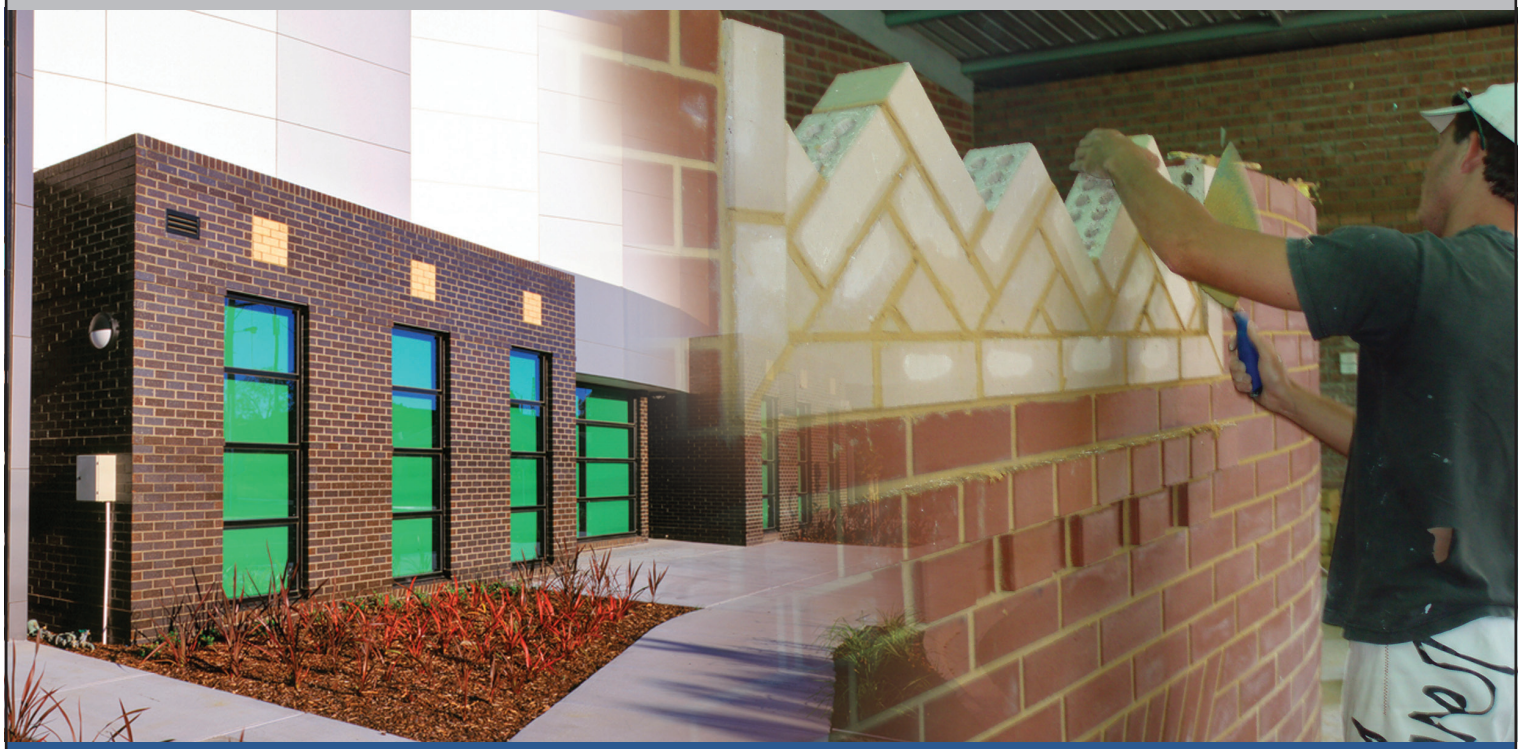
>>> Innovative Practices in Bricklaying

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

altegis GROUP

Acknowledgements

This report has been produced as part 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 apprentices from across Australia who generously contributed their time and expertise to share the innovative practices implemented in their organisations. All gave freely of their time to take part in interviews.

We also wish to express our gratitude to the project Steering Committee and the staff of the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation (ABBTF) who have offered suggestions for these Best Practice case studies.

Jude Walker and Tim Powers

22 William Street
Newtown Victoria 3220
Telephone: 03 5263 2514
Fax: 03 5263 3731
www.altegis.com.au

Steering Committee

Geoff Noble (Chair)	The Australian Brick & Blocklaying Training Foundation
Ross Petersen	Sutherland College, TAFE NSW
Paul Klepczynski	TAFE SA
Don McKenzie	Nat. Federation of Bricklayers & Masonry Employers Assn
Alan Waldron	Hutchinson Builders (Qld)
Paul Croudace	CSR Bricks & Roofing (Vic/Tas)
Jon Godby	Adbri Masonry (Qld)
John Glover	Group Training Association of Victoria
Dean Pearson	Australian Brick & Blocklaying Training Foundation Ltd (WA)
Joan Whelan	Construction Property Services Industry Skills Council
Tracey Murphy (past)	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Ann Stevens	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

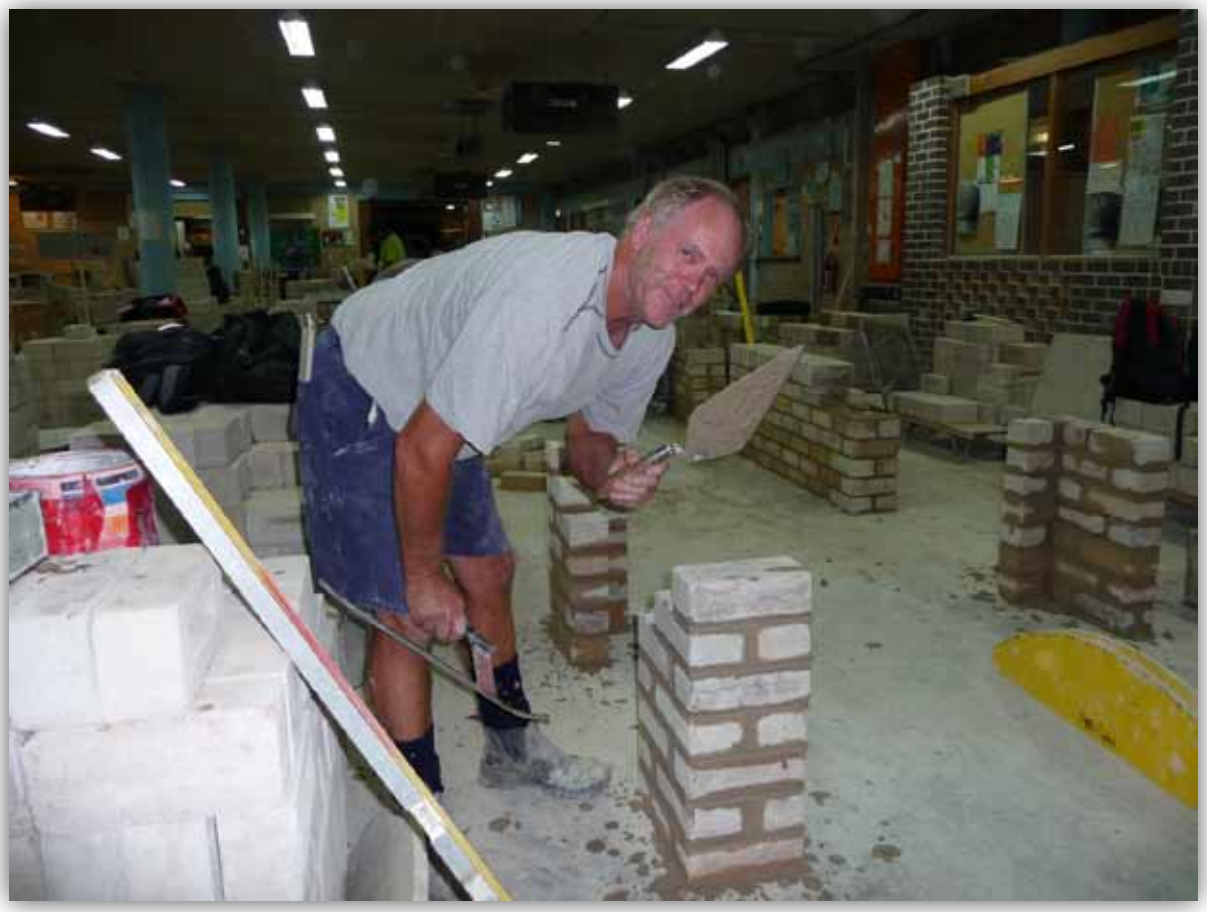
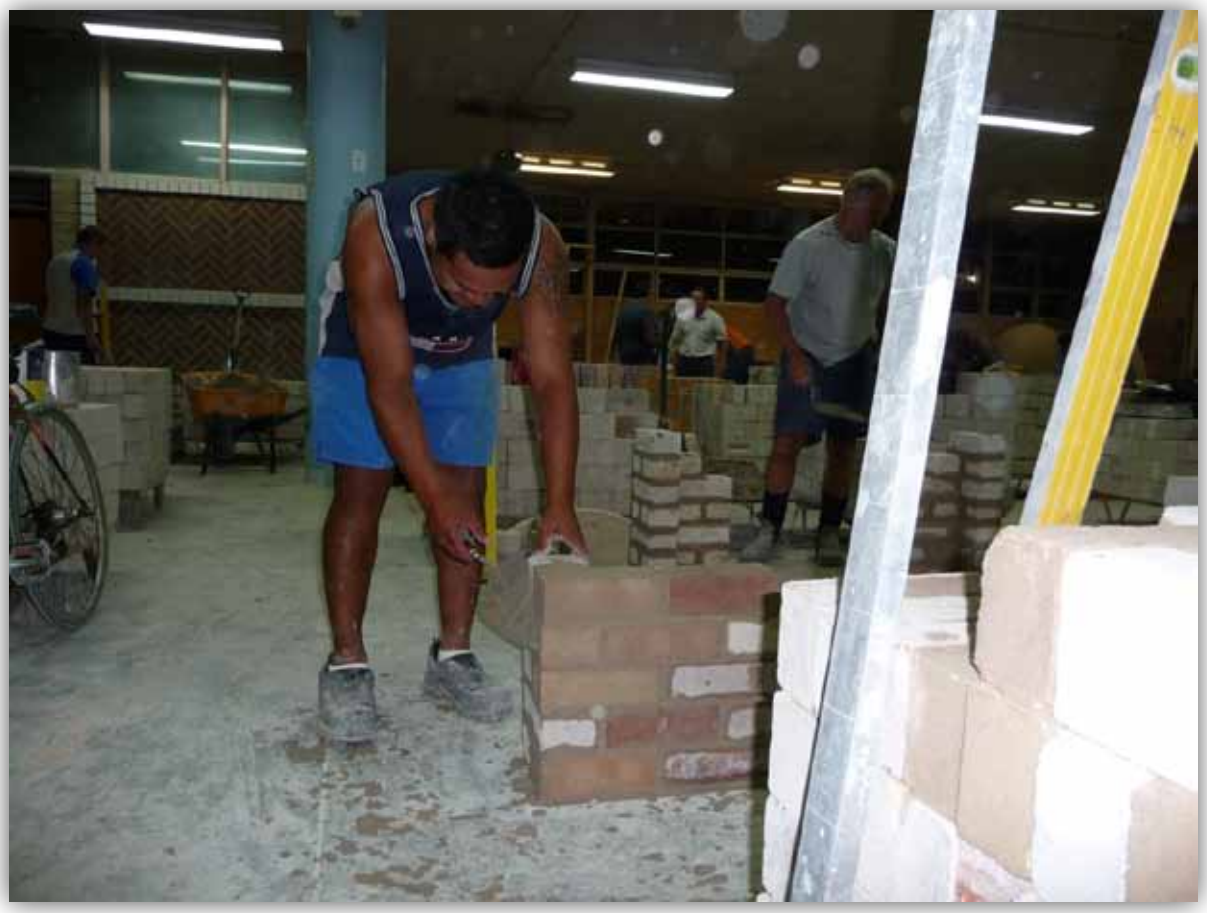


Table of Contents



Executive Summary

This is a companion report to the *Barriers and Drivers for Bricklaying Apprenticeship* report produced for the Construction and Property Services Industry Skills Council (CPSISC) with funding from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Industry Pathfinders project.

This Best Practice report seeks to identify and publicise innovative practices which contribute to the attraction and retention of people into bricklaying apprenticeships, and to improve the industry so that the bricklaying qualification is valued.

