recruitment panel need to ensure speedy communication with the applicants post interview. This will keep prospective apprentices up to date of where they stand in the interview process.

Companies may also benefit from involving a professional recruiter on the selection panel. Group training companies can be engaged to provide an independent, external perspective to the decision process.

## Preparing the applicant

The panel should recognise the time and effort each applicant puts into written submissions as well as the preparation involved in the initial screening process, and the preliminary and final interview.

Employers need to be mindful that most people applying for apprenticeships have limited experience in job interviews. For many applicants, it may be their first interview after leaving school and it is important that overall this is a positive experience for them – even if they are not successful in this instance.

A panel approach can be particularly daunting for young candidates who, if they are not alerted in advance, can become very agitated during the interview.

- It is common courtesy to provide the names and titles of who will be on the interview panel to each applicant at the time the interview is being arranged.

- In addition, candidates should be provided with details of when, where and, if necessary, how to get to the interview.
- Encourage the applicant to ask any questions they may have about the position, and provide some guidance on how to prepare. Young applicants in particular should be encouraged to find out about the employer or workplace, trade or industry.

### Traditional interviewing

Typically a traditional interview starts with the chair of the panel providing some background on the company and then some information about the particular position he/she wants to fill. Usually the first question to the interviewee will be a very general, open-ended question to help put the candidate at ease, such as ‘Tell us a bit about yourself’.

Other traditional interview questions include:

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Why are you interested in working for us?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What do you expect to be doing in three years?
- What did you like most/least about school?

Of course, the interview panel is looking for as close a match as possible between the candidate’s responses and the company’s specifications. The best way to ascertain this is through asking good questions, listening carefully to the responses and then asking follow-up questions to pick up on points which may be of interest but need further elaboration.

### Behavioural interviewing

Behavioural interviewing is based on the premise that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. This means finding out how candidates have behaved in similar situations to those they will face in the new job to ascertain how well they are likely to handle the job and the workplace. This technique is generally considered more effective than just relying on responses to traditional questions.

Companies that invest the time and energy in developing behavioural interviews often attract top candidates. This technique can be useful in screening applicants’ abilities in the following areas:

- decision making;
- problem solving;
- leadership;
- motivation;
- communication;
- interpersonal skills;
- planning and organisation.

For example, the following are some sample questions that can be used to assess interpersonal and ‘people’ skills:

- Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.
- Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?
- Have you ever had to ‘sell’ an idea to your classmates, colleagues, team or group? How did you do it? Did they ‘buy’ it?
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?

Behavioural interview questions such as those outlined above should also be adapted to the unique behavioural characteristics of traditional trade apprenticeship roles, such as being mechanically minded, methodical, and capable of paying close attention to detail. Try to develop questions which explore these aspects of applicants’ past behaviour.

### Outlining wages at the interview

Information on wages, how they will be paid and any other incentives should be provided to applicants in clear written form at the interview for them to take away with them. This is important because candidates will not necessarily remember the salary if it is simply mentioned in passing. It is important to encourage the applicant to give careful consideration to how they will live on a training wage for the period of the apprenticeship.

Many employers choose to pay above the stipulated minimum wage to ensure that they:

- attract the best candidates when recruiting;
- retain their apprentices for the full term of the apprenticeship;
- retain their apprentices’ services after the completion of the training period.

Employers should also explain at the interview any other benefits or requirements such as leave entitlements, allowances, superannuation, workers’ compensation and where internal company policies can be viewed. It is important that applicants understand that employers will treat them the same as all other workers.

### Interviewing minors (under 18 years of age)

Under Australian Law, any child or adolescent below the age of 18 is a minor. The approach with minors is the responsibility of the employer managing the appointment.

Parents/legal guardians do not have to give their consent for the

young person to be interviewed if the employer is confident the young person understands the application process. If there is any doubt in the employer's mind about the level of understanding, the employer would be well advised to obtain the consent of a parent/legal guardian. It is often helpful if an appropriate adult attends the interview.

## SELECTION

### Short-List Criteria

Criteria must be developed for the purpose of short-listing candidates, preferably in consultation with the other interview panel members. In developing the criteria it is important to remember that candidates will need to be able to demonstrate how they meet those criteria in a written application. As some attributes cannot be demonstrated in this format, it is best to explore them at another stage in the selection process, such as at interview. Appropriate shortlist criteria might include:

- Minimum educational requirements;
- Related work/volunteer experience;
- Technical skills;
- Written communication skills;
- Evidence of teamwork abilities; and
- Understanding of policies and procedures.

