>>> Barriers and Drivers for Bricklaying Apprenticeships

Industry Pathfinders Project

1 July 2009

Prepared for

CPSISC
Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council

Funded by

Australian Government
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Prepared by

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Acknowledgements

This report has been produced as the final stage of a project funded under the Australian Government's Industry Training Strategies Programme, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Altegis Group wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the bricklaying teachers, employers, industry groups and other agency representatives from across Australia who participated in this project through forums, surveys and interviews.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the Project Steering Committee members who have worked extremely hard to organise the forums and interviews, and to distribute and collect survey responses.

In particular, we are very grateful to the support this project has been provided by the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation (ABBTF). The Development Managers in each State have been very helpful in passing on contacts and State based information on the bricklaying industry. Further, the ABBTF actively participated in the telephone surveys with bricklayers enabling the project to reach more individuals than would otherwise have been possible.

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Executive Summary

The bricklaying industry is an integral part of the commercial and residential construction industry, with over 26,000 bricklayers and blocklayers across Australia. However, roughly 55% of the workforce currently practices the trade without any qualification or formal training in bricklaying or blocklaying. Australia has a strong history of apprenticeship training in the construction field and yet approximately half of those who begin an apprenticeship in bricklaying do not complete their apprenticeship. These issues gave rise to this project to explore deeply the barriers and drivers for Bricklaying Apprenticeships.

This report accompanies two other reports within this project. *The National Bricklaying Apprenticeship Status Report* overviews the bricklaying industry and its impact on the environment for bricklaying apprenticeships. Also, a companion document entitled *Innovative Practices in Bricklaying* has been developed to highlight the positive activities in bricklaying training.

This report has been funded by DEEWR under the Australian Government's Industry Training Strategies Programme and managed through the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council (CPSISC), which works with the construction industry to improve training for industry members.

The information and recommendations within this report are primarily based upon national surveys with bricklayers, bricklayer lecturers and bricklayer apprentices & students. These surveys and recommendations were further informed by five interstate forums and interviews with representation from commercial and residential bricklayers, bricklaying industry associations, State departments of education, builder associations, group training organisations, and union representatives.

Reasons for Taking Up Apprenticeship

The most common reason bricklaying apprentices took up the trade was to work outdoors. Approximately 1/3 of respondents were also driven by the opportunity to *get a qualification*. Although *money* was the third choice, it is noteworthy that this was a choice not made by over 2/3 of the apprentices/students surveyed. In fact, of the top five reasons, four are personal drivers and include: *work outdoors, get a qualification, I like to see the results of my work, the opportunity to be my own boss*.

This speaks to the key drivers most useful to advertise the trade to potential bricklaying apprentices.

Unqualified sub-contractors (i.e. those without a formal qualification in bricklaying) were attracted into the trade for similar reasons, but tended to place a higher value on *money* and the opportunity to be their own boss.

This may suggest that a key driver to attract unqualified sub-contractors, is a qualification &/or training that focuses on running a business (i.e. as an avenue to more money).

Pre Entry Issues

Common Image - The bricklaying industry suffers from a poor self image. Whilst bricklayers acknowledge the many aspects they do enjoy within the trade, they also identify that the industry suffers from a 'rogue element' or 'cowboy' mentality that can bring an element of disrepute to the trade.

Apprentices describe a bricklayer as hardworking, earning good money, enjoys working outdoors and uneducated.

Many of these images reflect the key drivers to enter the trade for apprentices. However, the image of 'uneducated' appears to be a key barrier. Many employers, associations, State education organisations and union representatives acknowledge that bricklaying is 'often perceived as a second tier trade ... not professional enough.' This often has a direct impact on advice and application numbers into the apprenticeship scheme.

Influencing Apprentices - Parents were the most influential group as reported by current apprentices in helping them to decide to take up bricklaying. However, many felt that whilst parents had good intentions, they were not always well informed on the trade and may have their own prejudices on the trade. Apprentices felt that other bricklayers were a more respected source of information 'because they know the trade' and they could provide believable information. In fact, many of the top influencers were either in bricklaying or involved in the construction trades. Utilising this group to encompass the message on 'who should go into bricklaying' would seem to hold more sway than media individuals and/or glamorised lifestyle choices that set up false expectations. . In fact, 81% of bricklaying lecturers surveyed felt that 'most people who are just starting their bricklaying apprenticeship don't really know what they are getting into'.

Comments on the internet as a source of information highlighted its ease of use and accessibility. However, it should be noted that when apprentices were asked about the most frustrating sources of information, the internet rated the most frustrating, with comments on how hard it was to find information and 'too slow to find the information'.

Knowledge of Apprentice Support/Subsidies - Of particular concern is the lack of knowledge amongst current apprentices of the available support and subsidies available to them. 58.5% of apprentices, who responded, said they were receiving no wage support and/or subsidies.

Ideal Candidates - Many employers, GTOs and forum attendees spoke of poor apprentice selection by many employers. Many comments suggest that it is very common for employers to take on an apprentice simply because of a common friend or family connection. The strong inference is that often the apprentice is chosen for reasons that have little bearing on whether they are well suited for the industry.

Bricklaying lecturers tended to believe that employability skills were more important than technical skills when selecting an apprentice. They highlighted fitness, attitude, work ethic, reliability and punctuality as the most important attributes. Employers also expressed similar themes.

It would appear that some GTO's with a strong presence in the construction field tend to have more targeted and industry specific selection methods. More importantly, these selection processes appear to have dramatically reduced the attrition rate for bricklaying apprentices within these specific 'best practice' group training organisations.

School Career Advisors - Career Advisors were perceived as generally providing sound knowledge on the trades and how to go about getting an apprenticeship. Less well regarded was their specific knowledge on the bricklaying trade. In receiving career advice, it is interesting to note that those who took on a bricklaying apprenticeship were generally encouraged to attend TAFE and the trades in general by Career Advisors. This appears to be a well informed direction from the Career Advisors.

Pre-Apprenticeship Programs - The majority of Registered Training Organisations (RTO) delivering bricklaying apprenticeship training appear to be heavily involved in some form of Pre-Apprenticeship program, taster program, or other bricklaying training before the apprenticeship Certificate III.

The survey of apprentices found that 19.4% had done a pre-apprenticeship program of some form. However, there is little within the confines of this survey, to suggest that pre-apprenticeship programs improve outcomes in a direct manner for bricklaying apprenticeships. Notwithstanding the important role pre-apprenticeship programs have in promoting awareness of the bricklaying trade, their impact on attrition rates appears minimal.

Other Career Considerations & Concerns – Bricklaying apprentices considered a wide variety of other careers before making their decision to embark upon a bricklaying apprenticeship. However, the majority of other careers considered were dominated by the construction trade. This appears to be a long standing trend since sub-contractors also recollect considering similar alternative careers before entering the trade.

RTO Experience

First Year Attrition Rate – Previous research highlighted the particularly high attrition rate in the first year of a bricklaying apprenticeship[1]. Many bricklaying lecturers believe that high first year attrition reflects uninformed expectations of apprentices as well as their inability to access trowel skills quickly enough. Current apprentices perceive the high first year attrition rate is due to apprenticeship wages and related reasons like, '*saw other jobs that paid more'* and '*treated like cheap labour'*. Comments from employers also suggest a strong sympathy for first year apprentices who '*are doing it tough'* in their first year because of the low wage. Comments from a range of sources also suggest that moving out of the apprenticeship and working as an unqualified bricklayer is all too easy and financially rewarding for many on first year apprentice wages.

[1] National Bricklaying Apprenticeships Status Report, p. 63

Apprentice Feedback on Trade Training at RTO's - In general, bricklaying apprentices were quite satisfied with their training at the RTO. Often comments from apprentices highlighted the fact that skills learned in the RTO were not always experienced with their employer. However, this highlighted the importance of getting a qualification in their mind. Aspects least enjoyed by current apprentices highlighted the challenge of effectively engaging the interest and commitment of current apprentices. Many apprentices commented on the *slack time, waiting around for the next step* and general perceptions that they were *bored* with some of the current delivery. Part of the challenge is in managing a class of apprentices, when each has varying degrees of experience, capability and commitment for the subject matter. A number of RTO's (mostly in the private sector) are increasingly moving from a class management to a case management approach to training bricklaying apprentices. This allows for individual apprentices to move at their own pace through training. Case management also allows for flexibility with the employer during slow periods or inclement weather to slot an apprentice into the program. Case management may not be a method that is appropriate for all apprentices, but does have added importance for an industry with 55% of the workforce unqualified.

Success in Training - National surveys indicate that bricklaying apprentices most successful at trade training were on average, slightly older than 20 years old, had previous experience in bricklaying or labouring, were more likely to be doing bricklaying vs. labouring with their current host employer, rotated roles more often with their current host employer and tended to work on sites with more than one bricklaying apprentice.

Employer Feedback - Although most contractors were satisfied with the trade school, they felt that training would be improved by teaching more relevant and up to date practices, including job planning, costing, reading plans and management skills. Host employers also would like to see improved communication and feedback from RTOs on their apprentice. This was particularly noted within the commercial sector of the trade. Further, host employers would like to see RTOs improve discipline and '*weed out disruptive students'*, which they perceive to be slowing the progress of their apprentice.

Bricklaying Lecturers' Feedback – Bricklaying lecturers were generally satisfied with the Training Package, but suggest that more industry engagement is required in the ongoing development to properly reflect current industry practices. Further comments reflected that some units within the training package no longer appeared relevant. This was balanced by other comments that encouraged the maintenance of trade skills across a range of practices that may not be prevalent in current construction design.

Whilst most bricklaying lecturers believe that the physical resources are appropriate for the teaching needs in bricklaying, a number of comments reflect frustration with the practice of reusing bricks and the impact on quality outcomes for student projects.

Teaching resources appear to be the area of most concern with some bricklaying lecturers. Many suggest teaching resources should be developed to better meet student needs, whether it is learning challenges or preferences to keep them engaged in the learning process. Lecturers generally feel constrained to make time to develop quality teaching resources within the demands of their day-to-day activity. Regional RTO's are particularly constrained in the development of resources without the economies of scale provided by some of the larger capital city RTO's. A number of lecturers feel there should be support for the development of resources.

There does appear to be widespread support for resource collaboration between RTOs, by lecturers and RTO management. However, there are also a number of barriers highlighted by the bricklaying lecturers including funding, past failed attempts and the ability to manage an equitable model.

On-The-Job Experience

What Makes a Good Bricklayer? - The quality of work done was the most dominant factor for both employers and subcontractors. In fact, this was the case for both qualified and unqualified bricklayers, as well as those in both the commercial and the residential sector.

Importance of Trade School - Despite the fact that bricklayers feel that apprentices learn more about the trade on-the-job, they still value the importance of the formal schooling. Even unqualified employers within the trade believe that training through a trade school is important – over half believe that it is important and only 17% believe it is *not important at all*.

Feedback on Employers' Training Capacity - Many RTO bricklaying lecturers feel that employers are generally well prepared to train apprentices on-the-job. Where concerns were raised, lecturers felt that some employers did not make the time to train or offer an appropriate variety of work to supplement the training school experience. Lecturers also raised the concern that some apprentices were working under bricklayers that were not qualified themselves.

Why an Employer Takes On an Apprentice - When employers were asked about the reasons they took on a bricklaying apprentice, the following ratings emerged:

1. Makes good business sense
2. An apprentice is more likely to stay with an employer over the 3-4 years
3. Because the employer was an apprentice once
4. It costs less to employ an apprentice

However, sub-contractors and bricklaying lecturers perceived employers' primary reason for taking on an apprentice was *cost*. The difference in perceptions on cost between employers and lecturers is particularly worrisome as this difference can create barriers to the relationship and possibilities for collaboration.

Cost of Apprentices to an Employer - The general view in many trades, is that an apprentice is a high cost in the first year of their apprenticeship and that the employer tends to 'lose money' on them in the first year, to be 'recouped' in the latter part of their apprenticeship when they start producing at a higher output/quality. The high cost in the first year did not bear out in surveys with host employers. Over half of host employers indicate that first year apprentices '*break even'* or '*make them money'* on the job.

	Cost	Break Even + Make Money
First Year Apprentice	46%	54%
Second Year Apprentice	25%	75%
Third Year Apprentice	7%	93%

A number of comments suggest that the cost largely depends upon the individual apprentice, whilst other employers suggest it is how well the employer goes about teaching them from the very beginning.

What Makes for an Enjoyable Work Experience? - Apprentices generally reflect that they quite enjoy the work that they do with their employer, with only 6% stating that they do not enjoy their work experience. Apprentices across all years enjoy their on-the-job experience more when provided more trowel time and when provided the opportunity to rotate in their role during their first year.

Current bricklaying apprentices suggest that they would learn more about bricklaying on-the-job if they were provided more bricklaying time, more time with the boss and provided more responsibility such as setting out their own job. However, apprentices also acknowledge that they should ask more questions and listen more on the job.

Employer Challenges – Finding the right person for an apprenticeship dominates the thoughts of most employers in dealing with the apprenticeship scheme. Most comments suggest that employers struggle with the maturity level of most apprentices and the social and/or life challenges that are common for young adults. Employers also feel that the lack of interest in the trade make selection processes difficult.

Beyond finding the right person, the cost of overheads is a major challenge dominated by Workers Compensation and the associated paperwork. With the high use of sub-contracting, few host employers appear familiar with employee administration.

Employers worry whether they will have enough work to employ an apprentice over the apprenticeship period. They also are concerned that teaching an apprentice will slow down productivity and hamper their ability to run the business.

The Unqualified Workforce

The choice by so many to enter the trade without trade training is an important dynamic in the bricklaying industry that has a direct impact on the bricklaying apprenticeship program.

Reasons Behind Unqualified Workforce – Poor Apprenticeship wages were identified by host employers and bricklaying lectures as the dominating reason behind a large unqualified workforce and the major barrier for individuals to access training for a qualification. Comments suggest that the low wages over the apprenticeship period particularly dissuade young people who may not have the 'long term view' on their career. Nor are careers necessarily a life-long decision these days with the trend towards multiple careers in a lifetime. Many employers and RTO lecturers reflect that current new entrants into the trade often start at a later age and often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This means their financial needs are greater and yet they may not be in a position to access family support.

The pathway for individuals to enter the bricklaying trade without an apprenticeship or qualification has a long history in the trade. Employers suggest that this history and the view that much of the trade involves hands-on learning, support the trend towards a large unqualified workforce. Although 70% of employers believe it is important to have bricklayers trained through trade school, one third of all bricklaying employers surveyed believe that bricklaying is a trade that can be learned on-the-job and does not require a formal qualification.

Other suggested reasons behind the large unqualified workforce include an undervalued qualification that is never requested on the job site, as well as, challenging study requirements and the abundant paperwork in managing an apprentice.

Can You Tell the Difference? - One would hope that training ensures some sort of advantage that is evident in the workplace. Employers perceived that the quality of work done by qualified bricklayers was better. However, this tended to depend on the type of work. Quite a few employers noted that much of the '*standard work on the line'* is hard to differentiate. Employers also believe that an apprenticed tradesperson has a better understanding of the trade and develops their skills more quickly.

Largely, those who were qualified believed they could tell the difference in workmanship, whereas, unqualified bricklayers disagreed and felt that there was little to differentiate. Unqualified bricklayers believe that a good bricklayer is more dependent upon the individual and the attitude they bring to the job. Some employers believe that there is little difference in evidence and that much simply depends upon getting the experience with the right gang.

Enticing Unqualified Bricklayers - 40% of unqualified bricklayers who responded to the survey have seriously considered taking up a bricklaying apprenticeship or training qualification. Most often, they chose not to get their bricklaying qualification because of the cost or did not feel the qualification was necessary.

However, roughly 1/3 would be more interested if there was a robust recognition process for what they already know. They would also be more inclined if their boss encouraged them to do so or it helped them retain their job. And finally, many would seriously consider the training if they received an increase in wages due to the qualification.

Enhanced Trade Training

In surveys, interviews and forums across the country, most participants highlighted the need for enhanced tradespersons' training for qualified and unqualified bricklayers. Even for qualified bricklayers, many acknowledge that an apprenticeship is a sound basis for starting a career in the trade, but there are other challenges and training needs some years later when they have refined their hand skills and understanding of the trade.

The largest number of comments centred on '*business training*'. Most identified the need for bookkeeping, computer skills, tax management as well as softer skills like time management and managing apprentices.

However, training needs were not only limited to business skills. Further training was highlighted by RTO lecturers in the area of specialist work including refractory work, new products, and restoration skills, to name a few. Many employers worry that important skills are being lost to the industry because of the current trends toward common bricks, parging, tilt slab, etc.

And finally, there was an identified need for building stronger pathways into general building and builder's registration. This was viewed as an important career extension with positive impact on the image of bricklaying.

Licensing

Although licensing was not an identified objective within this project, the topic of licensing within the trade emerged in every single forum during discussions amongst stakeholders. The predominating view was that licensing the trade at the contractor level would improve the quality of work, better protect the customer and increase the skilled workforce, in the long run.

Introduction

The bricklaying industry is an integral part of the commercial and residential construction industry, with over 26,000 bricklayers and blocklayers across Australia. The labour force is largely represented by contractors and subcontractors with few employees. Whilst this provides a dynamic and responsive workforce, the tendency towards small business size suggests this sector of the market is particularly susceptible to economic downturns. This has a direct impact on the Australian Apprenticeship Scheme and training of future bricklayers.

This report was given rise by the challenge within the bricklaying industry to attract individuals into bricklaying apprenticeships and to ensure that sufficient numbers are completing their apprenticeship training. An aging workforce[2] and particularly high attrition rate within the apprenticeship program (i.e. approximately 47-50% nationally)[3] are two issues that are evident and commonly discussed amongst industry associations, training organisations, bricklayers and blocklayers. Additionally, with approximately 55% of the trade currently practicing without qualifications[4] or formal training in bricklaying, this raises issues on awareness and perceptions of training within the trade.

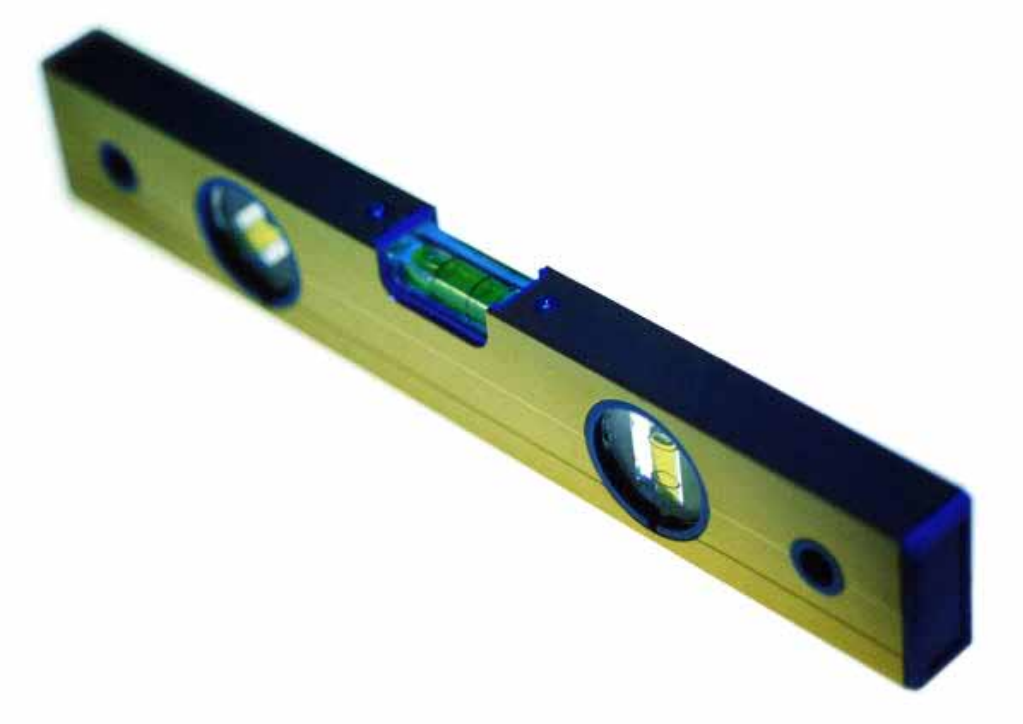
This report has been produced as the second stage of a project funded under the Australian Government's Industry Training Strategies Programme, administered by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. The first stage report is entitled 'National Bricklaying Apprenticeship Status Report' and reviews the current environment for bricklaying apprenticeships.

The project is delivered through the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council (CPSISC), which works with the construction industry to improve training for industry members.

This second report aims to identify the drivers and barriers that are presently hindering the take-up of New Apprenticeships in Bricklaying & Blocklaying (i.e. General Construction - Bricklaying/Blocklaying).

The outcomes of this report will provide a more targeted capability to market the trade to potential apprentices and current unqualified bricklayers. Additionally, recommendations are suggested for training organisations and host employers that will provide stronger outcomes that best suit the bricklaying industry needs.

[2] Powers T. and Walker J. 2009, National Bricklaying Apprenticeship Status Report, p. 28
[3] Ibid, p. 69
[4] ABS Census, 2006



Project Methodology

This report is largely based upon national surveys conducted with bricklayers, current apprentices and lecturers in bricklaying from training organisations across Australia.

The topics and questions were informed by forums conducted in:

- Melbourne, Victoria (11th February, 2009)
- Perth, Western Australia (7th April, 2009)
- Brisbane, Queensland (4th March, 2009)
- Sydney, New South Wales (25th March, 2009)
- Adelaide, South Australia (29th May, 2009)

They forums involved 95 individuals in total with representation from commercial and residential bricklayers, bricklaying industry associations, State department of education, builder associations, group training organisations, training organisations and union representatives.

Additionally, five forums were conducted with bricklaying apprentices and mature aged students to better understand their views and perceptions on key topics.

And finally, 19 individual interviews were conducted with industry stakeholders to clarify topics.

The forums and interviews were used to inform the survey questions and recommendations throughout this report.

The number of surveys conducted was as follows:

- 356 Bricklayers
- 369 Apprentices and students
- 83 Lecturers

The bricklayer surveys were conducted by phone and have representation from every State and Territory. The contact details were provided by the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation or through the 'Yellow Pages'. It should be noted that non-qualified bricklayers were particularly targeted due to the high number of unqualified bricklayers within the trade. Although difficult to access, the survey team was able to produce 71 surveys from bricklayers who were unqualified (i.e. did not do formal training in bricklaying).

Reasons for Taking Up Apprenticeship

It would appear appropriate to query the reasons why apprentices take on an apprenticeship as an important start to the investigation. In this section, the key drivers for bricklaying apprentices are presented. Also important to the investigation are the perceptions of current bricklayers and bricklaying teachers on what they believed to be the reasons for people to take on a bricklaying apprenticeship. At issue here, are whether there are any differences or misunderstandings as to the drivers for people taking on a bricklaying apprenticeship.

Apprentices' Perceptions

Apprentices highlighted the following reasons for taking on an apprenticeship.

