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# Designing and delivering pre-apprenticeships

**Multi-Industry Pre-Apprenticeship  
Support Pilot**  
*Australia*



# Multi-Industry Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot - *Australia*

## Case study summary

The Multi-Industry Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot (MIP)<sup>1</sup> aimed to support young people to make more informed choices about vocational career options by giving them the opportunity to work in four or five different sectors through a pre-apprenticeship. MIP was delivered by 170 different providers to 1258 young people in schools and 1328 unemployed young people aged 16-24 in Australia. Victorian Group Training were one of these providers and offered a school-based pre-apprenticeship to young people aged 15-17.

This case study specifically highlights best practice in how young people can be supported to develop transversal skills<sup>2</sup>. The multi-industry format meant that the young people were supported to develop and recognise these skills by seeing how they were transferable across different workplaces and sectors.

The design of this programme led to high numbers of young people starting apprenticeships because the work experience was tailored to the needs of local labour markets as well as young people's individual ambitions. This meant that young people were effectively prepared for available apprenticeship opportunities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://aen.org.au/media-releases/multi-industry-school-based-pre-apprenticeship-support-pilot-project/>

<sup>2</sup> Transversal skills are non-technical skills such as teamwork and communication, that are extremely valuable because they can be transferred to almost every industry, they are sometimes referred to as transferable skills or soft skills.



## Country context

Australia has had two decades of strong economic growth, however bushfires and the Coronavirus pandemic are now creating a more uncertain future, particularly for young people. Young people are more likely to work in part-time and casual sectors, are at higher risk of poverty and generally take longer to find secure work<sup>3</sup>. During the Coronavirus pandemic, youth unemployment has rapidly increased from around 5% to potentially as high as 25% once job protection schemes end<sup>4</sup>.

Apprenticeships are a core and long-standing part of Australia's vocational education system, while pre-apprenticeships are more recent and less developed. Apprenticeships are centrally organised through national and state government and implemented through the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network. They are split into apprenticeships which cover more traditional trades such as the construction industry and traineeships which covers sectors such as childcare and hospitality. Apprenticeships can last up to four years and traineeships are generally one or two years. For simplicity, in the remainder of this case study, apprenticeship is used to refer to both programmes, unless a difference between them needs to be highlighted. Apprenticeships are offered at a range of levels from Cert II to Advanced Diploma and lead to nationally recognised qualifications. They are open to anyone of working age who meets residency or citizenship

requirements, with employers setting their own entry qualifications. All apprentices are paid at least the minimum wage. The majority of apprentices are young; in 2019 67% were aged 24 or under<sup>5</sup>.

Employment prospects for people who complete apprenticeships are generally very good. However, apprenticeship, and in particular traineeship numbers have dropped in the last decade. Following the Coronavirus pandemic, apprenticeship and traineeship starts have decreased even further and are expected to keep falling, with traineeships experiencing the most significant drops.

Pre-apprenticeships have been common in some traditional trades since the 1990's, however, they have only recently been introduced for a wider range of sectors. They are organised at state rather than national level but typically include literacy, numeracy, work preparation and potentially certification which will count towards apprenticeship study. This means there is no national funding or systematic integration into vocational education or the labour market. It is also difficult to get a national picture of the number of pre-apprenticeships and their progression outcomes. Pre-apprenticeships can be paid but there is no requirement for providers to do this.

Young Australians can also take part in school-based apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships where they split their time between school and

work. These programmes replace part of the school curriculum so young people studying either a Certificate of Education (CE) or a Certificate of Applied Learning (CAL)<sup>6</sup> can replace the vocational element of their study with an apprenticeship. Each week this would typically involve two days of school curriculum, one day vocational training and one day in the workplace.

In Australia, around 40% of apprentices do not complete their qualification and almost 30% drop out within the first 12 months. The main reasons for apprenticeship non-completion include problems with employment, not liking the industry and deciding to do something different<sup>7</sup>. This can be attributed in part to the lack of information and guidance about vocational pathways young people experience during mainstream education. This lack of informed choice has the potential to impact more widely on supply and demand in the labour market, as well as young people's individual futures.