This report has been developed through a consultative process of engagement with organisations involved in innovative practices. These include employers, Registered Training Organisations and industry or Government bodies such the Australian Brick and Block Laying Training Foundation and the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund.

Readers should not assume that the only innovative practices in the bricklaying industry are featured in this report. In an industry as widespread and diverse as brick and blocklaying, there are sure to be many more organisations and individuals who are doing exciting things to encourage the continued expansion of the bricklaying apprenticeship system, and to improve the overall operation of the industry so that the bricklaying qualification is more highly valued, and those organisations are encouraged to share these innovative practices across the industry.

The RTO case studies

Case Study 1 – Taking the training to the students – GippsTAFE, Vic

In 2006, GippsTAFE took the decision to set up a bricklaying training facility at the Yallourn campus. Colin MacLean was employed to establish the system and now has 27 apprentices in training. Local bricklayer, Kent Vodden, believes that having to spend approximately two hours to travel to Melbourne was a major disincentive for young people to take up bricklaying apprenticeships.

Case Study 2 – Apprentices Mentoring Apprentices – FCTA, SA

Flexible Construction Training and Assessment (FCTA) is a privately owned Registered Training Organisation located in South Australia. FCTA has a philosophy of working closely with both employers and apprentices to ensure that the training delivered to its students resembles their real work on-site as closely as possible. To assist with this process, FCTA mixes students from various stages within the class and uses the older students to mentor the younger ones.

Case Study 3 - Mature Age Students – Nirimba TAFE, NSW

Over the past fifteen years, Nirimba TAFE has been working towards a more flexible delivery model for its growing number of mature age students. For the past three to four years, this program has developed to the stage where, according to bricklaying Head

Teacher Rudi Meuwissen, they have a program which is highly flexible with quality educational outcomes.

Case Study 4 – Learning Materials to suit Gen Y – Silver Trowel, WA

Silver Trowel is a private RTO in Western Australia which has developed a number of processes to improve its training delivery for bricklaying students. These processes include flexible delivery, purpose built facilities which enable the students to work on large projects, and the development of interactive training materials which cater to the learning styles of the Gen Y cohort.

Case Study 5 – Blended Delivery – NMIT, Vic

Over the past couple of years, Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE (NMIT) has built on its existing self-paced bricklaying program to introduce a blended delivery model. This involves a combination of classes servicing mixed groups of apprentices with on-site training and assessment. According to program coordinator, Steve Lee, this is being driven by both industry and teachers and is proving a very successful model with students.

Case Study 6 – Pre-trade training – Wollongong TAFE, NSW

Wollongong TAFE has been working hard to establish strong pathways into the bricklaying apprenticeship program for young people. This has involved investing in promoting and running the ABBTF funded 'Step Out' program, as well as in developing and delivering the pre-apprenticeship course. The aim of this strategy is to ensure a strong supply of well prepared young people for the trade.

Case Study 7 – Seeing things through the student's eyes – Holmesglen TAFE, Vic

Holmesglen TAFE's bricklaying department has been making the transition from running programs which suited the way the College worked, to looking at everything through the students' eyes. This culture change has been a group effort by the teachers and includes a marketing campaign to raise the profile of the trade. Holmesglen has effectively communicated the link between various training programs to give students a pathway from taster courses to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

The employer case studies

Case Study 8 - Improving trowel skills – The Brick Man, Vic

As an employer, John Claxton from The Brick Man is committed to ensuring that his apprentices receive quality training through being exposed to as many facets of the trade as possible. This includes starting to lay bricks early in the apprenticeship and being given the opportunity to work on a range of different types of jobs.

Case Study 9 - Learning the Business – Byrne Construction, Vic

Byrne Construction is one of the largest commercial construction companies in the Victoria and works on major projects in both Victoria and Western Australia. Michael Byrne has realised that the only way to grow the business is to develop the business skills of the bricklayers and apprentices working for him.

Case Study 10 – Apprentice to Sub-Contractor – Porter Davis Homes, Vic

Porter Davis Homes in Victoria has recognised the importance of building its own pool of sub-contractors. To achieve this, the company directly indentures apprentices in a variety of construction trades, including bricklaying, and then prepares them to become sub-contractors who can deliver high quality work for Porter Davis Homes in the future.

The industry driven case studies

Case Study 11 - An industry approach to improving the trade – BCITF, WA

The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund (BCITF) contributes to the trade through a range of initiatives, including financial incentives to employers to take on an apprentice; subsidies for workers who undertake short course training to upgrade their skills; funding Registered Training Organisations to deliver Try a Trade programs for school students; and active promotion of the building and construction industry. Finally, they undertake valuable industry research.

Case Study 12 - An industry approach to improving the trade – ABBTF

In 2003, the brick and block manufacturers recognised that, if nothing was done to promote the industry, there would be a shortage of quality bricklayers in the future and that this would impact on their businesses. As a result, a decision was taken to place a levy on the purchase of bricks and blocks in order to fund the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation (ABBTF) to promote the industry and encourage the uptake of bricklaying apprenticeships.

In undertaking this project, it has been refreshing to realise how many organisations and individuals are passionate about the bricklaying trade, and who are implementing a range of innovative practices.

In conducting the research, it also became obvious that those organisations featured in this report were very willing to share information about their 'best practices' and were also very keen to learn from others. This desire, by all sectors of the bricklaying trade, to continually learn and improve the trade experience for apprentices should stand the system in good stead for the future.

Introduction

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

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. The project aims to identify barriers that are presently hindering the take-up of New Apprenticeships in Bricklaying & Blocklaying (i.e. General Construction - Bricklaying/Blocklaying).

This Best Practice report seeks to identify and publicise innovative practices which contribute to the attraction and retention of people into bricklaying apprenticeships, and to improve the industry so that the bricklaying qualification is valued. The CPSISC seeks to develop a national overview of current best practice methods that will not only enhance the quality of training and the experience of the bricklaying apprentices themselves, but are also transferable into other apprenticeship sectors. Twelve case studies have been documented as part of this project.

Project Methodology

This report has been developed through a consultative process of engagement with organisations involved in innovative practices. These include employers, Registered Training Organisations and industry or Government bodies such the Australian Brick and Block Laying Training Foundation and the Building and Construction Industry Training Fund.

The process used to develop the case studies involved:

1. conducting an interview with the primary contact involved in the innovative practice
2. conducting a verification interview with a second party involved in the innovative practice to confirm that the practice is actually occurring
3. writing up the case study and returning it to the primary contact for review to ensure that the case study is factually correct and faithfully represents the actual practice
4. seeking the cooperation of the primary contact in providing suitable photographs to be included with the case study

Twelve case studies have been identified and developed using the above methodology.

What is Best Practice?

The purpose of this section of the report is to identify and promote national best practice with regard to the training delivery methods of Registered Training Organisations, the ways in which employers work with apprentices or the work done by other agencies to promote the bricklaying apprenticeship system.

The CPSISC seeks to develop a national overview of current best practice methods that will not only enhance the quality of training and the experience of the bricklaying apprentices themselves, but are also transferable into other apprenticeship sectors.

This section contains an excerpt from a previous examination of best practice in the plumbing industry[1] which found the following:

> 'Managers and operational specialists are faced with the challenge of working in a different way, applying new skills and knowledge to their work, developing high level interpersonal skills and forming a different view of who their clients are and how they should treat them'
>
> Casey, D 1995, *Best Practice and Benchmarking: a module to support the development of best practice in the vocational education and training sector*, Australian National Training Authority, Canberra.

At the end of World War II, Dr. W. Edwards Deming brought Japan to the forefront of industrial development through his then radical notions of total quality management. Since then businesses have attempted to identify and implement world best practice in order to compete in an increasingly globalised market. As stated by Blakemore[2], 'In this highly competitive situation, success in business is dependent upon matching the needs of the customer with the capability of the producer to supply faster than ever before. The objective of a quality service to be provided, therefore, is to serve, gain, retain and maintain happy, satisfied customers'. This view is also reflected by Casey[3] (p. 14), who states that 'A focus on clients is vital, for it is the clients that determine the final success or failure of any enterprise. Organisations that focus closely on client requirements are much more likely to be able to react quickly to changes in client preferences and to retain their market share'.

> 'Best Practice is a management idea which asserts that there is a method, process, activity, incentive or reward that is more effective at delivering a particular outcome than any other technique, method, process, etc.'
>
> *http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/best+practice*

[1] Powers, T & Walker, J 2008, *National Best Practice for Plumbing Industry Training:* DEEWR Industry Pathfinder Project
[2] Blakemore, J 1996, *Quality Habits of Best Business Practice*, Prentice Hall Australia, Sydney, NSW.
[3] Casey, D 1995, *Best Practice and Benchmarking: a module to support the development of best practice in the vocational education and training sector*, Australian National Training Authority, Canberra.

According to King et al[4] (p. 3), best practice is:

- A catalyst for change
- A means for developing a learning organisation
- An integral part of business planning and an essential input into strategic development
- An essential component of both incremental and breakthrough improvement

When examining how best practice is implemented in education, Montague and Evans[5] (p. 2) identified three outcomes:

- Developing standards
- Improving institutions and/or whole systems
- Improving processes within institutions

> 'As Australians are increasingly encouraged to see education as a lifelong process, it has become crucial that they are provided with accessible options for expanding their education and skills in a way and at a level that is most appropriate for them. This means that easily accessible learning pathways must be available between the secondary education, training and further development education and higher education sectors in any desired direction'
>
> Victoria University 1999, *Demonstrating Best Practice in VET – Best Practice in Developing Learning Pathways*, Australian National Training Authority, Canberra, p. 7.

In developing the methodology for this project, Altegis Group has defined best practice as those innovative practices which address the specific needs of students, employers and teachers, and which are transferable to other training organisations.

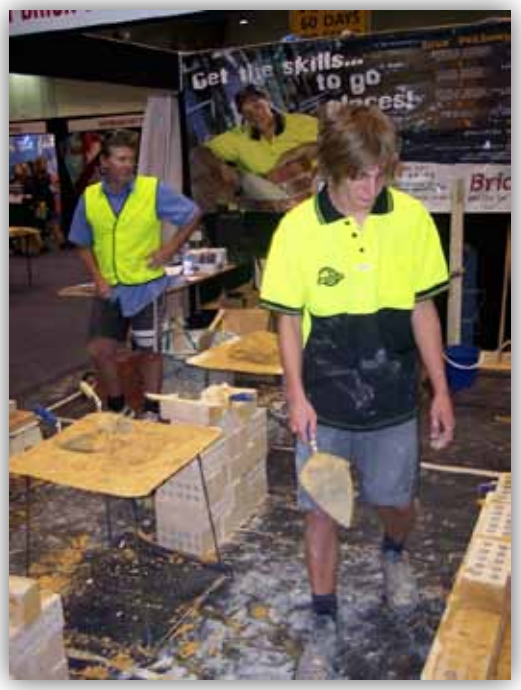
[4] King, MN, Morgan, R and Niall, D 1992, 'Benchmarking – an operational necessity', *Telecommunication Journal of Australia*, vol. 42, no. 3, pp. 3-13.
[5] Montague, A and Evans, P 1996, *Benchmarking by Teachers,* Australian National Training Authority, Canberra.

The Best Practices

As mentioned earlier in this report, identification of the case studies featured in this report came about through discussions at the various forums, as well as through personal referrals from members of the Steering Committee or staff from ABBTF.

Readers should therefore not assume that the only innovative practices in the bricklaying industry are featured in this report. In an industry as widespread and diverse as brick and blocklaying, there are sure to be many more organisations and individuals who are doing exciting things to encourage the continued expansion of the bricklaying apprenticeship system, and to improve the overall operation of the industry so that the bricklaying qualification is more highly valued.

We apologise to those organisations whose innovative practices are not included here and we encourage you to share those practices with others in order to continue to improve the system.



'Our institutions, to the extent that they address issues of learning explicitly, are largely based on the assumption that learning is an individual process, that it has a beginning and an end, that it is best separated from the rest of our activities, and that it is the result of teaching. Hence we arrange classrooms where students – free from the distractions of their participation in the outside world – can pay attention to a teacher or focus on exercises. We design computer-based training programs that walk students through individualised sessions covering reams of information and drill practice. To assess learning we use tests with which students must struggle in one-to-one combat, where knowledge must be demonstrated out of context, and where collaborating is considered cheating. As a result, much of our institutionalised teaching and training is perceived by would-be learners as irrelevant, and most of us come out of this treatment feeling that learning is boring and arduous, and that we are not really cut out for it.

