

impact on the business – time is wasted, many employees are frustrated and the work is not being undertaken in accordance with company procedures.

Customised training

Through the Ai Group literacy project, Thomas & Coffey has selected apprentices, tradespersons and supervisors to undertake customised training held in the workplace using materials directly relevant to the company and familiar to its employees.

“We have six apprentices and two tradespersons currently undertaking training on two mornings per week,” says Hambly. “We have been impressed with the progress they have made to date in communication, grammar and spelling.”

The program will continue for six months, culminating with some conflict resolution training to equip 12 additional employees with skills to effectively manage conflict in the workplace.

Effective teaching methods

Another participating company is Alcoa Fastening Systems Australia, a small manufacturer in Clayton Victoria with 68 employees, including 27 people born overseas.

The company’s human resources manager, Andrea Kelly, says the general consensus among participants is that they are learning a lot and have been surprised at the effectiveness of the teaching methods.

Two of the participants said: “We have learnt the meaning of English words that we have been using every day for many years. This training has helped us to understand what the words actually mean”; and “It’s just like going back to school. In my country we would be laughed at for doing something like this. It’s good to have the chance at my age to do this here.”

“From the company’s perspective the employees are starting work an hour early one day a week to participate, so this indicates that it is very valuable to them,” Kelly said.

“This project is important to us in improving the confidence of employees when communicating in the workplace, both verbally and in writing. Through a project such as this we’d also like to see participants more confident when applying for promotions and taking on additional tasks to expand their role.”

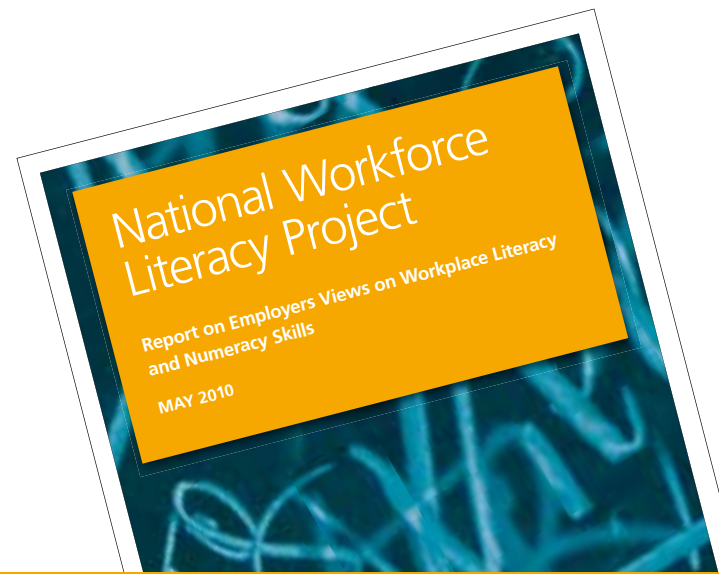
More support

The National Workforce Literacy Project is funded by the Commonwealth through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Ai Group has also been pressing strongly for more support to address this endemic problem.

The recent federal budget included \$120 million to fund a National Foundation Skills Outreach and Leadership Project. Among other things, this will develop a four-year National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which will help to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of an additional 140,000 people.

Such strategies will complement and enhance existing practices and will help make a real difference, both for our economic performance and for the wellbeing of the individuals concerned. However, this should be seen as just the start and further funding will inevitably be required over time.

We will help members further engage with and access these programs while the overall aim of our Literacy Project will be to identify practical solutions and fresh strategies that can be rolled out across enterprises.



Where are they now?

Three former AiGTS apprentices explain where life has taken them since they completed their apprenticeships, and offer their impressions of Australia’s training system.

ASHLEY WILLIAN



Ashley Willian encourages apprentices to make the most of their time to study.

Ashley Willian, 25, works as the leading hand electrician, overseeing the other electricians, at Melbourne-based JC Smale, a manufacturer of turnkey systems, or automation systems.

“It’s been a fantastic experience for me,” he says. “I’ve worked in most of the Australian capitals, and overseas – I was in South Africa working on a mining project for a while. We do some mining products, for Xstrata for example, all over the world.”

Mr Willian started as an AiGTS apprentice hosted to JC Smale. He did his apprenticeship in four years.

Overall, there are about 30 people working for JC Smale. The majority are fitters and turners, including machinists.

Mr Willian has given some thought to becoming dual qualified. “I was thinking about it, and specifically about instrumentation,” he says. “Instrumentation electricians are what Australian industry needs, and it would be a great fit with my current electrical qualifications. It would probably add about two years onto what I’ve done.”

“I think dual qualifications are a good idea, and it’s the kind of thing that a more mature-age apprentice would be more prepared to have a go at than someone who’s only 17 or 18.”

“One thing I’d be worried about in general is whether the quality of each skill would be lost – for example, my impression is that the South African millwright trade (a combination of electrician and fitter and turner) isn’t as strong in each of its components as our singly qualified apprentices here.”

Mr Willian’s decision not to become dual qualified has in fact been largely dictated by his decision to study commerce and electrical

engineering at university. His intention is to combine economics and finance with his current skills.

