

2018

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

**APPRENTICESHIPS AND TRAINEESHIPS
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 10 OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS' REPORT ON ANNUAL AND FINANCIAL REPORTS
2016-2017**

**Presented by
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Thank you Madam Speaker.

I rise today to provide an update on this Government's commitment to increasing and supporting apprenticeships and traineeships in the ACT.

This Government is focused on ensuring the ACT has an innovative, high performing and safe vocational education and training sector that supports all Canberrans to realise their potential. We are committed to increasing the skilling opportunities available to individuals, supporting our training providers, and delivering skills to the ACT economy to meet industry needs and support regional growth.

The Australian Apprenticeships system (which includes apprenticeships and traineeships), provides the opportunity for people to be employed while they train, and develop their competence in the workplace as they learn from employers with industry expertise. This outstanding pathway allows people to gain the skills and knowledge needed to start, or re-start, a career - all the while providing the workforce needs of industry.

When people think about apprentices, they tend to think of the traditional trades; plumbers, carpenters and electricians. While training people in these areas always remains a high priority, it is important to remember that Australian Apprenticeships are available in hundreds of qualifications.

This ranges from certificate II up to advanced diploma, in industries as diverse as health, community services, business, horticulture and ICT, as well as all of the traditional trades.

Since 2015, I am proud to say, the ACT has recorded the largest proportional increase in Australian Apprenticeship commencements in Australia, with commencements 47 per cent higher in 2017 than in 2015.

This has been against a backdrop of declining commencements across Australia and a transitioning economy that demands an increasingly skilled and agile labour force. Nationally, there has been a steady decline in apprenticeship commencements since 2012 when the Commonwealth Government withdrew a range of employer incentives for existing workers. This included a 49 per cent decline in commencements from 2012 to 2016.

There have been a number of factors behind the success of the ACT Government in supporting apprenticeship and traineeship numbers.

We have sought to understand the motivations and the barriers that influence people in taking the first steps and provide the high quality advice and real outcomes that school students and their parents need to assist their understanding of what apprenticeships can offer.

We have also proactively targeted a number of key groups in our community to take up apprenticeships and traineeships, in particular more mature Canberrans looking to re-skill and change careers and women in traditional trades.

We also have a framework in place to provide ongoing advice and support to both apprentices and their employers once the apprenticeship journey has commenced.

We also provide considerable support to those registered training organisations who work with employers to deliver the training they need. I will now outline some specific initiatives.

The Australian Apprenticeships User Choice program provides subsidies to training organisations to train students employed as an Australian Apprentice. Responding to the declining apprenticeship commencements, the ACT revised its approach to funding training, and significantly increased subsidies in areas of skills shortage.

This followed significant ACT Government investment in the development of an outside modelling tool which informs the ACT Skills Needs List, ensuring the ACT continues to make well informed decisions about where we direct VET funding.

The ACT Skills Needs List is constantly refined through good use of data analysis and industry consultation. The List identifies the VET qualifications more likely to improve an individual's employment outcomes, by identifying which skills the Territory needs to meet industry demand and get people into those jobs.

It's by having this comprehensive understanding of the local labour market, specifically as it relates to apprenticeships and traineeships, that we can then target our funding to encourage training in the right areas.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that all vocational training in the ACT is of the highest quality. The ACT Quality Framework continues to underpin the delivery of government-subsidised training in the ACT and promote excellence and transparency. The Quality Framework is about making sure our registered training organisations are well placed to provide the quality training that meets trainee and employer needs.

Ongoing support throughout an individual's apprenticeship is also a vital contributor to success. Additional support funding is available to training organisations to provide any assistance that may be needed.

And our Skills Canberra Field Officers are a critical aspect of the support provided to apprentices in the ACT.

They visit apprentices and employers in their workplaces and on their worksites to provide support throughout the training process. Establishing good practices early is crucial to ensuring safe and successful training and how important it is for apprentices, and their employers, to know their rights and understand their obligations.

Getting through the early part of an apprenticeship is often the biggest challenge. So it is in these early stages of an apprenticeship that our Field Officers focus their visits. Providing information, clarifying responsibilities under a national training contract, or supporting employers and their apprentices to work through simple misunderstandings, can be the difference between an apprentice dropping out of their qualification—and potentially out of employment—or remaining in the job in training.