*"Then the systems have been distorted because the school leaves it to the kids to say okay, what do you want to be, you don't want to go to university, what do you want to do when you leave and the kids get sucked into, I'll be a sport and fitness coach. So, there's 5,000 kids in a region who go and do that qualification and one may get a job if they're lucky." - Executive Director (Apprenticeship Employment Network)*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.socialventures.com.au/assets/Future-Fair-report-web.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> This was the opinion of one interviewee

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncver.edu.au/research-and-statistics/data/all-data/apprentices-and-trainees-2019-december-quarter-data-slicer>

<sup>6</sup> These are the two Australian school leaving certificates taken in year 12 at eighteen. CAL is a more vocational qualification, while CE focuses on academic subjects

<sup>7</sup> Alice Bednarz (2014) Understanding the non-completion of apprentices NCVET Occasional paper

# The Multi-Industry Pre-Apprenticeship Support Pilot (MIP)

The MIP was designed to address the connected problems of high apprenticeship drop out and young people not being empowered to make informed choices because of a lack of information about vocational pathways. It ran from 2016-2019 in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. It was delivered by the Apprenticeship Employment Network (AEN) and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education. AEN is an industry body representing non-profit training organisations across Victoria. Its purpose is to provide leadership to members in the areas of advocacy, negotiation and policy setting at both the State and National level.

*"I think we talked about young people not having the ability to make an informed choice at the right time. So, that was really where the conversation started, and it was about well, how do we improve completion rates, how do we get more people connected to employers at an earlier point in time while they're still in secondary school or they're unemployed. So, we have two programmes running in parallel. So that was, sort of, the justification for the programme and the government were really good. They basically said, you know, we know one size isn't going to fit all, we don't want to put too many constraints around how programmes could be developed and run, we'll leave that up to you, we trust you enough to go and do that." - Executive Director AEN*

AEN worked with 170 Group Training Organisations (GTOs) to deliver the programme to 1258 young people in schools and 1328 unemployed young people aged 16-24. GTOs are a unique feature of the Australian vocational landscape, delivering around 15% of apprenticeships. Their purpose is to provide stable employment opportunities, supply apprentices for employers and ensure supply and demand of skills in the local labour market. They also have a remit to support potentially excluded groups. They act as the young person's legal employer, placing them in employment, organising mandated training and finding new placements if needed. This gives the young person security if their placement falls through due to either a poor fit with the employer or changing circumstances meaning their labour is no longer required. GTO's knowledge of local labour markets meant they were ideally placed to deliver the programme.

*"So, we only used group training organisations who in Australia, they're, like, apprenticeship intermediaries, they should know what the employment labour market needs are at a local level and they should have employers that are willing to give work experience, real life chances and they're either training companies themselves or they could partner with a government funded training partner." - Executive Director AEN*

The programme was funded at \$6.8 million Australian dollars. GTOs were paid based on completion and outcome with \$760 paid per participant for completion of the work experience and training and \$1200 for progression to an apprenticeship for young people on the school based programme and \$1800 and \$2000 respectively for the work based programme. GTOs could use these funds to support any part of the

programme. They could also draw down other state funding if the young people they supported moved onto successful outcomes. Successful outcomes for this programme were for the young person to be in an apprenticeship or employment six months after the programme finished.

GTOs were given a high level of flexibility to deliver a programme that met the needs of their local area and catered for either young people in school or unemployed young people. However, there were some minimum programme requirements. The programmes had to last for at least 12 weeks and were commonly delivered for between 6-12 months, either full or part-time. Providers were given flexibility to determine the length, intensity and content of individual programmes, using the following criteria:

- How long should the work experience be and how many rotations should it have?
- How long can participants concentrate for, how will they be engaged?
- How do you provide the opportunities for multi-industry training within the time frame?
- How do you keep the interest levels up for the whole programme?
- What other commitments do your participants have?

Each programme was required to explore three or four different trade/industry areas from the following sectors: Engineering and Automotive Industries, Business and Services, Building and

Construction, Land, Food and Fibre, and Health and Community Service. The programmes all had to include hands on experience, knowledge sharing and collaboration between a range of stakeholders. In particular they had to enable young people to make an informed decision about entering a vocational career pathway and provide them with support to successfully gain and complete an apprenticeship. This included different activities beyond work experience with the purpose of getting young people to think about long term career choices.