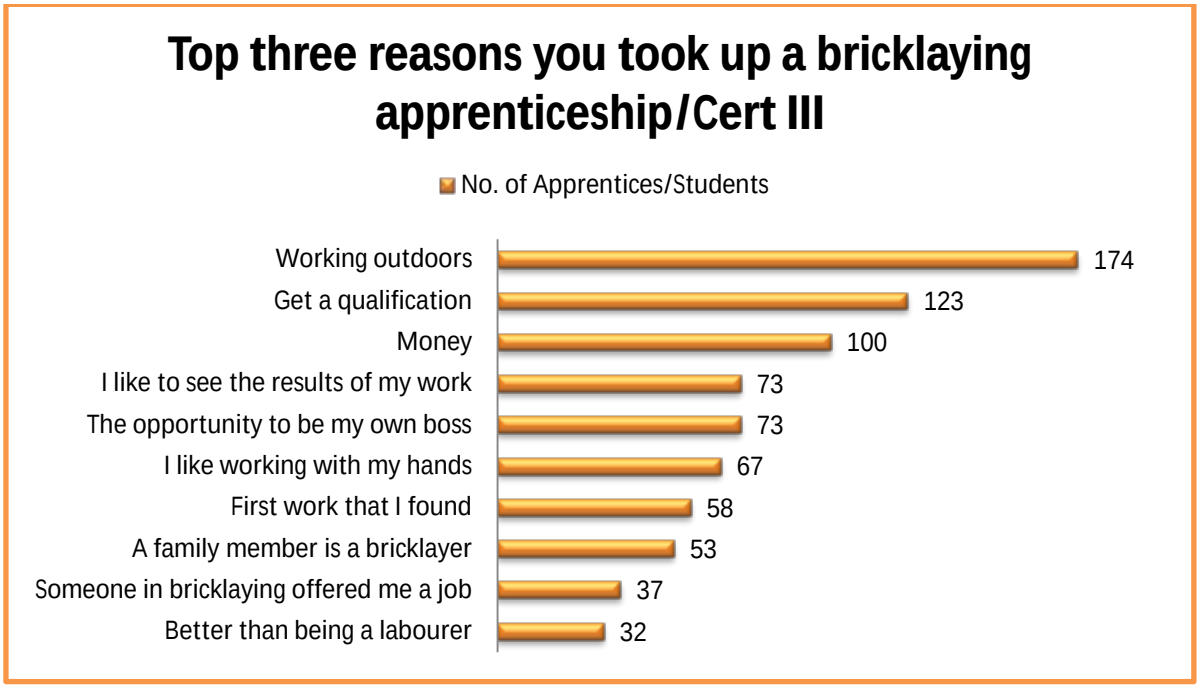


Chart 1 - Top three reasons for taking up a bricklaying apprenticeship

Almost ½ of all apprentice respondents highlighted the importance of working outdoors as a key reason for taking on a bricklaying apprenticeship. Approximately $^{1}/_{3}$ of respondents were driven by the opportunity to get a qualification. The qualification represented different issues to various apprentices. Interviews with trowel hands and forums with apprentices highlighted that a qualification was valued for the following reasons:

- Proof of ability
- Help retain a job in a down market
- The ability to do things right
- Personal growth/interest

- A piece of paper proving what they know (i.e. primarily trowel hands already in the trade)

It is noteworthy that *money* was the third choice as a reason for taking up a bricklaying apprenticeship – and a choice not made by over 2/3 of the apprentices/students. Although highlighted as a barrier later on in this report – and a topic greatly discussed by apprentices in forums – money does not appear to be as important a driver as the intrinsic or internal issues. In fact, of the top five items, four are intrinsic wants and needs:

- Work outdoors
- Get a qualification
- I like to see the results of my work
- The opportunity to be my own boss

This speaks to the key issues of how to advertise the trade to potential bricklaying apprentices. Whilst not ignoring that many aspire to be financially successful, with the 'beaut ute' and all, we suspect advertising to their intrinsic drivers will focus more on attracting those specifically suited to the trade.

Employers' Perceptions

Contractors tended not to place as much importance on working outdoors and the value of a qualification as did the apprentices. In fact, employers believed most individuals were attracted to the trade because of the opportunity to be their own boss. Further, those with more bricklaying experience, tended to feel people were attracted because they *liked working with their hands*.

Those in the commercial sector believed the most important factor for attracting bricklayers was money. This sector of the market does tend to pay a higher rate than the residential sector, so money must be recognised as a strategic point of difference in attracting bricklayers to this sector of the market. However, it does appear to overlook other underlying drivers for most bricklayers.

Unqualified sub-contractors tended to have different perceptions about why someone took up the trade than current apprentices. Their top four reasons for attracting people into the bricklaying trade are:

1. Money
2. The opportunity to be their own boss
3. Like working with their hands
4. Working outdoors

This may suggest that a key driver to attract unqualified sub-contractors, is a qualification that focuses on running a business (i.e. as an avenue to more money) and the opportunity to develop or hone more complex skills.

Masonry Contractor Associations, Group Training Organisation and union representatives were asked for their thoughts on how to attract the 'right people into the trade for the right reasons'. Responses included:

> "Get them in at an early age".
>
> "Make sure that they have had some experience of the trade before signing up to an apprenticeship. This could be through having done a pre-apprenticeship or taster program, or by having worked with a friend or relative. That way they understand what the trade involves and they are more likely to stay".

One respondent had given a great deal of thought to this issue. He suggested:

> "You need a 'third horizon' goal. Being a builder is very attractive, as builders can make a lot of money. But most builders are carpenters. What you need to do is to go into the private schools … Ask who wants to be a builder, architect, structural engineer. Talk to them about how they can do the apprenticeship to get cash to go to uni. During their holiday time at uni, they can work as a bricklayer and become cash positive … If this happened, we'd have engineers who understand bricklaying and can talk to architects. … It would also address the perception that 'it's a hard trade and I'll have a bad back later because they'd do bricklaying while they're young and fit and then practise their profession when they're older".

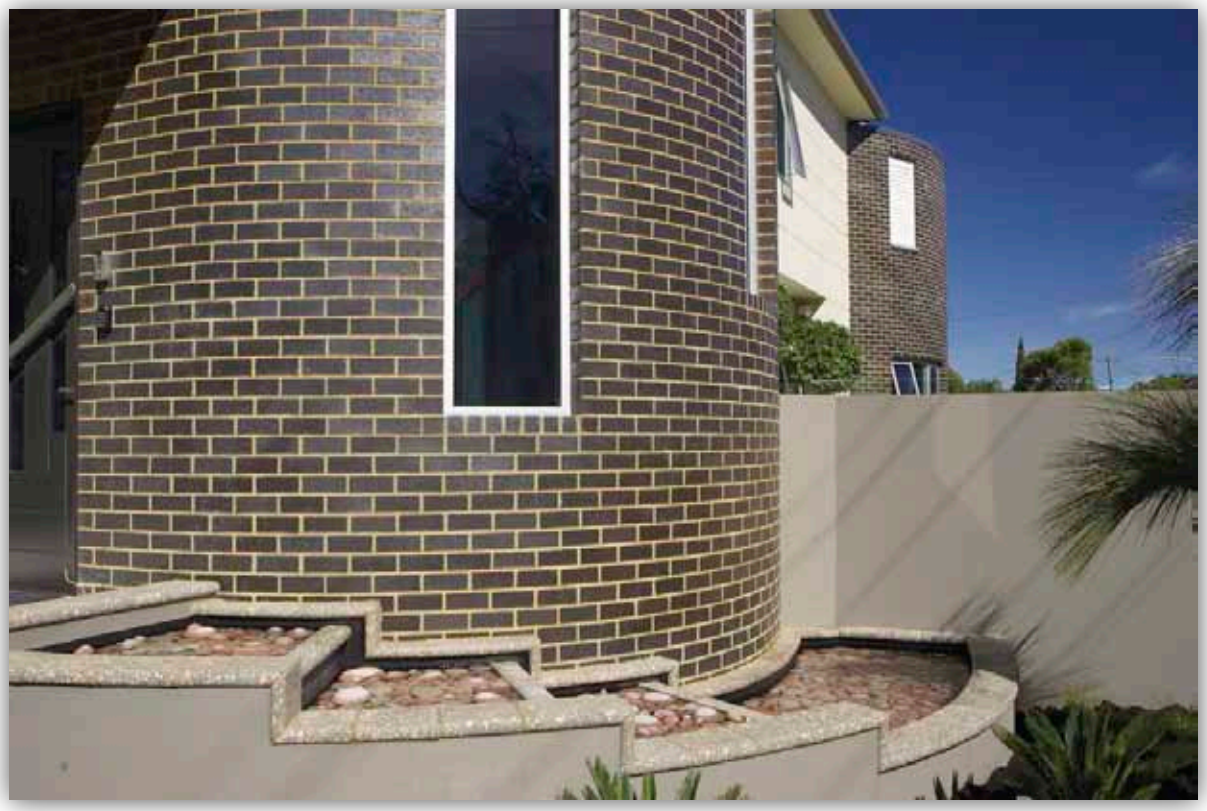
Bricklaying Lecturers

Bricklaying lecturers tended to overlook the importance to apprentices' desire to be their own boss and surprisingly rated apprentices' interest in a qualification lower than did the apprentices themselves. However, they were well aware of 'working outdoors' as a main driver.

Recommendation 1

Current promotional activities focus on future earnings and lifestyle. Future promotional activities to attract people into a bricklaying apprenticeship should also focus on:

- ***Working outdoors***
- ***Pathways into building***
- ***Other career paths offered by the qualification***
- ***Typical examples of brick & block craftsmanship***
- ***High likelihood of becoming your own boss***



Pre Entry Issues

It is important to understand the various dynamics at play when individuals are deciding whether to take on a bricklaying apprenticeship. The following section reviews those issues considered before actual apprenticeship training begins, and highlights the important attributes, influences and interventions within this complex process. It is hoped that this will provide a better understanding which can assist in steering the right individuals into a bricklaying apprenticeship.

Common Image

The bricklaying industry suffers from a poor self image. Whilst bricklayers acknowledge the many aspects they do enjoy within the trade, they also identify that the industry suffers from a 'rogue element' or 'cowboy' mentality that can bring an element of disrepute to the trade.

This is reflected by comments from Group Training Organisations that are in a particularly good position to compare different trades. Even those that are successfully managing a large complement of bricklaying host employers, comment on the challenging nature of the trade and higher cost to manage.

It is important to note the image of the trade held by apprentices when they first enter their apprenticeship program. Bricklaying lecturers are in a good position to hear the varying view of first year apprentices. They reflect the following common images that most apprentices have of a bricklayer when they first start their apprenticeship. It should be noted that this is only a snapshot in time and may not always reflect the cyclical nature of the industry.

1. Hardworking

   "A hardworking person who travels from job to job. Loves a beer and a good time and does not have to think too hard doing his job."

   "Hard worker, working outside and earning good money."

2. Earning Good Money

   "Tough outdoor type with plenty of money"

   "Owning a great ute, having a good life (able to afford most things)"

   "Hard working, coarse, abrasive nature, they have the potential to make a lot of money."

3. Working Outdoors

   "Hard worker, well paid, outdoors type"

   "Hard working, earn good money, their working hours suit an outdoor lifestyle"

"Working outside, using their hands, not sitting in an office."

4. Uneducated Workers

"They don't have a very good image of bricklaying in general. Some are only doing it to leave school and because they think you don't have to be very smart to do the job. I am trying to change that negative image."

"Uneducated, uncultured, honest, semi-skilled building worker

5. Skilled Worker

"SKILLED, RESPECTED PERSON IN THE COMMUNITY"

"…hard working, skilled, outdoor worker…"

"I think they look at bricklayers in different ways. Sometimes they think that the bricklayer has pride that they will be able to do that one day. If the brickie is very motivated and is very good at what he does then the apprentice treats that person as a mentor and someone to look up to. It also helps them determine a benchmark of what he needs to do to be as good."

6. Work for yourself

"… hard working ,loves a beer ,gets plenty of days off ,pay is good can be your own boss"

"Must be good to be self-employed and running your own business. Work the hours you want and take time off when it suits."

"Aussie Icon. Well paid, own boss."

"Get to work outdoors, hard work and you can work for yourself"

Many of these images reflect the key drivers to enter the trade for apprentices. However, the image of 'uneducated worker' appears to be a key barrier that was also reflected by participants in many forums around Australia. Many employers, associations, State education organisations and union representatives acknowledge that bricklaying is 'often perceived as a second tier trade … not professional enough.'

One interviewee commented:

"The perception out there is that there are two types of kids who go into bricklaying. The first is the type whose parent says 'My kid's not smart enough to go to uni'. The second is the type whose parent says 'My kid's about to go to jail'. We need to do something to address this perception".

Finding Information

The vast majority of bricklaying apprentices felt it was relatively easy to find information about the bricklaying apprenticeship scheme and training (i.e. 86% found it Very Easy or Fairly Easy to find information).

The best sources of information for most bricklaying apprentices were:

1. Other bricklayers
2. Bricklaying Training organisations (RTOs)
3. Parents
4. Internet
5. Australian Apprenticeship Centres

Apprentices felt that other bricklayers were a respected source 'because they know the trade' and they could provide believable information on the expectations and requirements to make it in the trade.

Apprentices noted that information provided by RTO's was believable and provided in a helpful manner that eased their worries and concerns.

Comments on the internet as a source of information highlighted its ease of use and accessibility. However, it should be noted that when apprentices were asked about the most frustrating sources of information, the internet rated highest, with comments on how hard it was to find information and 'too slow to find the information'.

The following lists the sources identified as most frustrating by current apprentices when they were searching for information on a bricklaying apprenticeship:

1. Internet
2. Nothing was frustrating
3. Parents
4. Australian Apprenticeship Centre
5. Recruitment Agency
6. RTO/TAFE
7. Newspaper

A relatively high number of comments from current apprentices noted they had no frustration with information sources – this is very encouraging. Comments on parents often reflected well meaning, but ill-informed information. The Australian Apprenticeship Centres were frustrating to some apprentices because 'too many forms', 'too slow' and 'lack of specific information' on bricklaying.

For many apprentices, this is their first foray into the full-time workforce. Whilst many believe that there is no barrier to finding information, the question must be asked, 'do they typically have enough information to make an informed decision?' Many bricklaying lecturers believe they do not fully understand what they are getting into. In fact, 81% of bricklaying lecturers surveyed felt that '*most people who are just starting their bricklaying apprenticeship don't really know what they are getting into'*.

Influencing Apprentices

Whilst many sources of information may be utilised, it is informative to note apprentices' perception of who has influenced their decision to choose a bricklaying apprenticeship. When asked, apprentices identified the following people or agencies as 'Very Helpful' in helping them make their decision.

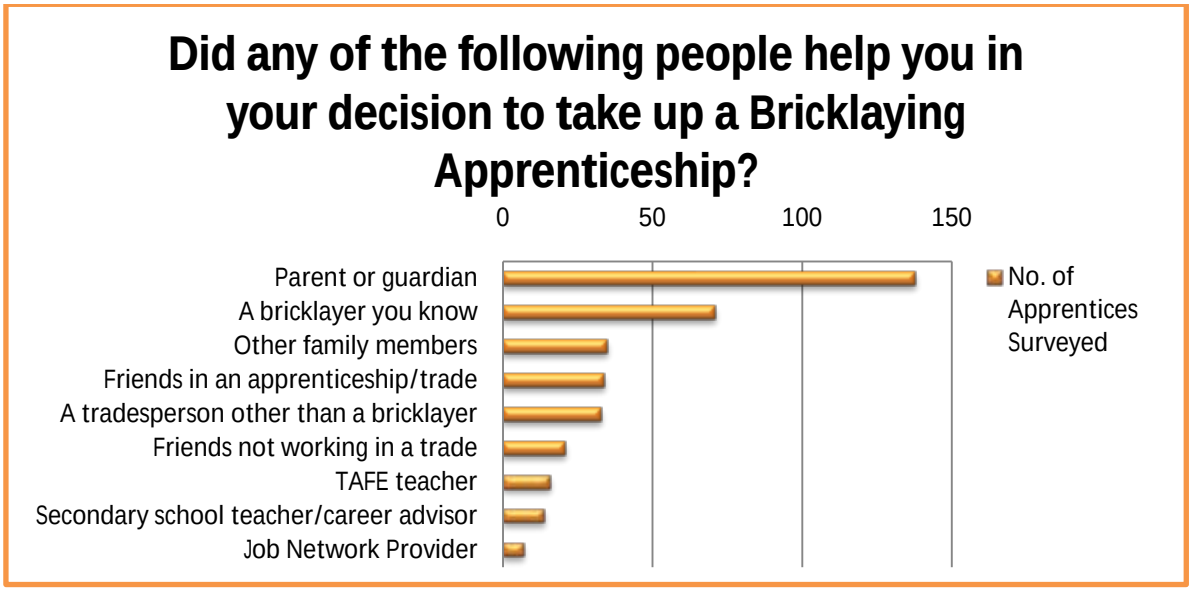


Chart 2 - Who helped in the decision to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship?

Not surprisingly, parents or guardians are the most influential in a young person's career choice. However, forum comments suggest parents may not always be well informed on the bricklaying trade and may have their own prejudices on the trade. Parents become an important group to target with appropriate information on bricklaying apprenticeships and a career in bricklaying.

Of the top five influencers above, three of them are trade related. Again, those in the bricklaying trade or a general trade appear to be extremely important in the decision process. Utilising this group to encompass the message on 'who should go into bricklaying' would seem to hold more sway than media individuals and/or glamorised lifestyle choices that set up false expectations.

Recommendation 2

The information sources which are most informative and influential for apprentices are bricklayers themselves, RTOs that teach bricklaying and parents. Those organisations which are trying to inform potential apprentices should look for strategies which connect the information more effectively to these sources. Marketing the trade should heavily utilise current bricklayers and clearly identify RTO contact details, information nights and training structure. Further, marketing the trade should include targeted information for parents and family members promoting the career paths and benefits of bricklaying.

Knowledge of Apprentice Support/Subsidies

Of particular concern is the lack of knowledge amongst current apprentices of the available support and subsidies available to them. 58.5% of apprentices, who responded, said they were receiving no wage support and/or subsidies.

Of those subsidies identified by surveyed apprentices, here are the top rated items listed by current apprentices surveyed:

- General 'government rebates, wage top-ups, apprentice bonuses & youth allowance' (13.6%)
- 'Travel, fuel allowance' (7.6%)
- 'Tool allowance' (4.5%)
- 'Living away from home allowance' (1.7%)

It should be acknowledged, that during a survey such as this, not all apprentices may actually remember the support that they are receiving. However, this lack of awareness suggests that many apprentices may not be taking advantage of current support payments made available to them.

Recommendation 3

The ABBTF to coordinate with the Australian Apprenticeship Centres to develop strategies to increase apprentice awareness of their entitlements. This may involve development of a marketable and easy to understand State-based information source(s) which can be distributed to apprentices within the first stage of their training.

Ideal Candidates

Bricklaying teachers were asked to consider the attributes of the ideal candidate for a bricklaying apprentice. Interestingly, none of the attributes had anything to do with previous experience in the trade, or technical ability. The focus was more on 'employability' skills.

The general themes in responses were:

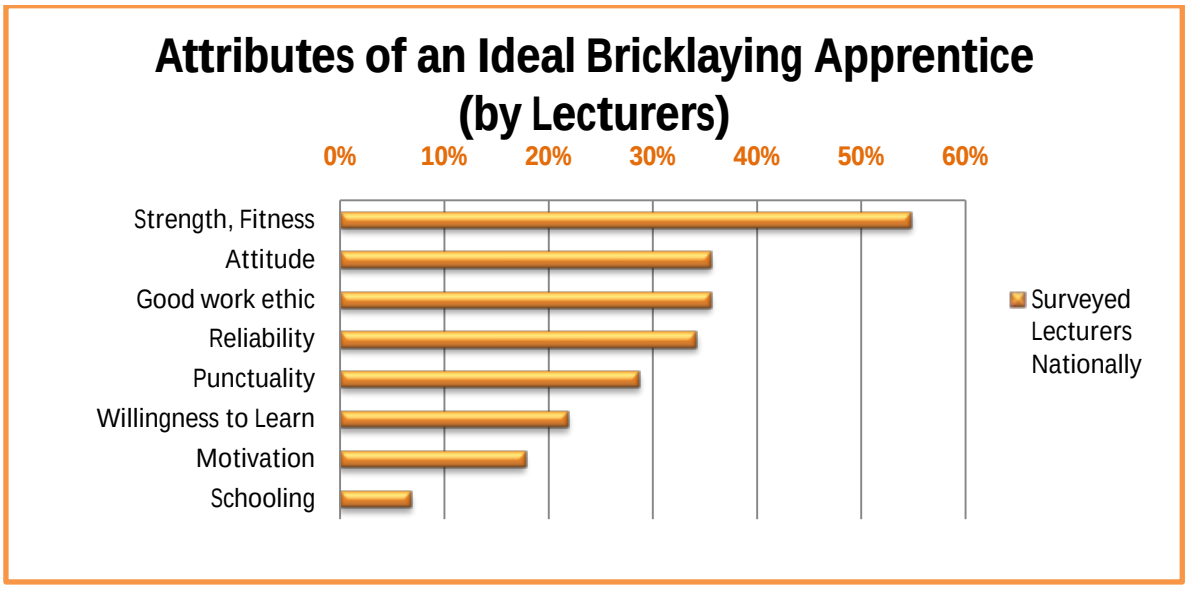


Chart 3 - Attributes of an ideal bricklaying apprentice

Roughly half of all surveyed bricklaying lecturers highlight the physical fitness as an important attribute for bricklayers. Employers also highlight this aspect as a key reason for much of the initial attrition rate within bricklaying. 23% of lecturers believe that apprentices are unaware of the demanding physical nature of the job, with many comments concerning back complaints and soreness amongst many first year apprentices.

Instructive in this area, is the experience of group training organisations (GTO). Although there is a great deal of variation on intake processes amongst GTOs, those with low attrition rates for bricklaying apprentices spend a great deal of time on selection. Those most familiar with the trade appear to have developed, or are continuing to develop, robust selection criteria and processes for choosing bricklaying apprentices. Through interviews and forums, it would appear that GTO's with a strong presence in the construction field tend to have more targeted and industry specific selection methods. More importantly, these selection processes appear to have dramatically reduced the attrition rate for bricklaying apprentices within these organisations. Group training organisations within the HIA and MBA seemed to have the most industry specific processes. However, there were other GTOs that had a strong presence in the construction industry that also provided robust selection criteria.

Many employers, GTOs and forum attendees spoke of poor apprentice selection by many employers. A variety of comments reflected that employers chose apprentices for varying reasons. At times, selection was based upon a connection with a local sports team, or receiving a referral that provided some information on attitude and work ethic. However, many comments suggest that it is very common for employers to take on an apprentice simply because of a common friend or family connection. The strong inference is that often the apprentice is chosen for reasons that have little bearing on whether they are well suited for the industry. In essence, there are few selection criteria.

Recommendation 4

The development of a robust selection criteria and process to inform apprentices and employers about the attributes of succeeding in the trade. The development should involve industry associations, GTO, RTOs, ITABs and ABBTF.

School Career Advisors

Just over 70% of current bricklaying apprentices recollected having a School Career Advisor when they were attending Secondary School. The School Career Advisor is often challenged to remain current on the ever expanding and dynamic nature of career choices for students. However, with a skills shortage over the last number of years in many construction fields, it was of particular interest to this project to ascertain:

- how informed Career Advisors are perceived to be with regard to the trades, and
- the pathways encouraged by Career Advisors for current apprentices.