“There’ll always be roles for people who understand both the operational and business sides,” he says.

Mr Willian preceded his few measured observations of the training system by stressing that he thinks Victoria’s apprentices are pretty well qualified.

“One of my bosses at work, who comes from another country, says you can’t just tell apprentices what to do here – they ask a lot more questions and think for themselves,” he says. “That’s maybe because the work opportunities are not all just assembly line-type situations; they’re smaller scale where every job requires special attention.”

One of Mr Willian’s most positive experiences during his training was the guidance he received from his instructors at Moorabbin TAFE. “I was lucky enough to have a really great mentor in my second year at TAFE – a teacher called Liano Casalaz, who is an electrician and electrical fitter,” he explains. “He’s still keeping me aware of opportunities within the industry.”

“That’s what the TAFE system is missing a bit – more mentoring would be a good idea. I think it should be a learning atmosphere rather than a working atmosphere. You can’t treat kids at TAFE the way you’d treat them on a work site.”

“I think employers are incredibly appreciative of good apprentices,” he concludes. “I tell apprentices to make the most of the years they’ve got to study. I really urge them to complete Certificate IV.”

READING

INTO OUR REPORT

The National Workforce Literacy Project Report drew on a series of roundtable discussions with employers from the manufacturing, construction and services sectors late last year. A survey followed in December, seeking employer views on workplace literacy and numeracy skills, their impact on business and the most effective measures for improving skills.

- More than 75% of respondents reported that their business was affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy.
- Labourers and process workers were the occupational group most affected by low levels of literacy and numeracy – 45% of respondents considered that labourers were affected.
- Respondents reported a wide range of impacts resulting from a lack of literacy and numeracy skills; most frequently cited were: poor completion of workplace documents and time-wasting through repeated work.
- Respondents saw a role for government, employers, education authorities and individuals in improving workforce literacy and numeracy skills – 38% think employers have a role.
- Only 8% of respondents reported that they had adequate capacity to assist the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills – the problem is most acute for small businesses, 28% of which report no capacity for this task.
- Internal company training, tried by 29% of respondents, was the most common measure used in trying to improve literacy and numeracy skills.
- Respondents identified many different measures that they considered effective for addressing literacy and numeracy needs – there was not a clear preference for one particular measure but workplace-based approaches were generally more favoured.

The National Workforce Literacy Project Report is available on the Ai Group website at: www.aigroup.com.au/policy/reports. For more information about Ai Group’s activities in this area, contact Ai Group Manager, Education Policy and Projects, Michael Taylor, on (03) 9867 0134.

MICHELLE COSTANTINO

Michelle Costantino, 31, completed a Certificate III in mechanical engineering in 2008 and is working as a maintenance fitter with Melbourne-based Mett Diecasting.

Her face is fated to become very well known, albeit anonymous, as she was the model for the female face on the sterling silver medal (pictured) awarded to apprentices who win the AiGTS Chairman's Award (see page 41 for this year's winner).

Miss Costantino was hosted to Mett Diecasting, a supplier to the automotive industry, throughout her apprenticeship and has been employed directly by the company for the past two years since becoming a qualified tradesperson.

"I went to Swinburne TAFE to complete a pre-apprenticeship," she says. "Then I got my apprenticeship through Ray Kerrison (now AiGTS General Manager). Mett employs about 200 people, about 80% on the shop floor. They have nine apprentices.

"I was 26 when I started as an apprentice. I finished my TAFE component in just under three years. It took three years and nine months to

complete the apprenticeship. My qualifications make me a fitter and machinist.

"I'm now working in the automation area as a maintenance fitter, doing maintenance work on all machines in the factory, which includes some welding."

Miss Costantino is the only female on the shop floor. That makes her extremely unusual – she's met only one other female apprentice – but she says the most important thing for women in her position is to recognise their physical limitations.

"I can't lift as much as the guys can," she explains. "I'm really upfront about what I can't do. I'll just say, 'I can't lift that'. Even the strongest guy needs help to lift. I'm not apologetic – I'm just not as strong. We have forklifts we can use to lift and move, and I have a forklift licence."

While Miss Costantino acknowledges that many women aren't interested in becoming an apprentice, her only regret is that she didn't do it sooner.

"At school, I wish someone had said to me, 'what about doing a trade'," she says. "I didn't do



Michelle Costantino's face appears on the sterling silver medal awarded to the AiGTS Apprentice of the Year

the vocational subjects. At first I was interested in going to uni, but I'm basically a very practical person. I don't really like office work, and in this job I get to walk around all day."

It was also a popular decision at home. "My Dad does a lot of wood working," she explains. "When I told him I was thinking about doing a trade he was ecstatic. My mother was happy, too."

SARAH GRIFFITHS

Sarah Griffiths, 34, is working as the North America – Systems Project Management Leader for Cummins Power Generation in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

"Before I decided to do my apprenticeship, I considered returning to university to complete undergraduate studies in a Bachelor of Applied Science – Natural Resource Management," she recalls. "But I couldn't really afford it at the time, so I was working doing manual labour, and cleaning houses and rental cars."