### Judgement

Whilst careful selection methods and criteria add significantly to the integrity and effectiveness of the selection process, in the end the employer's decision will always involve a degree of subjectivity. Indeed, selection is not a science and there is no absolute 'right' way of going about selecting a new staff member. You can only methodically work through all the steps and make your decision on the balance of the information you have gained.

With practice and experience it will become evident how consistently you are achieving a close match between your candidates' competencies and attitude and those required for the job. Remember that, if the Interview Panel does not feel they have a good fit, then the appointment should not be made.

### Pre-Employment medical testing

Pre-employment medical tests can be a useful component of the selection process for jobs that require certain physical or mental attributes. It is best to only test people who meet all the other requirements of the job. Employers should test everyone regardless of age, experience etc. It is important that all apprentices in traditional trades are tested. Age or experience is not a factor in determining who is tested.

It is vital that a pre-employment medical test relates exclusively and directly to the particular duties of the job and does not discriminate against people with disabilities. Employers could be liable for discrimination if they misuse pre-employment medical tests.

An employer could also be liable under privacy laws if they disclose results of a medical test to others, such as other employees.

Designing a pre-employment medical test requires a thorough analysis of what the job entails and a careful matching of tests to the required physical attributes. This task requires a high level of expertise.

## APPOINTMENT

### Off-The-Job Training

Before an RTO can register an apprenticeship, it must provide both the apprentice and the employer with induction information, which must cover:

- the rights and responsibilities of all parties to the Australian Apprenticeship; and
- the supervising RTO's grievance procedures.

The RTO must lodge the training contract and declaration that the induction information has been provided with an Australian Apprenticeships Centre (AAC). The AAC will forward the documents to the relevant state or territory training authority.

### Skill Enhancement Programs

Some employers place their apprentices in a core three months skills enhancement program covering hand and power tools, measuring & marking out, drawings and interpretation, first aid, electrical safety, general OHS and maintenance. This program is supplemented by a range of in-house training programs including: inductions, See Stop Control, Actions Employees Can Take, confined spaces, working at heights and fire fighting – all of which can be tailored in house to suit the size and nature of the business.

## Section 4: Retaining a new Australian Apprentice



## What makes an outstanding apprentice?

The employers involved in the project agreed on a number of attributes which can be used to describe an outstanding apprentice. Overall, outstanding apprentices were considered to be those who:

- Ask questions and grow their skills;
- Show interest and enthusiasm;
- Support their colleagues;
- Work on their technical and people skills;
- Are excellent listeners;
- Work towards discussing and resolving concerns;
- Take responsibility;
- View their apprenticeship as the start of their career more so than seeing it as 'just a job for now';
- Perform duties that may seem menial such as cleaning and maintenance of tools and equipment;
- Work safely at all times.

## Starting out on the right foot

Having defined the 'ideal' apprentice, employers participating in this project canvassed what they could do to support the development of a raw recruit into an outstanding apprentice. Discussions highlighted that the footing on which an apprentice starts their new job makes a significant difference to how things play out with their employer over the long-term.

An important first step is to recognise that your new apprentice may have little or no experience of a working environment. As such, it can be valuable to set aside time to help him/her settle into the business. For example, it can be most beneficial for employers to ensure new apprentices spend their first week becoming familiar with their own working environment and any other workplaces they will be in regular contact with.

New apprentices need to be properly introduced to the team, particularly those working closely with the new apprentice in the first few weeks. Expectations of the apprentice and other workers and tradesmen need to be outlined and understood. Supervisors need to provide daily checks in the first days and weeks to ensure the working relationships between the apprentice and the other workers are productive and positive.

Apprentices should spend their first days observing OH&S procedures and the tasks they will be expected to perform in the near future. Supervisors and qualified tradesmen responsible for demonstrating these tasks should explain where the work comes from and where it should lead. They should regularly ask and encourage questions to ensure the apprentice understands how their contributions will be measured and will benefit the

overall business. Understanding the role that their tasks play in the broader production process gives the apprentice a sense of clarity and purpose that will strengthen their commitment to the process.

Finally, employers need to discuss short-term expectations with the apprentice early on, preferably in the first week. This can be reassuring for the new employee, and help to correct any false impressions and misunderstandings. Usually a range of tasks would have been outlined for the first four weeks of the apprenticeship prior to the apprentice's commencement. Supervisors should monitor the completion of these tasks, not simply for reasons of process and due diligence but also to demonstrate that the employer is committed to the apprentice's successful induction into the organisation.