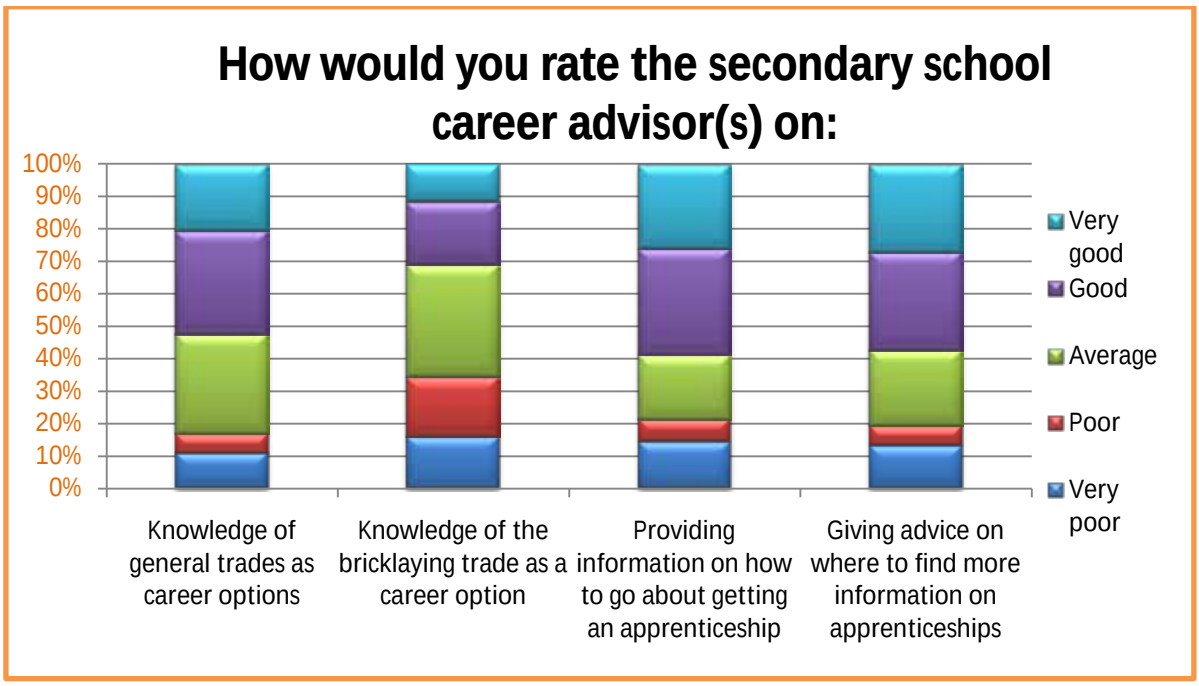


Chart 4 - How would you rate the secondary school career advisor?

School Career Advisors were perceived as generally providing sound knowledge on the trades and how to go about getting an apprenticeship. Less well regarded was their specific knowledge on the bricklaying trade – which has been on the skill shortage list for many years (only within the last few months have some States taken this trade off the skills shortage list).

Although, it can be a challenge for career counsellors to be across all career options, there is reason to believe that skill shortages should have a targeted approach. Further, there is an industry responsibility to support School Career Advisors with targeted information that is suited to their needs and the student cohort needs.

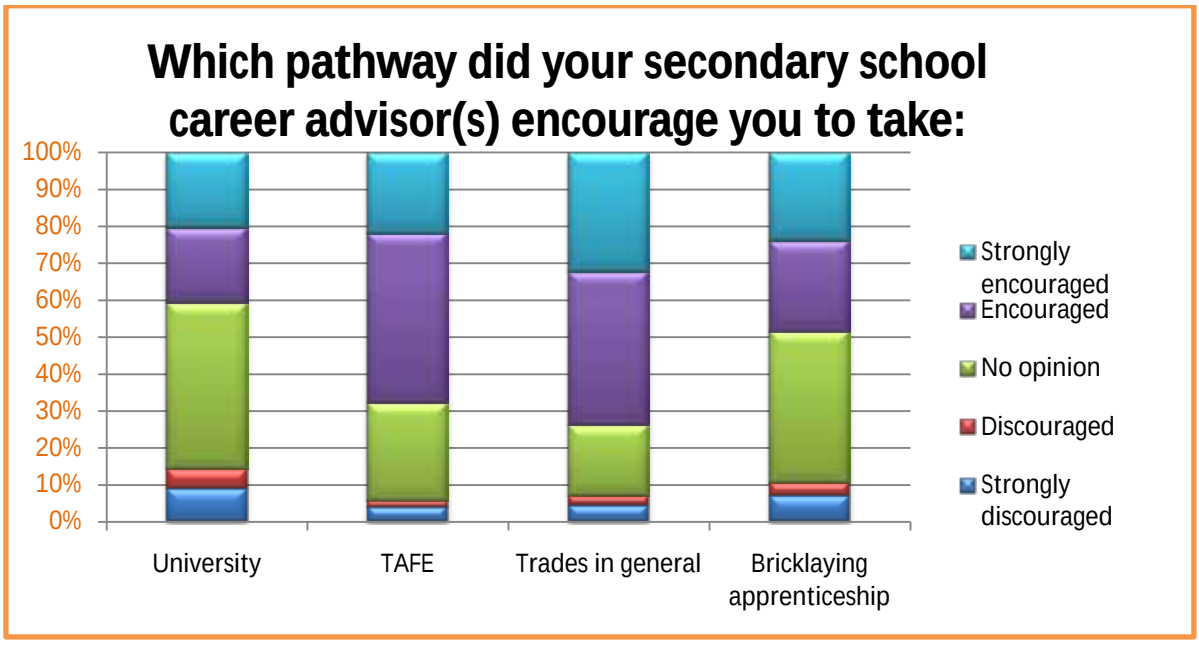


Chart 5 - Which pathway did the career advisor recommend?

In receiving career advice, it is interesting to note that those who took on a bricklaying apprenticeship were generally encouraged to attend TAFE and the trades in general by School Career Advisors. This appears to be a well informed direction from the School Career Advisors. Although survey feedback notes that School Career Advisors were not particularly influential in a bricklaying apprentice's decision, they were generally on the mark in encouraging the trades.

Although trades in general were encouraged, bricklaying specifically is notably less encouraged – only 40% of current bricklaying apprentices were encouraged to consider this trade by School Career Advisors. This may speak to perceptions of School Career Advisors on the trade or simply a lack of specific knowledge. In either case, the School Career Advisors require targeted information. Not only are they delivering career advice at an important stage, they can also be the 'gatekeeper' on access for programs such as VET in school, Pre-apprenticeship programs and 'taster' programs in general.

When apprentices provided their opinion on why they were encouraged to take a particular pathway by their School Career Advisors, many believed it was in their best interest.

> "Wanted see us boys get somewhere"
>
> "Just like to see me in a decent job"
>
> "They knew what I was like at school and thought this career would be best for me."
>
> "They probably just wanted me to better myself"
>
> "My VET teacher strongly encouraged me to get into a trade because of the shortage in work."

However, many apprentices felt that the trade was chosen because they were not performing well at school. Other responses seem to imply that their bricklaying apprenticeship was a 'fall-back' position – the best option available since they perceived they were not 'good enough' for other career paths.

> "I wasn't that good at school"
>
> "… because I was wasting my time in high school"
>
> "[I] am not very smart"
>
> "Because I didn't like school work. I just wanted to do physical work."

This perception of the bricklaying trade appears to be held by some School Career Advisors as well.

> "Because they told me I wasn't good enough for school."
>
> "Due to my results in school they kind of had an idea what was my potential"
>
> "Because high schools only encourage academically smart students.

Recommendation 5

ABBTF to support Careers Advisors' Networks with appropriate marketing program including information in media and format to appeal to students. This should include information from bricklayers, success stories that appeal to the key drivers, as well as advice on potential career paths which could result from successfully completing a bricklaying apprenticeship. This would be strengthened through involvement of Associations, Think Brick and RTOs/Advisory Groups.

Pre-Apprenticeship Programs

91% of all Bricklaying lecturers reported their organisation was involved in some form of Pre-Apprenticeship program, taster program, or other preparatory bricklaying training. While this may not equate into 91% of all RTO's, it does suggest that the majority of RTO's offer some form of pre-apprenticeship training.

The RTO lecturers perceive many benefits to providing pre-apprenticeship programs. As a group, the following represent the most common benefits identified:

- Starting Point

  "A starting point for young people to get into trade ... so a good return rate for the apprentices who do Cert III. Helps employers get semi trained workers. Gives young people an opportunity to try bricklaying before commencing apprenticeship."

  "We get to inform them of what the industry really is like. We can to some extent simulate the work place environment and after a week they sure understand how hard you have to work but also the skill that is involved with being a bricklayer ... We can inform them of their future too. Why you need maths for quoting and about how they could run their own business if that's what suits them ... There is a future in our trade."

  "Provides persons who think they would like to be in the bricklaying game with the opportunity to experience the physical day to day life of a Bricklayer, while obtaining some skills and knowledge that may help them find a job ..."

  "The opportunity for participants to get a taste of the trade and trade skills if they want to pursue the trade."

- Providing a realistic view of the trade allowing for informed choices

  "It gives them a realistic view of the trade as I always combine them with work experience. It clarifies with them that this is what they want to do as a career. The employers benefit from them being partially trained in the basics, less time consuming at the start."

  "Tasters give them exactly that. It gets them job ready. They get a good insight into Bricklaying. If they progress through those stages, they continue into an apprenticeship"

  "These programs help the student decide if bricklaying is the job for them. The students are able to talk to employers who visit the RTO and other apprentices"

- Better Prospects for employment

  "The student, employer and industry get a better product"

  "These programs are of benefit to help people decide if bricklaying is for them. They provide employability skills and make the person able to undertake task straight away in the workplace, depending on the time in training prior to employment the person may even gain the skills needed to commence laying bricks in the work place."

"Pre Apprentices is the best form of training for young people or mature aged workers out of work looking to obtain a trade qualification. The biggest advantage for a prospective employer is that [they] can hire a person with basic hand skills and sufficient industry knowledge who they can mould into a person to reflect the companies profile easily. The [Pre Apprentice] can also lay sufficient bricks to not be seen as a financial burden to the company".

"Another good advantage of a 12 month Pre apprenticeship is it provides a good overview of the trade to any prospective trade apprentice and if they chose not to remain in a particular skills group they [have] enough basic skills to move to another skills area within the construction industry"

- More in-depth training

"...more in depth training"

"Intensive training students gain trade skills more so than most apprentices who spend much of their first year labouring."

However, running these programs is not without its challenges. Lecturers across Australia identified the following challenges in running these programs through their training organisation:

- Funding

"Insufficient funds to pay for the delivery.

"Finding sufficient funding to provide a lengthy training program that will provide real skills and not just a short hands on experience."

"In our regional area we have a lot of interest from year 10 and 11 college students to take up a position in our Step-Out Programs [i.e. taster program run by ABBTF] ... However funding these programs is an issue considering our goal is to run more Step-Out Programs in more rural and remote areas to draw more students into the industry. However these look like being overlooked due to lack of sponsorship funding."

"Funding, meeting funding commitments and attracting the appropriate students. Currently our pre-apprentice students are required to enter through a SATAC enrolment." [Note: SA DET approves student participation]

- Lack of motivation

"Keeping the students keen and trying to get them a start in the game"

"Keeping them engaged 8 hrs per day for 16 weeks seems too long to be in the one place. Need to get some on site work experience in the 16 weeks"

"Trying to get students who are really interested in the trade rather than coming because they have to. E.g. To maintain payments from Centrelink."

- Getting the numbers

"Lack of places available."

"More employers than students available"

- Lack of Resources

"We are currently running a [Pre Apprenticeship] course for a full year and we are struggling for room on a daily basis especially when it rains because we can't use our outside facilities. This programme needs more outside working opportunities such as building halls, facilities that the general public could benefit from."

"Timing with trade classes and having enough space."

- Age of Students

"The young age of students is sometimes a challenge but is in some cases a critical time for the guidance towards employment"

"Younger students often have very little understanding of physical nature of bricklaying. Those that have not made any enquiries. i.e. talking to peers and bricklayers about the trade and merely enrolled because they 'couldn't think of anything else to do', typically drop out"

- Staff numbers

"Lack of staff members and support from upper management"

- Not enough work places

"Finding enough employers to take students on for work experience. Lack of management and administrative support, proper marketing, course content contains irrelevant units such as use a computer. Time is better spent on skill area topics."

- Low perception of the industry

"High School keeping students into years 11 and 12 when they are specifically not interested in higher studies to achieve a University entry grade.

"The community's perception that a career in bricklaying is an under achievement and only taken on by intelligence challenged people or people who cannot find a better job. They do not realise that a Bricklayer has the same potential as a carpentry apprentice as a career pathway."

"Participants, not enough promotion by various organisations, e.g. schools and public perception as a poor career path"

For those few RTOs not involved with any pre-apprenticeship programs, there were mixed views. There is some concern as to who is 'pushed into' the program and whether all employers appreciate the 'habits' picked up.

> "In my experiences some young people seem to be forced into these programs and they will never become bricklayers"

> "The employers that I mix with would rather choose their own apprentices and train them how they see important."

Other comments from RTO's not currently offering pre-apprenticeships were much more praiseworthy of the school based programs.

> "I think the school based and ATC programs are doing a good job because of the flexibility in that you can continue school and if you don't like it you can pursue other options. Another reason which I have found to be very important is that, it is on the site, in actual working situations, that is when individuals find out whether they are able to cope with the physical nature of the job, extreme weather, etc. Some individuals I have taught, who have completed a pre app indoors without much physical work, have really struggled on site."

The general feedback from lecturers on pre-apprenticeship programs is very positive. The survey of apprentices found that 19.4% had done a pre-apprenticeship program of some form.

Within the survey, apprentices who had done a pre-apprenticeship program were asked to respond to the following:

- Whether they enjoyed their training more/less
- Whether they laboured more/less within their 1st year or throughout their apprenticeship
- Whether they were more/less inclined to consider dropping out of the apprenticeships scheme
- Whether they were likely to be rotated more within the gang during any year of the apprenticeship
- Whether they felt they were more successful in trade training compared to other apprentices

In comparing current bricklaying apprentices who had done a pre-apprenticeship program to those who had not, the findings were somewhat surprising. Although apprentices who had completed a pre-apprenticeship program were much more inclined to have chosen Bricklaying as their 'Career of First Choice', there was little else to distinguish those apprentices who had done a pre-apprenticeship program when compared to those apprentices who had not.

Comments within the survey, interviews and forums were overwhelmingly supportive of pre-apprenticeship programs in all forms. However, there is little within the confines of this survey, to suggest that pre-apprenticeship programs improve outcomes in a direct manner for bricklaying apprenticeships. The primary outcome appears to be one of marketing the trade and raising awareness of the trade within schools.

Some interview and survey responses suggest that pre-apprenticeship programs do not always live up to expectations and offered comments on the following themes:

- The reduction in time of pre-apps has made them less effective for developing hand skills and work site capabilities
- The pre-app setting does not necessarily match the worksite environment & culture which can come as a shock to new entrants
- Pre-apps do not appropriately match the extended physical labour time required at the job site

The subject of pre-apprenticeship programs was also raised with representatives from the Masonry Contractors' Associations, CFMEU and Group Training Organisations. Comments included:

"Need to have more focus on practical skills".

"Need to try to attract the right kids into them. We were involved in a course last year, and half of the kids were only there to fill in time".

"The pre-apprenticeship courses are great for the kids to do. They get their hands on the bricks and get to see whether they like the heavy work. A lot of kids are keen to start with, but find out that they have to work too hard".

Notwithstanding the important role pre-apprenticeship programs have in promoting awareness of the bricklaying trade, their impact on attrition rates appears minimal. This is an area for further investigation, as a great deal of effort and money goes into the pre-apprenticeship programs.

Recommendation 6

Research means of structuring &/or modifying pre-apprenticeship programs to improve apprenticeship outcomes to better support industry needs and reduce attrition rates.

Other Career Considerations & Concerns

Many apprentices consider a wide variety of alternative careers before deciding on their bricklaying apprenticeship. When apprentices were asked about other careers they had considered, roughly 46% were dominated by the construction trade. Of these, the top six answers were:

- Carpentry
- Plumbing
- Building
- Electrician
- Plasterer
- Tiling

Many other occupations were considered outside of the construction industry, but few represented more than 5% of the total responses. The other career considerations by bricklaying apprentices included:

- Personal Trainer/sport
- Mechanic
- Hospitality / Baker
- Landscaping / Greenkeeper
- Other trades (non-specific)
- Armed Forces
- Police

These answers appear to remain somewhat consistent over time as sub-contractors also recollect considering the same alternative careers as listed above by current apprentices.

The biggest concerns when considering taking up a bricklaying apprenticeship, as identified by current apprentices, are:

Chart 6 - Biggest worry or concern when considering a bricklaying apprenticeship

Although there are a number of career option considered by potential bricklaying apprentices, their biggest concern when deciding to enter the apprenticeship program centres on earning enough money to make ends meet.

Whilst many stakeholders would hope that choosing the right career dominates the decision process, currently the apprenticeship wage represents the dominating concern and barrier in the minds of current apprentices.

RTO Experience

The focus of this section is on the trade training experience within the RTO. Of specific interest are the experience and perceptions of current bricklaying apprentices, and the attrition rate. Also explored are the perceptions of current bricklaying lecturers on apprentice outcomes and training resources. And finally, employer feedback is presented on their engagement, communication and perceptions of the RTO role in the trade training process.

First Year Attrition Rate

The previous report in this project highlighted the particularly high attrition rate in the first year of a bricklaying apprenticeship. In this section, the bricklaying lecturers and current apprentices offer their views on why this might be so.

When bricklaying lecturers were asked for the most common reasons why apprentices drop out during their first year, the following themes emerged:

- The trade experience was different from their expectation
- The work was too hard for them (Physical demand)
- Poor treatment or personality clashes on site
- Monotony – only used as a labourer
- Loss of employment
- Low wages

Current bricklaying lecturers suggested that a contributing factor for first year attrition is their inability to access trowel skills quickly enough. At times, the employer may not provide the opportunity for trowel work.

> "Employers tend to use first year apprentices as labourers, not enough on-site brickwork is done – hence the apprentice disengages"

> "Most lack basic bricklaying skills as they spend most of their time labouring. Some employers expect these skills to be picked up while they attend an RTO for a few weeks."

Other comments suggest that apprentices vary in their ability to understand the worksite environment and the skills required to set the job out as a labourer.

> "The overall working on the building site; getting used to all the terminology (slang) even walking onto the site. I call it your site legs as it's always uneven ground."

> "Learning work ethics, the men and their attitudes."

> "Some apprentices actually feel intimidated by sites at first. Do they fit in? Men teach harshly but that's the way they teach ... they expect a lot from the apprentice."

Bricklaying lecturers also highlight the first year difficulty of transitioning from a school mentality to a vocational training or workforce mentality. Comments suggest many apprentices take time to adjust their focus to learning trade critical skills including the employability skills that are particularly important to the bricklaying environment.

> "They are treated like adults which means they are subject to material that requires a mature response and, coming straight from school, some of these students are not used to that environment. Meeting deadlines with assignments and assessments requires a person who is motivated and willing to work alone at times."

> "Understanding that just turning up does not give you a pass. It is not school and therefore they will have to actually do something to get through this course."

Other comments from bricklaying lecturers reveal that a number of first year apprentices struggle with the theory components of the training. Also, a number of responses highlighted the challenge for many first year apprentices in coping with the related costs of training.

> "Some travel away from home to attend trade school therefore there are high costs involved with meals and accommodation (especially compared to their income)."

> "Some have to pay their own enrolment fee and material fee as well as their work books and other equipment required for theory and prac classes."

Current apprentices perceive that those who drop out in their first year of the apprenticeship do so for the following reasons:

- Apprenticeship wages too low
- Not suited to bricklaying
- Saw other jobs that paid more
- Treated like cheap labour
- Found the work too physically demanding
- They didn't get along with their boss
- Not enough trowel time & got bored
- Poorly treated on the workplace

It is interesting to note that almost all of these items listed above deal with the on-the-job component of training. This would suggest that apprentices need to be better informed on the worksite component of the trade and that there needs to be a stronger engagement with employers on ways to improve their capability to effectively train and transition new entrants into the workforce.

Further, of the top four reasons cited above by current apprentices on the reasons for first year attrition, three have some relation to money. Comments from employers also suggest a strong sympathy for first year apprentices who 'are doing it tough' in their first year because of the low wage. Many feel that the wage is not only a reason for first year attrition, but also a reason for many to bypass the apprenticeship itself and go directly into the trade.

A number of comments from GTOs, unions, association members and even employers speak of employers who dissuade people from taking on an apprenticeship due to the low apprenticeship wages.

These groups were also asked for other issues impacting on attrition rates and what strategies could be implemented to improve this. Many felt that there was too much concern over attrition and that, in fact, some attrition was desirable or reasonable to expect. Comments included:

> "We shouldn't get too hooked up on attrition rates. Some attrition is good as it's weeding out the kids who aren't suited".
>
> "We need to remember that this is Gen Y we're dealing with. This group is very mobile and are quite happy to try a number of different jobs".
>
> "It is ridiculous to think that apprentices will not emulate the mobility patterns natural to an industry (particularly those industries dominated by subbies, casual employment or day labour). Young people will be naturally more mobile than mature, settled workers – it is partly explorative but it is also due to the strength of the bonds which may not have developed with the employer and the job. In periods of high labour demand a lot of factors impress on apprentices to take them out of the trade before completing – this is particularly true of industries where partially trained operatives can deliver high volume work and there is a shortage of skilled labour – this is true of bricklaying plastering, painting and floor covering".

Others felt that there were a range of factors contributing to high attrition rates, particularly in the first year. These included:

- Unqualified bricklayers convincing them that they can earn more by leaving the apprenticeship and working unqualified.
- Mixing with the labourers on-site and realising that they are doing the same work for far less money.

A number of interview respondents commented on problems with the pay and conditions of apprentices. Examples were given of apprentices being underpaid, not getting a

travel allowance, not having conditions such as superannuation, and Workcover, paid by employers.

Recommendation 7

To direct various forms of subsidies into increasing the first year apprenticeship wages and to subsidise the training costs for first year apprentices

Apprentice Feedback on Trade Training at RTO's

In general, bricklaying apprentices were quite satisfied with their training at RTO's. In fact, 78% generally agreed that they learned important things about bricklaying in the RTO.

Often comments from apprentice forums highlighted the fact that skills learned in the RTO were not often experienced with their employer. However, this highlighted the importance of getting a qualification in their mind. Although some of these particular skills may not be prevalent in today's job site, they saw them as important skills for their career.

The vast majority of current apprentices enjoy coming to the RTO for their bricklaying apprenticeship training. Similar to the above, 78% reflected in the survey that they enjoy their training experience. There was little, to no variation between apprentices of different ages, previous work experience or the amount of trowel time provided on-the-job. Interestingly, the level of enjoyment seemed to be slightly higher in the first year of training when compared to later years of the apprenticeship.

One finding suggests that School Career Advisors have a strong understanding of who is best suited for the trades. Bricklaying apprentices, whom School Career Advisors strongly urged into the trades, generally rated their enjoyment of their training experience more highly than others.

