



Third-year engineering apprentice with Rural Hydraulics, Ryley Dalton, and Australian Industry Group Training Services area manager, Cheryl Arnott.

DON'T LET YOUR TRADE DISAPPEAR

Why it's worth the effort to train more apprentices

ON October 16, the Federal Government announced an extra \$3350 would be given to employers who took on an apprentice, in a skill shortage trade, between December 2009 and February 2010. Combined with existing employer incentive incentives (Commencement \$1500, Rural Skill Shortage \$1000 and completion \$2500) the total incentives to hire a new 16-19 year old apprentice in the next few months could be up to \$8350.

In May this year the Government tried to combat the large number of apprentices being laid off by offering an extra \$2800 to any employer who could give an out of work apprentice a second chance at completing their trade qualification. Add this to the existing incentives already offered for recommencing an apprentice (\$750, and completing them \$2500, as above), this brings to \$5950 the total incentives on offer for finishing the job started by another tradesman.

Finally, over the past three years the Government started to offer \$3800 in extra payments to the apprentices themselves if they took on a skill shortage trade. Then the Victorian Government threw in \$500 for trade apprentices and the NSW Government \$200. They further allowed registration rebates, travel assistance and payroll tax relief to employers.

All this money has been made available in an effort to solve the skill shortage problem.

Why then is Australian Industry still facing these shortages?

The latest survey by international employment services specialist Clarius Group analyses the shortages and over-supply of skilled labour in 19 Australian employment categories.

The Clarius Skills Index shows that the only trade to move from the top 10 shortages is in wood-related industries — and this is more than likely a result of the global financial crisis rather than any influx of new tradesmen.

Chefs, hairdressers and job categories in the metals, automotive and building trades are all still facing considerable shortages.

Cheryl Arnott suggests it may not just be about the money.

Ms Arnott is the area manager of Australian Industry Group Training Services for the Riverina and Hume region and is also a franchised agent for MAS National Apprenticeship Centres. The roles provide her with a significant insight into the thoughts and motivations behind employers' decisions to recruit apprentices. It also allows her an opportunity to counsel and care for a wide variety of 16-25 year olds as they look at their career options and taking up a skilled trade.

"One thing is very clear," says Ms Arnott. "The money is nice, but it is not what makes a successful apprenticeship. Gone are the days when hiring an apprentice was just a cheap labour option. It takes effort by the individual to combine work and study, but it also takes significant effort by the employer and his staff to ensure that the apprentice's needs are met, along with the business' needs.

"When we add to the equation the higher level of apprentice administration needs, industrial relations changes and the introduction of a whole new range of training options and fast-tracked qualifications, many employers appear to be giving up all together."

Ms Arnott's recent interviews with employers locally reveal that a number of them, large and small, will not consider apprentice recruitment in 2010 — not because of a downturn in business — but because it all appears too hard.

Some typical employer quotes she hears are:

"Young people today don't know how to work".

"In my day apprentices did four years — the first year on the broom — now they can finish in three years and still not know how to use a broom".

"I don't agree with fast tracking apprentices, so I won't put any on. It's an industrial relations nightmare we cannot afford".

"I've put hours into training apprentices and they just get up and go when the next best offer comes along. There's no loyalty anymore".

And from the apprentices:

"It's not what I expected at all".

"My supervisor doesn't like me".

"I don't understand what my boss really wants — he is never happy".

"The other apprentices at TAFE get to use machinery and make a real contribution to the workplace. I'm still sanding the table tops and sweeping the floor".

"Clearly there is a big gap in expectations and possibly some misconceptions on how we should be dealing with the recruitment and training of apprentices," Ms Arnott says.

"Employers need to understand that Generation Y may not be perfect — but what is the alternative?"

"Is it practical for you to keep working into your 80s and watch your trade die because you couldn't find the perfect apprentice?"

Young people and their parents may also need to look a bit closer at why these jobs are not meeting their expectations and perhaps gain a better understanding the needs of today's employers.

"I once asked a high profile local business identity to tell me what he was looking for in his next apprentice," Ms Arnott says. "You know," he said, "I just want someone who can show up on time and smile. The rest I can teach them. Is that too much to ask?"

"The generation gap is nothing new. Sometimes we all just need some simple direction and some new tools to change our attitudes and expectations," Ms Arnott says.

"Perhaps employers can use the extra government funding to take the apprentice out to Bunnings and let them choose their own broom — metaphorically speaking, of course."

For advice on apprenticeships and recruitment tips call Cheryl Arnott on 0418 605 107.