## Induction

All apprentices should be introduced to the organisation and their role through an induction program. Good induction pays for itself at all levels. It motivates workers, reduces staff turnover, addresses health and safety issues and prevents disputes. It builds reputation and goodwill between the employer and the employee. Everyone involved in recruiting and settling in a new apprentice should be aware of these principles.

Induction is the ideal opportunity to ensure the necessary workplace health and safety issues are fully explained and understood before the apprentice is assigned to their workstation. Apprentices should be alerted to the types of hazards likely to be found on worksites and the way risks from these hazards should be managed. Apprentices should also be shown how the impact of their actions on the environment can be minimised.

Through the induction process, the new apprentice should gain a solid understanding of the following:

- Legislation that applies to their everyday work;
- Layout, structure and purpose of the business they are working for;
- Line of authority and who to report to;
- Company Policies and Procedures (Duty of Care);
- Rules about Equal Employment Opportunity, Harassment and Bullying; and
- Workplace Safety (such as manual handling, chemical handling, protective clothing).

Apprentices have a large amount of information to absorb before actual work begins. An induction booklet or handout will assist them in retaining and using this information.

Apprentices should also be given the opportunity in the first weeks to tour the worksite and see what other tradesmen, managers

and office workers do to better understand the company and the industry.

### **Job outline & expectations**

Provide a clear outline of the apprentice's job that shows tasks, duties and responsibilities in the first three months. New apprentices must be constantly supervised and monitored in the first 100 days. They need to understand exactly what they are expected to do and how to work with constant supervision.

Employers and supervisors need to focus on the apprentice's ability to listen and learn. They must provide them with the appropriate guidance and support to know how to follow basic and clear instructions to avoid any disappointment. In many cases, this needs to be reinforced in the first week to ensure the apprentice is ready to be 'in learning' for the next four years.

### **Emergency procedures & First Aid**

Apprentices should be taken through emergency procedures and shown first aid stations. It is important that clear written information on procedures is provided.

### **Performance appraisals**

New apprentices need to have employers explain how the performance appraisal system works and the criteria by which the new employee will be assessed.

### **Trade awareness**

Trade, industry and OHS awareness is imperative for all apprentices to become effective tradesmen for the business and the industry.

Apprentices should have opportunities to accompany supervisors and tradesmen to some trade shows, OHS programs and presentations. This will engage and promote a learning culture within the business. It will provide apprentices with an opportunity to observe, listen and learn about how their apprenticeship and workplace relates to the industry more broadly.

### **Commitment**

#### **Encouragement**

To foster employee commitment to their role and to the business, employers and other staff members must provide continual encouragement to the new apprentice(s). The health of the relationship between apprentices, their employers, their supervisors and their co-workers is a good indicator of apprenticeship success.

While apprentices will have a lot to learn, this does not mean that they are not able to make a valuable contribution from the very beginning of their apprenticeship. Many companies cite taking on apprentices as the main way in which they update the skills of their company. This will only be possible if the employer is committed to giving the apprentice the opportunity to make a contribution, and if the apprentice feels that contribution will be valued.

#### **Integrity and honesty**

Integrity and honesty are fundamental to gaining the trust, respect and honesty of others. Do not inflate benefits, underestimate problems, or promise promotions that cannot be guaranteed.

#### **Constructive feedback**

The provision of feedback should be constructive and undertaken with care:

- A quiet, private setting should be used where there will be no interruptions;
- Describe the behaviour, activity or performance that requires feedback in a neutral and non-threatening way;
- Identify the situation and how it might have occurred;
- Describe the impact and the consequences of the behaviour or activity;
- Identify an alternative behaviour or activity and offer any support you can provide that may help enhance the employee's performance;
- Work with the apprentice to develop a plan for implementing the alternatives and the supports you have identified; and
- Invite the apprentice to give you feedback and describe how it felt to receive the feedback. Ask the apprentice how it felt for them to receive the feedback you gave.

#### **Effective Communication**

- Engage in two-way feedback;
- Be concise and courteous;
- Be patient - repeat your messages with different expressions and examples if necessary;
- Be empathetic;
- Consider timing when communicating;
- Be positive;
- Choose your setting or environment carefully before engaging in discussions with the apprentice about performance or other issues; and
- Listen/reinforce to avoid misunderstandings and mistakes.

## Occupational Health & Safety Training

The provision of traditional classroom style Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) training is still the norm, however apprentices who belong to Generation Y are looking for training that is more interactive, more varied and faster-paced. OHS Training should be viewed not only as a tool for productivity but also a tool for apprentice retention.