All apprentices were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on their RTO experience for the following aspects:

- Teaching in a way that is easy for you to understand the material
- Provide appropriate information and communication for you
- Giving you extra help with difficult subjects or projects
- Provide appropriate tools and materials
- The location of the school is convenient

Comments were generally positive and complementary towards RTOs.

> "Teachers are great and a lot of help but they're always busy with teaching other students as well. It's a bit too like school. But the teachers are great."
>
> "Teachers [are] great; very helpful in and out of school."

The aspects that bricklaying apprentices enjoy most about their bricklaying training are:

1. Learning a life skill
2. The variety of work
3. Learning new skills
4. Learning how to do things to a professional level
5. The hands-on experience

Apprentices were also asked to identify the aspects of trade training they enjoyed least. *A long day is* the dominant theme amongst survey respondents. In student forums, this was particularly noted for mature aged students outside of the apprenticeship program. For mature aged students in bricklaying, their trade training most often involved night school after a long day at the job site.

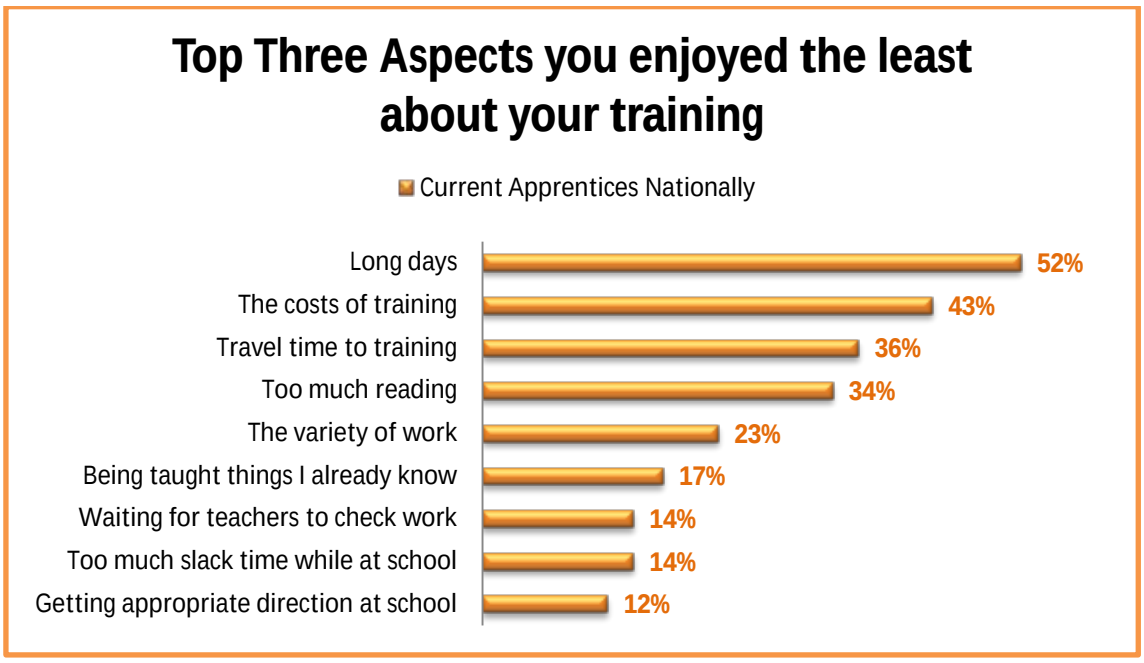


Chart 7 - Top three aspects you enjoyed least about your training

The travel time was a major issue for those in outlying and regional areas and is highlighted as a key barrier for first year apprenticeship attrition.

> "Need more training centres around QLD"
>
> "Not enough tech schools"
>
> "The course is too far from Northern Beaches"
>
> "Make a class at Ourimbah so we don't have to travel all the way to Newcastle"
>
> "Trade school needs to be closer. Make a school at Frankston TAFE"

However, a number of aspects least enjoyed deal with the challenge of effectively engaging the interest and commitment of current apprentices. Many apprentices in

forums commented on the slack time, waiting around for the next step and general perceptions that they were bored with some of the current delivery. However, some site visits during this project highlighted RTOs that were presenting theory and underpinning skills in a visual and dynamic capacity (See Case Studies).

Equally, there were other examples of RTO's that were using theory sessions to simply read the notes, fill in the blank in a classroom setting with overheads that harkened back a couple of decades. For bricklaying apprentices who would best be described as kinaesthetic learners with good spatial acuity, these methods would seem inappropriate and lacking.

Part of the challenge is in managing a class of apprentices in lockstep fashion, when each has varying degrees of experience, capability and commitment for the subject matter. A number of RTO's (mostly in the private sector) are increasingly moving from a class management to a case management approach for training bricklaying apprentices. This allows for individual apprentices to move at their own pace through a program. It also allows for flexibility with the employer during slow periods or inclement weather to slot an apprentice into the program.

> "... in some cases students need to be able to continue at their own pace be it slower or faster with the more capable apprentice, this is important in the student maintaining interest in the trade"
>
> "I believe our college approach is appropriate, although I would believe a centrally created self pace resource package would be positive approach."

Moving to a case management process is not without its challenges. It does require substantial tracking of competencies, flexibility of on-site resources and a teaching methodology that is more self-directed. The challenge for lecturers is also not inconsequential; requiring a high level of multi-tasking with apprentices at different levels of training on site at the same time. Comments from apprentice forums and lecturers lament the pace of teaching that 'moves to the slowest apprentice in the room' and creates a great deal of disengagement with a number of apprentices. Comments from apprentices suggest more training could be done in a day within the school.

Case management may not be a method that is appropriate for all apprentices, but does have added weight for an industry with over 55% of the workforce as unqualified. Within this context, training for the unqualified workforce (i.e. including RPL and gap training) will best be served by a strong underpinning case management system.

Recommendation 8

Development of training and assessment systems & resources that facilitate case management options within RTOs.

Self Identified Success in Training

It is somewhat difficult to ascertain which students are more successful than others within a trade qualification with competency based training – apart from completion rates. Without access to individual completion results or tracked scorecards by RTO's and/or employers, it would be difficult to collect such data on a national scale.

However, in the initial forums with groups of bricklaying apprentices, we were struck by apprentices' open candour on their own ability within the RTO. Many were quite open in discussing who was doing well and who was struggling. Particularly interesting was that those who were 'underperforming' or struggling with their training were quite willing to mention this in group discussion amongst their classmates.

On one hand, we were surprised by this. However, upon further reflection and discussion with lecturers, it appears that the nature of the trade, which involves working in gangs of 3-5 persons, tends to make transparent the abilities of every person on the job. Further, the gang size appears to be small enough (i.e. rarely is it larger than five) whereby an individual's failings cannot be hidden. There also appears to be a great deal of bonding within the trade where tradespeople quickly 'size you up' on the job and have ample opportunity to celebrate a hard day's work, or a job well done.

Within this context, one of the questions within the survey asked apprentices to self identify how successful they were at school with their training. The following chart represents the responses.

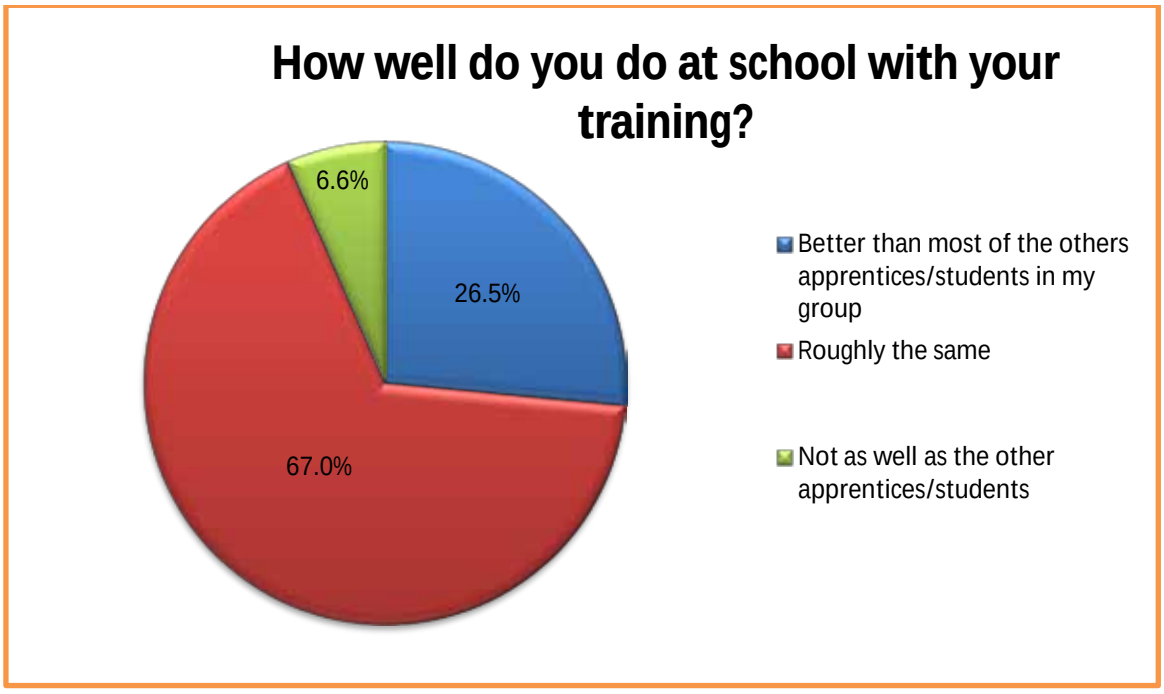


Chart 8 - How well did you do at school with your training?

Although, this is self identified, we were interested in comparing those that suggested they were doing 'Better than Most' to those who suggest they are doing 'Not as Well' as most other apprentices and students.

The key findings are as follows:

Age – Those who were 20 years or older were much more inclined to indicate they were achieving 'Better than Most'

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
Under 20	20%	6%
20 and Over	35%	6%

Table 1 - Schooling achievement by age

Previous Work in the Trade – Those who had previous experience in bricklaying and/or as a bricklayer's labourer also tended to self identify as 'Better than Most'

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
Bricklaying Experience	33%	11%
Bricky's Labourer Experience	62%	37%

Table 2 – Schooling achievement by length of experience in trade

Labouring vs. Bricklaying – Those who identified themselves as 'Better than Most' were significantly more likely to be bricklaying with their employer as opposed to labouring. This was further confirmed when surveyed apprentices were asked to identify the number of hours they were laying bricks by the end of their first year in the apprenticeship.

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
Mostly Labouring	13%	48%
Mostly Bricklaying	34%	13%

Table 3 - Schooling achievement by % labouring/bricklaying

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
Hrs Laying Bricks near end of 1st year of Apprenticeship	15.5 hrs/wk	10.2 hrs/wk

Table 4 - Schooling achievement by hours laying bricks

The number of Bricklayers – Those who identified themselves as 'Better than Most' had, on average, more apprentices on site working with the employer than those that identified themselves as 'Not as Well'.

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
No. of Bricklaying Apprentices	2.2 avg	1.2 avg

Table 5 - Schooling achievement by number of apprentices on site

Rotating your Role – Those who identified themselves as 'Better than Most' were much more likely to be rotated in their role during their first year of their apprenticeship.

	Better Than Most	Not as Well
Employer rotate your role/job in the gang during 1st Year	33%	10%

Table 6 - Schooling achievement by job rotation

Recommendation 9

Training advice should be developed to support the employer with 'best practice' guidance on key success factors such as time on the trowel, rotation and advantages of multiple apprentices on site.

Employer Feedback

Employers were generally satisfied with the trade school that their apprentice attends.

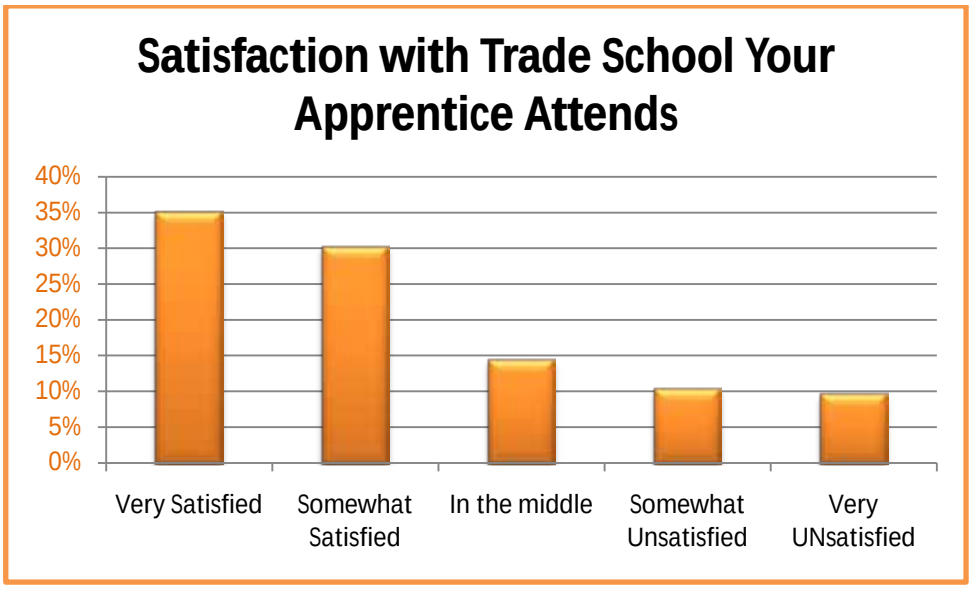


Chart 9 - Satisfaction with trade school your apprentice attends

However, there were slightly elevated levels of dissatisfaction within the following groups:

- Those with a great deal of experience in the trade (i.e. 38 yrs or more)
- Qualified Contractors
- Commercial Contractors
- Contractors aged 46-57 years old

Although most contractors were satisfied with the trade school, when asked what improvements they would like to see in the trade training, the following themes were evident:

- Teach what is relevant and up to date
- Provide employer with feedback – improve communication with the school
- Weed out disruptive students – improve discipline/ attendance, etc.
- Introduce individual job planning, costings, reading plans, management, etc.

Many comments were made regarding the skills being lost to the trade due to the higher use of common bricks, parging, lack of brick design in current residential buildings, etc. Many employers acknowledge the importance of learning these skills within the trade school – many of which they feel cannot be picked up on-the-job.

> "At school they learn things we don't do on site, such as old style work."
>
> "Trade school teachers are more the finer art of bricklaying"

Chart 10 - Trade school teaches apprentices a broad range of skills I can't always offer

Whist those that disagree, often comment on the teaching of skills already acquired on the job.

> "Why does my kid go to TAFE to do brick veneer or single leaf block when I do that on the job?"

However, bricklaying employers are somewhat disparaging of RTOs that do not focus on the important skills required in their business.

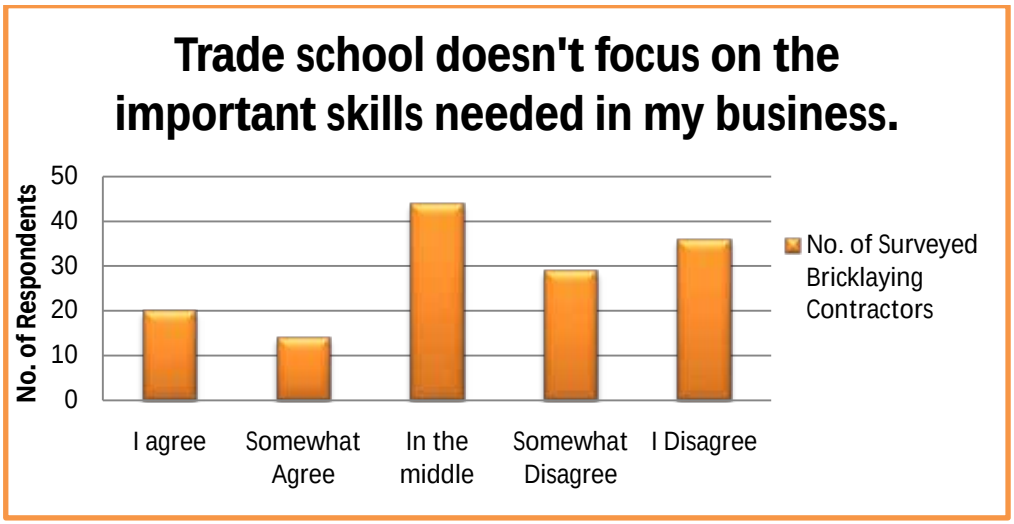


Chart 11 - Trade school doesn't focus on important skills for my business

Most comments focus on learning the basic skills used daily on the job including not only hand-skills, but also planning and management/supervisory capacity.

> "Not aware of the basic grounding of the skills"

"Do stop doing the old type of bricklaying"

"GET OUT OF THE OLD SCHOOL TEACHING, fireplaces and arches get more into what is happening in the building."

"to teach more business skills relevant to the industry"

"Don't put enough emphasis on plan reading. Would be good to have a way to teach about the footings up. They don't learn sub floor footing"

"Estimating jobs, being able to value their time adequately in their estimates so they realise how much needs to be charged to make money"

"More practical training, more applicable training, more reading plans and learning techniques"

"The apprentices need better estimating skills up front."

"The teachers should do actual site visits to see where the kids are actually at. Then they can see the areas where they need to improve on"

Feedback on the effectiveness of RTO's was also sought from the Masonry Contractors Associations, union and Group Training Organisations. These groups were asked to comment on the level of interaction between RTO's and employers, and the quality of facilities and resources. Whilst there was no adverse feedback about the quality of facilities and resources, the following more general comments were made:

"Some TAFE's are very old fashioned and take the curriculum to the nth degree with lock step training. There are better ways of doing it".

"Maybe the RTO's could implement a log book system for kids to keep on the job. That way, they'd know if the kids were getting any trowel time".

"RTO's need to get out on-site more so they know what the apprentices are learning there".

"The RTO's are doing a good job and are working much more closely with employers".

"The RTO's are working much more closely with apprentices. Our TAFE listened to a suggestion from us and has now developed a checklist of things they would like to see the apprentices practise on the job. That way, we know some of the things we need to teach them".

Communication with Employers

For employers of bricklayers, there appears to be two extremes when it comes to views on communication with the trade school. The graph below highlights the dichotomy, with many respondents at opposite ends of the scale.

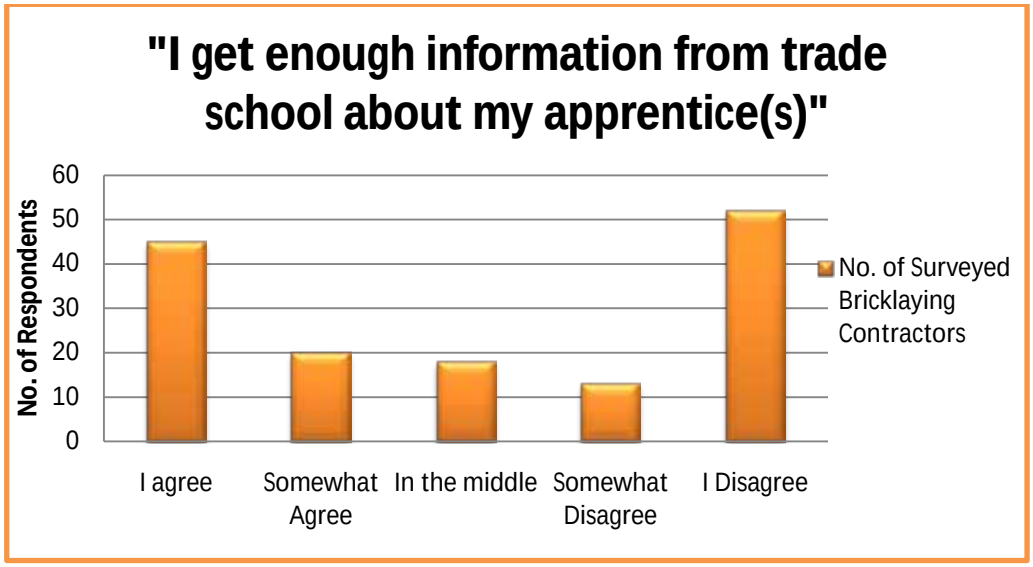


Chart 12 - "I get enough information from trade school about my apprentice"

Those in the commercial sector of the trade feel they do not get enough information from trade school. This is also the case for those who deal primarily in block laying. Whilst we do highlight the overlap – commercial sector primarily uses block – we do acknowledge that there are regional centres that primarily use block for residential. This includes northern Queensland and northern districts of Western Australia.

> "Only a phone call away, ring any time no issues,"
>
> "No feedback at all."
>
> "I have no idea what they do at trade school"
>
> "More information back to employer on apprentice progress"
>
> "Communication between trade school and employer needs to be improved. TAFE needs to send letters or phone calls to update"

Recommendation 10

RTOs to develop and share 'best practice' protocols already in place for robust communication processes with employers to inform them about apprentice progress and discuss related training issues.

Bricklaying Lecturers' Feedback

Bricklaying lecturers in RTO's across Australia were asked to comment on the Training Package, physical resources, teaching resources and challenges faced within bricklaying training. The following represents the major themes and comments that reflect the general nature of responses.

Training Package

Most lecturers were in general agreement that the current Training Package was appropriate for training bricklayers. There was no difference in satisfaction scores on the Training Package between public and private training organisations.

However, a number of lecturers commented on the need for the Training Package to properly reflect what is happening within the industry. Just as importantly, there was a strong flavour to the comments that suggest more industry engagement is required in the ongoing development of the Training Package.

> "Not enough input from people in the 'coal face' - more input is needed from the ACTUAL tradespeople and trainers themselves - not interpretations of bureaucrats"

Comments also reflected the need for adjusting some units and constant updating requirements to keep the Training Package current. However, even more than updating, some comments reflected on a number of units that many lecturers felt were no longer needed.

> "Some of the units are a waste of time; more time could [be] utilised gaining more trowel skills"
>
> "Some areas too basic"
>
> "Some modules in the package are not relative to what most bricklayers in the trade are doing"
>
> "Some subject areas won't be relevant in the future and more training needs to be put back in regarding running and managing a business, more on setting out"
>
> "Should look at the latest products and teach the students these as they come into demand e.g. rammed earth bricks, stonework, hebel."
>
> "Common core elements not really relevant to the trade, and in a lot of cases competencies are not able to be practiced on site"
>
> "Need updating more often"
>
> "Some modules no longer relevant to the industry"

At the same time, there were other comments that reflected on the importance of maintaining trade skills across a range of practices that may not be as prevalent in current construction design.

"Some of the skills that we teach are no longer relevant in the Bricklaying industry today as most jobs in Victoria are Brick-Veneer on slabs. However, if we don't teach and show apprentices some old-world skills then we will lose the art of the trade"

"All the material that is delivered develops a complete tradesperson, a mason that can take on a large range of work and use his skills to tackle new problems. The training needs to develop the whole person and not just to satisfy a small sector of the industry. After doing many RPL's, it is obvious that those who have not been fully trained or not trained at all miss many work opportunities and have to decline a lot of work that they are not capable of. Also this lack of training has led I believe to [a] rush attitude by the non-professional as he does not know how to do the job properly in many cases and just has [to] guess. This is also driving down the price as the unqualified are [eager] to work at any cost."

