

MTAA's response to Department of Employment  
and Workplace Relations:

# **Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper.**

January 2023



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## 1. Australian Automotive Industry in context

The Motor Trades Association of Australia (MTAA) is the peak Australian retail automotive association and represents the interests of its State and Territory Motor Trade Associations and Automotive Chambers of Commerce.

MTAA Members represent more than 95 per cent of the automotive supply chain consisting of many of the 72,521 automotive businesses across Australia<sup>1</sup> who employ over 384,810 Australians and contributed over \$39.35 billion or 2.1 per cent to Australia's GDP in 2020<sup>2</sup>.

MTAA member constituents include automotive retail, service, maintenance, repair, dismantling and recycling businesses who provide essential services to a growing Australian fleet of vehicles (19.8 million as of January 2020)<sup>3</sup>. This fleet has rapidly advancing technological systems, power sources and capabilities, including extensive use of electric powered propulsion, computers, sensors, radars and cameras that provide complex vehicle system interdependencies to make vehicles safer, more efficient, and environmentally sustainable.

## 2. Background

This response to the November 2022 Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper published by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is submitted by the Motor Trades Association of Australia (MTAA) and its member associations. The MTAA represents the Motor Traders' Association of New South Wales, the Victorian and Tasmanian Automobile Chamber of Commerce, the Motor Trades Association of the ACT, the Motor Trade Association of South Australia and Northern Territory, the Motor Trade Association of Western Australia, and the Motor Trades Association of Queensland.

MTAA and its member associations represent the interests of businesses and employers in the retail, repair, and service sectors of Australia's automotive industry. The industry employs around 400,000 people across 13 industry sectors and 52 trades. It makes up around 2.1 per cent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product.

In addition to representing automotive businesses across Australia, member associations provide services that directly contribute to the skills development and employment of the industry. Several of the associations provide training through their Registered Training Organisations. A number also directly employ apprentices and trainees through the Group Training Organisations they operate.

With a large and broad range of trades, the industry has a vital interest in ensuring Australia's apprenticeship system is positioned to meet the challenges outlined in the discussion paper. As the discussion paper notes, automotive electricians/mechanics had the third highest trade occupation commencements in the year to March 2022.

For the automotive industry, the challenges of enhancing the apprenticeship system need to be seen against the backdrop of a fundamental reshaping of its skills base that will occur as the shift away from internal combustion engines gathers pace over the next few years.

The MTAA and its member associations, therefore, welcome the opportunity to provide advice on ensuring Australian apprenticeships are able to better assist in meeting the industry's current and future skill needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Bletsos, MTAA Directions in Australia's Automotive Industry- An Industry Report (2021) 8[2].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 17 [2]-[3].

## 2.1 Key points and recommendations

**Recommendation 1** - There needs to be a clearer 'line of sight' to the career opportunities through apprenticeships that can only come by active engagement by relevant agencies and industry. The focus of AASN and employers needs to be on what is required to support apprentices to complete their trade and obtain long term employment, not the sign-up and related processes.

**Recommendation 2** - There is a need for more opportunities for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to deliver training in the workplace, utilising workplace delivery and assessment strategies.

**Recommendation 3** - Funding should be made available to develop high-quality marketing and information material that can be readily accessed by key 'influencers'.

**Recommendation 4** - A consistent and sustained broad media strategy that promotes trades training, and importantly, the career that can provide long-lasting financial and other benefits is required.

**Recommendation 5** - The AASN role should be enhanced to ensure they have the marketing and other resources and capability to actively engage and promote apprenticeships to students, jobseekers and other significant stakeholders including parents.

**Recommendation 6** - There needs to be a more structured, consistent and enduring approach to exposing potential apprentices, in schools and elsewhere, to 'real' industry businesses and employers. This will give potential applicants a better understanding of their trade interest and invest more employers in supporting and employing apprentices.

**Recommendation 7** - It is recommended that program funding to support greater engagement by employers with potential apprentices, in schools and elsewhere, should be provided.

**Recommendation 8** - A comprehensive review of school-based apprenticeships and traineeship should be undertaken with a view to identifying and addressing barriers to their expansion across states and territories, including school, industry and funding support.