So, what if we adopted a different perspective, one that placed learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world? What if we assumed that learning is as much a part of our human nature as eating or sleeping, that it is both life-sustaining and inevitable, and that – given a chance – we are quite good at it?'. And what if, in addition, we assumed that learning is, in its essence, a fundamentally social phenomenon, reflecting our own deeply social nature as human beings capable of knowing? What kind of understanding would such a perspective yield on how learning takes place and on what is required to support it?'

Wenger, E 1998, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, p. 3, Cambridge University Press, UK.

Case Study 1 – Taking the training to the students – GippsTAFE, Vic

Synopsis:

In 2006, GippsTAFE took the decision to set up a bricklaying training facility at the Yallourn campus. Colin MacLean was employed to establish the system and now has 27 apprentices in training. Local bricklayer, Kent Vodden, believes that having to spend approximately two hours to travel to Melbourne was a major disincentive for young people to take up bricklaying apprenticeships.

Purpose:

Prior to 2006, bricklaying apprentices from the Gippsland area were required to travel to Melbourne to attend trade school. This has been a major disincentive for young people to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship, especially for those under eighteen. GippsTAFE saw an opportunity here to enter the bricklaying training arena.

In conjunction with East Vic Workforce, a pre-apprenticeship group was arranged to start in the middle of 2006. The original intent was to use carpentry teachers for theory and to look for a bricklaying teacher for the practical component. However, Colin MacLean joined the team and took on the development of the program. Colin has been a bricklayer for over thirty years and has employed apprentices himself, so understands the issues faced by employers. Colin completed his Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training in 2004, undertook sessional teaching with Swinburne TAFE at Croydon in 2006, and has attained his Diploma of Vocational Education and Training Practice at GippsTAFE in July 2008.

When Colin commenced, there were no resources at all for bricklaying. According to Colin, 'There were no bricks, trowels, not even mud boards. There was an old mixer out the back – we had to get wheels for it!' Colin cut up some old marine ply for mud boards and, for the first twelve months, he brought in his own brick saw from home for the students to use. He spent $3,000 of his own to purchase tools until he could be reimbursed by the TAFE.

Now the bricklaying students have a section of the shed in which the carpentry course is taught. Profiles are set up and permanent brick walls have been built by the apprentices and last year funds were made available to purchase a pan mill to mix mortar and this has been set up with a surrounding block wall. It has taken some time to build up the resources required for training, but it is now working well.

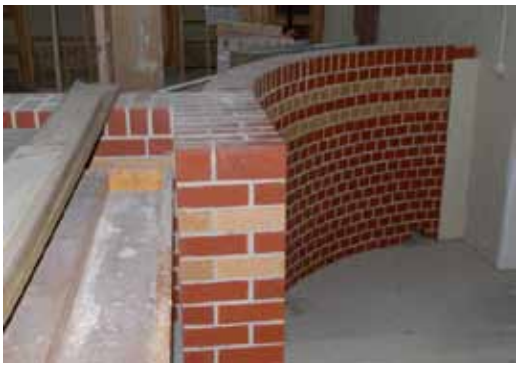
Status:

In June 2006, the bricklaying program at GippsTAFE started with 10 students in the pre-apprenticeship course, with two apprentices commencing in October. In 2007 the number of apprentices jumped to 11, and in 2008 it had risen to 25. This year there are 27 apprentices studying at Gippsland. Colin's students come from as far afield as Wonthaggi, Leongatha and Drouin through to Traralgon. Colin hopes that quality and structure of the course will encourage more employers to take on apprentices. Colin also hopes that not having to travel to Melbourne for training will encourage more young people to take on a bricklaying apprenticeship.

The apprentice numbers have been increased through the use of a number of strategies. The Apprenticeship and Traineeship area worked closely with the Australian Apprenticeship Centres to raise awareness of the new program. As well as being a driving force in getting bricklaying training up and running at GippsTAFE, the ABBTF has also strongly supported Colin in helping to advertise on local radio and print media. Colin says that, in a regional area, the best form of marketing is when employers get together down at the pub and talk about their apprentices and the training process. It is therefore very important that the course has high credibility with employers.

Benefits:

When developing the course, Colin decided to structure the training around eight one-week blocks for the year. However, only six of these blocks are delivered at the TAFE. Colin uses the remaining two blocks to visit apprentices and employers in the workplace and to do on-site assessments. On average, Colin will visit each apprentice three to four times a year on the job. Feedback from employers is that they are much happier only to lose their apprentices for six one week blocks rather than eight as happens at some other Institutes. They also appreciate the increased contact with the RTO in a workplace environment. Colin can easily relate to employers as he hasn't been off the tools for long himself. He can 'talk their language' and is familiar with their concerns as he's had apprentices himself. Feedback from the trade has been positive. Local bricklayer, Kent Vodden, believes that the on-site visits are a more effective way of assessing competency.



Apprentices are also more careful now about the learning process as they know that the employer and teacher are talking to each other. Colin has found that employers really appreciate the feedback about how their apprentice is progressing. This allows problems to be identified early and addressed in a coordinated manner.

The workplace visits also keep Colin up to date with what's happening on-site. This not only keeps him current with the trade, but also ensures that he can map the off the job training to the workplace. Colin believes that it is important to teach underpinning knowledge at school and for students to get practical experience on the job.

Colin can also help employers with most of the apprenticeship paperwork, thereby letting them focus on the business.

Lessons Learnt:

The major initial challenge faced by Colin was growing the program to a profitable level. There was a need to market the course effectively in the beginning. Colin believes that employers themselves can be the best source of marketing. He states that 'you need to remember that bosses talk amongst themselves in a regional area. They can make or break you. You have to ensure that you have credibility with the bosses. Don't tell them the kids can do certain tasks if they can't'. As student numbers in both pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs have grown, the course is now starting to cover its costs.

In the past, Colin has attended at and worked with the State-wide TAFE bricklaying moderating panel. This has meant that, when setting up the Gippsland course, he did not have to start from scratch with developing his theory materials as he had the books from other TAFEs. This has been very useful as it not only saved him time, but has also brought some consistency to the teaching process. Colin is concerned, however, that the moderating panel has not been meeting lately.

The issue of consistency is an important one for Colin. He states that he feels very frustrated that although there is a National Training Package, it is open to interpretation as to the tasks apprentices can perform to achieve competency.

Colin feels that if the circumstances of the apprentice change and they move RTO's, it would be far more useful if they had done similar training and assessment tasks.

Colin is also concerned that visiting onsite makes it harder to manage the hours between various competencies. He is currently developing a third party validation book for employers to use on the job, and hopes that this will help with picking up hours.

As part of his assessment process, Colin taps into the technology with which most young people are comfortable. He gets students to use their mobile phones to take photos of their work as evidence. The students are required to put the photos into a portfolio with explanations of what the photos are showing. This enables Colin to check for their underpinning knowledge. However, he states that 'Half the battle is getting young people to take an interest in their own learning, so I have to make it interesting and relevant'.

Colin states that it is very important to ensure that apprentices learn all aspects of the trade, such as arches and corbels, even if they're only doing brick veneer houses on the job. He believes that 'otherwise, in 10-20 years time, no-one will know how to do them. Once upon a time, the bricklayer was the most important tradesman on the job. Once the concrete footings had gone in, he had to be able to set-out the job and work out the levels on sloping sites. At times, he also had to construct cavity brickwork, set-out and install window and door frames, (the list goes on) – it was a skill to bring something out of the ground and have it level. With the inception of site excavations and slab construction in recent times most students who have finished their apprenticeships in the last few years don't get that experience on the job anymore. We need to ensure we teach that underpinning knowledge or it'll be lost to the trade'.

Future Plans:

When asked how he saw the program developing in the future, Colin stated that he would like to develop a more comprehensive assessment book which sets out the exact tasks that the apprentice has to complete to be signed off. He would also like to see a consistent set of teaching notes so that teachers in various institutions are teaching the same thing. He believes that this is something that the moderating group could develop. This would make it easier for students who are transferring to other Colleges.

Colin also discussed his thoughts on how to use technology more effectively. He would like to have the theory component of the course on-line with quizzes for students to test their understanding. He believes that it would be great if, when a

job gets rained out, the employer could send the apprentice home to do some theory work or, alternatively, the student could do it at night or on the weekend. Colin believes that this would enable the student to get through the theory part of the apprenticeship more quickly. This would give the employer a more productive worker sooner. However, Colin is also aware that, in a cash-poor environment, that this will take time.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Colin MacLean

Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE

Tel: (03) 5127 0233

E-mail: ColinM@gippstafe.vic.edu.au

Case Study 2 – Apprentices Mentoring Apprentices – FCTA, SA

Synopsis:

Flexible Construction Training and Assessment (FCTA) is a privately owned Registered Training Organisation located in South Australia. FCTA has a philosophy of working closely with both employers and apprentices to ensure that the training delivered to its students resembles their real work on-site as closely as possible. To assist with this process, FCTA mixes students from various stages within the class and uses the older students to mentor the younger ones.

Purpose:

FCTA was registered and commenced operations with three apprentices in 2001. The RTO offers pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship training in a range of the mortar/trowel trades, including bricklaying, plastering, wall and floor tiling, and wall and ceiling fibrous.

Manager, Lorraine Baff, explains that the philosophy of FCTA is to educate tradespeople to the highest standard and to educate the public about the importance of these trades, which she describes as being the 'backbone of the country'.

In order to do this, FCTA works in two particular ways. Firstly, they work actively to build strong relationships with their employer clients. Secondly, they do not segregate their students into 'year' cohorts. Instead, they mix Stages 1, 2 and 3 students in together and use the older students to mentor the younger ones.

Status:

Owner, Jim Baff, selected bricklayers straight out of the industry to form the core of his trainers. The four bricklaying trainers are now, or have already, completed their Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. Jim and Lorraine encourage their trainers to maintain and build on their networks and relationships with bricklayers to ensure that the training being delivered to their students is current and relevant to the needs of both the employer and the apprentice. According to senior trainer, Phil Sweet, ensuring that the training closely simulates the workplace is an important factor in helping apprentices to understand what the trade is really like and this is a key factor to successful transition into the trade.

Whilst FCTA does run with a training schedule, they are flexible enough to fit in with the needs of each employer. This can occur in a number of ways. For example, if an employer is taking holidays or is experiencing some downtime, FCTA encourages that employer to send their apprentice into the RTO for training during that period. The trainers also maintain close contact with the employer to determine what work projects are being undertaken and try to ensure that the apprentice is prepared at the RTO to gain the necessary skills for that work.

FCTA are able to achieve these goals by running their training to simulate a large on-site project with students from different stages mixed together and working on a variety of projects. FCTA's workshop manager has been handling large construction

sites for years, so is able to simulate that environment in the RTO. Mixing the apprentices together also enables the RTO to be more flexible as it is not necessary to find full numbers of each stage to run a class.

FCTA is very committed to the mentoring process and this has been part of the RTO's philosophy since commencement.

Lorraine and Jim are aware of the high attrition rate, particularly in first year apprentices, who often struggle with managing money, problems with their employers, etc. They also know that young people often do not want to listen to older adults, so they encourage the older apprentices to mentor the younger ones, and this is possible due to the structure of the training with apprentices from all stages mixed together.

Benefits:

FCTA encourages the mentoring process in a casual and natural way for young people to communicate. A trainer who notices that a young apprentice appears to be having some problems might point this out to an older apprentice. According to Lorraine, 'often the older one will just breeze over and start working next to the younger apprentice. They'll start talking about their own experiences and get the younger one talking about their problems'. By listening to the older students, the young apprentices realise that they are not the only ones going through the problem and they are encouraged to stick with it. The proof of the success of this process is shown in the fact that FCTA's attrition rate is only 6%[6].

Lorraine says that the 'older kids love acting as mentors. They see themselves as role models'. As well as helping the young apprentices, the mentoring process also prepares the older students for the time when they go into business themselves and have to deal with their own apprentices. Lorraine gives an example of a former student who has now taken on his own apprentice. He explained to Jim that it has been so much easier because he has been 'practicing his mentoring for the past couple of years'.

Trainer Phil Sweet also finds the mentoring process very valuable. Phil states that mentoring is a natural way of operating within bricklaying. Often an employer will take on a first year apprentice when the previous apprentice has reached his third or fourth year. The older apprentice mentors the younger one, and this frees the employer up to quote on jobs and run the business. Phil says that the mentoring system in the RTO is also very useful to the trainers, as it allows them to concentrate on the students who need more assistance.

Mixing the students up also has another benefit according to Lorraine. Young men are naturally competitive and this sense of friendly competition encourages the apprentices to want to learn. Because of this, apprentices are often able to move through their training at a faster pace. This is facilitated by the 'project' based structure of the program.