*"So, if the students couldn't get work experience all the time and they were still stuck in school or in a training room, some of the activities were, well go and research what the auto industry is doing, where's the technology going, what is that industry going to look like in the next ten years. Some of those projects had that as a mandatory part of the assessment, where kids had to come back and present. So, they had to ask the employers questions about the industry and, you know, they'll delve into a bit of their own personal enquiry about where they want to go with their career."*

**Executive Director AEN**

Each provider targeted their provision at young people who needed support to progress to employment, in their local area. Across the project as a whole, 6% had a disability, 4% spoke English as an additional language, 8% came from indigenous backgrounds and 35% were long term unemployed.

The programme built on existing practice such as pre-apprenticeship and taster programmes that GTOs were already delivering and was planned over a number of years. This meant that AEN were confident they had developed a robust model.

The pilot has now finished and applications have been made for further funding. Some GTOs are also continuing to deliver pre-apprenticeship programmes that follow the MIP model at their own cost as it means they can effectively progress young people onto their apprenticeships.

## School based pre-apprenticeship at VGTC

One of the programmes delivered as part of the MIP pilot was a school based programme delivered in Geelong Victoria by the Victorian Group Training Company (VGTC)<sup>9</sup>.

VGTC are a GTO, set up in 2004. They are a small organisation with around 10 employees, including trainees in their staff (one of these trainees is a former pre-apprentice). They develop and deliver school-based apprenticeships, traineeships and pre-apprenticeships across a wide range of sectors alongside other programmes. At the time of interview VGTC's delivery was still adapting to the demands of a post Covid world, introducing online learning and work experience simulation. Following a return to workplaces and the re-opening of schools across many parts of Australia, the state of Victoria was in the process of re-introducing social distancing and moving back to remote learning.

The programme was delivered in partnership with one small secondary school, Western Heights College in Geelong. Young people completed their school curriculum alongside the pre-apprenticeship as part of their Vocational Educational Training (VET).

VGTC delivered the programme to two cohorts as part of the pilot and continue to work with the school to support young people to progress to school-based apprenticeships.

Geelong is a small city outside Melbourne with a range of employment opportunities. VGTC were keen to develop a programme that reflected the local labour market. This meant it focussed specifically on horticulture, hospitality and construction as well as sectors with a national demand such as child and elder care.

*"The program was designed to be very flexible, which enabled us to tailor the delivery to suit our region's industry needs. There are numerous employment opportunities across our region that fall under the banners of horticulture, hospitality and construction. The reason we chose these industries was to give the program participants a diverse range of experiences that they could tailor to their interests and provide them with transferable job ready skills that could be used to gain employment within the region. These industries will generate employment opportunities well into the future and place these participants in good stead to gain employment and utilise their learnings taken from the program." - VGTC Managing Director*

The target group for VGTC's pilot was young people who were disaffected with school. The programme was promoted by VGTC going into the school to explain the programme. Everyone who was interested in taking part was given a place.

<sup>9</sup> VGTC: Apprenticeships Geelong | Traineeships Colac | Jobs

## Model of delivery

The programme included students aged 14-16 across two school years. Each programme ran for 26 weeks. Young people completed their VCAL (Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning) or VCE (Victorian Certificate of Education) in year 11 or their standard school curriculum in year 10 alongside work experience and employability training delivered by VGTC. This involved sessions delivered in school one day a week, blocks of work experience, and the rest of the time following the school curriculum.

The training delivered by the GTO focused on employability, workplace behaviour and health and safety. It also involved industry visits, guest speakers and structured discussions to help young people make good career choices. In this way young people were supported to understand different types of work in terms of pay and conditions, career qualifications, progression opportunities, industry expectations, skills and aptitudes and emerging career options.

The school delivered the remainder of the curriculum including English, maths and digital skills. The focus of this curriculum was also practical and so merged well with the pre-apprenticeship activities.

*"Pretty much all the English and maths were based on real-life situations. We'd do a project in Maths like painting a house, you've got to find out how much paint you'll need, real-life based problems. The English side of things would be presenting to the class, things like that. Everything ties in well with each other."*

**Former pre-apprentice**

However, the practical element of the pre-apprenticeship training was particularly valued by young people, in terms of having the chance to work while still at school.