**Recommendation 9** - While pre-apprenticeships have been a long-standing feature of the trade training system their availability needs to be 'mainstreamed', rather than the ad-hoc arrangements that can characterise funding and availability.

**Recommendation 10** - Industry should be resourced in a consistent and ongoing basis to provide mentoring support to first year trade apprentices in priority industries.

**Recommendation 11** - There needs to be a dedicated strategy that outlines to targeted businesses and industries the benefits of engaging, retaining, and importantly, developing their latter year apprentices.

**Recommendation 12** - Any review of apprenticeship incentives needs to consider options to provide direct increased support to first year trade apprentices in priority occupations.

**Recommendation 13** - There needs to be attractive, consistent and high-quality materials developed that target women, Indigenous, migrants, persons with a disability and other underrepresented groups in trade apprenticeships.

**Recommendation 14** - To maximise the benefit from improving the attraction of the industry to diverse cohorts, there needs to be a complementary strategy to engage with employers to help address workplace culture issues and misperceptions about a more diverse working environment.

**Recommendation 15** - A targeted, boost to commencement incentives for the employment of diverse cohorts in the trades should be considered.

**Recommendation 16** - Incentivising equity and inclusion training for employers and key staff would provide one avenue to bring about a more diverse workforce.

**Recommendation 17** - There needs to be strategies that link employers to groups that represent diverse cohorts and address some of the misperceptions and other barriers that may exist and put them in direct contact with potential applicants.

**Recommendation 18** - Resources and other support that assist businesses to make necessary workplace adjustments to accommodate a more diverse workforce should be enhanced.

**Recommendation 19** - For trade apprentices in priority industries and trades there needs to be specialist, industry recognised case managers or mentors that assist each apprentice and their employer to navigate the apprenticeship pathway and address barriers that arise.

**Recommendation 20** - There needs to be greater emphasis in future AASN contracts on funding them for progression and completion for trade apprenticeships.

### 3. What changes are needed to drive up the completion rate

The discussion paper notes there has been a steady decline in apprenticeship completion rates in recent years. It needs to be recognised, of course, that this decline runs in tandem with a tightening labour market that is now experiencing five-decade low levels of unemployment and widespread labour and skill shortages. Given the policy and other lingering impacts of COVID-19 on the labour market, a further deterioration in completion rates in the period since March 2022 cited in the discussion paper would not surprise.

While the impacts of COVID-19 may reduce over time as policies around migration, for example, are relaxed, changing workforce demographics and expected continuing low levels of unemployment mean attracting and retaining apprentices in the automotive industry will remain a challenge.

More than ever, there is a real need for all elements of the apprenticeship system to be calibrated towards both attracting apprentices and their completion. Employers, training providers, AASNs and apprentices must be wholeheartedly committed to ensure not only completion but also a job and valuable career.

There needs to be a greater focus on the real job and career at the end of the apprenticeship to reduce the risk of non-completion.

#### ***Greater flexibility by RTOs***

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more flexible ways of working, especially as employers struggle with labour and skills shortages. The training of a trade apprentice through block release models is proving a real challenge for many employers, particularly in regional settings.

There is a need to introduce more opportunities for quality Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to deliver structured training in the workplace, utilising workplace delivery and assessment strategies. Apprentices would still be required to be released from productive work. In addition to genuine on-the-job models, industry standard blended training models can provide learners the opportunity to demonstrate competency in course units in the workplace, supplemented by institutional specific instructions. On-the-job trainers build quality relationships with apprentices and their employers, becoming mentors and trainers and enabling monitoring of compliance requirements and competency. On-the-job approaches enable the clustering of units to train and demonstrate competency as the task arises in the workshop rather than progressing in a linear model.

**Recommendation 1** - There needs to be a clearer 'line of sight' to the career opportunities that can only come by active engagement by relevant agencies and industry. The focus of AASN and employers needs to be on what is required to support apprentices to complete their trade and obtain long term employment, not the sign-up and related processes.

**Recommendation 2** - There is a need for more opportunities for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to deliver training in the workplace, utilising workplace delivery and assessment strategies.