This process is also made easier by the 'on-site' culture developed through the work done to build strong relationships with employers. Trainers spend approximately 30% of their time with the employer on-site. This may include some on-site assessments, but is mainly designed to keep in contact with employers.

[6] Apprenticeship and Traineeship Information System (ATIS) data 1 June 2007 – 1 June 2009

There are a number of benefits gained by this. Firstly, the closer relationship means that apprentices cannot 'play the employer and trainer off against each other'. Secondly the trainer includes the apprentice in discussions with the employer so that they have some say in their training. The philosophy is to personalise the training for the employer and apprentice's needs. Often the apprentice will be asked what projects they would like to work on and this ensures that they are gaining the skills needed in their workplace.

Lessons Learnt:

Time is the major challenge according to Lorraine. Setting up a system to personalise training is time consuming and requires a lot of management. FCTA is able to do this because they are small and can be more flexible. Often getting everything done encroaches on their weekends, so the system is not for everyone.

It is also very important to keep employers happy so that they are more willing to work cooperatively with the RTO. To do this, FCTA tries to help them with the bureaucracy and paperwork involved in the apprenticeship system. This can often be difficult as many bricklayers have little tolerance for computers and paperwork.

Lorraine and Jim are also determined to maintain a high quality of training. If an employer approaches them about taking on a student from the pre-apprenticeship program, the RTO will not refer if they do not think that the student is ready. This is partly due to a desire not to disappoint the employer with the capability of the student. More importantly, they do not want the pre-apprentice to disengage through disappointment that they cannot keep up with the work. To overcome this, FCTA starts their pre-apprentices on trowel skills as soon as they commence the program. That way, the student is productive as soon as they start their work experience.

Lorraine and Jim believe that the future of the trade lies in training young people and find it a challenge to get sufficient funding to run pre-apprenticeship programs. They are also determined to do everything they can to keep young people in the trade and have often tried to find a new employer for an apprentice whose contract has been terminated.

Future Plans:

FCTA staff understand that they have a duty of care to ensure that apprentices are competent when they have finished their schooling. If they cannot do the work correctly there can be serious consequences.

According to Lorraine 'you can't take short cuts with the training'. To ensure that apprentices are as well prepared as possible, trainers work with employers to encourage them to give the apprentices as much trowel time as possible.

Lorraine and Jim would like to see the profile of bricklaying lifted. They believe that there is no substitute for quality workmanship and their training is designed to this end.

They also believe that it is very important not to deskill the bricklaying trade by breaking it down into separate skills sets such as basic bricklaying, blocklaying or brick paving. According to Lorraine, it is important to know all aspects of the trade.

Lorraine and Jim have a vision to educate people to value the trades and to ensure that the trades maintain a high quality.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Lorraine Baff

Flexible Construction Training and Assessment

Tel: 08 8289 6574

E-mail: fcta@bigpond.com

Case Study 3 - Mature Age Students – Nirimba TAFE, NSW

Synopsis:

Over the past fifteen years, Nirimba TAFE has been working towards a more flexible delivery model for its growing number of mature age students. For the past three to four years, this program has developed to the stage where, according to bricklaying Head Teacher Rudi Meuwissen, they have a program which is highly flexible with quality educational outcomes.

Purpose:

Staff at Nirimba TAFE have noticed a change in the student demographic for bricklaying training. For a long time, the bulk of students were young people entering bricklaying apprenticeships. Now there are a large number of mature age students who have been working in the industry for some time and are seeking to become qualified. Current students in this group are aged between 20 and 60+.

For some, participation in the course is to build skills which will position them to take on more complex work. For others, it is to enable them to start up their own bricklaying businesses.

This substantial increase in demand from older bricklayers has seen Nirimba TAFE move from the traditional program of requiring these students to attend for two nights per week over a three year period, to a much more flexible model where students attend the class times which suit them and have the option of studying their theory component via distance learning.

Status:

Rudi describes the mature age students as falling into one of three groups. The first group is comprised of people who have been labouring for bricklayers and have done some 'laying on a line'. This group has limited skills and knowledge, with varying techniques. Their work is often messy and dirty. The second group contains bricklayers who have worked in the industry for some time. They have good technique, but also have significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. Rudi estimates that this group would comprise 25-30% of the cohort. They are greatly restricted in the types of work they can take on due to the lack of a broad skills base.

The third group falls in the middle. This group has five to ten years experience in laying bricks, but have had very little training. They have little knowledge of the correct technical procedures and are often surprised to realise how much they still have to learn (usually about ¾ of the course). However, they are also excited to realise how much more work they will be able to take on when they have completed the program.

Twenty-nine year old student Josip falls into this category. He has been bricklaying for 6-7 years and is now keen to start his own business. He hopes

that, with the increase in his skills and knowledge, he will be able to move into heritage work and is very happy to be learning techniques which he has not had a chance to learn on the job. These include fireplaces, more complicated arches and techniques such as English bond and Flemish bond. According to Josip, it is difficult to go to school after working all day. However, he states that, once he is there, he really enjoys the training and says that this is also the experience of other students in the program.

In the flexible model, students can enrol at any time of the year. They work through a process of Recognition of Prior Learning to identify existing skills and knowledge and identify those areas for which gap training is required.

The theory component of the program is covered via distance learning, with students being able to complete approximately 50% or more of the course at home. Student Josip finds this component extremely useful as it means that he does not have to attend as much class work. With family responsibilities as well as a full time job, this makes the course a lot easier for him to manage. Each student is provided with instructional material and DVD's which show demonstrations of the various bricklaying techniques which can then be practiced during the class work. Where appropriate, students can also undertake work based projects.

Classes for the practical components of the program are conducted over two days and three nights, and students determine how frequently they wish to attend. For example, a student may decide to attend every class for a month to move more rapidly through the program, whereas another student may choose to come in for one class per week. Each student is able to decide on their own attendance pattern, depending on their personal circumstances. Given the distances some students travel to attend the TAFE (over an hour each way for some), this is very convenient. For many, attendance at one or two sessions per week is the most suitable. In being able to determine his own learning program, Josip is hoping to complete the program by the end of the year.

According to Rudi, at the moment, approximately 80-100 students are working through the flexible training program. The program is designed so that students of all different levels can work within the one class on their various projects.

Benefits:

Rudi states that it is the students themselves who are driving the demand for the program in their desire to seek out a bricklaying qualification. Feedback has been that students want more skills than to enable them to do more than only labour, and that there is no career path for advancement unless they become qualified bricklayers.

As many of the students are keen to start their own businesses, there is also a demand for the business units, which are electives in the new Training Package. It is hoped that, in undertaking these studies, students will be better placed to effectively manage their own businesses.

According to Rudi, the standard day time class structure has 100% of the content delivered during class work. In the flexible model, 50% is delivered externally and this is much more suitable for the adult cohort.

The success of the flexible program is attested to by the fact that the Institute for Trade Skills has awarded Nirimba TAFE a three star rating, the highest which can be achieved.

Lessons Learnt:

Rudi states that the greatest challenge has been to develop the flexible process. The previous standard TAFE delivery model for mature aged bricklaying training required students to attend two nights per week over a period of three years. If nights were missed, the student was required to either make up the classes or fail the program. In the past, courses using this structure would commence with 15 students and end up with only 5-10 left. As a result, Rudi and his team realised that such a rigid model does not work for adults who have many other commitments. They realised that they had to either become more flexible in their approach or abandon their adult student cohort. The challenge was to ensure that no quality was lost in moving to a more flexible model.

Adults learn differently to young students and that is why the flexible system has not been transferred entirely into the apprentice training course. The success of such a model depends on the maturity of the group. Where teachers ascertain that an apprentice group is mature enough, they will use the flexible model. For other groups who are not considered mature enough to take responsibility for their own learning, the traditional, more structured program is used.

According to Rudi, he and his team had to change their mindset about how to teach in the new structure. All of the teaching team deliver both the apprentice and mature age programs. To do this, they need to use different teaching styles. According to Rudi, you can't prepare for a flexible class as you have students working on a range of different projects and do not even know who will be attending each class. Instead teachers will develop resources to support the flexible delivery. This means that teachers must have an in-depth understanding of the whole course and not just prepare for the next class.

Future Plans:

Rudi is keen to continue to develop high quality resources for the program. The competitive environment of the training industry has meant that Nirimba TAFE has had to 'go it alone' to develop these materials. Rudi's ambition for the program is to become the provider of choice for adult bricklaying education.

Rudi is keen to ensure that the program remains of the highest quality. He states that 'you have to manage the whole package. It's no good marketing if you can't follow through with product'.

Rudi is passionate about the flexible program and its contribution to improving the trade. He believes that, if more people are not taught the trade correctly that work will continue to become more sub-standard and that, eventually, the trade will diminish. He believes that it is important to teach all aspects of the trade or each generation of bricklayers will know less than the one before and 'in time, there will be nobody left who knows how to do it properly'. The sole purpose then of Nirimba TAFE is to provide quality eduction to the industry.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Rudi Meuwissen
Nirimba TAFE
Tel: : 02 9208 7069
Email: rudi.meuwissen@tafensw.edu.au

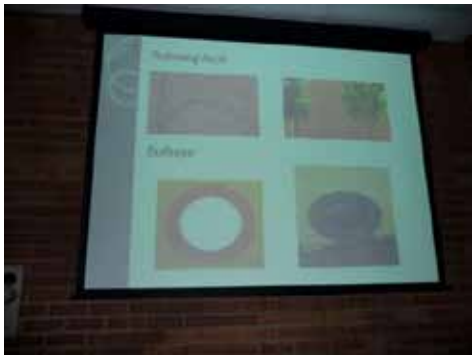
Case Study 4 – Learning Materials to suit Gen Y – Silver Trowel, WA

Synopsis:

Silver Trowel is a private RTO in Western Australia which has developed a number of processes to improve its training delivery for bricklaying students. These processes include flexible delivery, purpose built facilities which enable the students to work on large projects, and the development of interactive training materials which cater to the learning styles of the Gen Y cohort.

Purpose:

Silver Trowel was established in 1997 and now 'offer a variety of construction skills training courses for bricklaying, solid plastering and roof tiling as well as trade apprenticeship training in bricklaying, roof tiling and solid plastering; and traineeships in concreting and general construction'[7].



In building the organisation's capability to deliver these programs effectively, the management of Silver Trowel have operated from a philosophy of working flexibly to meet the needs of employers and students. This has involved developing a purpose built facility at their Kewdale location which is large enough for the students to build a two storey brick veneer house on the site.

They have also worked towards the development of a range of learning materials which will cater for the more active learning styles of Generation Y students.

Status:

Silver Trowel staff have been working towards building a more responsive training environment for their students and their employers. This includes more flexible delivery processes whereby an employer can send their apprentice into the training facility at a time which is convenient for them. To facilitate this process, Silver Trowel is only closed for one week over the Christmas period. This means that training can occur during the traditional construction down time, as well as when the weather is a problem over Winter.

With regard to the students, Silver Trowel's purpose built facility at Kewdale is large enough to enable the construction of a timber framed two storey house, which will be a permanent structure. Students will be able to build a brick veneer skin which can be dismantled at the end of the course. This practical component will complement the development of interactive presentation material for the theory classes.

[7] http://silvertrowel.com.au/about-us

Benefits:

According to Lisa Legena, General Manager of Silver Trowel, the Generation Y cohort are predominantly kinaesthetic learners who need to be engaged with the learning process. The two storey brick veneer construction will cater to this for the practical components of the program, as well as addressing a number of competency requirements.

Lisa states that the RTO was keen to bring that same approach to the theory side of the training. In the past, the theory has been mainly delivered through the use of workbooks. A lot of the material in these was not current and the use of the workbooks promoted a 'passive' learning style from the students, in which reading and listening were the two main approaches used.

Neil Pooley, the Silver Trowel staff member who is responsible for the apprenticeship course, has spent a significant amount of time in developing interactive Powerpoint presentations to increase the involvement of the students in the class activities. Neil, who completed his apprenticeship and started teaching in London, remembers what it was like to 'sit for an hour and a half, being spoken at, and trying to stay awake'. This experience has made him determined to make the Silver Trowel course more dynamic.

The Powerpoint presentations include a large number of graphics, including photos of students undertaking the tasks being discussed. According to Neil, the apprentices really respond to seeing older students on the screen. He says that seeing people they know makes them realise that they can also achieve this level of work. He believes that this really brings the presentation to life for the apprentices.

Opportunities for discussion and topic reviews are also built into the presentations, as are questions to test whether learning is occurring. Lisa believes that these strategies enable students to cement their theoretical knowledge in preparation for the practical components of the program.