She then made her decision to undertake an apprenticeship as an electrical fitter, finishing in three-and-a-half years and obtaining her A Class Electrician's licence. She was employed through EEAGTS in South Australia, which has since merged with AiGTS. Her in-school studies were undertaken at NASTEC Solutions and Regency Institute of TAFE in Adelaide, with on-the-job training provided by Cummins Power Generation.

"In the role I am in, and the apprenticeship I undertook, I obtained good exposure to the mechanical side of things as well," she says. "I am not dual qualified – my career has taken off so well in the electrical field that I have not really stopped to consider the option."

Having started her apprenticeship at 23, Ms Griffiths believes more 'mature-aged' candidates should be exploring the option of following her lead. "The only comment I would make about Australia's apprenticeship system is that more

adults should be welcomed to the system," she says. "When I started at 23 I was motivated to do the apprenticeship and sometimes it was overwhelming to be surrounded by much younger apprentices.

"Women should also be encouraged to look at the option as well," she adds. "I met very few women as an apprentice but those I did were good at what they were doing."

Cummins Power Generation offers both short-term and long-term solutions for standby power market needs, and Ms Griffiths has now been with the company for nearly 12 years. In her current role she has a team of project managers working for her.

"My career goals change as I get older and see more things that interest me," she says. "I love leading people and helping them to succeed. My goal when I completed my apprenticeship was to be in middle management, and having attained that goal I am enjoying the challenge. I would have to say I aspire to lead bigger teams, help more customers and continue to offer value in all that I do.

"I have been in Minneapolis for nearly three years now, and overall it's been a very rewarding experience. It's proof that you never know what you are capable of if you don't try the more challenging assignments."



Since completing her apprenticeship, Sarah Griffiths has achieved her goal of entering middle management and has had the opportunity to work overseas

KICKSTART RESTART

Interested Ai Group members can contact Lee Gross at AiGTS on 02 9466 5458 or email lee.gross@aigroup.asn.au.

One of the positive outcomes of the recent federal budget (see report on page 22) was the extension of the Government's Apprentice Kickstart program. The initial phase of the initiative, which concluded at the end of February this year, achieved its target of signing up 21,000 new apprentices within three months.

The extension is available to small and medium-sized employers (less than 200 employees) and registered group training organisations that employ an Australian Apprentice aged 19 years or less who is undertaking a Certificate III or IV level qualification that leads to a trade occupation on the National Skills Needs List.

The Apprentice Kickstart Extension triples Government incentives in the first year for employers of young people commencing a trade apprenticeship between 12 May 2010 and 12 November 2010 (inclusive). The existing \$1,500 commencement incentive payable at the three-month point will be boosted by a bonus of \$850 plus \$2,500 paid after nine months.

For more information on the Apprentice Kickstart Extension, visit the Australian Apprenticeships website: www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au.

The next generation

REPORT CARD:

TY BORLACE

QUALIFICATION: Certificate III Electrotechnology

HOSTED BY: SAGE Automation, South Australia

Ty Borlace commenced his apprenticeship in December 2005 and completed his training in November 2009.

It was evident from the outset that he had the qualities to become a top tradesperson. His excellent interpersonal communication skills, willingness to learn and his positive attitude not only impressed his trade school instructors but also his on-the-job mentors at SAGE Automation.

Mr Borlace attained credits and distinctions while completing the requirements of the TAFE component within 27 months. This allowed him to undertake additional post-trade studies in the use of a programmable logic controller (PLC).

In the third stage of his apprenticeship, he became an apprentice board adviser attending board meetings. During this period he was awarded the TAFE SA North scholarship and in his last year received the EEAGTS President's prize. He is currently completing the Advanced Diploma in Engineering and has accepted a job as a site supervisor at SAGE Automation.

Each year Australian Industry Group Training Services (AiGTS) recognises the achievements of its apprentices and trainees through a variety of awards, with an outstanding apprentice ultimately selected for the Northern, Southern and Western States. A certificate and a cheque for \$1,000 is presented to each of these

award winners at Ai Group Council meetings in their respective states.

The culmination of the AiGTS awards program is the presentation of the Chairman's Award to the outstanding apprentice for the year. In 2009, that honour went to Ty Borlace from South Australia.

The Chairman of AiGTS, Mr Doug Loveless, presented Mr Borlace with a sterling silver medallion, a certificate and a cheque for \$3,000 at the Ai Group South Australian Council meeting in April.

In accepting his award, Mr Borlace said he was sure he had made the right choice by completing an apprenticeship.

"An apprenticeship is a good way to improve your technical skills while also learning many life skills that could be beneficial in opening many career pathways," he said. "To all junior apprentices, I say aim high, do your very best when a challenge presents itself, and don't be afraid to have a go."



Prior to winning the AiGTS Chairman's Award, Ty Borlace was recognised as 2009 Apprentice of the Year at the SA Group Training Awards, presented by the Governor of SA, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce.



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