#### ***Improving advice to jobseekers and students***

In an environment of significant labour shortages and seemingly endless opportunities for students and jobseekers, attracting informed, motivated persons into the trades must receive greater attention. Fast changing technology in the automotive industry and the growth in electric vehicles makes this imperative even more significant.

While there have been significant reforms to apprenticeship processing and support over recent years, there needs to be greater efforts on providing consistent, accurate, high-quality and attractive advice to school-leavers, career changers and other jobseekers.

While there are a number of government internet-based sites available they tend to be 'sterile' and generally do not present the opportunities and benefits that can flow from a trade career. The high-quality multi-media marketing often presented by higher education institutions provides a striking comparison.

The NCVER [reports](#) that family and friends (30.8%) and teachers at school and training providers (23.7%) are the key source of initial advice about doing an apprenticeship or traineeship. Given the strong and pervasive focus on ATARs and university acceptance rates as measures of school 'success', and a lack of appropriate trades information and advice, it is not hard to understand why advice to undertake a tertiary education pathway is provided.

Jobseekers and apprentices need information to better understand why completion is so important, from the outset, to establish a mental resolve to finish what they have started. The apprentices' perspective must be at the heart of changes. There needs to be a very real, tangible end goal to starting an apprenticeship; in short, a direct line of sight to a real job and career.

There is a need for funding to develop high-quality marketing and information material that can be readily accessed by these key influencers. This needs to be supported by a consistent and sustained broader media strategy that promotes trades training, and importantly, the career that can provide long-lasting financial and other benefits.

### ***Enhanced AASN and industry roles***

The NCVER report cited above also indicates that Job Network and other employment agencies provided the initial source of advice to only 2.7% of apprentices and trainees before commencement. It also indicates that a quarter of apprentices and trainees didn't know what they would be paid before commencing their apprenticeship or traineeship.

These data would suggest that, along with better information and materials, there needs to be greater efforts to actively engage with potential apprentices and trainees. There needs to be a clearer 'line of sight' to the career opportunities that can only come by active engagement by relevant agencies and industry.

Similarly given the long-standing concerns apprentices express about first stage/year wages (and the lack of any information before commencement for a quarter of apprentices) it is important the rationale for first year apprentice wage rates, in particular, are explained along with the incentives available and financial and other benefits of completing a trade. The focus of AASN and employers needs to be on what is required to support apprentices to complete their trade and not the sign-up and related processes.

There needs, therefore, to be a reconsideration of the role of the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) to enable a more active engagement with students, jobseekers and 'influencers', armed with more engaging material that outlines the benefits of completing a trade. At the same time, there needs to be a focus in ensuring AASNs have the resources and strategies that can identify barriers and concerns early in the apprenticeship and seek to maximise progression, retention and completion of apprentices.

AASNs can partner with industry associations such as the MTAA and State and Territory motor trade associations to ensure that these materials align with existing programs the MTA's are undertaking. This will also assist in ensuring the content is aligned with industry needs and is fit for purpose.

It is recommended that the AASN role be enhanced to ensure they have the marketing and other resources and capability to actively engage and promote apprenticeships to students, jobseekers and other significant stakeholders. Additionally, it is recommended that AASN's partner with industry bodies in order to provide tailored and not generic industry advice.

It is recommended that action is taken to ensure AASN providers have a focus on retention and completion with the resources and strategies to identify and address barriers to completion.

It is recommended that AASN partners with industry associations to ensure material aligns with industry needs and enhances the existing programs the motor trade associations in each State and Territory is undertaking.

It is also clear that industry cannot simply rely on a steady stream of applicants to fill their apprenticeship vacancies. There needs to be a more structured, consistent and enduring approach to exposing potential

*MTAA's response to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations:  
'Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper'.*

apprentices to 'real' industry businesses and employers. This will give potential applicants a better understanding of their trade interest and invest more employers in supporting and employing apprentices.

It is recommended that program funding to support greater engagement by employers with potential apprentices should be provided. Employers are best placed to engage with students, parents and career counsellors on the careers available in the industry. While there is a long list of approaches that have been tried to achieve the principle of industry engagement, employers can win the hearts and minds of prospective apprentices and establish the direct line of sight to their future career.

**Recommendation 3** - Funding should be made available to develop high-quality marketing and information material that can be readily accessed by key 'influencers'.