### Be responsible

For safety purposes, it is not appropriate for other apprentices or unqualified employees to be responsible for training and supervising apprentices. This applies most strongly to the use of dangerous machinery or work of a hazardous nature. Apart from the fact that few apprentices have the experience and life skills to teach, the danger is that in practice bad habits or deficient practices might inadvertently be passed on.

### Minimise risks

Every employer is obliged to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to identify all reasonably foreseeable hazards arising from work. If a hazard is identified, the employer must make an assessment to ensure adequate risk control is in place.

Implementing reasonable, practical operating controls will minimise risks. If such measures are not reasonably practicable or do not sufficiently minimise the risk, administrative controls such as safe operating procedures MUST be implemented.

### Control procedures

Safe operating procedures are a practical measure that provides a reminder to all operators of the risk of injury when using machinery. Combined with signs that are permanently placed in prominent locations, these controls should provide apprentices with sufficient information to use the machinery unsupervised. Before they use the machinery they have to demonstrate their skills and knowledge on more than one occasion to a qualified tradesperson.

### Employer support

Where apprentices are employed through a Group Training Company, officers of the Group Training Company will ask to see and evaluate the host employers' safe operating procedures and hazard identification/risk assessment documentation. Should the documentation be inadequate, it would be expected through agreement that a proper hazard identification or risk assessment be conducted.

It is the responsibility of employers to clearly define work that is inherently dangerous and NOT PERMISSABLE until appropriate training is completed and competency is evident.

## Supervision

Supervisors from senior management level through to frontline managers and qualified tradesmen must guide, support and assist apprentices to do the best job they can.

### Qualities of a good supervisor

Good leaders and supervisors need to have strong and positive interpersonal skills and must have undergone at least basic supervisory training. They must motivate, manage conflicts, resolve problems and emergencies and do their best to meet their own performances and ensure others contribute to meeting business goals. For safety purposes, it is NOT appropriate for apprentices or unqualified employees to be responsible for training and supervising apprentices. Supervisors may select qualified tradesmen (or a number of qualified tradesmen in a variety of sections for larger companies) for supervising apprentices.

### Constant supervision in the first 100 days

It is important that guidelines describing the meaning of different types of supervision (constant, progressive and broad supervision) are provided to ensure the direct supervisor, qualified tradesmen (working alongside the apprentice) and the apprentice fully understand the expectations and levels of supervision to be applied.

Providing the apprentice with constant and direct supervision during the first 100 days is imperative for legislative compliance, as well as being an essential part of the business' duty of care. Constant visual and audible contact will prevent unnecessary risks that may lead to injury. Continuous supervision is required when the new apprentice is performing tasks for the first time and until skills are demonstrated by the apprentice on more than one occasion to show full understanding and competency. This should be an expectation by the apprentice and the employer.

### Managing apprentices

If the apprentices to be supervised are located some distance from the supervisor there is the potential for the apprentice's supervision to be inadequate. It will be more challenging, potentially hazardous and even more important to:

- identify all the problems and issues to be addressed with apprentices as they arise;
- use the available time with workers effectively.

Every business needs a supervisory system that will guide supervisors appropriately in planning, delegating, controlling and the performance monitoring of their apprentices. The extent to which this is documented will vary between firms and will vary with firm size. It is the primary responsibility of the leading supervisor to keep track of all things that need to be done and how they are controlled and monitored in the sections. Employers need to be specific and selective about who is assigned to be 'in charge' of an apprentice.

### Effective communication

Regular supervisory sessions (for example, toolbox talks) with all apprentices should be carried out. This is regardless of whether they are working in the same location or in another site to which supervisors must travel to see them. Regular sessions must be held with all apprentices to enable the supervisor to get timely feedback on any technical and/or interpersonal issues of staff so that they can be dealt with as soon as they arise. Employers should be flexible and vary the time spent with apprentices as their needs require. To make sure supervisory sessions have the greatest impact, supervisors must think very carefully about what is to be done and plan how the time together is best used.

### Monitoring

The employer should check how things are going with the apprentice and their supervisor, or the tradesmen working most closely with the apprentice, on a regular basis. Once the apprentice commences off-the-job training, regular contact should be made with the RTO. It is important to also continually encourage the apprentice to come to supervisors and employers with any problems.