*"I enjoyed the working side of things, getting more life skills out of it than just sitting reading a book. It's a different way of learning, and I found that way better than just sitting in a classroom, getting that real-life work experience out of school."*

**Former pre-apprentice**

Generally, across the pilot, the employability skills offered by the GTOs were seen as more effective than the training that schools could deliver because they were delivered in an applied rather than theoretical context. Across the programme as a whole 82% of the participants enjoyed the practical workshops and the work placement the most. Many participants across the pilot programmes had previous negative experiences of education and preferred applied learning which had direct relevance to their work experience.

VGTC was given freedom by the school to develop the training that young people needed. They were primarily interested in building reliability and confidence: these were seen as the most important skills that young people could then transfer from workplace to workplace.

*"You're not expected to be the best childcare worker, admin person, builder or plumber. If you rock up on time every time you're expected to, they'll teach you the job, and that's all we promote. That's why Christine's been successful. Hugely reliable, always here, always on time, that's all we advocate. We promote those stories back to the kids..The basic behaviour is all we expect, all we teach. All our narrative right through is those sorts of behaviours."*

**VGTC Managing Director**

The focus was then on providing young people with multiple work experiences so they could make an informed choice about next steps for employment or an apprenticeship. This also supported both the participant and employer to ensure a good match in a safe environment. Each person had a tailored programme of different work experiences that matched their interests and ambitions but also the local labour market. This was negotiated with each young person through meaningful open dialogue.

Each young person typically completed three or four work experiences over 26 weeks. Work experience started when a participant had completed essential health and safety training. Some of this work experience had a community focus depending on the partners involved. For example, one year-group were supported to create a community garden in the school. Students grew plants for the garden as well as constructing fencing, gates and a pizza oven. The training delivered by VGTC linked to what young people were doing in the workplace.



*"I've run a couple of individual school-based models, horticulture and hospitality, where the workplace really ties in what they've learnt the day before in the theory. If you've got a workplace that is willing, if they're learning about propagation, they will propagate in the workplace. Learning about pruning, they will prune, that week. It's really hand-in-glove, if you can get the training and the workplace right."*

**VGTC Managing Director**

All young people were assigned a mentor at VGTC. Their role was to support and encourage the young person, building their confidence and dealing with any work-related issues. They continued to mentor the young person as they progressed onto a full school-based apprenticeship.

This personal support was integral to the young person's future outcomes. They typically progressed to other programmes with VGTC and so kept the same mentor who then supported them through the next stages of their career. This support was crucial to Christine, a young person who had completed the programme. After completing the pre-apprenticeship, she progressed to a school-based traineeship in childcare. However, she then changed direction and was successful in gaining a traineeship at VGTC because she had consistent support from her mentor.

Finding good quality work experience that young people could access was challenging but VGTC had strong connections in the local area. VGTC focused on work exposure rather than work experience. They felt that any experience needed to be sustained so that the young person could build trust and have a high quality work experience rather than be used for routine tasks.

*"It has to be work exposure now, because you want to become an electrician, what really are you going to do for one week? You're not going to wire a house. What you're going to do is look, learn and listen, and you're going to get real good exposure. You change that narrative a little bit, you talk to the employer and say, 'Can you give this student some exposure?' What we mean by exposure is can you tell him what you're doing, explain to him the process. I think they get more [from that than], 'Sit over there and paint the fence, wash the pickup truck.' I think it's just tweaking the narrative a little bit, educating employers, as well."*

**VGTC Managing Director**

## Outcomes for young people

The pilot as a whole collected extensive data on young people's progression and outcomes. Each provider assessed their learners' knowledge of vocational pathways at the start and end of the project as well as their assessment of the value of the programme. They also surveyed host employers about their experience of hosting young people and their assessments of the individuals they hosted. The collated data for the programme as a whole found that 56% of the young people who participated had a change of career interest. After completing the programme 91% would consider an apprenticeship compared to 48% at the start of the programme.