**Recommendation 4** - A consistent and sustained broad media strategy that promotes trades training, and importantly, the career that can provide long-lasting financial and other benefits is required.

**Recommendation 5** - The AASN role should be enhanced to ensure they have the marketing and other resources and capability to actively engage and promote apprenticeships to students, jobseekers and other significant stakeholders including parents.

### **Mainstreaming Pre-apprenticeships and SBATs**

Pre-apprenticeships provide a great opportunity for potential apprentices to get a good understanding of their trade interest and, with a meaningful work experience, provide direct engagement with employers and job opportunities. While they have been a long-standing feature of the trade training system their availability needs to be 'mainstreamed', rather than the ad-hoc arrangements that can characterise funding and availability. Given widespread labour shortages, this will be particularly important as industries seek to tap into non-traditional cohorts that may need extra support to undertake an apprenticeship.

***The MTA SA/NT recognises the importance of encouraging school students and young people to undertake a career in automotive trades. To this the MTA has set up a School Pathways program in South Australia that promotes automotive trades to school students with interactive school visits, connects students to automotive businesses for work experience, and helps to establish school-based apprentices.***

***To further enhance this program the MTA SA/NT recognises a short course aimed at giving school students a taste of an automotive apprenticeship is a valuable experience. This is a short three-day course to expose them to heavy and light vehicle, auto electric, automotive repair, and body repair training. Their training will also involve work, health and safety practices and automotive life skills. By using accredited training courses students can receive RPL credits to future automotive studies and secondary education credits for their studies at school.***

***The MTA SA/NT recognises the valuable contribution the School Pathways program has had with a noticeable increase in work experience for school students, new apprentices going through the MTA Training and Employment centre in SA from this program, and the exposure of automotive trades to many school students. Because of this program the MTA has been able to place students in rewarding automotive careers.***

As the above example highlights there are a number of approaches that could be considered to further enhance trade training opportunities.

Similarly, school-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) have long been a feature of the trades training system, linking students with business and industry. More so than pre-apprenticeships, they have been an inconsistent and under-utilised approach to linking students with trade careers, often dependent on the goodwill and participation of individual schools and the leadership by individuals in industry.

A comprehensive review of SBATs should be undertaken with a view to identifying and addressing barriers to their expansion across states and territories, including school, industry and funding support.

In addition to SATs, trade relevant schools-based VET programs can be used to encourage students to explore their options and create a pathway to an apprenticeship.

**Recommendation 6** - There needs to be a more structured, consistent and enduring approach to exposing potential apprentices, in schools and elsewhere, to 'real' industry businesses and employers. This will give potential applicants a better understanding of their trade interest and invest more employers in supporting and employing apprentices.

**Recommendation 7** - It is recommended that program funding to support greater engagement by employers with potential apprentices, in schools and elsewhere, should be provided.

**Recommendation 8** - A comprehensive review of school-based apprenticeships and traineeship should be undertaken with a view to identifying and addressing barriers to their expansion across states and territories, including school, industry and funding support.

### ***Greater support during the apprenticeship first stage***

Keeping apprentices in employment during the first year of their trade apprenticeship is critical to achieving greater completions. It is during this early stage that the bulk of cancellations (26.6%) occur.

The data cited in the discussion paper and earlier NCVET [analysis](#) highlights the consistency of workplace issues being the key driver of cancellations. These analyses indicate a range of factors impacting cancellations, including around a third of trade cancellations due to problems with the employment experience (including issues with the employer), personal issues (e.g., health, transport) and nearly one in five due to not liking the type of work or industry.

Very recent [analysis](#) undertaken by MTA Queensland, the Australian Automotive Aftermarket Association and Australian Automotive Dealer Association of first- and fourth-year automotive apprentices confirms the importance of addressing these workplace issues. For first year apprentices getting access to a diverse range work experiences is a key issue, as it was to some extent for final year apprentices.

To address some of these on-the-job issues a number of MTAA member associations have introduced mentoring programs. These programs generally have an experienced and respected automotive industry person who maintains close contact with first year (and in some instances second year) apprentices and their employers. With their broad industry experience, they can tailor their advice and guidance to the specifics of the industry sector and firm.