A number of lecturers presented views on the design of current units and the need for a holistic and engaging approach to cover the competencies.

"Do not like the stand alone nature of the 6 BCGCM1000B Units. They should be imbedded in a more holistic course."

"For me this is one of the reasons that Cert I and Cert II courses we run are so poorly attended on theory days. These 6 units are boring, had to deliver, provide no feeling of learning a trade for the participants."

"Also some of the modules have too much information on certain subjects and tend to complicate the simple."

Physical Resources

Most bricklaying lecturers believe that the physical resources are appropriate for the teaching needs in bricklaying.

Most negative comments from lecturers focused on their brick supply; their need to reuse bricks and the impact on quality outcomes for student projects.

"Old used bricks not conducive to excellent workmanship"

"While we can obtain common house bricks and blocks it would be good to have available some decorative bricks such as squints and plinth bricks, even if they are seconds"

"We are a relatively small school at present but are building up & demanding more resources as we progress"

"The resources we use are appropriate for our training but due to cost the recycling of some products i.e. bricks, mortar sometimes reduces the quality of a student's project which frustrates the student; need some frog bricks; fire bricks"

Other comments on physical resources centred on the challenges experienced in growing bricklaying programs and the access to space that is dedicated to the bricklaying department. Indicative of these responses is the following:

"Space is at a premium and so students miss out at trade school and may never experience some aspects of bricklaying onsite"

Teaching Resources

Here again, most bricklaying lecturers generally agree that the teaching resources are appropriate for all of the apprentices. But within this category, there is a slightly larger group who disagree at some level – 32% either disagree or somewhat disagree that current resources are appropriate for all apprentices.

Many teachers find it difficult to make time or develop quality teaching resources within the constraints of their day-to-day activity. A number of lecturers feel there should be support for the development of resources.

"Lack of time due to lack of funding to produce quality resources"

"Again all RTO's are different. We produce our own teaching resources and because of AQTF, and new training packages these learning resources are always fluid. One day I would like to say I have great teaching resources, but things keep changing"

"Understaffed and professional help needed to modernise resources"

"I have pushed for greater management support for a collaborative approach (Qld and interstate) for many years and only recently has this begun to occur."

"It is absolutely ridiculous that there isn't a curriculum development section for the development of quality written resources"

Many other teachers suggest teaching resources should be developed to better meet student needs, whether it is learning challenges or preferences to keep them engaged in the learning process.

"Not enough resources for apprentices with learning problems"

"Again for TAFE, but it should spell out that most TAFE teachers are qualified with uni degrees so have been trained to meet the needs of a large range of students. This cannot be said for private providers who will only have cert 4 level qualifications. Fully qualified teachers will continue to develop resources and lessons that suit the changing needs of students and

employers. Unqualified trainers will simply try their best without the depth of knowledge of teaching strategies."

"I have been involved as content advisor on flexible training involving use of computer training and have witnessed many times that complete lack of interest in bricklaying apprentices using this format. They are very much hands on and prefer hard copy and discussion/problem solving"

"Desperate need to develop resources that are more flexible and available for example on-line learning and flexible assessment arrangements"

"Need more computer/internet access and training"

Collaborating across RTOs to Develop Resources

Bricklaying lecturers have made comments on the challenges in developing resources with a range of issues reflecting time constraints, development skills, varying student needs and development resources for audio-visual resources. Further comments have been made regarding the need to engage employers and explore on-site assessment and delivery.

Regional RTO's are particularly constrained in the development of resources without the economies of scale provided by some of the larger capital city RTO's.

The recent survey suggests that bricklaying lecturers are very much in favour of collaborating with bricklaying teachers from other organisations to develop teaching resources.

"Bring it on!"

"I feel as trainers we are trying to achieve the same outcomes so therefore I would welcome the opportunity to work with the TAFE. I feel we would both have ideas that everybody could get better outcomes from but since I've left the TAFE, I was a sessional and now work for a [private training organisation] I feel I am in opposition when we should be working together"

"Could save a lot of work if we could swap resources"

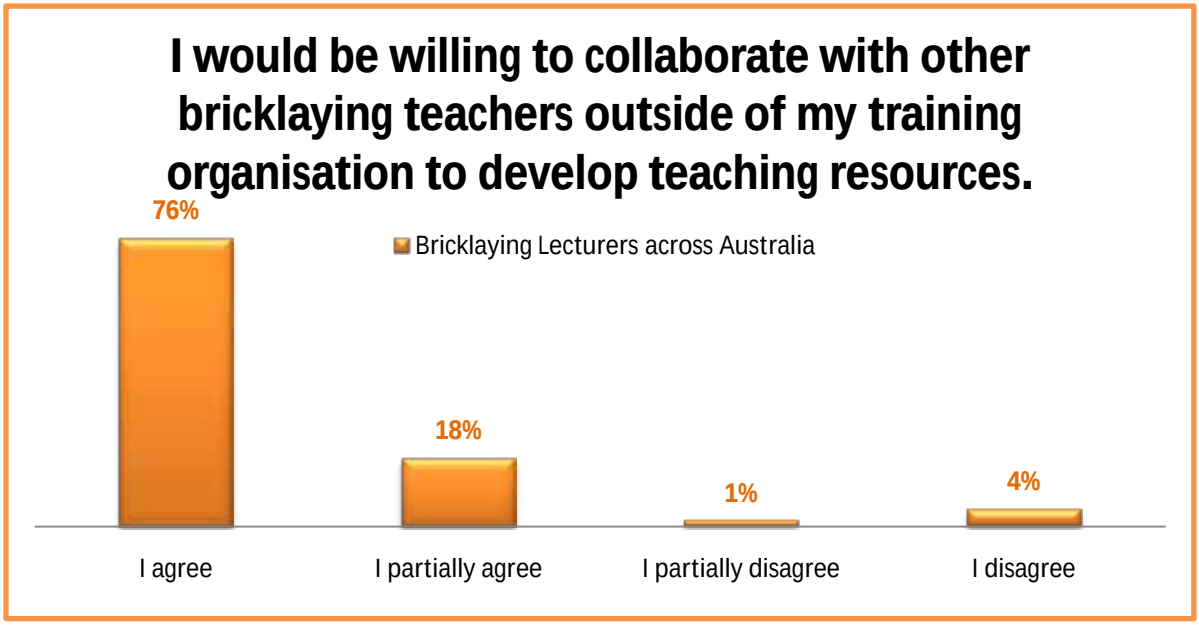


Chart 13 - I would be willing to collaborate with other bricklaying teachers outside my RTO

This is not a new idea and there is already some collaboration occurring in regions and specifically between some RTO's.

> "We do meet with other NSW bricklaying teachers annually and meet with the VIC teachers now and then"
>
> "We already collaborated with most of the bricklaying sections around NSW and as we are on the border of VIC and NSW we also collaborate with several VIC TAFE campuses."

Whilst many individuals are supportive of the idea, many raise concerns about a number of barriers including funding, time release and even the past experience of failed attempts.

> "I have been involved in doing this and find that a lot are willing to be involved in meeting but it is very rare that anything gets acted upon. There will be a lot of issues that will need to be considered if you want an outcome at all. It is possible but it will involve some careful planning and structure."
>
> "Tends to depend on PD funds available"
>
> "If it didn't affect their core business and didn't cost anything. For some reason the costly process of each Institute developing their own resources seems to have greater support"
>
> "Have tried this many times in the past, but too many other organisations just want handouts from the few dedicated in doing the hard work"
>
> "I have been involved for several years in this process and whilst one other TAFE contributes, the remainder are not committed and simply there to receive only, either due to lack of commitment from their TAFE or other ..."
>
> "Time allocation a problem"
>
> "This is on offer now, providing it is a two way street..."

However, the surveyed bricklaying lecturers believe there would be support within their organisation to sharing the work, if there were strong outcomes of a collaborated effort on resource development.

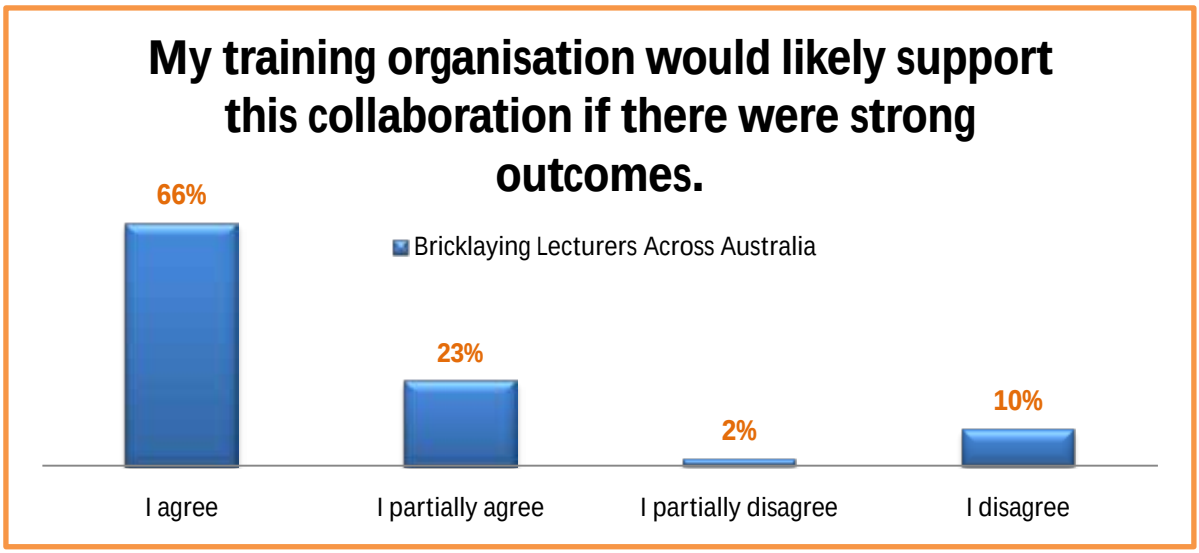


Chart 14 - My RTO would likely support collaboration

A number of surveyed lecturers were also concerned with the increasing contestability between RTOs and in particular, the competitive nature between TAFEs and private RTOs.

> "Unfortunately we are in a position to compete not only with private RTO's but with our own sections within our training organisation"
>
> "While competition exists and private RTO will be able to obtain these recourses I do see a conflict. Training of apprentices cannot be profit driven"
>
> "We live in a competitive world ... Nationally supported and paid for materials are always shared however the cost must come from a national base. Individually developed resources are developed by trained teachers who use their training to give them a delivery edge in training."
>
> "Whilst ever education is profit driven and our organisation is competing for clients, then resources will be too well valued and protected"

Recommendation 11

A national advisory group to be formed from bricklaying training organisation representatives to collaborate on resource development and other training related issues including employer engagement and recognition processes. This national group would also provide an avenue for influence on training package development and pathway progression for the industry.

On-The-Job Experience

One of the hallmarks of the apprenticeship scheme is the important relationship an apprentice has with their employer. The employer's role in providing experience and learning opportunities within the industry helps to ensure that apprentices are fully competent in the skills required.

Employers acknowledge this important responsibility and are fully aware of the importance of practical experience in learning the trade. In fact, 70% of all bricklaying employers believe that apprentices learn more about the trade on-the-job as compared to what they learn at trade school.

Chart 15 - Where do bricklaying apprentices learn the most about the trade?

This section explores the experience and perceptions of the apprenticeship training program within the work component, or on-the-job. Reviewed within this area are the views of bricklaying employers on the attributes of a good bricklayer, perceptions of training responsibilities, why employers take on an apprentice and perceptions of current apprentices and bricklaying lecturers as it pertains to the on-the-job component of training.

What Makes a Good Bricklayer?

In surveys with employers, and subcontractors, the views on what makes a good bricklayer were consistent. Employers and subcontractors alike, perceive the following five factors as most important for a 'good bricklayer':

1. Quality of work done
2. Someone who listens to the boss
3. Being able to work within a team
4. Ability to read plans
5. Getting the job done on time

The *quality of work done* was the most dominant factor for both employers and subcontractors. In fact, this factor dominated both qualified and unqualified bricklayers, and those in both the commercial and the residential sector.

Even the second factor, 'Someone who listens to the boss' was rated highly by subcontractors and bricklaying employees.

The only subtle difference noted in sub-groupings is that unqualified residential bricklayers tend to place slightly more importance on 'Getting the job done on time' when compared to all employers.

Importance of Trade School

Despite the fact that bricklayers feel that apprentices learn more about the trade on-the-job, they still value the importance of the formal schooling. There is strong support for trade school within the sector, despite the large percentage of unqualified bricklayers.

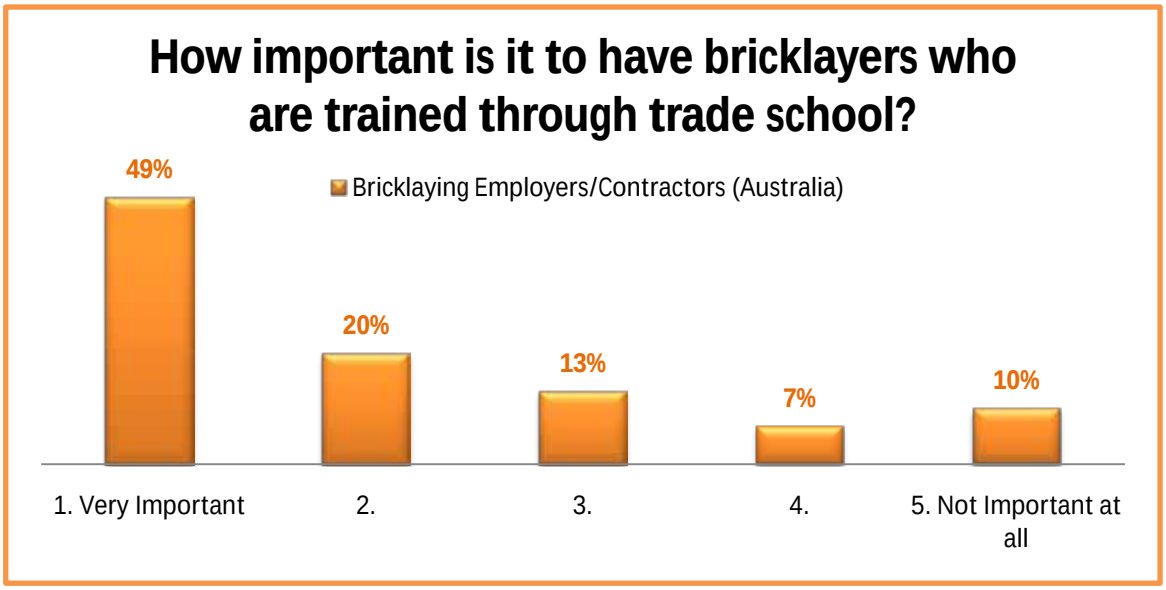


Chart 16 - How important is it to have bricklayers who are trained through trade school?

Even unqualified employers within the trade believe that training through a trade school is important – over half believe that it is important and only 17% believe it is not important at all.

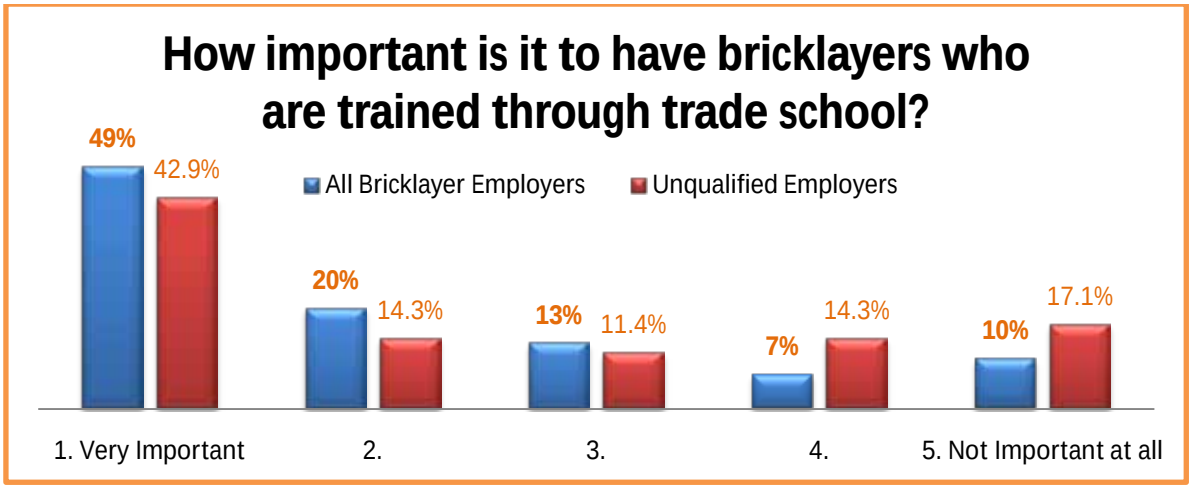


Chart 17 - How important is it to have bricklayers who are trained through trade school (qual vs. unqual)

When exploring this perception of training by employers, there is little difference between age groups, product use (i.e. brick vs. block) or years of experience in the trade. However, there are strong differences of opinion between residential and commercial sectors.

Those in the commercial sector more strongly believe in the importance of trade training when compared to the residential sector (i.e. 72% of commercial believe trade training is Very Important vs. 42% in the residential sector).

Whose Responsibility is it to Train Bricklaying Apprentices?

When asked about the responsibility of training bricklayers, there were some differing views offered by employers and RTO lecturers.

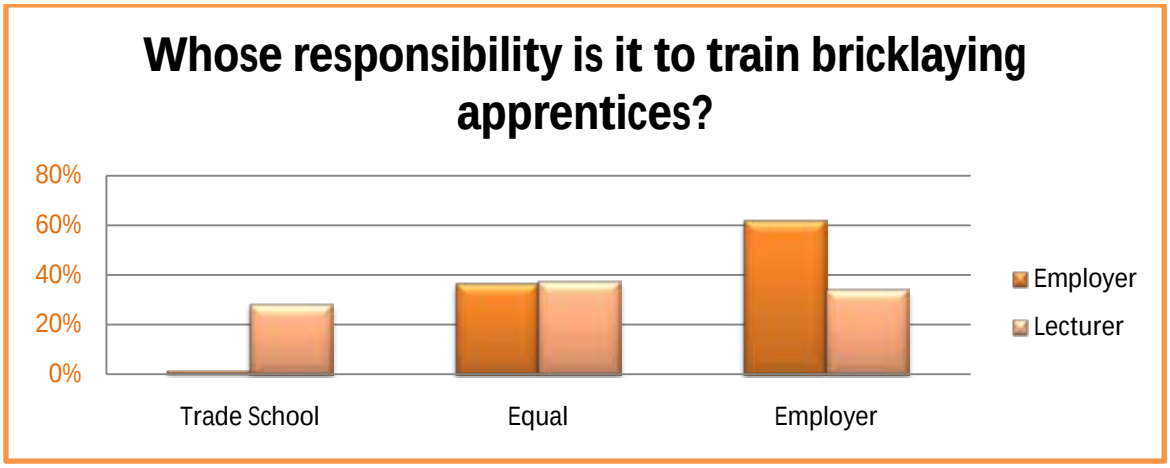


Chart 18 - Whose responsibility is it to train bricklaying apprentices?

Many employers believed that the amount of time spent on-the-job with the apprentice meant that the employer was primarily responsible for training the apprentice bricklayer.

> "The apps have only done a short time at school each year. He learns a heap more at one day at work than 2 weeks at trade school"
>
> "Spend more time with employer than at training school"

Other employers tended to see the responsibility as shared or equal. Many reflected their opinions of the different roles the employer and RTO provide to the training process.

> "Trade school is the technical side of the trade"

Some employers were less sure that all employers offered appropriate training. Typical comments included:

> "Personally I think it's the boss but I know of many bricklayers who just want them to lay as many bricks as possible and can't focus on the training side."
>
> "Many just push the number of bricks. But the employer just needs to give them a chance to learn and direct them."
>
> "Boss should have more input - if you don't put in you only get what you put into the apprentice"

Some differences in employer responses suggest that residential bricklayers are more inclined to see the responsibility as the employer's when compared to those in the commercial sector (i.e. 66% vs. 39%). Further, older bricklayers are also more inclined to see the responsibility as shared, when compared to younger bricklayers.

Bricklaying lecturers were much more spread or divided in their opinions of whose responsibility it is to train bricklaying apprentices.

Many agreed that the employers play a large role in the training process because of the time spent on the site.

> "Common sense shows that the biggest influence by far is the employer (even purely on time basis) - he/she are paying them"
>
> "We are only meant to complement their training. I have them for 36 days a year the employer has them for the rest. The majority of training has to come from them, show them all aspects of the trade not just labouring"
>
> "An RTO should only be expected to build on and supplement the training provided by the employer. Working on a 5 day week an apprentice spends 950 days on site and 90 at an RTO. If you do the sums it would be apparent who has the greatest opportunity to influence the skills development of an apprentice."

Other lecturers focused on the shared responsibilities and the need to collaborate for effective training outcomes.

"This is an equal responsibility that should be shared, the employer has to provide the apprentice with opportunities to learn and develop and not simply use them as cheap labour."

"To train Apprentices there needs to be a collaborative approach taken up by the training organisation to work with the employer and develop the training needs of the Individual Apprentice."

Many bricklaying lecturers reflected on the range of skills that are not always learned on-the-job and the importance of the trade school in developing knowledge of these skills. In fact, 59% of all lecturers surveyed, believe that apprentices do not get a wide breadth of experience in the trade with their employer.

"Trade schools provide the student with a wider range of experience than one employer can offer..."

"It should be the employer's responsibility but unfortunately most apprentices are not exposed to a range of bricklaying tasks on site and majority are "line jockeys" running into a line new houses. The training delivered off site by TAFE develops level skills, problem solving skills, and a range of projects they are not exposed to on site"

"... Also most employers work in narrow fields of work and cannot possibly expose their apprentice to all facets of the trade or industry."

And finally, a number of lecturers reflected the differing roles provided by RTOs and employers in the training process.

"Training is the delivery of hand skills development (Employers responsibility). Teaching (TAFE responsibility) is the development and underpinning the apprentice knowledge base of Standards, Codes and Industry Specifications/standards needed to become a qualified tradesperson"

"Our role is to teach them to think like a bricklayer and to give them the information that employers don't have the time to stop and teach"

"Time restraints and employee cost don't allow for the old system of master and apprentice.

