Training Apprentices on Queensland Government Building Projects

Queensland

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MASTER ELECTRICIANS AUSTRALIA

What are effective, non-procurement alternatives to the current Training Policy based on the ceasing of the Policy from July 2026?

Greater Employer Support

Small businesses play a crucial role in training new apprentices in the energy sector. According to PSO's latest data on average apprentices in training by employer size, businesses with fewer than 20 employees account for hiring 50% of apprentice training positions (as of 2024), while larger businesses with more than 200 employees take on just 24%.[1]

Despite their critical role in training apprentices, small businesses often face financial constraints that make taking on apprentices challenging. Training an apprentice has been estimated to cost over $250,000, including administrative overheads, unbillable hours, opportunity costs, and training fees. Targeted support is therefore essential to enable these businesses to continue developing the workforce and meet projected future demand.

While the Federal Government offers $5,000 to employers (half of the funding offered to the apprentices which is set to be reduced to $4,000 as of 1 January 2027[2] (a reduction which MEA does not support)) and the Queensland Government has initiated the *Apprenticeship Pilot Program* these figures cover an immaterial sum of costs for training the apprentices.

It is MEA's understanding there are more prospective electrical apprentices than training position available as employers are unable and/or unwilling to take on more apprentices in part due to the cost. In the electrical sector, incentives to encourage employers to take on more apprentices is needed.

MEA would like to see employers receiving at least $20,000 in support per apprentice (a combined figure from Federal and State Government). By reviewing and redirecting existing programs to add to support offered through the *Apprenticeship Pilot Program*,

[1] Powering Skills Organisation "2024 Apprentices in Training" [Accessed February 2026] < Data Dashboard - Powering Skills Organisation>
[2] "Changes to Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System from 1 January 2027" *Australian Government* < Changes to Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System from 1 January 2027 | Australian Apprenticeships>

employers could secure the resources needed to sustainably hire and train new apprentices.

By offering greater funding to support increased apprentice employment, both head contractors and subcontractors will be better positioned to participate in government construction projects with apprentices already engaged and/or with the capacity to take on additional apprentices as work commences.

What are practical approaches the building and construction industry could adopt to increase apprenticeship numbers, completion rates and workforce diversity?

Apprenticeship numbers

- Increasing training capacity –
    - Offer greater employer funding to afford taking on apprentices (see above)
    - Increase TAFE training capacity by increasing number of teachers and placements available.
    - Increase participation by underrepresented groups (see below)

Completion Rates

- *Secondary School -* Introduce a senior secondary ATAR subject (see below) with a focus on the practical mathematics skills relevant to apprenticeships. Industry feedback regularly highlights that apprentices frequently discontinue their training due to difficulties with mathematical assessments. Addressing this through a targeted secondary school subject would better equip apprentices for the mathematical requirements of their training and improve completion outcomes. We understand in electrical apprentices a major factor in non-completions is difficulty with the math subjects in year 1 and 2.

- *Pipeline Planning –* Plan construction projects in advance to support apprentices with continuity of work across projects. Apprentices often leave

smaller employers for higher wages offered by larger employers on fixed-term construction projects, only to face unemployment once the contract concludes.

Diversity

- *Women*
    - *Career Pathways -* Increased career pathway options into electrotechnology, such as the proposed ATAR subject (see below), to overcome information gaps and broaden understanding of viable career paths for women.

    - *Amenities –* Enforce mandated guaranteed access to clean and private toilet amenities provided by the site principal contractor; offer targeted employer education, ensuring proportionate implementation that supports participation without penalising good-faith employers.

    - *Incentive Grants -* Offer targeted financial incentives to employers to adapt business practices that actively support increased women in the construction workplace (measured through commencement and completion rates), alongside attraction and completion incentives for prospective female apprentices.

- *Mature Aged Apprentices*
    - *Incentive -* Offer targeted mature-age wage subsidies for small businesses to incentivise both employers and prospective mature apprentices. Such subsidies should be contingent on the creation of new apprenticeship positions to avoid market distortions and ensure funds are directed to increasing training capacity. By reducing the financial barriers for mature entrants and supporting small businesses in meeting their wage expectations, such a policy would unlock an experienced and motivated talent pool, increase apprenticeship commencements and

completions, and deliver faster returns on training investment, directly boosting industry productivity.

- *Rural and Remote Students*
    - *Training Access -* Apprentices living in rural and remote areas face significant barriers to accessing training facilities, resulting in high attendance costs that discourage many prospective apprentices. Greater uptake of digital and mobile training opportunities, supported by government, would assist (see below).

What are practical approaches that could support the employment of apprentices and trainees by contractors on government projects?

Below are some listed alternatives to procurement requirements (in addition to other suggested policy solutions recommended throughout this response) –

- Recognition programs for contractors demonstrating strong training outcomes
- Recognition of apprentice employment costs within contract pricing supported by funding support per 1st and 2nd year apprentice hired- particularly SMEs that carry significant training obligations.
- Where non-price criteria relates to engagement of apprentices on a project, this should specifically target new entrants to the industry (i.e. first year apprentices).
- Encouraging early engagement with training providers during project planning.
- Targeted incentives for employing priority cohorts (e.g. women, regional, mature aged).
- Tender score uplift for contractors committing to (and where possible proven) apprentice continuity post-project.
- Incentives tied to apprentice retention and completion (not just hiring).
- Further advance the existing Construction Skills Queensland (CSQ) programs to better support apprentice pipelines.

- Improve continuity of work opportunities for apprentices across government-funded projects to reduce periods of unemployment or apprenticeship cancellation between contracts.
- Consider mechanisms that support subcontractors directly, recognising that many apprentices are employed by subcontracting businesses rather than principal contractors.
- Formalised apprentice support mechanisms on major projects (mentoring, retention support, early intervention for at-risk apprentices).

Do you have any ideas regarding other measures that could be introduced to support apprenticeships and training outcomes in the building and construction sector?

ATAR Subject

The current senior secondary curriculum is heavily ATAR-focused. Many students are not willing or able to access certificate II courses or other positive exposure to a trades career.

MEA proposes a senior schooling subject be introduced (which could be a redesigned existing subject such as Engineering) as an ATAR-scaled subject that integrates practical content on electrotechnology, sustainable energy, and relevant engineering applications. The subject could be named something like 'sustainability technologies'.

This would broaden trade career awareness, improve engagement, particularly for female and undecided students, support progression into VET pathways, and provide employers with better-prepared apprentice candidates, strengthening the construction and energy workforce.

It would also have a critical element of including necessary mathematical skills to support students once they become advanced apprentices and commence assessments that involve more difficult mathematics.

Digital and Remote Training

Increase access to digital and remote training to alleviate resource capacity pressures at RTOs, and to support rural and remote training access while reducing cost burdened on employers for staff attendance.

Do you have any other feedback you would like to provide?

National Licensing

The Federal Government is currently reviewing interstate licensing both broadly for all industries and specifically for the electrical industry. MEA encourages the Queensland Government to continue participating in discussions with the intention to implement the final scheme. This will support more labour mobility becoming available for government construction projects.
