

Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System

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This submission is provided to:

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations

Submitted via email ApprenticeshipsReview@dewr.gov.au

Our members

- Canegrowers
- Cotton Australia
- Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers
- Nursery & Garden Industry Queensland
- eastAUSmilk
- Australian Cane Farmers Association
- Queensland United Egg Producers
- Turf Queensland
- Queensland Chicken Meat Council
- Pork Queensland
- Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group
- Burdekin River Irrigation Area
- Central Downs Irrigators Ltd
- Fairburn Irrigation Network
- Mallowa Irrigation
- Pioneer Valley Water Co-operative Ltd
- Theodore Water Pty Ltd
- Eton Irrigation
- Queensland Oyster Growers Association
- Lockyer Water Users Forum

About the Queensland Farmers' Federation



The Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland.

We are a member-based organisation representing the interests of peak agriculture industry organisations, both state and national. Through our members QFF represents more than 13,000 primary producers across the cotton, sugarcane, horticulture, dairy, nursery and garden, poultry, eggs, pork, and intensive animal industries.

We unite the sector to engage in a broad range of economic, social, environmental, and regional issues through advocacy, policy development, and project activity. We work with the government of the day on behalf of industry, farmers, and the community to provide powerful representation and contribution to the policy direction, sustainability, and future growth of Queensland's agriculture sector.

Our Council of member representatives and policy committees set the strategic priorities for policy development and advocacy, while our Executive Board ensures our corporate governance.

QFF draws on the expertise and industry knowledge of our members and through our commitment to collaboration and considered policy development, we lead Queensland's agriculture sector towards a strong future, ensuring our members are ahead of the game and have a voice at the table on the issues that matter to their members.

Submission

QFF welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System

We provide this submission without prejudice to any additional submission from our members or individual farmers.

Background

The Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System plays an important role in supporting the development of a skilled workforce by providing financial incentives and assistance to both apprentices and employers. This system aims to encourage the uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships across various industries, including agriculture, by offsetting the costs associated with training and employment.

- I. The effectiveness and efficiency of the Incentive System, against objectives of encouraging take up of apprenticeships and traineeships, examine the role of services, support, and high-quality training provision
- II. Understand how cost of living pressures impact apprenticeship and traineeship take-up and completion rates

- III. Take a holistic view of the apprenticeship system through non-financial supports provided through the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network as well as States and Territories, including workplace conditions, culture and the role employers play in the quality of apprenticeships and traineeships. Identify systemic barriers to apprenticeship completion rates
- IV. Consider effectiveness of the system and its support services in creating training environments that encourage adoption and completion by people who face additional barriers to undertaking training (women, First Nations peoples, those in rural and remote communities)
- V. Explore the alignment between the incentive system and priorities within 2023 Employment White Paper as well as the Government's economic objectives including promotion of lifelong learning opportunities, levers and initiatives beyond the Incentive System that encourage employers to take on apprentices and encourage them to provide people who are underrepresented

QFF aims to advocate for policies and initiatives that support the continued growth and success of apprenticeships within the agricultural sector. This includes advocating for targeted incentives and support mechanisms that address the specific challenges faced by agricultural employers and apprentices, such as seasonal work patterns, remote locations, and skills shortages.

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Incentive System (i)

Currently, the effectiveness of the Apprenticeship Incentive System is very poor. Take up in agriculture and other industries which are not core trade, is low. Objective 1 of the Employment White Paper 2023 "Delivering sustained and inclusive full employment" is a guiding principle for this point of review. While the Incentive System works well for some trade industries, the complexity of the system can be confusing for employers and apprentices to navigate, deterring some from participating in the program (in particular smaller businesses with limited resources). There are also concerns about the adequacy of the incentives provided, particularly in industries or regions facing skills shortages. In some cases, the level of financial support may not be sufficient to offset the costs and risks associated with training apprentices, leading to underinvestment in apprenticeship programs.

The effect that cost-of-living pressures is having on apprentices and trainees (ii)

Objective 2 of the White Employment Paper 2023 'promoting job security and strong, sustainable wage growth' links directly to the current cost of living crisis impacting those nationally. Currently, prospective apprentices and trainees face significant financial challenges that deter them from pursuing vocational training opportunities. High living costs, including accommodation, transportation, and daily expenses, can create financial strain for individuals considering apprenticeships or traineeships, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or in high growth regions with soaring housing costs.