Feedback from the students is that they enjoy this type of dynamic learning environment and find that it helps them with absorbing and understanding the material. Lisa says that the whole group becomes involved in the discussion.

The material has also proven useful when students are unable to attend a particular class as they are able to access the course presentations on-line and then discuss the material with the teacher when they next attend the course. This type of flexibility also enables students to proceed at their own pace.

Lessons Learnt:

Lisa says that implementing the flexible model has been easy as far as the employers and apprentices are concerned, with a high level of satisfaction from those groups.

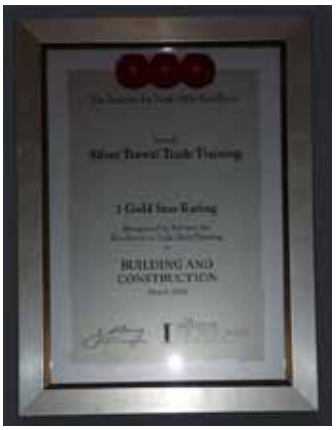
The challenges have been related to establishing the internal systems and processes to support this approach. Lisa says that the key has been ensuring that the right people are available to develop the resources and deliver the program in a timely manner. Neil is very passionate about the trade and this is evident in the amount of work he has done to 'bring the course to life'.

According to Neil, one of the greatest challenges has been in developing the material and using Silver Trowel's own photos, so that the presentations are all original and use current material.

Neil is involved in all aspects of the program, including the site visits and assessments, and he uses these visits to promote the apprenticeship system to employers.

Future Plans:

Lisa is keen to build on the current success of the program by continuing with the development of the training resources. At this stage, all of the generic units have been redeveloped, as have many of the technical units. The intent is to have current, interactive sessions developed for all stages of the program in the near future.



Neil hopes that, in the future, a question bank can also be developed for on-line use as another tool for students to check their learning.

Silver Trowel has also been funded to conduct 'taster' and pre-apprenticeship programs. The vision for these programs is to ensure that they are of the highest quality, so that students are fully engaged with them and inspired to continue with the trade, and that employers will have a source of well trained work experience students, who they will be keen to take on as apprentices.

The quality of the Silver Trowel programs can be attested to by the fact that they have been awarded a three star rating by the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence, and have recently been nominated for the Small Trainer of the Year Award.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Lisa Legena
Silver Trowel
Tel: : 08 9453 0777
Email: lisa@silvertrowel.com.au

Case Study 5 – Blended Delivery – NMIT, Vic

Synopsis:

Over the past couple of years, Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE (NMIT) has built on its existing self-paced bricklaying program to introduce a blended delivery model. This involves a combination of classes servicing mixed groups of apprentices with on-site training and assessment. According to program coordinator, Steve Lee, this is being driven by both industry and teachers and is proving a very successful model with students.

Purpose:

There is a recognition within the bricklaying industry that many of the more complex facets of the trade are now rarely used in mainstream residential building. These include fireplaces, chimneys, incline brickwork, corbels, decorative brickwork and arches. Often these are now only seen in old buildings, churches or Government buildings which are architecturally designed. As a result, NMIT is now offering a learning structure in which the day to day practical work of a bricklayer is learnt through a combination of on the job learning and assessment, and attendance at College where students learn the more complex processes. According to Steve, employers are keen for this to happen as they understand that whilst laying bricks along a line is easy to teach, the more intricate bricklaying techniques are the heart of the trade and are in danger of being lost to the trade.

Status:

The change to a blended delivery model has resulted in more face to face meetings between teachers, employers and apprentices on-site. Employers have found this very valuable. When NMIT receives notification of a new apprentice sign-up, the employer is contacted to find out what work they are doing on-site. Often these are employers who have had apprentices with NMIT in the past. The teacher visits the site to sign the training plan with the employer and apprentice. By determining the type of work being done by the business, the teacher can then determine what on-site training and assessment can be offered. In this way, the learning environment can be tailored to the needs of that particular employer and apprentice.

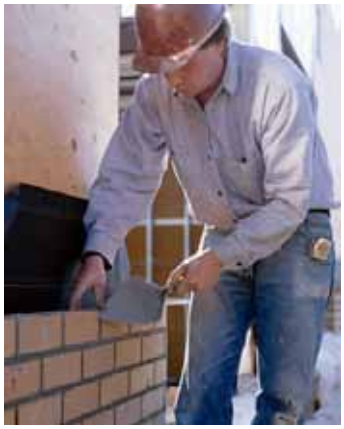
As a result of the above process, the College has a group of students who are being offered on-site assessment. Depending on the work being contracted by their employers, some apprentices will be assessed for more on-site competencies than others. At times, this means that there may be a small number of students who need to come in for a particular competency. As it is not cost effective to conduct a class for three or four students, these small groups are blended in with other groups. As well as being more cost effective, this also enables students to proceed through the course at their own pace.

This does, however, make the teaching process more difficult for teachers when a group of twelve students could be working on twelve different projects. One might be doing an arch, one a buttress pier, whilst first years might be laying out a base

structure. Steve advises that it is possible to manage this more complex teaching process because of the refined resources developed in cooperation with other Institutes.

Benefits:

In the past, on-site assessment has had a poor reputation with some employers due to the tendency for it to be seen as a 'tick and flick' process. The improved relationships being forged with employers have seen a much greater acceptance of the process. According to Brian Sandl, one of the NMIT bricklaying teachers, the main benefit of the blended delivery model is that it motivates the employer to do the right thing by the apprentice through doing training on-site where the student should be learning. The employers who do train on-the-job get the benefit of having the apprentice on-site more often. Brian states that 'employers love the process as they don't want to lose their kids to trade school'. He goes on to say 'I trained a lot of apprentices myself when I ran my own business and I would have loved this process to have been available to me'.



The capacity for apprentices to self-pace through the program means that students can progress more quickly through their schooling. This is attractive to employers as it means that they are productive more quickly on the job. Having the mixed groups in classes also means that, if a student finishes a particular project quickly at college, the teacher can ring the employer and send the student back to work early. Feedback has been that employers are very happy with this process. It also results in a better atmosphere at the College as students are not being forced to fill in time until other students have finished.

Apprentices also like being able to progress at their own pace, as it means that they no longer have to move in 'lock step' where they are working at the pace of the slowest student. Steve says that it is still sometimes necessary to push unmotivated students, but the improved communication with employers means that they can work more closely with them, and help to move these students forward.

By spending more time on-site and working more closely with employers, the reputation of NMIT appears to be enhanced in the eyes of employers. Employers realise that teachers are trained tradesmen as well as qualified teachers. This has given them a much better profile now than in the past.

The improved communication with employers and students has also meant that apprentices can no longer try to play the employer and trainer off against each other. Steve says that employers now often phone the College to ask about student progress and details of the course.

Sometimes employers will be offered work which involves more complex brickwork. If they do not have the required skills within their team, they may lose the job. There are occasions when the employer himself does not have these skills and, in these instances, the relationship between College staff and employers has now developed to an extent where the employer will seek assistance in undertaking learning or Recognition of Prior Learning himself. These relationships have also seen instances where employers will actually call the teaching staff for help with things like quoting for jobs as they know the professional quality of the teachers.

Lessons Learnt:

The introduction of a blended delivery model comes at a cost. One of the challenges being faced by NMIT staff is ongoing cost and access to resources such as cars, mobile phones, navigation systems, laptops, etc.

According to Brian Sandl, time is also a major issue. At the moment, NMIT has five full-time bricklaying teachers working with 50 first year apprentices plus all of the second and third years, whilst at the same time running pre-apprenticeship programs, tasters and hobby courses

It is also vital to keep the classwork going, while preparing for, and conducting, site visits. Brian states that there is also a need to review all of the competencies and continue to develop new material to cater for on-site delivery and assessment. This means that there is a massive amount of paperwork to develop and maintain. He believes, however, that the program will run much more smoothly once it is all set up, with significant benefits to the industry.

Also, for the past forty years there has been a culture of programmed and timetabled courses. These are easy to manage when you know there will be a teacher in front of a class of twelve students for a set number of hours each year. So one of the biggest hurdle has been getting management to let go of the 'apron strings'. The management role is much easier if you know your teachers are in the classroom. According to Steve, 'you need to have to have a high level of trust when you don't know where teachers are, when they're not here at 8.00-4.00 as has been traditional.

It's also a more difficult model to manage. Traditionally, teachers have been programmed for 780 hours of teaching, with each class having approximately twelve students. According to Steve, 'The on-site training and assessment doesn't meet this model because we will be going out to assess one person at a time. This means that we have to somehow interpret the real cost involved in this process'.

It also becomes more difficult to manage the nominal hours. For example, 'the Brick Veneer competency has 60 nominal hours, so we have to deliver training and assessment within this timeframe. In the Institute that is easy. We have practical components, theory and an assessment that equates to this time frame. When you go on-site to deliver and/or assess this competency, the time taken becomes variable depending on the learning that has happened on-site and the underpinning knowledge of the student, not to mention the travel time and all of the other infrastructure cost involved.

This means that the blended delivery model now requires a totally different approach. Luckily, according to Steve, the program managers have been open to this as they understand that it is the approach of the future. This is what industry wants and what the teachers want.

The timing of a change such as this is also very important. NMIT's bricklaying department went through a period when a number of the older teachers left. Some perceived this 'changing of the guard' as an opportunity to try a different way of teaching bricklaying. The process started with some on-site assessments for a couple of years and has now expanded out to include more on-site assessments as well as some on-site delivery. Luckily, NMIT has a great team of trade teachers who are very passionate and dedicated. The team includes four full-time teachers plus Steve, as well as five sessional teachers. According to Steve, these are all 'really good guys who are committed to putting something back into the trade'. With the change in

the teaching model, the team now takes on more of a mentor role than that of a teacher. Some of the sessional teachers are ex-teachers who went back out into the trade. Steve says that 'having them come back in a sessional role has been great as they've been able to mentor the newer teachers and the students relate really well to them because they're highly experienced and such great teachers'.

Future Plans:

Steve's plans for the future include a vision of having all of the bricklaying theory resources available for students to do on-line. This is a major goal, but will need the availability of an on-line learning expert to further develop resources. This will come with an infrastructure cost. This is a big hurdle, so Steve sees this happening 'in small chunks'. Brian agrees with the need to have access to experts who can use training toolboxes, TAFE VC, etc. to develop the on-line material. He believes they will need to sell this visionary idea to the Institute management noting that this investment will produce major savings in the long run.

NMIT is also working in a network with staff from some other TAFE Institutes in Victoria and interstate to develop and review materials as part of a continuous improvement process. In this way, materials are always current and relevant to the learning styles of the student cohort. Steve does not see that contestability will make a difference to this sharing of resources between Colleges.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Steve Lee

Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE

Tel: 03 9269 8743

E-mail: stevel-brk@nmit.vic.edu.au

Brian Sandl

Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE

Tel: 03 9269 8642

E-mail: briansandl@nmit.vic.edu.au

Case Study 6 – Pre-trade training – Wollongong TAFE, NSW

Synopsis:

Wollongong TAFE has been working hard to establish strong pathways into the bricklaying apprenticeship program for young people. This has involved investing in promoting and running the ABBTF funded 'Step Out' program, as well as in developing and delivering the pre-apprenticeship course.

The aim of this strategy is to ensure a strong supply of well prepared young people for the trade.

Purpose:

According to acting Head Teacher, Troy Everett, Wollongong TAFE has always been proactive about working with industry and trying to attract young people into the trade.

As a method of achieving this, teachers from the TAFE have been going into the schools to do bricklaying demonstrations and conduct information sessions and 'Try a Trade' tasters for the students. This has created a lot of demand.

With the introduction of the ABBTF into NSW, Wollongong TAFE now delivers the ABBTF funded 'Step Out' program in schools, and this program has become very popular with both students and careers teachers.

In the two years they have been running, the 'Step Out' programs have been so successful that Wollongong TAFE has been able to secure funding to deliver a twelve month pre-apprenticeship course as well.

Status:

As stated earlier, the 'Step Out' program has been running through Wollongong TAFE for the past two years, and Troy estimates that the numbers for the current program have risen by approximately 20%.

The teaching staff have put a lot of work into making this a program which will inspire young people to continue with the bricklaying trade. One of the teachers, Mick Matthesius, is a young bricklaying contractor who teaches part-time for the TAFE. He is very passionate about the trade and brings that passion to his work with the students. Mick states that he is very proud of his skills and ensures that every brick he lays is done well. The students see this and, according to Mick, it begins to build in the students that same sense of pride in their workmanship.