A 2017 SA MTA program that provided mentoring for the first two years of the apprenticeship achieved a 90% completion rate. An MTA Queensland program targeting first two years apprentices lifted retention rates to around 80%. The success of mentoring programs is further evidenced in the discussion paper where the larger public sector agencies renowned for their trade training support are achieving completion rates of around 80%. Feedback from apprentices, also highlighted in the discussion paper, indicates apprentices strongly value this support. It is time that all trade apprentices can access this valuable and successful support.

Industry should be resourced in a consistent and ongoing basis to provide mentoring support to first year trade apprenticeships.

**Recommendation 9** - While pre-apprenticeships have been a long-standing feature of the trade training system their availability needs to be 'mainstreamed', rather than the ad-hoc arrangements that can characterise funding and availability.

**Recommendation 10** - Industry should be resourced in a consistent and ongoing basis to provide mentoring support to first year trade apprentices in priority industries.

Presently the South Australian and Northern Territory MTA has a mentoring program underway. The following testimonial is from an apprentice who has engaged with the MTA mentor in their first year. As the testimonial shows the program has been a major benefit to the apprentice's wellbeing and career, and the value of a specific industry mentor program.



***“My interactions with the MTA Mentor during the beginning of the second year of my apprenticeship were needed [...] they played a crucial role in helping me to understand that everyone is on such vastly different points of mechanical learning because of friends, family and available resources, and that I was no exception. I am now backing myself more at work and much, much more confident in taking bigger and more complex jobs, thanks to the mentor and their interactions with my colleagues and I”***

***“In regard to the mentor program I do find it has helped in regards to keeping me on track not only in for the concept of life itself but my working life too. Being able to contact the mentor anytime does reassure me that someone is only one call away. Not only that, but I’m not talking to a stranger that I’ll most likely never contact again. Being able to contact the mentor rather than an online counsellor has allowed me to gain trust in any information that I speak out”.***

The following testimonial is from a business whose apprentice was engaged by the MTA mentor with positive outcomes.

***“The MTA Mentor and has been instrumental in aiding and helping my apprentice to work through some mental health issues they are currently experiencing. The mentor visited my workshop recently and I have every confidence in him and his approach to these matters.”***

These testimonials show that an industry mentor that has relevant experience in the industry and is independent from the workshop is crucial to ensuring credibility of the mentor and thereby resulting in positive outcomes for the apprentice’s wellbeing.

### ***Don’t forget the later apprenticeship years***

The analysis undertaken by the MTA Queensland and others cited above surveyed fourth- year apprentices about their experiences and expectations. This research indicates a significant proportion of these latter year automotive apprentices expressed the strong desire to broaden their industry experiences and particularly gain broader business and career development opportunities. Some level of frustration and a desire to look at other careers was identified in this analysis.

At the same time, some employers express a reluctance to employ apprentices because of the risk of losing experienced staff and not recouping the investment they have made in the early apprenticeship years.

This ‘clash’ of sentiment and expectations is hindering a sustainable skills development approach, especially in the current labour market. There needs to be a dedicated strategy that outlines to targeted businesses and industries the benefits of engaging, retaining, and importantly, developing their apprentices. The approaches required would likely vary according to industry and business and should be delivered by trusted, respected industry figures.

**Recommendation 11** - There needs to be a dedicated strategy that outlines to targeted businesses and industries the benefits of engaging, retaining, and importantly, developing their latter year apprentices.

### ***The wages conundrum***

The discussion paper highlights that wages are a considerable concern for some 38% of apprentices and especially first-year trade apprentices. As the paper indicates, for some first-year apprentice their wages are little more than half the minimum wage.

While this and the other research cited above clearly identifies this concern, it is not the main or major reason apprentices cancel their apprenticeships. Workplace issues are a significant cause, as highlighted above, with low wages being the cause in around 7-9% of cancellations.

At the same time, the discussion paper highlights employer concern about apprentice productivity especially during the early apprenticeship stages. It will be interesting to understand the impact of the generous apprenticeship incentives available during COVID-19 and the extent to which these incentives were passed onto apprentices and/or used to offset the reduced productivity of early-stage apprentices.