"We assess what they learn on the job"

"Both have a role to play. Employers show apprentices how to lay bricks to a line, this is what makes money. Trade School teaches students the underpinning knowledge so that in the future they will hopefully know how to adapt to different circumstances/changes in the building industry"

Feedback on Employers' Training Capacity

Many RTO bricklaying lecturers feel that employers are generally well prepared to train apprentices on-the-job. However there are a substantial number of lecturers who believe some employers are not well prepared. It should be acknowledged that it is

difficult to generalise across the board on this issue. However, those who felt employers were not well prepared suggested that:

- Some employers do not have the time to train
- Do not have the variety of work to show apprentice different skills
- Are not qualified themselves

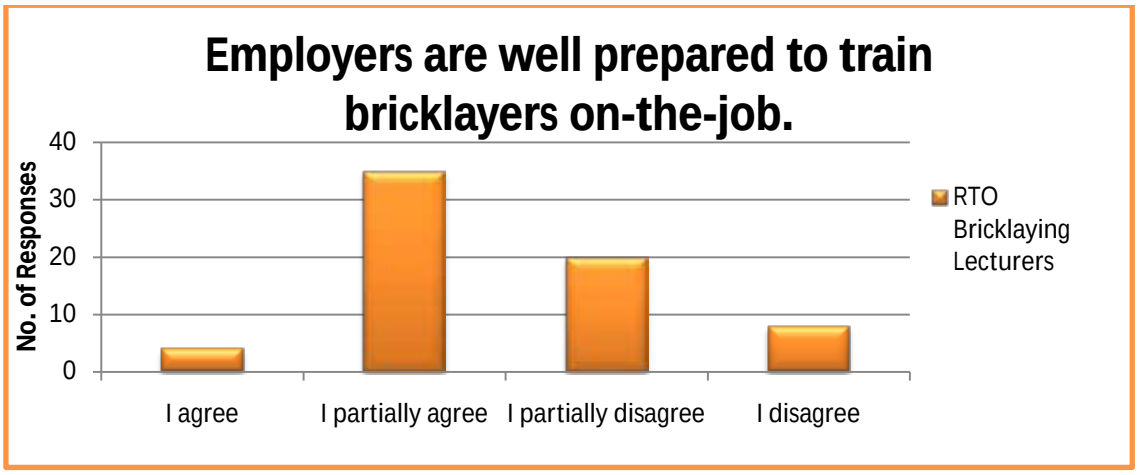


Chart 19 - Employers are well prepared to train bricklayers on the job

RTO lecturers also offered their opinion on the flexibility and training support offered by employers on-the-job. The trend generally matches the previous discussion on preparedness of employers.

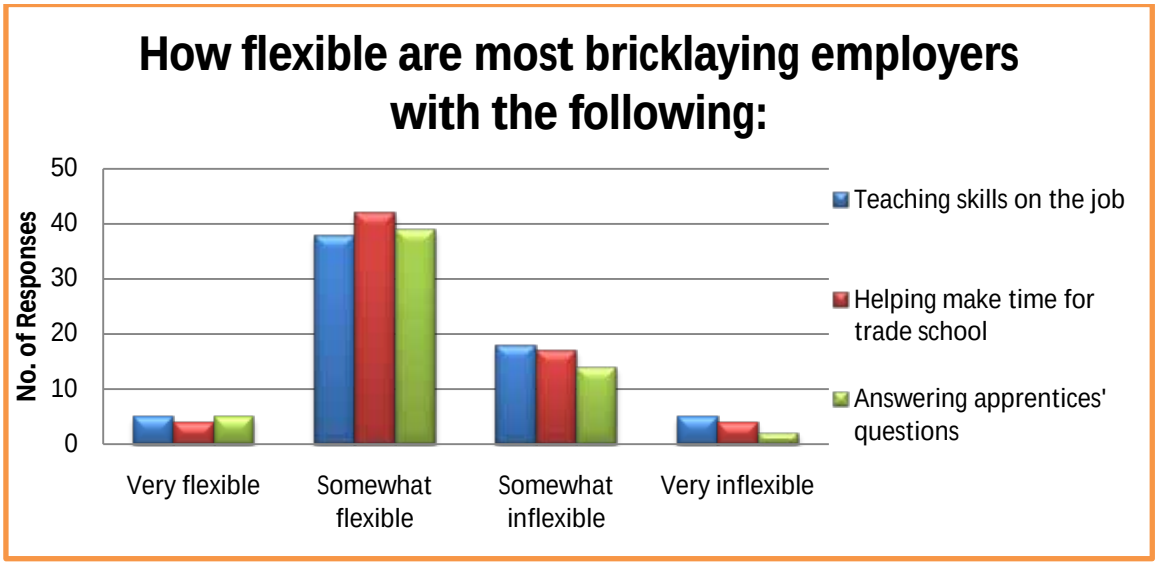


Chart 20 - How flexible are most bricklaying employers?

Comments from RTO lecturers acknowledge the difficulty in generalising across all employers and we acknowledge that this area may require some deeper investigation into different categories of employers' flexibility.

"Some bosses teach them, some don't - more don't know how to teach them!"

"We have had some apps disadvantaged by employers not sending them to trade school when allocated"

Although the question was focused on the employers' flexibility in the training process, the vast majority of comments from RTOs suggest the need and imperative of RTOs to accommodate the needs of the employer more flexibly. It was clear that a few of the respondents, and only a few, were already contemplating or progressing down this pathway of supporting the employer more flexibly. There appear to be more comments on flexible programs from private training organisations. Comments included:

"The only flexibility the employer wants is for their apprentice to come to TAFE when the employer wants and we try to accommodate this."

"Have a flexible program offered by the Trade school helps - more than anything else"

"It is our experience that it has assisted that we have flexible delivery policies, hence the employer is then more co-operative about allowing their student to attend trade school"

Why an Employer Takes On an Apprentice

When employers were asked about the reasons they took on a bricklaying apprentice, the following ratings emerged:

1. Makes good business sense
2. An apprentice is more likely to stay with an employer over the 3-4 years
3. Because the employer was an apprentice once
4. It costs less to employ an apprentice

A number of comments from employers suggest that finding the right person who will stay on with them is a critical factor for their business. It appears to be important not only from a cost factor, but also in the skill set and teamwork within the gang.

"Can train them up in my way and then they'll work the way I want them to. Builds trust and work ethic."

"Need loyal staff who will not leave when offered $1 per hour more from another employer"

"Don't have the luxury of a labourer. Takes a while to get the mortar right."

"loyalty they tend to stay / labourer float hard to find"

RTO lecturers also perceived that employers wanted to take on apprentices to ensure they picked up good habits and worked well within the employer's gang.

"The employer knows that the apprentice will end up working more to the ways or likes of the employer…

"I believe the industry is realising to get a bricklayer to do the work the way your crew works is easier to obtain from someone you train yourself other than relying on another trades person."

The perception of '*Costs less to employ an apprentice'* was rated 4th across all bricklaying employers. However, within different segments of this group, there appears to be some variation.

- Unqualified employers rated cost slightly higher
- Residential employers rated cost slightly higher
- Employers with more experience rate cost lower in importance than those with less experience

However, other groups perceived cost as the most important reasons for taking on an apprentice, including:

- Sub-contractors perceived employers' primary reason for taking on an apprentice was cost
- Lecturers also perceived cost to be the primary reason for taking on an apprentice

"It is cheap labour for the first 2-3 years. You can have someone by your side who's reliable for 3-4 years." (Subcontractor)

"Employers see Apps as cheap labourers. Some don't pick up a trowel for 3 years. Usually put on an apprentice as cheap labour for the first few years. Then slowly allow them to lay bricks. There are a few sincere employers but looking at the numbers it's not many." (RTO Lecturer)

The difference in perceptions on *cost* between employers and lecturers is particularly worrisome as this difference can create barriers to the relationship and possibilities for collaboration.

Cost of Apprentices to an Employer

Taking on an apprentice is often a long term investment for employers and group training organisations. Many apprentices come into the trade 'very green', with little experience in the bricklaying culture. Further, a number of apprentices are making their first foray into the full-time workforce during a time where they are still learning to manage finances and competing personal interests.

From employers and especially bricklaying associations, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a substantial cost to employers when taking on an apprentice. This includes direct financial costs, time and effort to train in bricklaying skills, as well as pastoral care for challenges that include money management, drugs, relationships and attitude on the job – just to mention a few.

However, the cost of an apprentice seems to dominate discussions on direct support payments and the level of support required within the industry. The general view in many trades, is that an apprentice is a high cost in the first year of their apprenticeship and that the employer tends to 'lose money' on them in the first year, to be 'recouped' in the latter part of their apprenticeship when they start producing at a higher output/quality.

To this end, we asked bricklaying employers about their perceptions on the cost of an apprentice over the span of their apprenticeship. The chart below highlights the general findings by year of apprenticeship.

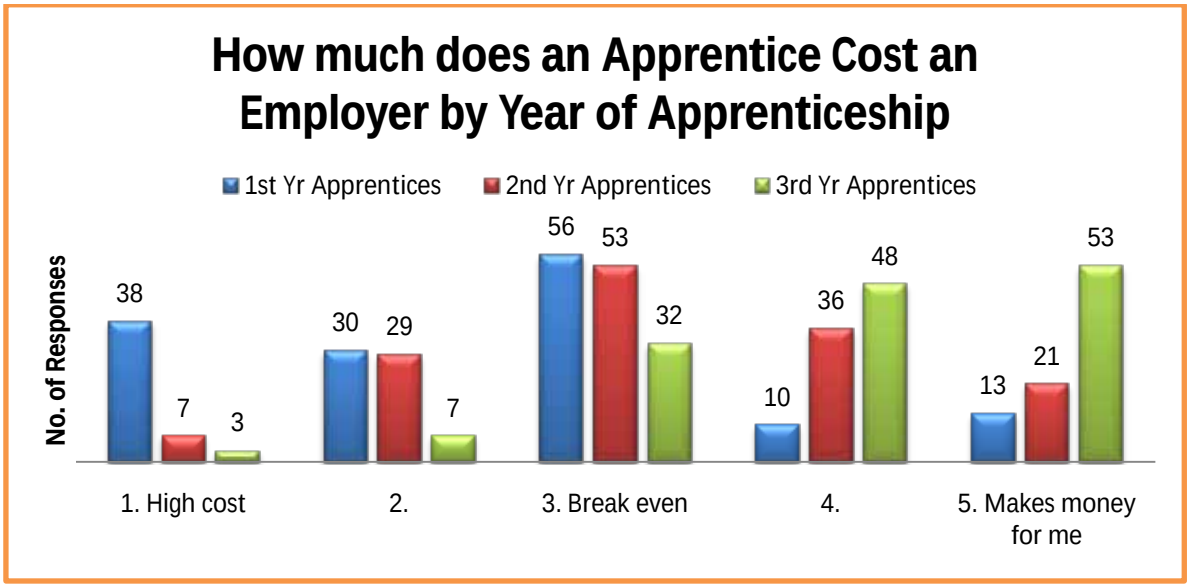


Chart 21 - How much does an apprentice cost an employer by year of apprenticeship

First Year

Roughly 46% of all employers believe that first year apprentices are a cost to the business. Surprisingly, 38% believe that they break even in the first year and 16% feel that they actually make money.

A number of comments suggest that it largely depends upon the individual apprentice, whilst other employers suggest it is how well the employer goes about teaching them from the very beginning. Interviews with some employers has indicated that this is related to how soon first year apprentices are allowed to start laying bricks on-site, rather than labouring. Where this occurs, and apprentices start to build those hand skills, then they are more likely to be productive for the bricklayer. Other comments from employers focus on the lack of productivity on the trowel.

> "A 1st year apprentice does a lot of labour for 3 months saving the employer money on paying labour rates"
>
> "… depends how you teach them."

"1st year they labour a bit and make your money that way. Depends on the kid too."

"Really depends on the apprentices attitude"

"If he lays 40 bricks at .80 a day he can't pay for his wages"

	1 High cost	2.	3. Break Even	4.	5. Makes money for me
First Year	26%	20%	38%	7%	9%

Table 7 - Cost of first year apprentice

There are some differences in perception on the first year apprentice costs for employers when comparing responses from qualified and unqualified employers. Qualified bricklayers are much more inclined to see first year apprentices break even in their first year, whereas unqualified bricklayers are more likely to see first year apprentices costing them money (i.e. 62% of unqualified employers rated the cost as 1 or 2 in the above scale). This may have some basis in their past training experience as an apprentice – better preparing them to train others.

Second Year

By the second year of the apprenticeship, employers in general believe that 39% of apprentices are making money for the business (i.e. selection 4 & 5 in the table below). A further 36% feel they are breaking even during this second year and 25% of employers still feel they are a cost to the business.

	1 High cost	2.	3. Break Even	4.	5. Makes money for me
Second Year	5%	20%	36%	25%	14%

Table 8 - Cost of second year apprentice

Qualified bricklayers are more inclined to believe that second year apprentices make money for the employer, when compared to unqualified employers (i.e. 42% vs. 28%).

Responses from commercial employers indicate that second year apprentices are still considered to be a cost to the business (i.e. 38% of commercial vs. 18% of residential).

Third Year

Approximately 72% of all bricklaying employers surveyed believe that an apprentice makes them money by the third year of their apprenticeship.

	1 High cost	2.	3. Break Even	4.	5. Makes money for me
Third Year	2%	5%	22%	34%	37%

Table 9 - Cost of third year apprentice

Only 7% of all employers feel that third year apprentices are still a cost to the business. In the commercial sector of the industry, where wages are generally higher, 12.5% still feel that third year apprentices are a cost to the business. But even in the commercial sector, this is a minority view, as 57% believe they earn the commercial business money in their third year.

Contrary to popular belief, more than half of all bricklaying employers believe that apprentices across all years are not a cost to the business. That is to say, that for each year of the apprenticeship, greater than 50% of employers believe that apprentices are either at a break even stage or earning the business money.

	Cost	Break Even + Make Money
First Year Apprentice	46%	54%
Second Year Apprentice	25%	75%
Third Year Apprentice	7%	93%

Table 10 - Cost vs. break-even of apprentices

This may change during economic cycles, especially during down cycles where an experienced bricklayer may more closely approach the cost of a second or third year apprenticeship wage. This can have a dramatic impact on the ability of some employers to maintain apprentices.

Support Payment and Subsidies

Masonry contractor associations, the union and Group Training Organisations were asked for their views on the effectiveness of the various support payments received by employers and apprentices. These included payments made by the Federal Government and the ABBTF plus industry training funds/boards in some States (e.g. SA, WA, TAS, and Qld).

Most respondents felt that the subsidies worked to increase the number of apprentices, although one interviewee gave his opinion that the fact that subsidies have to be paid shows that the trade system is not working properly, as employers should not have to be paid to take on an apprentice.

Others felt that, whilst the subsidies themselves were useful, there were some problems with the process. Comments included:

> "The admin process for the GTO's is very complex as you have to work out exactly how many days each apprentice has been on the job every month. There needs to be a better way"

"The progression payment needs to be brought back as many kids leave before completion"

"The system is open to abuse when kids are used as cheap labour for the first year and then put off once the commencement has been paid"

"The system works well, but they (employers) don't need to be paid any more money. It wouldn't bring any more apprentices into the trade"

"The subsidies are really important. A lot of employers would really struggle without them"

There was also general agreement that the allowances paid to apprentices were very important in partially offsetting the low wages.

"Maybe, rather than paying more money to the employer, the ABBTF subsidy could be used to increase the first year apprentice's wages, or go towards paying for their training, travel, etc."

What Makes for an Enjoyable Work Experience?

Apprentices generally reflect that they quite enjoy the work that they do with their employer, with only 6% stating that they do not enjoy their work experience.

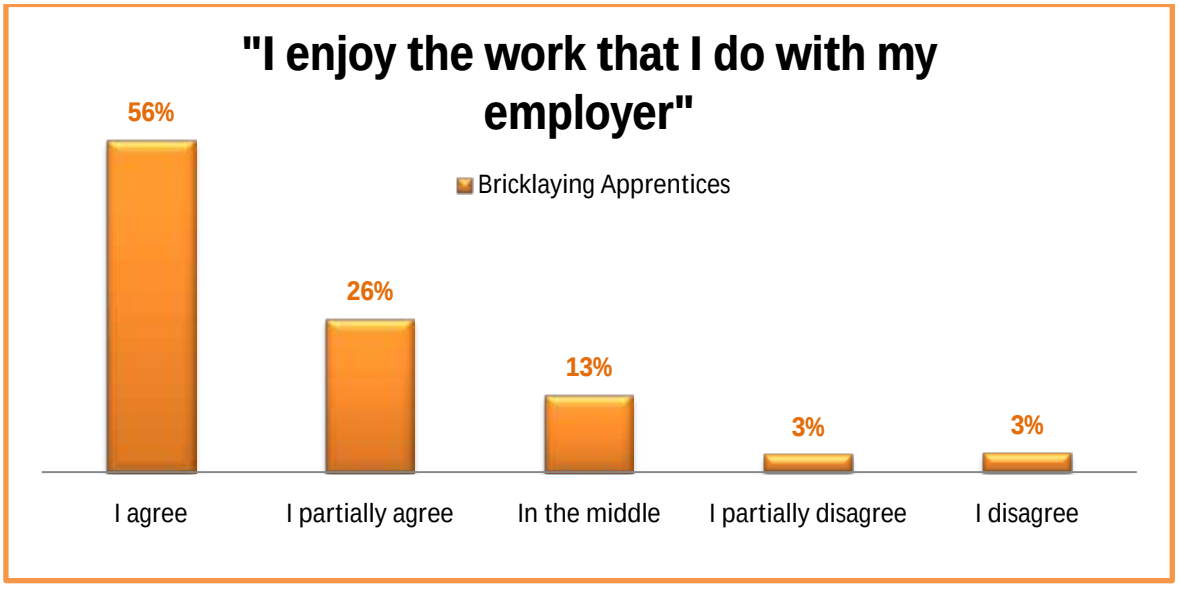


Chart 22 - "I enjoy the work I do with my employer"

In exploring some of the different groupings of apprentices we found that first year apprentices tended to enjoy their work experience the most, when compared to other apprenticeship years. This may have some relationship to the novelty of the trade, but is interesting in light of the high degree of labouring in their first year.

Following on with the theme of first year experience, there was a strong relationship between enjoying the work with their employer and the amount of first year rotation of job roles in the gang.

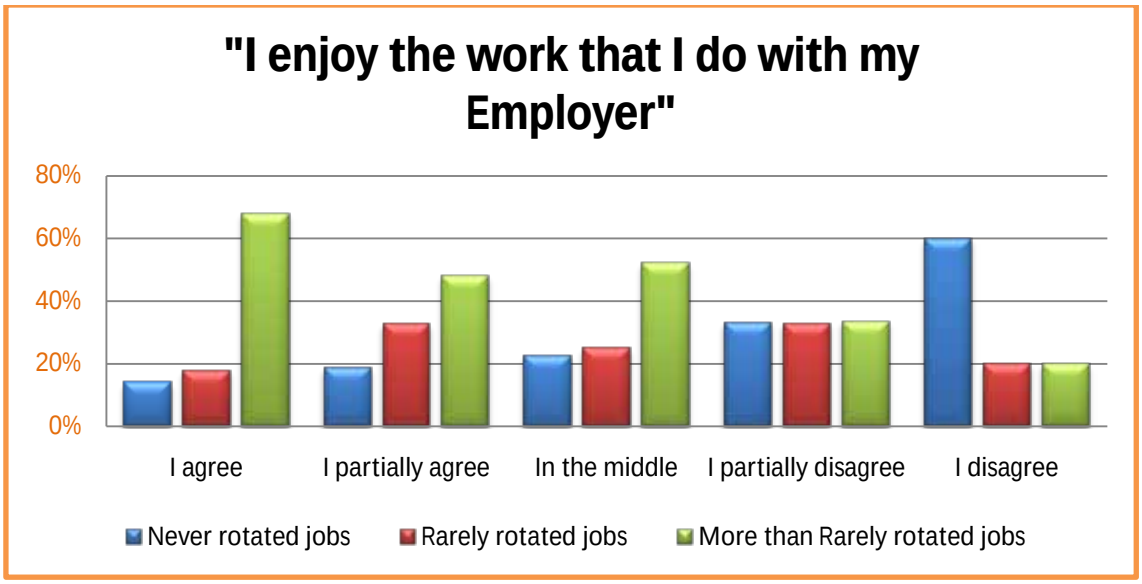


Chart 23 - "I enjoy the work I do with my employer by job rotation

Those who were rotated in their role during their first year tended to enjoy working with their employer much more than those who were rarely or never rotated.

Apprentices across all years tended to enjoy their on-the-job experience more when they were provided more trowel time laying bricks or blocks.

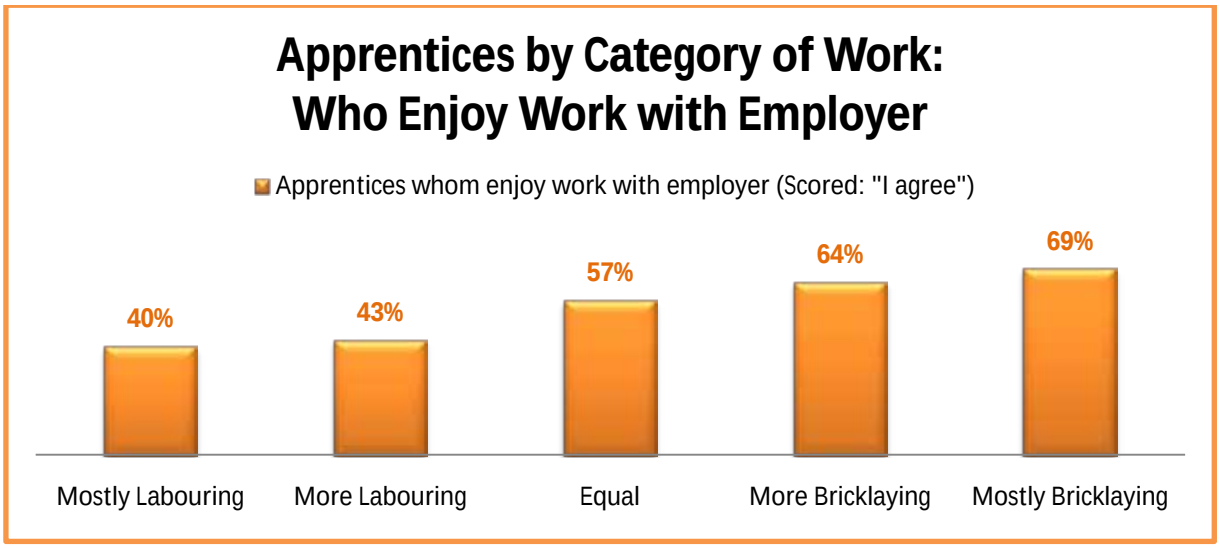


Chart 24 - Apprentices who enjoy work with employer

There was some relationship with *enjoying work with the employer* for those apprentices who chose bricklaying as their first choice as a career. Further, those who took up bricklaying because they *enjoyed working outside*, also tended to enjoy their work more with the employer.

Enjoying their work experience with their employer is an important consideration for the apprenticeship program. Perhaps unsurprisingly, but important nonetheless, is that those who enjoy their work with the employer are much less likely to seriously consider dropping out of the program.

- 26% of those who enjoy working with their employer have seriously considered dropping out
- 73% of those who DO NOT enjoy working with their employer seriously considered dropping out.

It is worth noting that the research methodology did look for relationships in other areas. Within the design of the current survey, no relationship was found between the agreement level on the statement, 'I enjoy the work that I do with my employer' and the following:

- Direct employment vs. Group Training Organisations
- Whether the apprentice had done a pre-apprenticeship program
- Previous work experience in the trade
- Amount of pay
- Number of different host employers
- Whether they felt they were more/less successful in trade school
- Age

Apprentices were generally satisfied with the support they received from their employer and felt they were taught many skills on the job and that employers were available/willing to answer their questions while at work.