In discussing the trade, Mick presents himself as a success story. He explains that he struggled at school, but found that this was no impediment to him becoming a very successful business person. Mick, a keen

surfer, 'sells' the lifestyle benefits of the trade as well as the opportunities provided by being self-employed. According to Troy, Mick is able to 'speak their language' and the students respond very well to his style.

Troy advises that this has been a very important part of the success of the program and he describes the need to have someone who is a professional representative for the TAFE and the ABBTF, but is able to 'connect with the kids'. Mick tries to make sure that the students are not only learning about the trade, but are having fun at the same time. He believes that this combination contributes towards successful outcomes and encourages the young people to articulate into either a pre-apprenticeship course or directly into an apprenticeship.

The teachers delivering the 'Step Out' program work with the students on projects which are of benefit to the school. The program also involves each student keeping a work diary each day. The teachers combine this with photographs of the student's work to develop a professional portfolio which the young person can present to potential employers when seeking an apprenticeship.

The success of the 'Step Out' programs have resulted in Wollongong TAFE receiving funding for a year long pre-apprenticeship program, which currently has 40 students enrolled.

Benefits:

Troy explains that one of the strategies developed for the 'Step Out' program has been to get engagement from the careers advisors. They began by working with one careers advisor to have the program run in his school. He is now very enthused and has 'spread the word', so that other careers advisors have now come on board. The program has now been run several times in some schools, with one school having two 'Step Out' programs in one semester.

There have been two benefits from the program's success. Firstly, it has seen a change for the careers advisors in building their understanding of the trade. Prior to this, the tendency was for them to refer young people into bricklaying because they 'weren't bright enough for anything else'. Now they are becoming much more aware of the possibilities afforded by a career in the trade. Secondly, the students themselves are promoting the program, and Wollongong TAFE is now receiving enquiries about the course directly from students. The quality of this program is indicated by the fact that, of the forty students in the pre-apprenticeship course, 25-30 of them have come from the 'Step Out' program.

The pre-apprenticeship program being conducted by Wollongong TAFE is designed very heavily around the work experience component. Students spend the first half of the course gaining the necessary knowledge and skills within the TAFE environment, and the second half of the course undertaking work experience.

The success of the program is partially measured on job outcomes from the program, so teachers work intensively with the students to prepare them for this.

They support the students in the workplace during their work placement and liaise with employers to identify issues at the earliest possible moment.

Students are mentored by the teachers in how to 'sell' themselves to a potential employer. This includes personal presentation, punctuality and work ethic. During class, the students develop a picture of the 'perfect' bricklaying tradesperson, and can measure themselves against this when preparing to find work. Teachers also have the young people report back to them after interviews, so that they can assist in developing a good interview technique. They also encourage the students to be proactive in using their own networks to find an apprenticeship.

Wollongong TAFE's pre-apprenticeship program can credit the students with up to 1.5 years of their apprenticeship. Troy believes that the program, which currently also has a female student, is building a cohort of young people who are well prepared to enter the trade.

Lessons Learnt:

In the current economic climate, the major concern for the program is that it is building a greater demand from young people seeking apprenticeships, in an environment in which work is slowing down. This has seen a greater emphasis for teachers in trying to place the students for work experience. To achieve this, Wollongong TAFE staff are working closely with the ABBTF to talk to as many employers and industry associations as possible to build the profile of the programs, and to make them aware of the pool of job ready young people who are available.

Future Plans:

Troy explains that Wollongong TAFE is in the middle of its first cycle with regard to the 'Step Out' and pre-apprenticeship programs. He would like to see the cycle established so that there is an overlap of 'Step Out' programs each year, with students being able to articulate into the pre-apprenticeship course, or directly into an apprenticeship.

He would also like to see the program become so successful that employers will approach the TAFE for work experience students, in the understanding that these young people will come onto the site prepared for the work. Mick states that, during the 'Step Out' program, he creates an environment similar to that which the students will face in the workplace. He ensures that they work hard, turn up on time and 'don't stand around with their hands in their pockets'. This contributes to their understanding of the trade and makes them more useful to an employer.

In the longer term, Troy would like to see Wollongong TAFE building on its already strong relationship with ex-students, who have had such a good experience in their courses that they will be keen to take on more apprentices themselves.

In order to achieve this, Troy says that Wollongong TAFE will need to continue reinvesting in the training cycles to make them more

successful each year.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: George Dragovic
Wollongong TAFE
Tel: : 0414 480 569
Email: george@gghome.com

Case Study 7 – Seeing things through the student's eyes – Holmesglen TAFE, Vic

Synopsis:

Holmesglen TAFE's bricklaying department has been making the transition from running programs which suited the way the College worked, to looking at everything through the students' eyes. This culture change has been a group effort by the teachers and includes a marketing campaign to raise the profile of the trade. Holmesglen has effectively communicated the link between various training programs to give students a pathway from taster courses to pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

Purpose:

Glenn McGill has been working at Holmesglen TAFE for the past six years and now heads up the bricklaying department. At the moment, there are approximately 580 bricklaying students. These students range across a number of courses including:

- the apprenticeship program with about 300 students,
- the pre-apprenticeship course with about 70 students, as well as
- courses for international students and
- pre-vocational and taster programs at various times of the year.

Glenn believes that it is important for Holmesglen to change its culture from the traditional approach to be more responsive to the needs of industry and students. The bricklaying department has been working towards this end with a new perspective, which involves 'looking at everything through the eyes of the students'.

Glenn and his team are also keen to raise the profile and popularity of the bricklaying trade and so have been working hard to market their courses and to strengthen the links between their various programs.

Status:

Four years ago, Holmesglen TAFE found that enrolment numbers for the bricklaying program were starting to decline and bricklaying teachers realised that, to turn this around, they would have to take a different approach to training delivery.

Glenn McGill, Head Teacher, believed that it was important to change the culture to be student focused and his group began to work to improve their approach to the 'feeder' taster and pre-apprenticeship programs. As Glenn says, 'Each time we are able to take students from our taster courses and move them on into pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship programs, it's ensuring that they are kept employed!'

The Holmesglen bricklaying department is also focusing more on marketing the trade. They are building stronger relationships with employers, as well as architects,

developers and builders, and plan to start working with the schools to improve the profile of the trade.

Benefits:

There has been a practice in many secondary schools to shift the more difficult students into training in the trade areas. Whereas many other TAFE Colleges have seen this as a problem and found it difficult to deal with students with behavioural problems, the Holmesglen teachers have actually seen this as a great opportunity. According to Glenn, many of these students have 'played up' in school because they are bored. Some within this cohort have even ended up in the corrections system. However, with the proper approach, even this group is viewed as another source of students for Holmesglen's bricklaying programs. Glenn believes that many of these students are actually quite creative and are looking for training which gives them an opportunity to express this. In learning bricklaying, and seeing what they can create in a short period of time, many of these students become engaged with the learning process and seek a pathway into further training. According to Glenn, this can be a life changing experience for some students, with growing confidence and self-esteem. Glenn also says that much of the 'bad' behaviour disappears when the students are working with their hands and enjoying it. The teaching staff focus on practical skills with the students and 'slip the theory in without them being aware'.

As a result of this work, many of the students seek advice on further pathways once they have completed their taster programs. Many of them articulate into the pre-apprenticeship course, whilst others leapfrog the pre-apprenticeship and go directly into an apprenticeship.

Apprentices Gavin Hallam and Brent Cincotta are examples of this process at work. Gavin knew nothing about bricklaying until he came through the TAFE with his school and observed the bricklaying students. He liked the look of the work and enrolled for a pre-apprenticeship program. One of his teachers notified him about an apprenticeship vacancy with a commercial bricklayer and Gavin submitted his resumé which showed his work in the pre-apprenticeship program. Gavin is now in the second year of his apprenticeship on site, and the third year of his studies at TAFE. He feels that the pre-apprenticeship program made him more attractive to his employer as it showed that he understood the basics and could use a trowel.

Brent, who is also a second year apprentice, was labouring for a commercial bricklayer, who encouraged him to do the pre-apprenticeship program and then took him on as an apprentice. Brent states that he already knew what happens on-site due to his labouring experience, but the pre-apprenticeship course prepared him for the bricklaying side of the work.

Glenn says that the teachers have also done a lot of work to build relationships with employers, and now spend a significant amount of time in contact with them. This has taken a few years to resolve, but Glenn advises that there is a much higher level of rapport now. Employers often ring the College to discuss the course and their students. The department's pre-apprenticeship program includes a work placement. Glenn says that this has been very successful, with employers now seeking out the College to get placements as they know the 'quality of pre-apprentices being turned out'.

Holmesglen is also trying to raise the profile of the trade more widely and has worked actively to engage architects, developers and builders with the program. The department is in the process of planning for a trade night, and has arranged for some

architects to attend as guest speakers. Many of these had disengaged with the College as they perceived that staff 'didn't care', but are now 'back on side' and this is to the advantage of the students. At the trade night, students will be made more aware of the career opportunities open to them as a result of having completed their bricklaying apprenticeship and Glenn finds that the young people are responding to this information.

Glenn and his teachers are also trying to raise the students' level of pride in their trade by building display panels of outstanding student work. For example, one group of students built a non-smoking sign out of polychromatic bricks and this often receives very positive comments from passers-by and other students. Glenn advises that Think Brick is also planning to run an article about the program.

Lessons Learnt:

Glenn explains that any change in culture can be a difficult thing. Teachers have moved to the realisation that the pre-vocational and taster courses are a feeder into the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. He believes that gaining access to the students while they are still in Years 8 and 9 shows results with an increased uptake of positions in these more advanced programs.

It has also been necessary to overcome the traditional TAFE culture of 'if we have the facility they will come'. Glenn feels the refocus on marketing is now paying dividends.

Glenn says that only in the last 18 months have they seen the possibilities for linking pathways. In the past, the taster courses were more about 'babysitting' rather than being seen as a source of new students. One of the areas which needs to be addressed is a lack of hard data on the success of linking these programs. However, Glenn believes that the success of these strategies is being reflected in the higher numbers of students coming through courses.

Holmesglen's pre-apprenticeship bricklaying course has increased from one per year to the current offering of four courses per year, with the increase in students coming mainly through the taster groups. Feedback from these students is that 'I really loved it; what do I do now?' The pre-apprenticeship program runs continuously throughout the year.

Future Plans:

Glenn sees that there are still a number of ways to improve the programs. Teachers are working hard with students to instil pride in the trade. Teachers engage students in the discussion of how they present to potential customers and, next year, they are considering introducing a dress code.

Glenn also sees the importance of building stronger relationships with careers teachers. He believes that they are part-way there now, but need to make them more aware of what bricklaying is all about. At the moment, Holmesglen does not have any input into the recruitment of students for taster programs. However, Glenn would like to see bricklaying teachers conducting presentations in the schools to give an insight into the trade for students.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Glenn McGill

Holmesglen TAFE

Tel: 03 9564 1584

E-mail: Glenn.McGill@holmesglen.vic.edu.au

Employers

The role of individual employers in keeping the trade viable cannot be underestimated. It is very refreshing to see that many employers are passionate enough about bricklaying to go 'above and beyond' what is required of the standard apprenticeship training process to ensure that their apprentices are best positioned to be successful in their chosen career path once they have completed their training.

'Apprenticeships … are not just about training; they are employment contracts as well as contracts of training. An enterprise that takes on an apprentice … is normally undertaking a recruitment decision as well as a skill formation decision' (p. 460).

Smith, E 2007, 'Australian employers' strategies to improve the quality of apprentices', *Journal of Education & Training*, vol. 49, no. 6, pp. 459-473

Case Study 8 - Improving trowel skills – The Brick Man, Vic

Synopsis:

As an employer, John Claxton from The Brick Man is committed to ensuring that his apprentices receive quality training through being exposed to as many facets of the trade as possible. This includes starting to lay bricks early in the apprenticeship and being given the opportunity to work on a range of different types of jobs.

Purpose:

John's business, The Brick Man, has been operating for about six years and builds on John's twenty years experience as a bricklayer. John has been taking on apprentices since commencing The Brick Man and has now trained six, with five having completed their qualification. John now prefers to put on a new apprentice every two years. This enables him to have a third year apprentice working with his first year. John finds that, in working with a first year student, the third year apprentice has to rethink and reflect on everything they've learnt, and this reinforces the learning for them. He also believes that the mentoring experience itself is an excellent development tool for the older apprentices.