Lifting wages alone will not solve the cancellation ‘problem’. Nonetheless, they are a considerable concern to apprentices and a likely barrier to recruiting suitable candidates, especially in a labour market characterised by widespread labour shortages and cost-of-living concerns.

Apprentice wage relativities were last adjusted around a decade ago. Noting widespread industry concern at the time (and likely now) about the impact on commencements, especially during an economic downturn, further upward adjustments may not be appropriate.

However, the strong impact on the recruitment of trade apprentices as a result of the COVID-19 funding measures are unambiguous. With the current Australian Apprenticeship Incentives System introduced in July 2022, incentives paid to apprentices in priority occupations is limited to \$5,000 over two years. While it is acknowledged the discussion paper is not focusing on incentives (these to be considered separately), it is clear greater direct support to first-year trade apprentices is worthy of consideration.

Any review of apprenticeship incentives needs to consider options to provide direct increased support to first year trade apprentices in priority occupations.

**Recommendation 12** - Any review of apprenticeship incentives needs to consider options to provide direct increased support to first year trade apprentices in priority occupations.

#### **4. How can the services delivered better encourage and support apprentices from diverse backgrounds**

Apprenticeships have been a feature of the trades workforce for hundreds of years, building strong traditions and practices that have served it well, mostly. The automotive industry has been and remains a strong participant in the apprenticeship system.

This system has been particularly effective at recruiting young males straight out of school, often following in the footsteps of family and friends. While this model has worked well in the past, the contemporary labour market outlined earlier means new approaches to recruiting more diverse cohorts are necessary.

A strong, integrated package of measures is required to build the momentum for change in the recruitment and retention of diverse client groups.

**Recommendation 13** - There needs to be attractive, consistent and high-quality materials developed that target women, Indigenous, migrants, persons with a disability and other underrepresented groups in trade apprenticeships.

##### ***Diverse cohorts, diverse messages***

While the traditional trades have long relied on approaches that target the young male school leaver cohort, they have been much less effective in engaging with more diverse client groups and their networks.

As with the discussion earlier, the marketing and messaging of the apprenticeship system needs to be overhauled. There need to be attractive, consistent and high-quality materials developed that target women, Indigenous, migrants, persons with a disability and other underrepresented groups identified in the discussion paper.

The material needs to highlight how apprenticeships can align with the cultural and practical considerations that might otherwise limit participation by diverse cohorts. Case studies should promote and celebrate participation by non-traditional apprentices. Important, also this material should not just focus on getting an apprenticeship but also on the career pathways and outcomes, the success stories.

**Recommendation 14** - To maximise the benefit from improving the attraction of the industry to diverse cohorts, there needs to be a complementary strategy to engage with employers to help address workplace culture issues and misperceptions about a more diverse working environment.

**Recommendation 15** - A targeted, boost to commencement incentives for the employment of diverse cohorts in the trades should be considered.

**Recommendation 16** - Incentivising equity and inclusion training for employers and key staff would provide one avenue to bring about a more diverse workforce.

### ***The role of influencers***

Approaches that recognise the important cultural and other factors relevant to particular cohorts need to supplement other approaches. Some migrant groups, for example, maintain strong family and other community networks that are highly influential in decisions regarding employment pathways for their members.

Similarly, Indigenous apprenticeship recruitment and success can be highly influenced by family and local cultural groups, with outcomes influenced strongly by the support of influential community members.

Marketing and other approaches need to be tailored to the role of these key influencers and organisations and provide relevant and current knowledge of apprenticeships and the career options.

### ***Lifting business engagement***

As noted above, the approach to apprenticeship recruitment and employment has largely been one that follows long-standing and traditional workplace practices, conventions and culture. To effect a change will require businesses and employers to rethink and recast these arrangements.

Incentivising equity and inclusion training for employers and key staff would provide one avenue to begin to effect change. This would be particularly relevant for employers of apprentices of diverse cultural backgrounds and those seeking to employ persons with a disability.

While apprenticeship employer incentives are not included in the discussion paper, the COVID-19 funding clearly demonstrated the powerful difference they can make to commencements. A targeted, perhaps time limited, boost to commencement incentives for the employment of diverse cohorts in the trades should be considered.