An important part of monitoring is the appropriate scheduling and recording of work and training commitments:

- Make sure the apprentice is free to attend off-the-job training;
- Take the apprentice's skill levels into account when planning work;
- Provide opportunities for the apprentice to practice new skills under proper supervision;
- Allow the apprentice to gain as broad a variety of experience as possible;
- Keep training records up-to-date.

When problems arise, be supportive and do not let the problems escalate, rather ensure the RTO and the worksite deals with them immediately.

### Motivating

Apprentices are motivated in different ways. While one person will feel rewarded by a pay rise, another will value praise and recognition above all else.

On and off-the-job training will be a strong motivating factor for apprentices. It helps them grow in the company and the trade and gain new skills. This will boost their performance at work and make them more valuable employees.

Other tips to motivating apprentices include:

- Recognising and encouraging responsibility;
- Increasing autonomy, discretion and personal accountability;
- Using rewards appropriately;
- Addressing poor performance of new apprentices positively and professionally; and
- Using discipline effectively.

### Job rotation

To ensure the new apprentice retains their energy and eagerness to learn about every aspect of the business, a rotation plan should be put in place even if the areas are not a core aspect of the trade. Any promises made in the interview about job rotation or gaining different experiences **MUST** be fulfilled.

### Mentoring

All new apprentices should receive immediate mentoring support to prepare them for what will be an unfamiliar workplace environment and to provide ongoing support for their professional development. Mentors should:

- Take a personal interest in the apprentice's development;
- Communicate well and develop a rapport;
- Provide feedback and progress reports;
- Be a good role model;
- Explain how to develop a good relationship with other workers;
- Give carefully thought-out instructions and take time to demonstrate correctly and explain;
- Allow time for the apprentice to practice new skills;
- Ask questions to confirm their understanding;
- Check progress and provide feedback;
- Seek feedback;
- Provide variety; and
- Give recognition.

## Probation

Probation is a period of time when an apprentice works and trains with their employer before each party decides whether to continue with the apprenticeship. Probation is usually the first three months of an apprenticeship and is the most important time for the apprentice and business to establish a suitable working relationship.

Before the end of probation, the employer and apprentice must both decide whether the contract should continue and, if so, to complete the training contract. Do not let the end of the probation period pass unnoticed. Take the time to formally provide feedback and to discuss the future to ensure that the apprentice is also interested in continuing the relationship, if this is the employer's desired outcome.

This is the time to set short and medium term goals and to frankly discuss any areas in which improvement is needed. Many companies also use this milestone as an opportunity to have a celebration to publicly mark the transition from probation to ongoing employment.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Steering Committee

The team for the project comprised:

**Brian Kerwood**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Sharon Murphy**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Michael Johnson**, Australian Government's  
Department of Education, Science & Training

**LeeAnne Fisher**, Australian Industry Group

**Ray Kerrison**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Peter Schreiner**, Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE)

**Jeff Owen**, JBO Engineering Pty Ltd

**Bill Quarrell**, Gear Cutting & Manufacturing (Aust) Pty Ltd

**Gordon Smale**, JC Smale & Sons (Aust) Pty Ltd

**Vince Westphal**, Mett Pty Ltd

The steering committee was appointed by Australian Industry Group Training Services as a consultative group to work in an advisory capacity on matters such as the scope of the project and methodology. Four steering committee meetings were held.



*Bottom left:* Brian Kerwood, Vince Westphal, Peter Schreiner

*Top Left:* Jeff Owen, Sharon Murphy, Gordon Smale

*Absent from photo:* Michael Johnson, LeeAnne Fisher, Ray Kerrison, Bill Quarrell

## Apprentices, Employers & Supervisors

The study involved the participation of 70 new apprentices as well as their employers, host companies, direct supervisors, managers, apprentice masters, leading hands, section leaders and other qualified tradesmen.

## Australian Industry Group Training Services (AiGTS)

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**Brian Kerwood**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Sharon Murphy**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Peter Schreiner**, Swinburne University of Technology (TAFE)

**David Muller**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**David Tate**, Australian Industry Group Training Services

**Gordon Brown**, Flowserve

**Brian Scholes**, Hawker de Havilland

**Fran Amos**, Ramset Fasteners

**David Wright**, Ramset Fasteners

**Cheryl Arnott**, MAS National

**David Wookey**, Toyota Motor Corporation

**John Horley**, Careers Education Association of Victoria  
(Gisborne Secondary College)

**Ivo D'Silva**, Hunter Douglas

**Jim Glen**, Bishop Manufacturing

**Matthew Eschler**, MAS National

**Christine Pracy**, TAFE – New South Wales

**Stephen Lovegrove**, K E Brown Electrical Switchboards

**Cheryl Kitto**, Australian Industry Group

## LINKS AND CONTACTS

### AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY GROUP TRAINING SERVICES

[www.Aigts.com.au](http://www.Aigts.com.au)