When asked to identify the aspects they enjoyed most about their work experience, the top five aspects were:

1. Working outdoors
2. Making money
3. Learning a life skill/career
4. The people I work with
5. Seeing the results of my work

In exploring the challenges of their work experience, the following aspects that apprentices enjoyed the LEAST were identified as:

1. Too much labouring
2. Long hours
3. The weather
4. Treated like cheap labour
5. Not getting enough experience laying bricks
6. Being treated without respect

Apprentices were also asked what they would suggest to help them learn more about bricklaying on-the-job. Of the 246 apprentices who offered suggestions, the most common themes were:

- More time bricklaying
- If the boss had more time to teach me
- I listened more / asked more questions
- More one-on-one time teaching
- I had my own job / more responsibility

Employer Challenges

Managing an apprentice is not without its challenges for employers in the bricklaying industry. Many employers acknowledge that it is 'a huge commitment taking on a kid.' This industry is particularly vulnerable because of the small size of most businesses within the trade. As stated in the Status Report[5], 'Of the 13,711 registered bricklaying businesses operating at the beginning of 2008, 72% of them are sole proprietors with no employees. 27% have less than 20 employees and only 1% of the businesses operating have 20 or more employees'[6].

Employers identify the following as the most common challenges for them in taking on a bricklaying apprentice:

Finding the right person for an apprenticeship

Finding the right individual to become an apprentice is the most dominant theme expressed by employers. Most comments suggest that employers struggle with the maturity level of most apprentices and the social and/or life challenges that are common for young adults. Drugs, money management and peer pressure appear to be common issues that employers find themselves confronting with apprentices. Employers also feel that the lack of interest in the trade make selection processes difficult.

Apart from maturity issues, 'attitude' is probably the second most dominant item in

[5] Powers, T & Walker, J 2009, *National Bricklaying Status Report: Industry Pathfinders Project,* p. 15
[6] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, Businesses by Industry Class by Main State by Employment Size Range – 2006-7 Cat. No. 8165.

this category. Many employers feel that those with the right attitude can go far and they are very appreciative when they find an apprentice who fits in with the attitude that works with the employer.

Typical comments include:

> "Sometime they just don't get it - maybe it's because they are young. They have a different way of doing things."
>
> "They're not too bright. They can't think on their feet. They're in dodo line. The maturity thing ... he's very immature. It exhausts you."
>
> "If they don't have the right attitude, you need to get rid of them quickly ..."
>
> "Knowing if the apprentice can handle life's pressures as well as work."
>
> "Age, Maturity, Life problems, Peer group pressure, growing up in society"
>
> "If they're young, can be difficult to manage - need to pick them up, buy their tools etc."
>
> "Just getting someone who is reliable and turns up on the job. and hard working to push themselves physically"
>
> "They don't turn up, they smoke too much marijuana, they don't ring you, they are lazy"
>
> "Getting someone who is reliable and someone who can transport themselves to jobs. Hard to find them young and responsible."
>
> "Drugs, attitude, nutrition, and not strong enough for the trade"

Cost of Overheads

The comments on costs specific to apprentices were largely dominated by Workers Compensation and the associated paperwork. Remembering that this is a trade that largely works on a subcontracting basis, many employers are not familiar with employee arrangements and it appears they find the process expensive and worrisome.

> "Finding the insurance – workers comp. And finding government support – not enough to encourage".
>
> "Workers comp was over $6000 in a year. And every time their wage goes up, the workers comp goes up."
>
> "The biggest issue is workers comp and the amount of money you have to shell out. I know there are some great incentives, but there are still high costs. And the bureaucratic nightmare ... the paperwork. The workers comp is pretty big especially for apprentices. We're pretty high risk so its costly - high premiums."
>
> "The work cover / kids are more accident prone and with a subby they look after themselves - this is in regard to small businesses - huge responsibility"
>
> "13% of their total wages is required for insurances - this is too high. It's more if there have been claims"
>
> "Clumsiness and accidents, not following instructions"

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is currently investigating ways to reform business regulatory processes to make Australian industry more competitive. Issues under consideration include payroll tax and Australian Business Number and business names registration[7]. It is to be hoped that other business regulations such as Workers' Compensation will also be reviewed as part of this reform process.

Steady flow of work

Because of the micro-business structure within the trade, many employers are challenged and worried about being able to provide sustainable work for an apprentice over the three year apprenticeship (4 years in some States). This certainly appears to give cause for many employers to question whether they should take on an apprentice.

Additionally, employers are unaccustomed to paying subcontractors during down days, or wet days and hence feel constrained to pay apprentices during these unproductive times. For some host employers, this also includes the time spent at trade school. Comments from Group Training Organisations also suggest that many of the unlicensed trades such as bricklaying, struggle with quantifying wages over the year with holidays versus a higher rate for on-site hours.

> "Having a steady flow of work."
>
> "Keeping them in work ... continuity. It's always in the back of my mind"
>
> "Paying during slack times"
>
> "4 years of full time work is hard to get for ourselves and to have an apprentice is added pressure. Apprentices need to take holidays when it's quiet or rainy like we do."
>
> "Mainly the time they are at school, paying for wet days and not too many jobs around when it rains you get paid for it"

Teaching an Apprentice Slows Down Productivity

A number of employers are challenged with running the business and overseeing the apprentice. They acknowledge there are many facets to properly preparing an apprentice, but the multi-tasking and various responsibilities in running a small business makes it challenging to make it all 'fit into the day ...'.

> "Watching them and trying to do the job"
>
> "Teaching the young people the skills of the job / strength training / spreading mortar slow process but it works"
>
> "To be able to back off and spend enough time with the kids. What works with one doesn't work for all."
>
> "having the time to teach while still running the business"
>
> "Getting them to learn. You have to check constantly and it takes time. As they're young it doesn't sink in quickly."

[7] http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-03-26/docs/attachment_b.pdf,

The Unqualified Workforce

The previous report in this project (See Status Report) highlighted the fact that 45% of all bricklayers in the trade are currently qualified. Here, we re-emphasise our definition of qualified to mean those bricklayers currently in the trade who have a completed Certificate III in bricklaying. Our references to 'unqualified' bricklayers only refer to their lack of a Certificate III qualification – and involve no inference on capability other than what is reported through the survey responses.

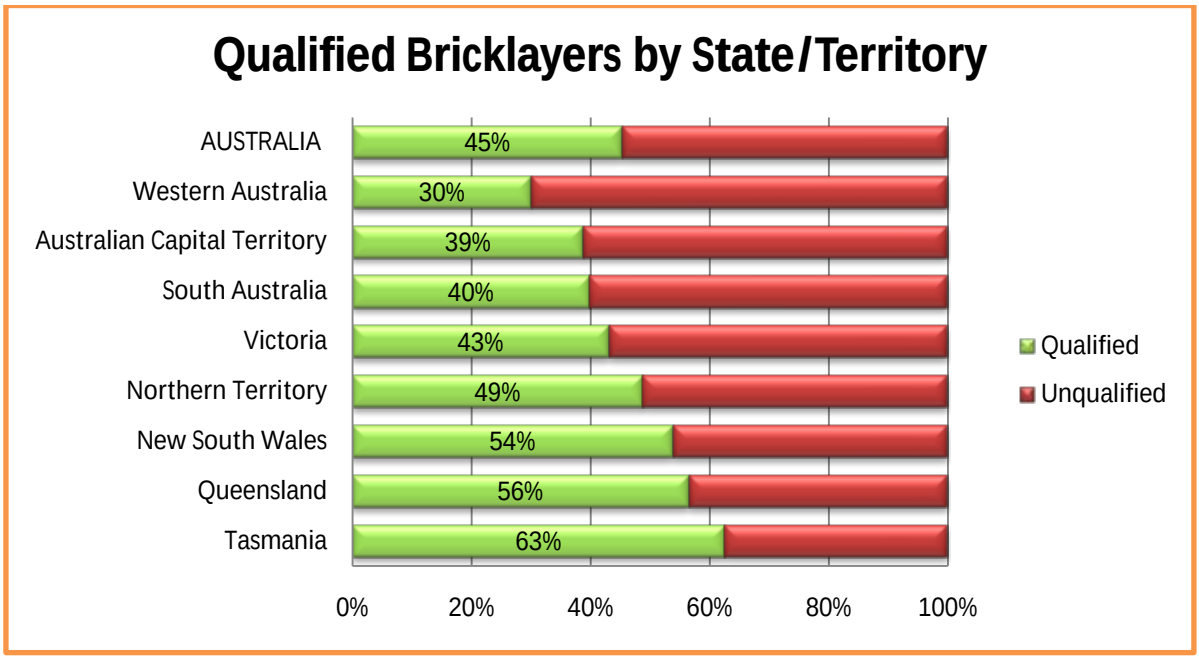


Chart 25 - Qualified bricklayers by State/Territory (Source ABS 2006 Census)

The choice by so many to enter the trade without trade training is an important dynamic in the bricklaying industry that has a direct impact on the bricklaying apprenticeship program. It is important to understand what factors support this unqualified pathway and what barriers are in place preventing the road to qualification for many in the industry.

Equally important, with so many in the trade without a qualification, is the question of whether this suggests an opportunity for a robust RPL process and gap training for the current workforce. Does the current workforce see value in this, and what would it take to entice them to become qualified?

And finally, a key question involved in this exploratory process is: *What difference does a qualification make in the industry? Can people tell the difference in work between qualified bricklayers and unqualified bricklayers? If so, what are the key differences?*

Reasons Behind Unqualified Workforce

Employers were well aware that many within the trade are unqualified. However, many were somewhat surprised by the high percentage. Those involved with the representative associations, such as the Masonry Contractors Associations and the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation were unsurprised. In fact, many within these associations felt that the 55% unqualified workforce was understated and the proportion was actually higher than this amount.

Employers and RTO lecturers were specifically asked to comment on why they believe so many within the industry decide not to do a bricklaying apprenticeship. The following represent the main themes from their responses

Poor Apprenticeship Wages

The vast majority of comments from employers and RTO lecturers involved the fact that the apprenticeship wages represent a major barrier for individuals to access training for a qualification. The difference in a labourer's wages to that of an apprentice is substantial and many question whether a qualification that does not eventuate in a higher rate of pay at the end of the training is worth the three years of lower pay.

Employers are sympathetic to this situation and often express the view that more subsidies should go to the apprentice, especially in the first year. Some employers even go so far as to dissuade some individuals from taking on an apprenticeship so they do not have to work for the low apprenticeship wages. Although this may represent some advantages for the employer (i.e. no time away from work), financially they are worse off. Hence, the argument for not taking on an apprenticeship is sincere and 'financially' well intended.

Other comments suggest that the low wages over the apprenticeship period particularly dissuade young people who may not have the 'long term view' on their career. Nor are careers necessarily a life-long decision these days with the trend towards multiple careers in a lifetime.

Finally, many employers and RTO lecturers reflect that current new entrants into the trade often start at a later age and often come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This means their financial needs are greater and yet they may not be in a position to access savings or family support.

> "…money for apps is not good enough - not to start late in life"
>
> "They can't afford to do it as apprentices wage is not enough."
>
> "Because of the low wages, labouring can pay better"
>
> "They get put on as a labourer and earn 500/600 dollars, so it's hard to go back to 200 dollars as an apprentice."

"Because most bricklayers left school early and don't come from families with money."

"Because of the low wages as an apprentice. They want to do the job but [are] not paid enough."

"Get offered more money as a 1st or 2nd Year app to be a labourer, the kids do not see the long term benefits they see short term and the money now not later"

"Many employers talk people out of the apprenticeship, because the labourer has been working with them for years and they can teach them. I can teach and pay you more."

"They get the same pay as a qualified one why have low pay for 3 years"

"Too old to be an apprentice with wage constraints"

"Many started later in life and could not afford the drop in wages"

Hands-On Learning

Many comments acknowledge the large component of practical hands-on skills required within learning the bricklaying trade. Although 70% of employers believe it is important to have bricklayers trained through trade school, one third of all bricklaying employers surveyed believe that bricklaying is a trade that can be learned on-the-job and does not require a formal qualification.

Chart 26 - "This is a trade that can be learnt on the job"

There is also the widely held belief that those unqualified bricklayers who have a number of years experience are appropriately skilled to be successful in the trade.

"I started doing an apprenticeship but didn't like it. It is a trade you pick up as you go along. It's more of a practical, on site experience. If you are in with the right team you can learn."

"All blockwork which is easier than brickwork. Don't really need so much training."

"Some of them don't get to go to TAFE and instead just get on the trowel. They learn more on site than they would at TAFE"

"Probably because if you have the opportunity to get your hands on experience you can get on a job as a labourer and work your way up."

"It is mostly a skill based trade"

"Have picked up the necessary skills from on the job training over a number of years."

A Common Pathway

The pathway for individuals to enter the bricklaying trade without an apprenticeship or qualification has a long history in the trade. The typical pathway is for an individual to join a gang as a labourer. If they prove their mettle in this role, they then begin to pick up a small amount of trowel time on the line.

Other comments suggest that many individuals who worked in a family business were helping out at an early stage and simply picked up the trade over time with their father.

A few comments from both employers and lecturers suggest this unqualified pathway had its early start as a major trend during the construction boom in the '70s. Others suggest that the unqualified bricklayer is more typically an older tradesperson. The survey results suggest there is a difference in average age that is significant but not as large as many would suspect.

	Average Age	Minimum Age	Maximum Age
Qualified Bricklayers	40.7 yrs old	22	59
Unqualified Bricklayers	44.6 yrs old	26	60

Table 11 - Qualified vs. unqualified bricklayers by age

"Picked up the skills as labourers. Unable to [do] technical stuff"

"They start as labourers and their bosses put them onto laying bricks if they think they can do it."

"Start as labourers and just carry on from there"

"Late 70s ,80s 12 week course during the boom. Destroyed the trade ... the market was flooded. There were a number of quickie brickie courses"

"In the 60's and 70's it was not deemed necessary to go to school to become a bricklayer"

"Many who don't have apprenticeship started a while ago."

"They may start off in a family business and get taught on site."

Undervalued Qualification

A number of comments reflect that the qualification is not valued by some within the work site with little bearing on obtaining work. Further, a few comments revealed a perception by some employers that the trade school did not value-add to the skill set required on site.

> "Because you don't need to - you can get plenty of work without it"
>
> "They learn from being labourers, no need to be qualified"
>
> "There is no need for it, what they do at trade school is a waste of time"
>
> "They don't think TAFE can teach then anything useful that they don't already know"

Challenging Study Requirements

Many bricklaying lecturers also believe that many unqualified bricklayers shy away from trade training because of literacy and numeracy problems, or simply a negative perception of school and training.

> "Some may not have the scholastic ability"
>
> "Poor literacy levels/ many are not confident with formal training"
>
> "Can't read or write"
>
> "Structured learning perceived as a burden (usually for early school leavers)"

Cost for Mature Aged Workers

Whilst apprenticeship wages dominated this category, the cost for mature aged workers was also highlighted as major reason many bypassed the qualification route. For those individuals beyond 21 years of age, the study for a qualification in bricklaying is often done in the evenings after a full day of work. In essence, they do their qualification on their own time and most often without the financial support afforded through the apprenticeship scheme.

Further, many of these individuals have added financial and family commitments that make the training particularly onerous. Whilst there are many comments from RTO lecturers about the commitment of this mature aged group, the current numbers are small in comparison to apprenticeship numbers. Comments from the survey suggest that the cost, time and availability of training are the biggest barriers to this group.

> "Main reason would be that they are too old before they decide to do an apprenticeship ..."
>
> "Financial circumstances is the reason why I dropped out but now I'm going for the RPL."

"Money - especially for those entering industry later."

"Cannot afford to attend college training"

"Too expensive to train"

Administering the Apprenticeship Paperwork

Although many employers suggest that it is important to have bricklayers who are trade trained, a few employers reflected that the paperwork requirements and collection of subsidies are one of the least enjoyed aspects of managing the apprenticeship arrangement.

"Culture of the industry - do not like paperwork, or dealing with bureaucrats"

"RPL process is too difficult (evidence)"

"A lot will learn the trade as they go and employers do not need to go though signup and can offload the employee at any time"

The problems faced by employers dealing with apprenticeship paperwork were also identified by a number of representatives of the Masonry Contractors' Associations, union and Group Training Organisations. There was significant discussion about the lack of business expertise amongst many bricklayers who 'just want to lay bricks. They don't understand all of the insurances, and financial and legal issues, and don't want to have to deal with all of the paperwork'.

This discussion also resulted in many of the interviewees highlighting the importance of apprentices undertaking business skills, either later in their apprenticeship training or after they were qualified. There was a great deal of concern about the fact that the business aspects are electives in the new national Training Package.

Recommendation 12

RTOs to develop specific delivery models for mature aged students who have varying degrees of expertise. These models should include flexible delivery, RPL and portfolio approaches, and self-paced project based delivery.

Difference Between Qualified and Unqualified

Two separate surveys were used for bricklayers. One was designed for employers and the other was designed for subcontractors or employees. Although somewhat harder to access, the project attempted to collect the views of unqualified bricklayers who make up a large proportion of the industry.

Within both of these surveys, approximately 23% of the respondents were non-qualified.

	Qualified	Unqualified	Total
Employers	122	37	159
Sub-contractors/Employees	106	34	140

Table 12 – Survey response numbers for qualified and unqualified bricklayers

In comparing the qualified and unqualified bricklaying workforce, there were a few differences, but in general the two groups were less distinguished than would generally be presupposed.

Without repeating comments included in the earlier part of this report, the differences between the qualified and unqualified bricklayer are:

- The qualified bricklayer typically has a larger number of employees &/or subcontractors working for them when compared to an unqualified bricklayer

	Average number of subcontractors / employees
Qualified Employers	5.4
Unqualified Employers	3.6

Table 13 - Number of sub-contractors/employees

- Qualified bricklayers are more inclined to view trade school training as very important to the industry (i.e. 69% consider this *Very Important* or *Somewhat Important*). This may not be surprising in itself; however, 57% of unqualified bricklayers also believe trade training is important for the industry.
- Unqualified bricklayers regularly interact with bricklaying apprentices. 85% of surveyed unqualified bricklayers manage or have worked closely with bricklaying apprentices in their experience.
- Unsurprisingly, unqualified employers are much more inclined to believe that bricklaying apprentices learn more about their trade on-the-job
- Qualified subcontractors tend to have started their trade at an earlier age when compared to unqualified subcontractors

	Age when you first started in the trade
Qualified Employers	16.6 yrs old
Unqualified Employers	18.8 yrs old

Table 14 - Age started in trade by qual/unqual

- Qualified subcontractors are twice as likely to have made bricklaying their first career choice

	Bricklaying Was Your 1st Career Choice?
Qualified Employers	58%
Unqualified Employers	27%

Table 15 - Bricklaying as first career choice by qual/unqual

Can You Tell the Difference?

A critical aspect to trade training is the perception of whether there are strong outcomes from the apprenticeship process for industry. With so many unqualified bricklayers within the industry, one would hope that training ensures some sort of advantage that is evident in the workplace.

Subcontractors and employees were asked if they could tell the difference between those that have done a bricklaying apprenticeship and those who have learned the trade on-the-job.

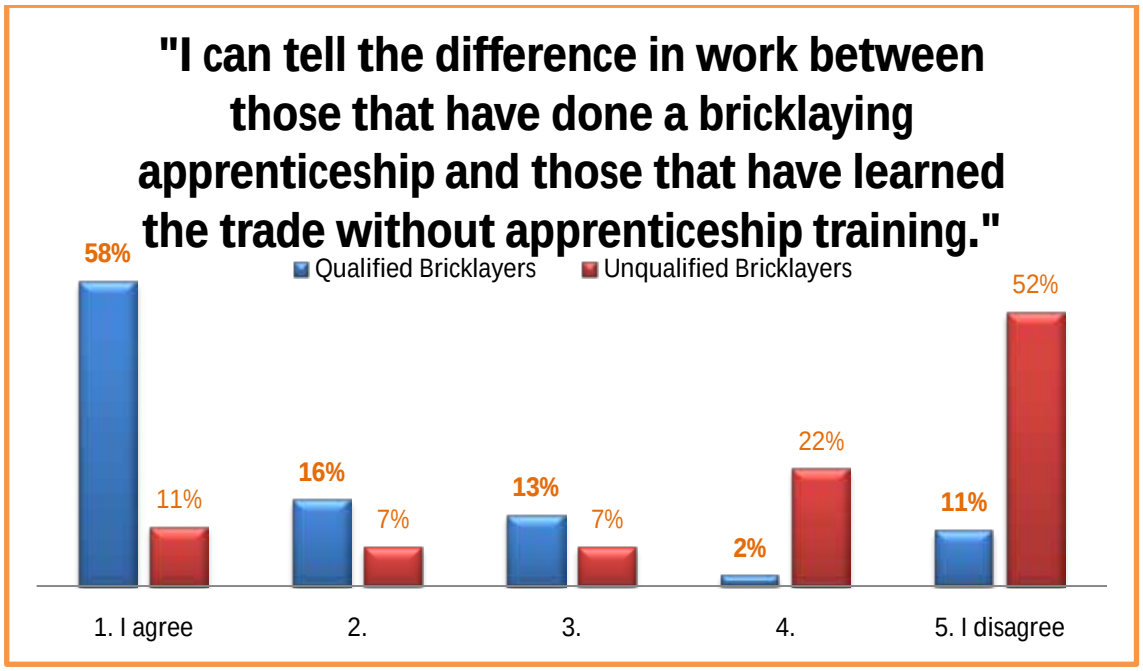


Chart 27 - Quality difference between qual/unqual

Largely, those who were qualified believed they could tell the difference in workmanship. Unqualified bricklayers disagreed and felt that there was little to differentiate. Typical comments from subcontractors and employees included:

> "On a wall you can't tell if they've done an apprenticeship"
>
> "No need when all you got to do is get them in"
>
> "Trowel hands are the reason the trades got a bad rep"
>
> "Trowel hands are crap they do bad work"
>
> "Don't need to do a 4 year apprenticeship anymore"
>
> "Notice pride in their work, and their attitude."

Employers were asked their opinion on the same question. Most comments reflected strong support for distinguishing qualified bricklayers from unqualified bricklayers by the quality of work. Employers perceived that the quality of work done by qualified bricklayers was better. However, this tended to depend on the type of work. Quite a few employers noted that much of the 'standard work on the line' is hard to differentiate. Employers also believe that an apprenticed tradesperson has a better understanding of the trade and develops their skills more quickly.

> "Yes I can, that goes for any age and any amount of time in industry"
>
> "Ya, I can tell a difference. But I have someone who has been in the trade for 11 years without a qual and he is at the same stage as your (just turned) 2nd year" (Non-Qualified bricklayer)
>
> "Ya I can. Our apprentices told me a few things that they learned and it was new to me … and that's good." (Non-Qualified Bricklayer)
>
> "Yes, brickies who have done an apprenticeship have a fuller understanding of the trade sooner."
>
> "In some areas of the job you may be able to but not in most"
>
> "Bricklayers who have done an apprenticeship have more knowledge at the set out stage and have the ability to fix thing if there is a mistake."
>
> "I can tell the difference of someone that has learnt formally and prefer to hire them"

Many suggest that there are a great number of important aspects that go unnoticed by the unqualified bricklayer. Some of the unqualified bricklayers learn these issues through experience, but some suggest that, by the nature of the trade, they have often moved on to the next job and rarely look back.