When John takes on a new apprentice, he informs them that they will be learning the labouring side of the work for their three month probation period, as well as watching and learning from the more experienced bricklayers. John believes that the labouring experience will stand them in good stead later, and that anyone who can't learn the labouring side within three months is not likely to succeed in the trade. However, he believes that it is extremely important to 'get them on the trowel' as soon as they have finished the probation period.

Status:

John also believes that it is very important to keep your word with the young apprentices so, having made the commitment to get them on the trowel, for the next nine months he places them with an experienced bricklayer and gives them as much practice as possible in laying bricks and blocks. According to John, this is when they really learn their bricklaying skills. John believes that it is critical to 'get them on the trowel as much as possible in their first year, when many employers just keep them labouring. What happens, if you keep them labouring, is that they get to the third year of their apprenticeship, but can only lay at the pace of a first year. The employer then gets rid of them because they're not fast enough. By getting the pace up, they stay in line with their wages, and they can lay enough bricks and blocks to be profitable to the business'.

This view is also reflected by John's first year apprentice, Brett, who describes a fellow student who has only laboured on the job and is finding it very difficult to keep up with the others at trade school.

The Brick Man works mainly in high end architectural residential work, but also undertakes insurance jobs, for instance when someone has backed into a fence and destroyed the letter box. John believes that these are great jobs for an apprentice to do under supervision. They get to do the laying out and have to think through how many bricks they will need and how long the job will take. Whereas a job like that might take an experienced bricklayer half a day, the first year apprentice might take two days. When they do another similar job a year later and do it twice as quickly, they are learning time and motion skills and can see the improvement they are making.

Benefits:

Before commencing his apprenticeship, Brett worked at KFC. He decided that he wanted to do a physical trade and checked the Internet for information. He was not able to find very much information this way, so turned to a friend, Lincoln, who worked for John. Brett went along and watched him working and liked what he saw. He found out that John had a position available and applied for the apprenticeship. Brett believes that watching his friend work gave him a good feel for what the trade was about and he found it very interesting. Brett feels that his apprenticeship so far has given him a better understanding of the construction trade. As well as the hand skills he has learnt, Brett has also improved his problem solving and planning skills. He has really enjoyed being able to lay bricks and thinks that he would have been 'turned off if I'd only been labouring'. He speaks proudly of the three jobs of his own which he has done already under John's supervision.

Brett states that the schooling he is undertaking at Holmesglen works in well with what he is doing on the job. At trade school, he is able to take the time to learn the finer skills with the trowel, and finds that he is spreading a lot better when back on the job.

John also believes that apprentices should have the opportunity to learn the more complex brick work as this teaches them to be more accurate. According to John, 'architects will measure your work and if it's not millimetre perfect, they will want it pulled down'. Through doing this type of work, John believes that the apprentice is learning how to do high quality work from the start, and the speed will develop later on. Brett states that he loves learning the complex, finer work and finds it very satisfying to see the result.

John is passionate about keeping apprentices in the trade. He believes that an apprentice signs up to learn how to be a bricklayer. 'If they're just mixing mud and stacking bricks, they might as well have just been a bricky's labourer', he says. 'The boss gives them a hard time because they're not fast enough when it's the boss' fault for not giving them enough trowel time. As an employer, you have a responsibility that when they move on, they should be tradesman quality. If you take on an apprentice, you have that responsibility'.

As well as learning the hand skills, John tries to teach his apprentices the business aspects of being a bricklayer, for example, how to quote a job. He explains to the apprentice that he needs to be a sales person to win work and feels that Brett's customer service experience from KFC has been really useful as he can talk to clients easily.

Lessons Learnt:

John believes that the biggest challenge in the trade is getting employers to change their perspective about how they train their apprentices, and to give them more time 'on the tools'. John states that the profile of the trade will never improve unless the quality of work is improved.

John also thinks that the low level of pay is a disincentive for apprentices. They are willing to accept it, but it is particularly difficult for the older apprentices who are not living at home. However, John also recognises that it is difficult for employers to pay adult wages for mature age apprentices when they cannot lay fast enough to pay their way. Brett agrees that the low wages cause problems for many apprentices.

Future Plans:

John would like to see apprentices work for a number of different employers when they've finished their apprenticeship in order to gain a wider range of experience. He believes that it takes a while to 'get the feel of how to lay a brick. It's challenging to learn, but once you've learnt it, you can do anything'.

John has interviewed a number of bricklayers who have their qualification, but can't lay any better than a second year apprentice because they haven't had enough trowel time. He feels that this is the employer's fault for not training them properly. John asks, 'How can you sub-contract when you can't keep up? The employer will say "sorry, but I can't keep you on because you aren't fast enough". A first year apprentice will start out laying a hundred bricks a day. By the end of third year, he should be able to lay 300-400 bricks per day'.

John says that bricklaying is always going to be hard work, so if you don't like hard work you're wasting your time. To stay in the trade, he feels that it is important to learn to work smarter.

He also believes that there needs to be more business education and training. Apprentices need to learn how to manage the money side if they want to start their own businesses. They need to 'understand money coming in and going out. They need to learn to read a profit and loss statement'. He also feels that a bricklayer who understands the money side, and is working for someone else, will have a better understanding of why the employer is pushing them to lay more bricks.

John thinks that it would be very useful for fourth year apprentices to do a business course, maybe at night school, and Brett agrees that this would be very handy.

Contact(s) for further details / Contact and acknowledgements:

Contact: John Claxton
The Brick Man
Tel: : 0417 325 027
Email: info@thebrickman.com.au

Case Study 9 - Learning the Business – Byrne Construction, Vic

Synopsis:

Byrne Construction is one of the largest commercial construction companies in the Victoria and works on major projects in both Victoria and Western Australia. Michael Byrne has realised that the only way to grow the business is to develop the business skills of the bricklayers and apprentices working for him.

Purpose:

Michael Byrne did his apprenticeship with an accountant who took up bricklaying. Whilst not being a great bricklayer, his boss' accountancy background meant that he was very good at the paperwork. This was in strong contrast to an employer for whom Michael later worked. This employer was an excellent bricklayer but couldn't manage the business effectively and ended up in trouble with the Australian Taxation Office. This experience taught Michael that 'paperwork is king'. He learnt how important it is to manage a business properly and understood the importance of budgeting to not only pay the day to day bills, but manage until payment for the next job came in.

Byrne Construction has been in operation since 1979. Michael Byrne started in residential building and moved into commercial work in 1985. As the business grew, Michael started tendering for work and, despite not having liked school, he taught himself, through trial and error, to do the business paperwork. This included doing double entry bookkeeping and wages by hand before the business computerised in 1987.

Understanding 'where the money is and is not', has helped him to survive. As a result, Michael has a strong commitment to ensuring that his staff learn business skills as well as trade skills.

Michael has taught all of his office staff to establish and work to organisational procedures. All systems and processes have been documented and clear guidelines exist for staff development. As a result, Michael has been able to successfully grow his business to the stage where, now, both of his sons work for him, as well as two estimators, a full-time and a part-time bookkeeper and a warehouse manager. Michael employs six staff in the office and 75 on-site, as well as four apprentices. His success in running the business means that his apprentices are assured of work.

Over the past three years, Michael has extended his business training to include his apprentices who are brought into the office four to five times per year to learn a variety of administrative and management tasks.

Status:

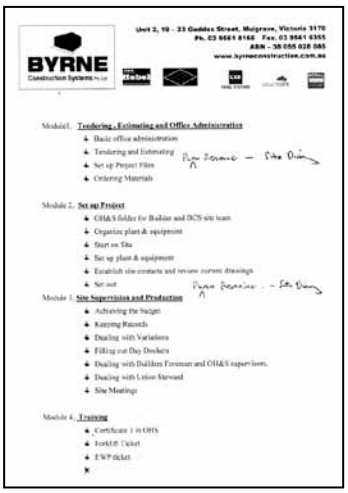
Michael realises that many people who choose to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship are not interested in learning the paperwork side of the business, so he uses the early rotations through the office to determine whether the apprentice has the aptitude and the interest in learning more.

The training process developed by Michael includes four modules. These include:

- tendering, estimating and office administration
- setting up a project
- site supervision and production
- additional training for tickets

The training manual designed to deliver these skills is still a 'work in progress' according to Michael.

The driving force behind the training is to develop future supervisors and managers. Michael explains that, when they are busy, they could have any number of jobs if they had the people to run them. However, it is often difficult to find people with the skills necessary to manage a project. According to Michael, many bricklayers are not good managers, and Michael often finds himself in a situation where new work cannot be accepted due to a lack of supervisors and managers.


BYRNE
Construction Systems

Module 1. Tendering, Estimating and Office Administration
- Basic office administration
- Tendering and Estimating
- Set up Project Files
- Ordering Materials

Module 2. Set up Project
- OH&S folder for Builder and ISCS site team
- Organise plant & equipment
- Start on Site
- Set up plant & equipment
- Establish site contacts and review current drawings
- Set out

Module 3. Site Supervision and Production
- Achieving the budget
- Keeping Records
- Dealing with Variations
- Filling out Day Dockets
- Dealing with Builders Foreman and OH&S supervisors
- Dealing with Union Steward
- Site Meetings

Module 4. Training
- Certificate 1 in OHS
- Forklift Ticket
- EWP ticket

Second year apprentice, Gavin Hallam, says that having had the experience in the office has given him a greater appreciation of what goes into running a successful bricklaying business and he now sees a career path for himself when he has finished his apprenticeship as a supervisor, and later a manager, with Byrne Construction.

Michael recognises that not everyone will want to move into administrative or supervisory roles, with a 'strike rate of about one in ten'. Michael looks for people who show an interest in how the business is run and has had some success, with one employee now managing construction of a high rise building.

Apprentices come into the office for a full day four to five times per year. Michael feels that it is important to start within the first three months to gain an idea of the apprentice's personality and aptitude. Sometimes they are too young and sometimes 'they already think they know it all'.

Michael runs them through each of the four training stages and lets them work in the office, learning how to fax, do the ordering, and working with the estimators to learn to read plans. This is not a formal training program with assessments. Michael believes that it is important not to overload the apprentices when they also have trade school to deal with.

Benefits:

Michael believes that apprentices learn a range of skills which will be useful to Byrne Construction later should they go on to supervisory and management roles, but will be just as useful to them should they choose to start up their own businesses.

Apprentices learn to draw up schedules, maintain a site diary, help with the time sheets, track down invoices and delivery dockets, understand production and how to achieve it, supervise small groups to achieve budget, and even how to open and close the office, turn the alarms on and off, etc.

Gavin has spent five days in the office and states that he has worked with staff to learn general office functions such as emailing and faxing, as well as trade specific skills such as estimating, setting up job profiles and tendering and securing work.

He believes that it is very valuable to learn what goes on behind the scenes before the first brick is even laid.

According to Michael, apprentices also learn to deal with situations involving the builder's foreman, OH&S supervisor and union steward. By learning these skills, Michael believes that they will also gain an understanding of when they need to involve management, so they don't end up in difficult situations.

The final module of the program involves assisting the apprentices to gain their Certificate III in OH&S, and forklift and EWP tickets.

Part of Byrne Construction's philosophy is to move the bricklayers around into different gangs to find groups which work well together. In learning to understand this process, the apprentices become aware of the importance of seeking the best outcome. Apprentices are also taught how to deal with variations and filling out day dockets in a format which can be understood. This is a critical issue as office staff may deal with variations up to six months after the job has been completed.

The training program is not only useful for teaching the apprentices new skills. It also makes them realise the importance on doing paperwork correctly when on site and gives them a better feel for the whole job, from quoting through to finishing. The apprentices often remark that now they realise the work involved in the business side. Even those apprentices who do not take to paperwork are building a better relationship with the office staff by working there, and understand the work and the various processes more clearly.

Lessons Learnt:

Michael believes that having good business processes in place is part of sound business practice. This includes establishing a clear process for recruitment and training. Byrne Construction has set up written procedures for interviewing so that staff can step in where necessary. Michael believes that the process is also useful for applicants as they understand that the business is prepared to teach them, but that they also have some responsibilities. Byrne Construction requires all applicants to compete a written application and prospective apprentices have to go through two interviews. Michael calls this 'selection by de-selection'. He does not believe that people should be able to 'just waltz in here and expect to get a job. They should have to work for it'. Part of the process is to identify the ones who have the potential to move up the ladder once they have completed their apprenticeship, or who have the capability to start their own business.

One of the greatest challenges is finding the time to do the training properly. Michael originally spent a week setting up the basic program and developing the handouts, and he has been updating the program over the past three years. There is no formal training schedule. Michael looks for a day which appears to be quiet and brings apprentices into the office then. However, this can be difficult to do when work is busy.

