

WOMEN IN TRADE CONSULTATION

Skills Canberra organised two stakeholder consultations on 14 and 19 September 2017 to gauge opinions, perceptions and recommendations from employers, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), Group Training Organisations (GTOs), apprentices, and peak bodies. The sessions focused on understanding enablers and barriers impacting women seeking to take up a trade. The ACT Government has recently emphasised the need for boosting women representation in traditionally male dominated trades and has allocated funds in the 2017-18 ACT Budget to support this work. The findings of these consultations will inform Skills Canberra's future programs to assist women looking to take up a trade.

Overview

The two consultations gathered 28 participants comprising of employers/GTOs (6), RTOs (4), apprentices/tradespeople (5), peak bodies/industry associations (9) and unions (4). (Figures represent a head count of participants.) The sessions were facilitated by Ann Goleby and included a presentation from Berwyn Clayton, Emeritus Professor, Victoria University, on the findings of a study on women in the electrical and automotive trades. The discussions were structured around the key themes of 'Barriers' and 'Enablers' for women in trades. The discussions are summarised below.

Barriers

1. **Misconception about trade pathways:** Trade pathways are generally not viewed as a viable option for either gender and are often seen as inferior compared to university education. In particular, females are often discouraged from entering a trade.
2. **Trades are physically demanding:** Working conditions in trades can be physically demanding, dirty and lack flexibility for women tradespeople.
3. **Targeting those who are not academically inclined:**
Due to the conventional perception that trades do not require a high level of academic aptitude, trades are targeted to those who struggle at school; when in reality, most trades are technical and require strong STEM skills.
4. **Discrimination not being adequately addressed:**
Negative experiences and the perceptions of workplace cultures in male dominated industries discourage women from accessing trade pathways. Employers expressed a lack of confidence to deal with issues that may arise and highlighted a need for them to monitor their workplace culture and filter their own and their employees' behaviour to be more polite.
5. **Lack of exposure:** Australian School Based Apprenticeships (ASBA) are not commonly accessed by female students and technical and trade related subjects have a low female representation, mostly due to role stereotypes being perpetuated in schools. Consequently, lack of awareness and exposure of trades in school lead to a lack of interest and participation of women in male-dominated trades.

"I just ignored the 'no'." – female automotive apprentice talking about how she entered her trade.

6. Representation of tradeswomen in media: Tradeswomen are often depicted as ‘ditsy’ or sexualized – both of which disempower women – and very little imagery of real women on real worksites is circulated.

Enablers

1. Networks: Stakeholders noted that not all employers are resistant to taking on female apprentices. Employers who do take on female apprentices provide positive feedback and see women as an important recruitment source. They cite the following as benefits to their business:

- Tempering an all-male environment with female employees to create a more diverse and balanced workplace.
- Having a more diverse workforce sees a greater variety of approaches to the work.
- Girls are more mature than boys at the common entry ages of an apprenticeship at 15-17.
- Many young male apprentices dismiss university as a vocational pathway and see an apprenticeship as the only remaining option. Employers often find their motivation falters as the training progresses. Conversely employers find women are more dedicated to apprenticeships. They tend to be more resolute and driven than their male counterparts having had to defend their choice to pursue a trade.
- Participants also observed that informal and formal networks of female apprentices provide valuable mentoring support to prospective and training apprentices. They also provide support systems when women have completed their training.

“Grandad always let the boys help, but as a girl I wasn’t allowed in the shed.” – Female qualified cabinet maker.

Stakeholders suggested that forming a network of employers who are willing to take on female apprentices would assist prospective female apprentices in locating a receptive and supportive employer. This network could also be accessed by young women seeking work experience and women who are in trades. Industry Associations could be useful resources in assembling employer networks.

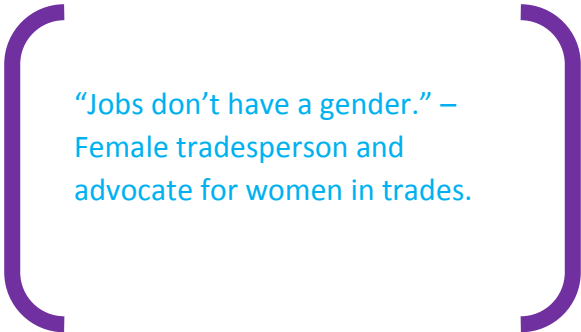
2. Pre-apprenticeships: Stakeholders pointed out that pre-apprenticeship programs within schools help garner interest amongst girls who might otherwise have remained unaware of traditional trades as viable career options. It was suggested that the programs in schools should include:
- Expansion of existing ‘try a trade’ programs and workshops to include worksite visits and rolling opportunities throughout the year. Exposure to industry offers a better understanding of what to expect on worksites.
 - A range of tradespeople visiting schools to speak about their profession in combination with school groups visiting worksites. While ‘try a trade’ offers practical exposure to the

trades, visits could be useful in highlighting to students the various pathways a career in the trades can offer.

- Extended work experience programs that span terms as opposed to just weeks allowing students access to more than one employer for a breadth of experience.
- Programs in schools that pull together a variety of skillsets to work on one project on site.

Participants also thought that pre-apprenticeship programs outside of schools could help mature age apprentices gain the necessary experience to apply for apprenticeships.

3. Early exposure: Career decisions are usually solidified with the educational choices made during school and post-secondary education. However, role stereotyping affects and potentially narrows students' choices from a young age. While it may be difficult to make a short course on trades compulsory for early high school years, it was suggested that all students are exposed to the trades, for example, through opportunities to use tools.



“Jobs don’t have a gender.” –
Female tradesperson and
advocate for women in trades.

4. Information: The participants indicated improved information that is authentic, accurate and describes the trades, their benefits and career opportunities is crucial. It was also noted that radical change is needed in career advice provided in schools, at career markets and extending to information available to parents and carers.
5. Female tradespeople as advocates: Stakeholders noted that using female tradespeople to encourage women into trades will be effective. The successful women in trades and their employers need to be promoted in schools, career markets and job portals.
6. Education: three specific target groups were identified for education on vocational education opportunities broadly and specifically to support attraction of women into trades.
- a) Careers advisors: It was suggested that a course for parents and career advisors focused on providing in-depth information on what a trade involves and the career opportunities it offers could encourage more women into trades.
 - b) RTOs: Resources for RTOs that encourage more women into teaching positions and promote non-tolerance of poor behaviour, which negatively impacts both women and men apprentices, while training and in workplaces.
 - c) Workplaces: Employer representatives expressed that even when employers support female apprentices they may not be well equipped to deal with workplace discrimination. A short course for employers, employees and apprentices on how to handle discriminatory behaviour and reinforce an inclusive culture in the workplace with an expectation of zero tolerance of denigration of any worker (male and female) could help combat this.