As a result, many are opting for immediate employment or alternative educational pathways (which may appear to offer a higher end income) to alleviate the immediate financial pressures. Directly impacting apprenticeship uptake rates as well as completion rates. The ability of apprentices and trainees to sustain training commitments throughout these cost-of-living pressures is becoming

increasingly difficult, forcing many to seek additional employment or reduced hours, impacting capacity to meeting training requirements due to the need to prioritise immediate financial needs.

Policymakers have a responsibility to implemented targeted support mechanisms during this time of national financial crisis/pressure, to safeguard the workforce. QFF advocate for additional government funded apprenticeship subsidies for living expenses, transportation allowances and accommodation support to aid in alleviating financial burden and assist in stabilising completion rates. Access to flexible payment options or loans would also aid in mitigating some of the upfront costs associated with training fees and materials.

How the Apprenticeships System can best support high quality apprenticeships and traineeships, including the roles of government support, workplace conditions and culture, and employers (iii)

As attempts to alter workplace conditions and culture would require significant government intervention and be unlikely to produce the desired outcomes, other areas are likely to yield better outcomes and should be focused on. Priority should be to creating incentives for both the apprentice and employer to participate.

To best support high-quality apprenticeships and traineeships, the Australian Apprenticeship System must prioritise flexibility for both employers and apprentices. This flexibility enables employers to tailor apprenticeship programs to their specific needs and circumstances while allowing apprentices to pursue training in a manner that suits their learning style and career goals.

Additionally, it's crucial to consider additional protections for apprentices without inadvertently disincentivising employers from taking on apprentices. Priority should be given to creating incentives that benefit both the apprentice and the employer, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship that encourages participation and investment in high-quality training and development programs. By focusing on creating a supportive environment and offering tangible benefits for all stakeholders, the Australian Apprenticeship System can effectively create a culture of growth and sustainability of high-quality apprenticeships and traineeships across various industries.

The ability of the system in creating a training environment that encourages women, First Nations people, people with disability and people in regional, rural and remote communities into apprenticeships and traineeships (iv)

The current Australian apprenticeship incentive system could be more effective in creating a training environment that encourages underrepresented groups, including women, First Nations people, people with disabilities, and individuals in regional, rural, and remote communities, to pursue apprenticeships and traineeships.

This initiative aligns directly with Objective 5 of the Employment White Paper 2023, which aims to overcome barriers to employment and broaden opportunities. By providing financial support for housing or transportation costs, the system can help alleviate some of the practical challenges that individuals in these communities' face when accessing training opportunities. This measure would contribute to creating a more inclusive and accessible training environment, ultimately fostering greater participation and diversity within apprenticeship and traineeship programs.

Perceptions and status of apprenticeships and traineeships and alignment with Employment Priorities (v)

There is a lack information offered in schools about trade apprenticeship opportunities and Tafe courses and the potential benefits of choosing either of these options over completing a university degree. It is not enough to simple make students aware of these opportunities, but to showcase the benefits and career pathways these courses and apprenticeships can offer. Schools and government campaigns need to highlight apprenticeship and Tafe courses as a high earning pathway out of school with lots of employment opportunities and lower debt. There needs to be a rehaul of how these pathways are advertised to the younger generation. Specific highlighting of regional lifestyle benefits may help attract more people to these pathways and the diversified opportunities/locations these careers can offer.

Agriculture itself has not been a big user of apprenticeships in the past (in comparison to trades), however the reality is moving forward, these will be a vital aspect in bridging the gap in workforce shortages. Governments will push for preferred pathway being is an apprenticeship that is aligned to a job outcome. In Ag, this issue remains while work is inconsistent through seasonal workforces and changing climatic conditions (i.e. drought), causing industry to lose work and flexibility in this training space. QFF put forward that agriculture requires a different model to address the unique barriers that the agricultural industry presents for apprenticeships. A national group training model would provide a more targeted pathway which incorporates feedback provided within this review.

RTOs current delivering Traineeships and apprenticeship experience difficulties recruiting for the small pool of skilled and knowledgeable trainers and assessors to deliver qualifications, especially in rural, regional and remote areas with compounding issues such as housing shortages and employers' ability to have a continual supply of meaningful work due to seasonality and drought. The viability of delivering qualifications in thin markets is a major concern for training providers that need to remain profitable. Solutions would need to involve the ag industry and training provider working together and exploring the possibility of establishing an agriculture-specific post school Group Training Organisation (GTO) to directly employ apprentices/ trainees and then place them with suitable host employers for the necessary on-the-job training. The [Australian Industry Trade College](#) and also a model worth investigating for school-based apprenticeship pathways.

Yours sincerely

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