Participants' career pathway outcomes at the six-month point post their MIP completion were also monitored. They found that 37% of young people had progressed to an apprenticeship or traineeship. Outcomes were higher for the young

people in the employment group because they were ready to work immediately. However, it has been challenging for AEN to monitor young people as they continue to progress their careers due to issues with data collection at national level. The need for robust data around pre-apprenticeships in Australia remains a challenge.

GTOs were better placed to track the outcomes for their own learners. The outcomes for the Geelong group in particular were very positive, both in terms of learner evaluations and in terms of the outcomes achieved. During the two year delivery of the pilot programme all of the young people progressed to a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship.

*"We've done it 4 years now. I think it works pretty well, we're getting the outcomes so I wouldn't change too much. 100% of the year 10 group rated the 3 elements of Work Placement, Sharing Industry Experience and Career sessions 5 out of 5...The takeaway from this is, prior to VGTC coming to the school, 35 kids had no idea what they were going to do post Year 12, we had half of them doing VCE, half VCAL. We came in with a model and spoke about this is what we can do, who's interested? They jumped onboard, 35 of them gained a traineeship out of it." - VGTC Managing Director*



The young people also felt well prepared for a traineeship or apprenticeship due to the range of work experience they had enjoyed and the emphasis on transferable workplace skills and behaviours.

*"...I think very prepared. I did have that experience from before in other workplaces, the childcare sector with kindergartens and things like that so I sort of knew what I was going into." -*

**Former pre-apprentice**

The programme was also highly successful in keeping disaffected young people engaged in education by providing them with work experience that was relevant to their interests.

*"We had a cohort of about a dozen who were going to leave school in Year 12, this programme re-engaged them in school, and they completed Year 12 and now are working full-time. If you ask the school, they always talk about that." -* **VGTC Managing Director**



## Partnerships and employer engagement

Mutual trust and long term partnerships underpinned the success of the programmes delivered as part of the pilot. AEN had trusted relationships with GTOs, this meant they could give them the freedom to develop programmes that met the needs of their local area. It also meant the GTOs were happy to enter into a funding model where they were paid on delivery of outcomes.

Equally GTOs had good relationships with employers that meant they could develop high quality work experience by responding to local need. This addressed one of the perceived challenges to delivering pre-apprenticeships.

*"A reason why people don't do a lot of pre-apprenticeships and working experience is they say that the employers don't want them, but we didn't actually find that.. No employer said no, so the employers were using the programme as a recruitment tool." **Executive Director AEN***

A high quality work experience with engaged employers was seen as the most significant factor in achieving a successful outcome. This programme shows how this can be done by a data driven approach that responds to local need.

VGTC also had a strong partnership with the school who helped to shape the programme. They had worked together on previous work experience projects, from which the MIP was a natural progression.

The relationship between the school, the GTO and employers was therefore central to the success of the programme in Geelong. This meant that young people could get the work experience they needed.

*"We're pretty well established, we've got 350 apprentices and trainees spread right across the region, all sectors, so we've got some contacts in there. The school lean on us, so this school in particular leans on me and our contacts to allow work experience, and then we lean on the school. It's always hard and getting harder, but we've built OHS [Occupational Health and Safety] models, we call it IBSafe, that they do before they do work experience at the school. We're going above and beyond to protect the workplace, to allow them to come onto the site."*

**VGTC Managing Director**



## Effective practice

- One of the most distinctive features of this model is the multi-industry experience tailored to local labour markets and young people's individual ambitions. This was data driven for each provider rather than imposed at state or national level.
- Having multiple work placements, combined with mentoring, ensured that young people were effectively supported to make informed and realistic choices about their future. The statistics that 56% of young people changed their minds about their career paths and 91% would consider an apprenticeship are significant indications of the pilot's success in supporting young people to become more informed.
- The multi-industry format also meant that young people were aware of transversal skills and wider employability skills and behaviours from a young age as they were able to see how these transferred across different workplaces.
- From a provider perspective, the multi-industry format also allows the programme to run in rural areas where there are not sufficient young people for a single theme pre-apprenticeship.
- VGTC had exceptionally high progression outcomes. This was primarily due to their success in progressing young people to their own programmes, providing a continuity of support. They were able to do this because they effectively prepared young people for existing opportunities.