We are serious about encouraging people to follow through with their training, and the ACT is the only jurisdiction to provide a completion bonus for eligible students.

The youngest and potentially most vulnerable apprentices are those of school age.

As a result, the Field Officers prioritise visiting all Australian School-based Apprentices within the first two months of their training contract being approved. Skills Canberra works closely with the Education Directorate and WorkSafe ACT to support our school-based apprentices and improve pathways for young people into vocational training and rewarding careers.

In addition to working directly with apprentices and employers, our Field Officers foster the collaborative and growing relationship between the ACT Government and training providers, industry, schools, employment service providers and other stakeholders.

We understand assistance has to come in many forms and we work closely with the Australian Government to increase our capacity to support our apprentices and establish good habits. This means more mentoring programs and empowering apprentices to become role models in their industries.

The ACT is in the process of developing programs that emphasise the importance of well-being at work. This includes dealing with work stresses, starting tough conversations about mental health, and making sure apprentices are aware that help will always be available.

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is the ACT's largest provider of training for apprenticeships and traineeships and has a wonderfully broad base of courses in community services, information technology, health, construction, childcare, hospitality and tourism.

Given the importance of CIT as the public provider of VET in the ACT, the ACT Government has provided extensive support to CIT. This has allowed CIT to undertake a comprehensive range of quality improvement activities to support the delivery of quality training.

These activities aim to ensure CIT is delivering skilled workers of the highest quality, and that apprentices and trainees have access to the supports they need to complete their training.

One of the initiatives implemented at CIT, and since rolled out to a number of private providers, has been the use of MyProfiling. This mobile app streamlines assessment and reporting processes and allows apprentices, their employers and their training organisations to more easily track their ongoing progress. The ACT will continue to support CIT so it remains the pre-eminent provider of high-quality, cutting-edge training across the ACT and region.

In March this year I launched the Women in Trades Grants Program to help more Canberrans access training opportunities. The program will leverage the creativity of the VET sector and industry to increase female participation in traditionally male-dominated trades.

I launched the program alongside Leilani McGurgan, a second year electrical apprentice, employed by ACT Property Group. Leilani had a range of employment before taking up a trade and realising it was the perfect environment for her to be challenged, and the perfect opportunity for her to inspire other women to have a go and take up a trade.

The Women in Trades Grants Program was the fulfilment of a promise by this Government to try to boost the number of female tradespeople, and ensure young women aren't discouraged from following an interest into historically male-dominated trades. I look forward to making announcements about the outcomes of the grants program shortly.

This Government will continue to work with the Australian Government to identify opportunities to increase and support apprenticeships and traineeships in the ACT. We are working to make sure ACT dollars go further to create more apprenticeship pathways and work experience opportunities for young people in ACT schools, more support for registered training organisations in areas of skills shortage, and new higher apprenticeships in priority areas.

We need to make VET available for students who have a passion and talent, but aren't sure where to apply them. We also need to make sure students are exposed to the possibilities that vocational training provides to embark on long, satisfying careers. The ACT Government has a role to play in this and endeavours to increase the number of apprentices employed across our diverse workforce.

ACT VET projects are an affirmation of our belief that the chance to upskill or reskill, and find yourself in a stimulating professional environment, is one that should be afforded to all individuals, regardless of age or gender.

Our successes on the national stage in recent years, through the Australian Training Awards, are a testament to the success of the 'ACT eco-system' in supporting improved apprenticeship outcomes through quality training and appropriate support.

In the past week a number of our male and female apprentices competed on the national stage, with more than 10 Australian Apprentices representing the ACT at the national WorldSkills competition in Sydney.

I am again looking forward to the ACT Training Awards later in the year that will be another opportunity to celebrate the wonderful successes and achievements of ACT apprentices, trainees, employers and training organisations.

This Government will continue to support apprenticeships and traineeships as a key part of our high-quality VET sector, delivering skilled workers to meet industry needs in the ACT, now and into the future.

Madam Speaker, in closing, I will also table some highlights of facts and figures on apprentices and trainees in the ACT, which demonstrate further some of the successes in this important area.

ENDS.