#### AiGTS PRIMARY CONTACT IS:

**Project Manager**  
**Sharon Murphy**  
**Mob: 0418 388 599**  
**Email: [smurphy@aigroup.asn.au](mailto:smurphy@aigroup.asn.au)**

#### MELBOURNE OFFICE

20 Queens Road  
Melbourne VIC 3004  
**Tel: 03 9867 0149**  
**Fax: 03 9867 0193**

#### SYDNEY OFFICE

51 Walker Street  
North Sydney NSW 2060  
**Tel: 02 9466 5454**  
**Fax: 02 9466 5452**

#### ALBURY OFFICE

560 David Street  
Albury NSW 2640  
**Tel: 02 6021 5722**  
**Fax: 02 6021 5117**

#### BALLARAT OFFICE

15 Dawson Street  
Ballarat VIC 3350  
**Tel: 03 5331 7688**  
**Fax: 03 5332 3858**

#### BENDIGO OFFICE

92 Wills Street  
Bendigo VIC 3550  
**Tel: 03 5444 5531**  
**Fax: 03 5444 5940**

#### BRISBANE OFFICE

202 Boundary Road  
Spring Hill QLD 4004  
**Tel: 07 3244 1775**  
**Fax: 07 3244 1799**

### MAS NATIONAL (AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP CENTRE)

#### REGIONAL VIC & NSW

560 David Street  
Albury NSW 2640  
**Tel: 02 6021 5722**  
**Fax: 02 6021 4117**

#### SYDNEY

51 Walker Street  
North Sydney NSW 2060  
**Tel: 02 9466 5458**  
**Fax: 02 9466 5452**

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**METROPOLITAN OFFICES**

**SYDNEY**

51 Walker Street,  
North Sydney  
NSW 2060  
PO Box 289  
North Sydney  
NSW 2059  
Tel: 02 9466 5566  
Fax: 02 9466 5599

**MELBOURNE**

20 Queens Road  
Melbourne VIC 3004  
PO Box 7622  
Melbourne VIC 8004  
Tel: 03 9867 0111  
Fax: 03 9867 0199

**BRISBANE**

202 Boundary Street  
Spring Hill QLD 4004  
PO Box 128  
Spring Hill QLD 4004  
Tel: 07 3244 1777  
Fax: 07 3244 1799

**CANBERRA**

44 Sydney Avenue  
Forrest ACT 2603  
PO Box 4986  
Kingston ACT 2604  
Tel: 02 6233 0700  
Fax: 02 6233 0799

**REGIONAL OFFICES**

**ALBURY/WODONGA**

560 David Street  
Albury NSW 2640  
PO Box 1183  
Albury NSW 2640  
Tel: 02 6021 5722  
Fax: 02 6021 5117

**BALLARAT**

15 Dawson Street Sth.  
Ballarat VIC 3350  
PO Box 640  
Ballarat VIC 3353  
Tel: 03 5331 7688  
Fax: 03 5332 3858

**BENDIGO**

92 Wills Street  
Bendigo VIC 3550  
Tel: 03 5443 4810  
Fax: 03 5443 9785

**GEELONG**

'La Cabine'  
1 Yarra Street  
Geelong VIC 3220  
PO Box 638  
Geelong VIC 3220  
Tel: 03 5222 3144  
Fax: 03 5221 2914

**NEWCASTLE**

16A Bolton Street  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
PO Box 811  
Newcastle NSW 2300  
Tel: 02 4929 7899  
Fax: 02 4929 3429

**WOLLONGONG**

Level 1,  
166 Keira Street  
Wollongong NSW 2500  
PO Box 891  
Wollongong East  
NSW 2520  
Tel: 02 4228 7266  
Fax: 02 4228 1898

**AFFILIATES**

**ADELAIDE**

Engineering Employers  
Association South  
Australia  
136 Greenhill Road  
Unley SA 5061  
Tel: 08 8300 0133  
Fax: 08 8300 0134

**PERTH**

Chamber of Commerce  
& Industry Western  
Australia  
180 Hay Street  
East Perth WA 6004  
PO Box 6209  
East Perth WA 6892  
Tel: 08 9365 7555  
Fax: 08 9365 7550

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