

# BUILDING TECHNOLOGY TRAINING FOR A NEW GENERATION

## Bob Day

### Introduction

Toward the latter part of last century the training environment in Australia undertook a slow but dramatic change. The apprenticeship system that served our training needs so well began to collapse and a range of group apprenticeship programs emerged in an endeavour to keep alive a model of training that was clearly dying.

In the housing industry trade contractors stopped taking on apprentices, there was a move toward specialisation focused on sub-elements of each trade and the completion rate for apprenticeships plummeted to a point where we now have a completion rate of only 44%.

I believe it is time for HIA to engage in a serious discussion about the future of Trades Training in Australia with a view to proffering alternatives that will address the skill shortages that are limiting the future growth of our industry.

### Problems:

1. Australia is in the grip of an acute trades skill shortage.
2. The current apprenticeship-based training system is unable to meet supply and is in fact collapsing as it is not grounded in economic reality.
3. Trade contractors are not engaging apprentices because it is too expensive, too complicated and too risky.
4. The image and status of apprenticeship training has been in significant decline over the past 30 years.

### Discussion

Apprenticeships have been with us for centuries. They began with simple, informal arrangements whereby parents would arrange for a tradesman (the Master) to teach their adolescent child the skills of the trade in return for payment.

Over time, and as workplace regulation grew, the parents stopped paying the Master and the Master started paying the apprentice. However, as remuneration levels increased, trade contractors found the cost increasingly untenable and most stopped engaging apprentices altogether.

In some industries the tenability of this situation changed long ago. Where, for example, nurses once undertook the bulk of their training in the workplace and were paid for doing so, they now undertake most of their learning in a tertiary environment and undertake 'on the job' training as unpaid work experience.

Professionalised training of the kind undertaken by nurses, teachers and countless others has now become the norm as they acquire the skills for employment and pay for the privilege (eg HECS).

## Solutions:

A radical change in the way that people who work in the building trades are recruited and trained is necessary if skills shortages are to be addressed and if the capacity of our young people is to be fully realised. The changes considered necessary are as follows:

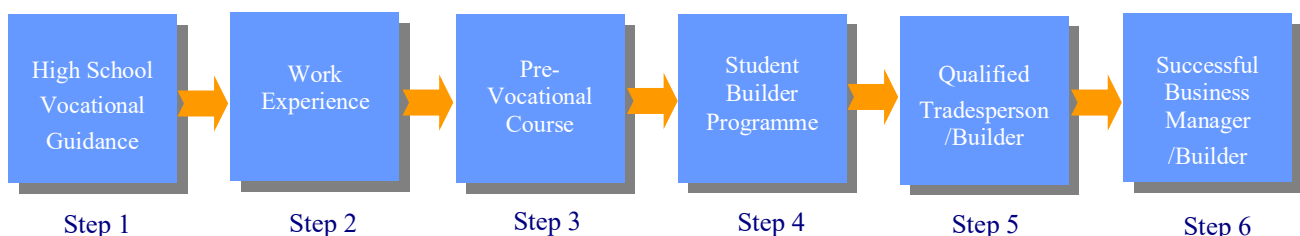
1. Eliminate the differentiation that exists between a career in the building industry and other career options
2. Transfer the education and training of traditional trades from of the world of 'employment' to the world of education.
3. Replace the term "Apprentice" with the term "Student Builder".
4. Re-badge building course subjects and titles to provide a broader and more positive image for a career in the building industry. eg
  - Building Technology – Timber
  - Building Technology - Metal Fabrication
  - Building Technology – Cementitious, Stone and Clay
5. Focus each training element toward the acquisition of a formal qualification as a builder through the attribution of status points for each subject and by including a wide range of elective subjects. eg Occupational Health and Safety for Builders, Business Management for Builders etc.
6. Make HECS available for those training for the building industry.
7. Shed the stereotypical, hard hat, blue singlet image of building workers and vigorously promote a fresh, forward-looking, multi-faceted image of 'Careers of the Future'.

While we in the housing industry understand the importance of a highly skilled trades workforce, we will not attract young people to the industry if we do not recognise and respond to the limitations of our current positioning.

We need to find ways to help young people and their families pass the "Dinner Party" test (*ie What others think when we say our son is "an apprentice bricklayer" compared with "he's a student builder"*) if we are to have any hope of attracting people to the industry in the numbers required. Professionalising trades training and re-positioning the role and status of apprentices as Student Builders is important to this process.

## Proposed Training Model

### **INDUSTRY RECRUITMENT PROGRAMME**



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| Step 1. | High School vocational guidance programme.         |
| Step 2. | Work Experience programme with host employers.     |
| Step 3. | Pre-Vocational courses at Tech Colleges Australia. |
| Step 4. | Admission to Student Builder Programme.            |
| Step 5. | Qualified Tradesperson/Builder.                    |
| Step 6. | Successful Business Manager/Builder.               |