> "Yes most definitely. There are things that you will get taught and you miss these when you have not been trained off the job"

Further comments from employers suggest that whilst the trade training is important, it must work in concert with appropriate training from the employer.

"Yes it is obvious. However if they have not been trained properly problems still arise."

"Quality work is more a result of correct training on the job. A boss who is only interested in number of bricks laid will not ensure the training bricklayer is neat, straight and clean."

"Probably in about 70-80% of the cases. Depends how much their bosses taught them"

Notwithstanding the positive comments above, a great number of employers believe that a good bricklayer is more dependent upon the individual and the attitude they bring to the job. Many believe that with the right work ethic and outlook, bricklayers can sufficiently learn on-the-job.

"I had a labourer once who learnt the trade from jumping on the trowel. He was neat as another bricklayer."

"Yes I do agree. I do know people who have come up through the ranks who do better than those who have been handed the apprenticeship on a plate. It depends on the person." (Non Qual)

"It's a bit of mixed bag. I've had some that have done an app ... it depends upon the person." (Non-Qual)

"No. Some people can pick up bricklaying without going to school. Bricklaying is something that you don't have to go to school for... Some people should never have gone into it. Even if they went through trade school they don't make good bricklayers."

Some employers believe that there is little difference in evidence and that much simply depends upon getting the experience with the right gang.

"No difference. On job training better."

"In most cases. Everything looks good from the road"

"Not particularly. There's not much difference. Once you are good, you are good. Bricklaying is bricklaying." (Non-Qual)

"Not true, experience counts"

"Lot of 'old hands' who are better than those with apprenticeship training"

Enticing Unqualified Bricklayers

40% of unqualified bricklayers who responded to the survey have seriously considered taking up a bricklaying apprenticeship or training qualification. When asked why they chose not to do so, there were three main themes:

1. Too costly
2. Age
3. Qualification is not necessary

Many unqualified bricklayers are interested in getting their qualification, but due to the barriers previously mentioned, have not done so.

Unqualified subcontractors were asked a number of questions on factors that may encourage them to get their qualification. The following are the main results:

	Much more interested
If you didn't have to do any training for the things you already know	34%
If you received a higher wage after getting the qualification	38%
If your boss/employer wanted you to take the training	27%
If you felt it would help you keep your job when there was not much work around	33%

Table 16 - Responses from unqualified sub-contractors

The Value of a Qualification

As mentioned earlier, there seems to be an undervaluing of the bricklaying qualification by parts of the industry. The issue of the value of a qualification has recently been the subject of a research report undertaken by the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund (BCITF) in WA[8].

The report found the following:

> 'Although it was reported that the industry is rife with unqualified tradespeople (estimates of up to 50%), **qualifications are rarely checked**, although the most care was taken in selecting a 'finishing' tradesperson compared to other trades, because of the importance of the customers' first impressions when they take delivery of their new home. Some difficulty was reported with checking qualifications because of *lack of knowledge* (i.e. if not qualified in that trade themself a supervisor might not know about appropriate levels of qualification) and also that due to the number of immigrants there were *many training organisations that are unrecognised* (e.g. Guilds).
>
> While some builders said they looked for qualified tradespeople (to maintain their positioning as a quality provider) some trades are notorious for unqualified practitioners e.g. brickies, gyprockers and carpenters'[9].

[8] BCITF 2007, *The Value of a Trade Qualification*
[9] ibid, p. 4

The report goes on to state that:

> 'There were mixed opinions about the value of qualifications with some participants adamant that qualifications were of little value while others thought they were of vital importance. However, it was apparent that qualifications are not needed in order for people to work in the current environment and this makes it difficult to maintain any sort of quality standards.
>
> The advantages that qualifications bring were said to include:
>
> - Opportunities into the industry and into bigger and better building companies.
> - Longer term career path in the industry (after the boom ends).
> - Personal satisfaction and reward at the achievement (pride).
>
> However, many participants felt that experience on the job, work ethic, reliability, attitude and efficiency were more pertinent drivers of standards than a formal qualification or certificate. There was universal interest in valuing and ensuring quality in the industry. The idea of certification or registration was often mooted by participants as a means of ensuring quality across the industry.
>
> While there was little knowledge amongst unqualified tradespeople about the availability of the RPL scheme, and some comment about whether it was necessary in the current environment, there was widespread support for the capacity to be able to be recognised for long experience in the industry'[10].
>
> 'Regardless of views about the value of qualifications, most tradespeople (qualified and unqualified) were in agreement that quality training made a difference and was often hard to provide in the current market due to time and cost constraints and the non-availability of good trainers. ...
>
> For many the value of apprenticeships was seen to be not in the qualification it eventually provided but in the hands-on training apprentices would receive. Structured training taught by someone with a quality focus and who has good training skills was seen to be an ideal to strive for but (unfortunately) was often not realised due to time pressures in the industry, the opportunity costs of time spent on training and a lack of good training approaches'[11].

As can be seen from these excerpts the findings of the BCITF research are consistent with those of this project.

[10] ibid, p. 6
[11] ibid, pp. 39-40

Ongoing Trade Training

In surveys, interviews and forums across the country, most participants highlighted the need for tradespersons' training for qualified and unqualified bricklayers. Even for qualified bricklayers, many acknowledge that an apprenticeship is a sound basis for starting a career in the trade, but there are other challenges and training needs some years later when they have refined their hand skills and understanding of the trade.

RTO lecturers offer some insight into this aspect of the trade. As a group, they have all had trade experience as well as a strong engagement with the education system – whether as a full-time or sessional lecturer. Most bricklaying lecturers work within a TAFE and have the added experience of viewing a range of different trade training regimes at various levels of training beyond an apprenticeship (e.g. Cert IV, Diploma and Advanced Diploma). Although this level of training is not available for bricklaying, it does provide a broadened view of some trade training options.

When asked whether there were ongoing trade training needs, 81% of survey respondents offered suggestions.

Business Skills

The largest number of comments centred on 'business training'. Most identified the need for bookkeeping, computer skills, tax management as well as softer skills like time management and managing apprentices.

Every State forum group also highlighted the need for developing business skills. With roughly half of the 26,000 bricklayers nationally registered as an independent ABN, there is a strong imperative to suggest that business skills are needed by many bricklayers within a few years of their entering the trade. As mentioned earlier in this report, this view is also held by representatives of the Masonry Contractors' Associations, union and Group Training Organisations, who feel that the lack of business skills is a primary cause of the high number of business failures within the bricklaying industry. There are over 13,000 registered businesses in the bricklaying services industry and each year roughly 16-18% exit the industry.[12]

A number of organisations associated with bricklaying are already starting to offer training in this area. HIA and MBA each have developed recent training programs for apprentices or tradespeople to gain business skills. For many of these organisations, this is seen as an enticing career path opportunity and a value-add for apprentices with their group training arm.

Other organisations, such as Holmesglen TAFE are developing a concept that will provide tradespeople with a 'business centre' to allow them a point of contact for business

[12] Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, Counts of Australian Businesses including Entries and Exits Jun 2003 to Jun 2007, Cat. No. 8165.

services and avenues for business training. They foresee a tradesperson coming in from time to time to use office facilities such as computers, printers, accounting programs and meeting space to run their business. It is an innovative approach that could provide a stronger connection between education and industry.

Pathway into General Building

Many RTO lecturers see the need for building stronger pathways into general building and builder's registration. It appears that the lack of qualified bricklayers is a barrier to entry into the Certificate IV in Building.

Further, with such a strong emphasis on veneer bricking in current construction, there is less required understanding of the rest of the construction trades than would otherwise be the case on load-bearing brick structures. Where there is more double bricking and load-bearing brick construction, there appears to be stronger pathways into general building. This is reflected in comments from Western Australia where the practice is more common as well as overseas in countries such as England and Canada.

Many feel that a pathway into general building is not widely promoted within bricklaying and that this would do much to extend the career aspirations and image of the trade. As mentioned earlier in this report, there are also opportunities for bricklayers to be a foundation for people wishing to become architects or structural engineers.

Specialty Work

Further training was highlighted by RTO lecturers in the area of specialist work including refractory work, new products, and restoration skills, to name a few. Many employers worry that many of the skills are being lost to the industry because of the current trends toward common bricks, parging, tilt slab, etc.

A number of employers, builders and associations worry that, as trends change back toward brickwork that requires these 'lost' skills, the industry will be at risk. Design trends change over time and tend to follow the 'top end of town' where architects lead with new designs. These trends tend to 'trickle down' whereby the more general house designs tend to pick up on these new 'fashions'. Recent comments by Linda Ginger, CEO of Think Brick Australia, make clear that the trends in bricklaying are ultimately customer driven.

However, the builder does have some influence over those in the 'showroom' and where there are difficulties in supplying sufficiently capable bricklayers for particular designs and styles, no doubt some influence will come to bear.

Managing Apprentices

Although not highlighted by RTO lecturers, forum participants consistently noted the challenge of managing young apprentices and suggest that training and/or some form of support to better equip employers was needed.

Most forums noted the challenge of generational gaps and most commonly referred to the difficulty in dealing with the 'Gen Y' apprentices.

Recommendation 13

There appears to be widespread support for ongoing trade training for qualified and unqualified bricklayers in three areas:

1. ***Promoted Pathways for bricklayers to become builders***
2. ***Business skills development***
3. ***A master craftsman/artisan level of training***

Licensing

Although licensing was not an identified objective within this project, the topic of licensing within the trade emerged in every single forum during discussions amongst stakeholders.

Within those groups, however, there was some difference in the use of the terminology. For some, there was an imperative that the trade itself should be licensed under a trade specific body as is currently the case with the electrical and plumbing trades in some States. Others referred licensing as the 'registration of qualifications' with a State authority. This is the context within which the current bricklaying contractors' registration requirement operates in NSW and QLD. These States require contractors to provide evidence of their qualification (i.e. Certificate III in Bricklaying) in order to take on the role of contracting with a builder. This registration is not required for those subcontracting or employed under the contractor.

For others, the term 'licence' was sometimes loosely use to refer to the process of setting up a bricklaying business; in other words, the business registration process.

At the first forum which was held in Victoria, the topic of licensing was strongly put forward as a means of 'cleaning up the trade'. A few participants wondered how much of an impact it would have in doing so, but it was one of the most widely supported views on the day.

Even in the States where registration of contractors is currently in force, there was strong support for this measure and some inclination to more stringently licensing the trade (i.e. technical trade oversight).

Surveyed bricklayers overwhelmingly supported an intention to license or regulate the trade, as did all respondents to the interviews with Masonry Contractors' Associations, the union and the Group Training Organisations. Comments included:

> "I can understand why (the builders) don't want it. It's about power. When you get a group of bricklayers and they become a licensed body and they have representation, they now have power and they can demand higher or stable rates. At the moment they are fragmented and they (the builders' associations) have control over the industry. Licensing may cause the builders to lose control"
>
> "If the trade were licensed then Government might enforce contracts which require contractors to have apprentices"
>
> "Licensing would make the trade more attractive to potential apprentices"
>
> "It would get rid of back yarders"
>
> "Bricklayers have trouble getting paid in a timely manner by builders. If they were licensed, it could be better regulated and might even raise rates"
>
> "It could result in bricklayers having to give a guarantee on their work to customers, and that would get rid of a lot of the dodgy bricklayers"

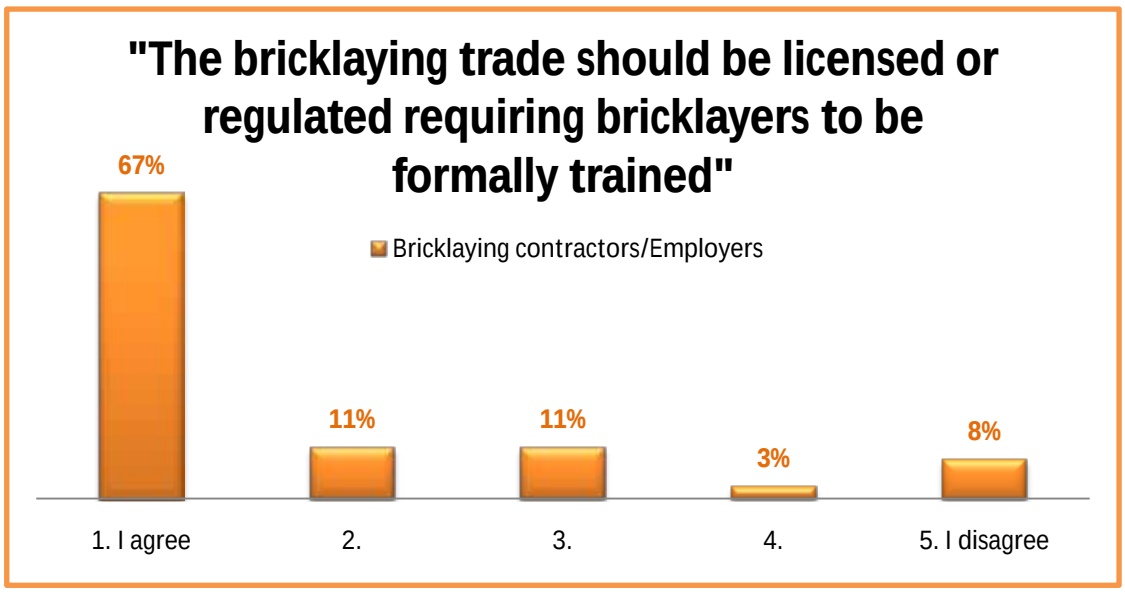


Chart 28 - Bricklaying trade should be licensed

Even unqualified bricklaying employers were supportive of this direction.

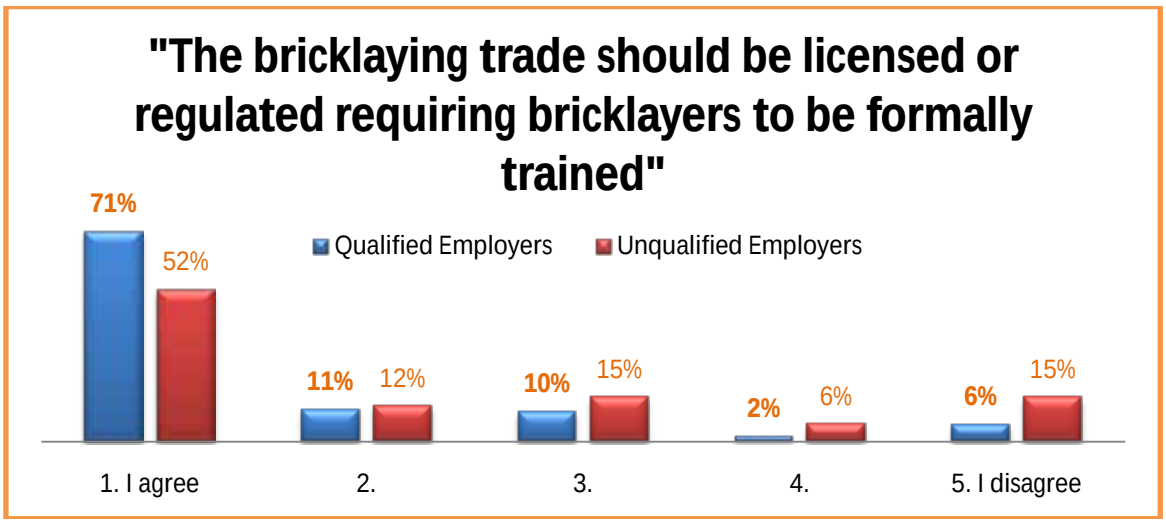


Chart 29 - Bricklaying trade should be licensed by qual/unqual

In analysing the view across bricklaying employers, there was no statistically significant proportional difference between sectors of the trade, years of experience, age, or product usage (i.e. bricks vs. blocks).

RTO teachers were also overwhelmingly supportive of a regulated or licensed trade, although this may be somewhat unsurprising.

Comments generally focused on:

- Improving the quality of work within the industry was the most common view behind registering and/or licensing the trade as far as lecturers were concerned.

"Get the quality back in the Trade"

"Too many cowboys out there"

"We should be licensed. We do the most important part of the job. If we stuff up the brickwork, it stuffs up the plasterers up … and the roofers if it's out of line. .. Bricklaying is a real skilful art. Most bricklayers out there just do it for the money."

"I have personally been involved in repairing work that is not up to standard by unqualified bricklayers and also know of other tradesman who have had to do the same, which costs the builder in the long run"

"The cost of rectifying brickwork that does not meet the AS3700 is costly and poor quality masonry can kill if it falls over, so why allow the possibility of opening the door to let more non-qualified people build masonry walls"

"People who disagree do not understand the extent to which the structural integrity of building projects can be affected by the poor workmanship of bricklayers, the costs associated in rectifying faults and the emotional stress placed on owners of these projects. Licensing of all bricklayers would initially upset many in the industry but would eventually make them more accountable for their work."

"We would eventually see a return of the high standards of workmanship seen in the past."

- Protecting the customer

"This is vital to ensure that our trade is not decimated/fragmented, and that the customer can be assured that the work is being done by a fully trained professional bricklayer"

"Protect the customer"

- Increasing the skilled workforce in bricklaying. Whilst a number of comments reflect the importance of an increase in skilled bricklayers, others reflect on the challenge that the initial impact of licensing the trade may have on the industry, by decreasing overall numbers initially, or possibly creating a barrier to entry in itself.

"This would immediately increase the number of skilled tradesmen being developed. Would elevate the trade. Would also improve the general quality of all brickwork and bring it back to a top quality product"

"This would improve the quality but could lead to decreased numbers in the trade"

There were few comments on the potential structure of such a process, but those who did comment seemed to be more inclined towards regulation rather than licensing.

"Regulated but not licensed. Inspected or checked on to ensure the quality"

"Would be a good idea, a green card is a good idea, but hard to enforce"

"trained and registered"

"The contractor needs to be licensed. Bricklayers formally trained or not, will learn new things on every new job"

However, the view on licensing or regulation was not unanimous, with some dissenting views from employers.

"if your heart's in it, formal training isn't necessary."

"Regarding the license, I strongly disagree"

The overwhelming view appears to be strong support for some form of licensing. Whilst this may require a stepped process, most comments support the registration of bricklaying contractors. This would provide a substantial incentive for qualifications as the industry is dominated by small businesses.

This move would also quickly set a benchmark for contracting bricklayers nationwide and quite possibly provide the basis for a culture shift within the bricklaying industry.

Currently, there appears to be strong incentive within the marketplace for the bricklaying workforce to bypass bricklaying training. This is particularly so for mature aged entrants into the field. With the trend towards more career changes, the bricklaying industry is currently at risk of having the current bricklaying qualification become obsolete within the workplace.

Recommendation 14

Licensing of Bricklaying Contractors - Industry associations to lobby for all States to require proof of qualification before issuing a business registration for bricklaying contractors.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Promoting to Apprentice Drivers - Current promotional activities focus on future earnings and lifestyle. Future promotional activities to attract people into a bricklaying apprenticeship should also focus on:

- *Working outdoors*
- *Pathways into building*
- *Other career paths offered by the qualification*
- *Typical examples of brick & block craftsmanship*
- *High likelihood of becoming your own boss*

Recommendation 2

Targeting Key Influencers - The information sources which are most informative and influential for apprentices are bricklayers themselves, RTOs that teach bricklaying and parents. Those organisations which are trying to inform potential apprentices should look for strategies which connect the information more effectively to these sources. Marketing the trade should heavily utilise current bricklayers and clearly identify RTO contact details, information nights and training structure. Further, marketing the trade should include targeted information for parents and family members promoting the career paths and benefits of bricklaying.

Recommendation 3

Apprentice Awareness of Entitlements - The ABBTF to coordinate with the Australian Apprenticeship Centres to develop strategies to increase apprentice awareness of their entitlements. This may involve development of a marketable and easy to understand State-based information source(s) which can be distributed to apprentices within the first stage of their training.

Recommendation 4

Selection Guidance - The development of a robust selection criteria and process to inform apprentices and employers about the attributes of succeeding in the trade. The development should involve industry associations, GTO, RTOs, ITABs and ABBTF.

Recommendation 5

Support for Career Advisors - ABBTF to support Careers Advisors' Networks with appropriate marketing program including information in media and format to appeal to students. This should include information from bricklayers, success stories that appeal to the key drivers, as well as advice on potential career paths which could result from successfully completing a bricklaying apprenticeship. This would be strengthened through involvement of Associations, Think Brick and RTOs/Advisory Groups.

Recommendation 6

Review Pre- Apprenticeship Model - Research means of structuring &/or modifying pre-apprenticeship programs to improve apprenticeship outcomes to better support industry needs and reduce attrition rates.

Recommendation 7

Increase First Year Apprenticeship Wages - To direct various forms of subsidies into increasing the first year apprenticeship wages and to subsidise the training costs for first year apprentices

Recommendation 8

Case Management - Development of training and assessment systems & resources that facilitate case management options within RTOs.

Recommendation 9

Supporting the Employer as Trainer - Training advice should be developed to support the employer with 'best practice' guidance on key success factors such as time on the trowel, rotation and advantages of multiple apprentices on site.

Recommendation 10

Communication with Employers - RTOs to develop and share 'best practice' protocols already in place for robust communication processes with employers to inform them about apprentice progress and discuss related training issues.

Recommendation 11

National Bricklayer Teachers' Advisory Group - A national advisory group to be formed from bricklaying training organisation representatives to collaborate on resource development and other training related issues including employer engagement and recognition processes. This national group would also provide an avenue for influence on training package development and pathway progression for the industry.

Recommendation 12

Mature Aged Training - RTOs to develop specific delivery models for mature aged students who have varying degrees of expertise. These models should include flexible delivery, RPL and portfolio approaches, and self-paced project based delivery.

Recommendation 13

Post Trade Training Structure - There appears to be widespread support for ongoing trade training for qualified and unqualified bricklayers in three areas:

1. *Promoted Pathways for bricklayers to become builders*
2. *Business skills development*
3. *A master craftsman/artisan level of training*

Recommendation 14

Licensing of Bricklaying Contractors - Industry associations to lobby for all States to require proof of qualification before issuing a business registration for bricklaying contractors.

Conclusion

Bricklaying apprenticeships are valued by those in the trade and continue to evolve to better meet the needs of industry. However, there are challenges in the current environment including the high proportion of unqualified bricklayers in the workforce and the high attrition rate within the bricklaying apprenticeship scheme.

This report highlights current feedback from bricklayers, bricklaying lecturers and current apprentices. These groups suggest quite specifically the key drivers and barriers within the bricklaying trade as it pertains to the apprenticeship program and improving the skill level within the trade.

They reflect the most prevalent reasons why current apprentices take up the trade along with who is most influential and informative in that process. Selection processes by some of the better performing group training organisations make strong the case for better up front processes including support for School Career Advisors and a review of Pre-Apprenticeship programs.

Especially poignant throughout the report is the barrier of low apprenticeship wages, especially in the first year of training. Feedback contradicts the long held misconception that most apprentices are a high cost to the host employer.

The survey results also suggest structural changes such as the need for a national training advisory group for RTO's to develop case management processes, stronger communication with host employers and ongoing training for the trade that enhances skills for both qualified and unqualified bricklayers.

The recommendations within this report do not represent ideas imposed upon the industry, but rather are representative of those espoused by industry participants. The future challenge lays not in changing views, but rather in finding the appropriate means to action them.