Traditional apprenticeship recruitment approaches mean employers have generally had limited contact with diverse client groups and the organisations that represent them. There needs to strategies that link employers to these groups and address some of the misperceptions and other barriers that may exist, and put them in direct contact with potential applicants. Industry bodies, like MTAA and its association members (with their strong network of businesses), would be well placed to broker these important links that build on their existing activities aimed at boosting more diverse workforces.

These contacts and other measures would be ineffective if other necessary workplace changes are not made to ensure retention of diverse apprentice cohorts. There are practical changes, for example, that may need to be made to accommodate the needs of a disabled worker. More flexible working hours might assist a female apprentice with children.

Resources and other support that assist businesses to make these changes are necessary. While it is acknowledged there are some existing avenues available, assistance tailored to the needs of individual industries would be more effective, more likely embraced by businesses and the inclusion of diverse workers more readily 'normalised'.

Industry advisors with strong understanding of the needs of various cohorts should be engaged to deliver this support and other measures outlined above to assist employers to engage and manage a more diverse workforce.

**Recommendation 17** - There needs to strategies that link employers to groups that represent diverse cohorts and address some of the misperceptions and other barriers that may exist and put them in direct contact with potential applicants.

**Recommendation 18** - Resources and other support that assist businesses to make necessary workplace adjustments to accommodate a more diverse workforce should be enhanced.

## Flexible work arrangements for apprentices

*It is important to align with current workplace best practice to gain and retain staff. Flexible working conditions are particularly attractive to today's employees however often don't align with workplace practices in an automotive workshop. As an example, a regional small/med workshop employed a female apprentice. This apprentice was also a representative women's Rugby League player. The employer worked with this young apprentice to allow her to temporarily suspend her apprenticeship for the NRL season. The outcome has been highly beneficial to both employer and employee. These types of arrangements need to be considered and adopted as options as we move to include more females within the automotive industry as they bear the responsibility of parental care and often require flexible work arrangements.*

## 5. How can support services be optimised to meet current and future needs of apprentices and employers

### **Case management**

Given the decline in completions, the alternative opportunities and an ongoing skills and labour shortage, there needs to be a stronger focus on supporting apprentices to not only commence their trade apprenticeship but to complete it. A 'whole of term' approach is required, and one that seeks to case manage each and every trade apprentice.

As the data and case studies above highlight, it is an individualised support approach that will make a real difference to completions. For trade apprentices in priority industries and trades there needs to be specialist, industry recognised case managers or mentors that assist each apprentice and their employer to navigate the apprenticeship pathway and address barriers that arise.

Acknowledging that some larger and particularly public sector organisations already have appropriate support in place, this initiative should be limited to small and medium businesses or those that have completion issues.

Case management is a role that can be led by industry associations engaging with employers. Strategies are required to raise the collective ambitions of everyone involved in apprenticeships. Employers should be encouraged to see apprenticeships as an opportunity to attract and retain the talent they have nurtured. Apprentices need to have information that demonstrates they will be more successful in the long journey if they complete before chasing economic rewards  
AASN funding

While there have been some shifts away from a focus on commencements, there needs to be greater emphasis in future AASN contracts on funding them for progression and completion for trade apprenticeships.

### **Expand the footprint**

Some of the data cited earlier indicates the importance of influencers and other networks, the latter being particularly relevant to potential apprentices from diverse groups. Support should be provided, as part of the marketing overhaul outlined above, for outreach to these key groups with contemporary materials that highlight the benefits of a trade apprenticeship.

As noted earlier, there is also a need to support initiatives that directly link industry to the groups that represent diverse client groups.

### **Shape the incentives to priorities**

Once again, while acknowledging the discussion paper is not considering incentives, it is clear they can send a powerful signal to the value placed on progression, completion, hiring and supporting diverse groups. If there is to be the necessary shift away from traditional approaches, the incentive regime needs to reflect that necessity.

**Recommendation 19** - For trade apprentices in priority industries and trades there needs to be specialist, industry recognised case managers or mentors that assist each apprentice and their employer to navigate the apprenticeship pathway and address barriers that arise.

**Recommendation 20** - There needs to be greater emphasis in future AASN contracts on funding them for progression and completion of trade apprenticeships.