Future Plans:

Michael believes that the investment he is making in business training will pay dividends in the future. He says that it is 'about finding future management' for the business. But he also feels that it is improving the bricklaying trade as well.

He would like to see the Registered Training Organisations covering things like tax and insurances.

In the future, Michael would like to further develop his training to include how to supervise bricklayers, but finds that he runs out of time to do it all. Perhaps, in the future, he will consider employing a part-time trainer and building in more structure by setting aside specific days for apprentices to come into the office for training. He is considering compressing the training into a single block which would take place at the commencement of the apprentice's third year, to give them a break from the site work.

According to Michael, the training program has come about through Byrne Construction trying to solve its own problems with finding skilled people to work in the business. He believes that the company cannot grow further unless they continue to train their apprentices in business skills. However, whilst the primary reason is to build their own business, Michael also believes that 'bricklaying will die if we don't have good skilled people'.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Michael Byrne

Byrne Construction

Tel: (03) 9561 8166

E-mail: michael@byrneconstruction.com.au

Case Study 10 – Apprentice to Sub-Contractor – Porter Davis Homes, Vic

Synopsis:

Porter Davis Homes in Victoria has recognised the importance of building its own pool of sub-contractors. To achieve this, the company directly indentures apprentices in a variety of construction trades, including bricklaying, and then prepares them to become sub-contractors who can deliver high quality work for Porter Davis Homes in the future.

Purpose:

Porter Davis Homes has been operating in the residential construction industry in Victoria for ten years.

In 2004, the company began to directly indenture its own apprentices, and now has twenty-six on the books. These apprentices are placed with Porter Davis Homes sub-contractors to learn their trade. The company ensures that they mix with other tradespeople working on the site, so that they gain a better understanding of how the various trades work together.

In their final year of the apprenticeship, each apprentice is offered the opportunity to attend business skills training to prepare them for the move into sub-contracting to Porter Davis Homes. They are also offered financial incentives if they commit to working for the company in a sub-contracting arrangement.

Status:

In order to maximise the opportunity for successful completion of the apprenticeship, Porter Davis Homes has implemented a stringent recruitment process. Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised on the company's website, and ABBTF personnel are also encouraged to refer likely applicants.

At the first contact, the applicant goes through an informal telephone interview to set them at ease. The person is asked to describe why they want to take up a bricklaying apprenticeship, what they know about the trade and what exposure they have already had to the industry. This enables Porter Davis Homes to 'get a feel' for how keen the applicant really is to undertake the apprenticeship, and how much they understand about what the trade entails.

One of the building managers will then meet with the applicant and talk about the trade to make them aware of the hard work involved in being a bricklayer. Those who show that they are really keen and able to undertake the work are indentured to the company.

Teresa Wright, HR Projects Coordinator for Porter Davis Homes, explains that even though they make every effort to select the right people for the trade, there are still some young people who decide that 'it's not for them' after they have

started. Despite this, Teresa believes that the work done in this early stage reduces the company's attrition rate within the first year.

In the final year of the apprenticeship, Porter Davis Homes enrols the young person in a business skills course with the Master Builders' Association. They hope that, by doing this, the student will successfully make the transition from apprentice to sub-contractor.

Benefits:

Porter Davis Homes strives to ensure that each apprentice will successfully complete their trade training. To facilitate this process, the building managers consider which sub-contractor will be best matched to act as the host employer for each apprentice. The building managers understand the capabilities of each of the sub-contractors, including their personalities, they way they work, the size of their gang, and the type of work they do. They also understand which sub-contractors will make the best trainers, and recognise that each young person will need a host employer who is keen to work with an apprentice and who is capable of training them effectively on the job.

Cable Savage transferred to Porter Davis Homes as a second year bricklaying apprentice and has just completed his trade qualification. According to Cable, the experience has been exceptional. He states that, in getting to work with a variety of people on site, it has enabled him to 'find out different methods and understand the right and wrong way to do things'. Cable believes that this has enabled him to work more efficiently.

Porter Davis Homes has also long understood the importance to their business of having skilled, reliable sub-contractors working for them. As a result, the company made the decision some time ago to invest in their apprentices as a way of building a pool of sub-contractors who could take the business into the future.

In order to give apprentices the best opportunity to start their own business, Porter Davis homes enrols them in, and pays for, a two day business skills course run by the Master Builders' Association. This program is designed specifically for apprentices to make the transition to sub-contractor, and teaches them how to start their own business, how to manage insurances, develop a business plan and understand registration issues.

Cable advises that he now has a better understanding of things such as how to estimate, how to do a BAS statement and how the Worksafe system operates. He believes that these will assist him in his sub-contractor's role.

As Teresa says, 'If we're investing three years in an apprentice, we want them to be a success at the end, and we want to create a loyalty between Porter Davis Homes and the apprentice'.

When the apprenticeship has been completed, the company seeks a twelve month commitment from the apprentice to work for Porter Davis Homes as a sub-contractor. Where this occurs, the apprentice receives a $1000 Bunnings voucher to help them with the expenses of setting up their own business. This money can be used to buy a trailer or tools, or contribute to updating the apprentice's work

vehicle. Cable, who received a $500 voucher due to starting as a second year apprentice, is planning to purchase additional tools.

Lessons Learnt:

According to Teresa, the major challenge faced by Porter Davis Homes is in getting the right apprentice who will commit firstly to completing the apprenticeship, and secondly to ongoing work with the company.

The building managers and construction supervisors keep an eye on each apprentice and, should they begin experiencing any difficulty, the building manager will meet with them to try to resolve the issue. Problems may vary from behavioural issues to learning difficulties. Whilst every effort is made to assist the apprentice, Porter Davis Homes also expects them to meet certain standards of behaviour. As Teresa Wright states, 'If they can't do the right thing in the supported environment of the apprenticeship, how will they be able to make the transition to a reliable sub-contractor?'

When asked about his experience as a Porter Davis Homes apprentice, Cable states that 'I am really positive about the Porter Davis program. They supported me in every way. If I had a question, they answered it. If I had a problem, they came out on site and helped me. I'd recommend any apprentice to work for them'.

Future Plans:

Porter Davis Homes has recently entered into a partnering arrangement with NMIT to offer work experience to students in the pre-apprenticeship program. The company hopes that this will encourage students to consider applying to Porter Davis Homes when the time comes for them to seek an apprenticeship.

According to Teresa, the future of the apprenticeship program is continually evolving. In 2004, when Porter Davis Homes started directly indenturing apprentices, there were only a small number. Now, with 26 apprentices working with the company, more structure is needed to ensure the smooth running of the program. The apprentices now form part of the company's performance appraisal system, and two years ago they began to conduct 'apprenticeship days' when they bring all of the apprentices together.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Teresa Wright

Porter Davis Homes

Tel: (03) 8786 1200

E-mail: teresa.wright@porterdavis.com.au

Industry drivers

As well as the work being done by individual employers, there is a push from the industry more generally to promote the trade and to improve its profile. As well as this marketing role, these industry bodies are highly proactive in promoting training from 'taster' programs, through pre-apprenticeship courses and into the Certificate III program. They are also active in facilitating the career pathways which are possible once a bricklayer is qualified.

Case Study 11 - An industry approach to improving the trade – BCITF, WA

Synopsis:

The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund (BCITF) contributes to the trade through a range of initiatives, including financial incentives to employers to take on an apprentice; subsidies for workers who undertake short course training to upgrade their skills; funding Registered Training Organisations to deliver Try a Trade programs for school students; and active promotion of the building and construction industry. Finally, they undertake valuable industry research.

Purpose:

According to the BCITF's website:

'The Building and Construction Industry Training Fund (BCITF) was established in 1990 by an Act of Parliament to support the training of eligible people in the building and construction industry. Under the Building and Construction Industry Training Levy and Collection Act 1990, the BCITF collects a small training levy from all construction projects in Western Australia. The goals of the BCITF are to improve the quality of training and to increase the number of skilled workers in the building and construction industry.

The funds received from the collection of the training levy go back to the industry to support training and skills development. The training levy ensures that people undertaking and paying for construction work in Western Australia make a contribution to training the skilled people needed to carry out the work. In this way, the whole community contributes to and benefits from the BCITF training levy and our funding programs.

Since its inception, the BCITF has supported the training and employment of more than 24 000 apprentices and trainees and has helped over 124 000 industry workers to upgrade their skills'[8].

According to Eamon Moore (Manager, Strategy and Communication) of the BCITF, the 0.2% levy is calculated on the total project value and is mainly collected through local Government agencies. The revenue from the levy is used to provide an incentive to employers to take on apprentices, with up to $7,000 available to employers of apprentices across the industry, including bricklaying, and to support industry workers who can receive subsidies of up to 80% of the cost of a range of short courses.

As well as employer incentives and funding for training, the BCITF also actively promotes the industry. Eamon explains that, in 2004, the Fund launched the One Industry, No Limits campaign, which was designed to present building and

[8] www.bcitf.org

construction as 'an industry of first choice'. They also promote the incentives to employers to encourage them to take on more apprentices.

As part of the No Limits program, the BCITF works in partnership with several RTO's which, since 2005, have been funded by the BCITF to deliver 'Try a Trade' programs to Year 10 students. The aim of these programs is to help young people make informed decisions about whether the building and construction trades offer them a career path that is of interest to them.

Status:

Research and Development Manager, Margo Keating, advises that the BCITF also undertakes valuable industry research, with a number of reports having been produced. These reports are made available to the public via the BCITF website.

Benefits:

Bricklaying is an important construction trade in Western Australia, due to the double skin construction of many buildings. The work being done by the BCITF is important to the ongoing vitality of this trade, and the incentives and contributions made to training are a critical component of this work.

The research undertaken is a vital component as it helps underpin the strategic decisions of the Board, and a number of projects have been completed. These include:

- Construction Industry Statistical Snapshot, which is updated quarterly
- The Value of a Qualification
- State of the Industry Report
- Optimizing the Potential of the "Other" Construction Workforce
- Barriers to Apprentice Employment
- Building Worker and Apprentice Attrition Rates Survey'[9]

Such research provides valuable background information which, amongst other aims, enables the building and construction trade to remain viable into the future.

For example, the research conducted into attrition rates was designed to examine, amongst other aspects, the cost of training an apprentice across a number of trades. This research showed that the employer carries most of the burden of training and that the net cost of training is higher when the apprentice leaves during their first year.

Lessons Learnt:

Eamon advises that the lessons learnt from the BCITF experience include the importance of promoting the trades.

[9] http://www.bcitf.org/default.aspx?id=331

According to Margo, one of the major lessons learnt is that, if a trade qualification is not sufficiently valued by industry, apprentices receive negative messages about the value of that qualification and this impacts on their motivation to continue formal training. Good training is an important underpinning mechanism for ensuring quality work across the industry.

Future Plans:

From the BCITF research, recommendations are developed for the Board to consider. The Board may then make operational changes or provide advice to the Minister. These recommendations may result in changes to the way incentives are paid, impact on mature age targets or recommend changes to training and training delivery.

Since the beginning of 2009, the BCITF Board has taken on responsibility for the previous Building and Construction Industry Training Council and has employed a Director of Skills Development, who will liaise closely with industry and make recommendations to the Department of Training about training needs and reforms within the trade areas.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Margo Keating
BCITF
Tel: : 08 9381 3900
Email: mkeating@bcitf.org

Contact: Eamon Moore
BCITF
Tel: : 08 9381 3900
Email: emoore@bcitf.org

Case Study 12 - An industry approach to improving the trade – ABBTF

Synopsis:

In 2003, the brick and block manufacturers recognised that, if nothing was done to promote the industry, there would be a shortage of quality bricklayers in the future and that this would impact on their businesses. As a result, a decision was taken to establish the Australian Brick and Blocklaying Training Foundation (ABBTF) to promote the industry and encourage the uptake of bricklaying apprenticeships. The purpose of the ABBTF is to 'ensure there is an adequate and competent bricklaying and blocklaying workforce to support the demand for bricks and blocks as a construction material and improve the standing of bricklayers and blocklayers within the building industry'[10].

Purpose:

'The scheme is jointly funded by brick and block manufacturers and builders, tradesmen and the general public who purchase bricks and blocks. They contribute $2.00 per 1,000 for clay bricks and .10 cents per square metre for concrete masonry'[11].

Over a period of time, the ABBTF has commenced operations in various locations until now the scheme, which has been approved by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, operates in every State of Australia as well as in the Australian Capital Territory. The work of the ABBTF revolves around the following activities:

- Promotion of the trade through schools and the community by presentations and visits to career teacher groups and careers events. Direct promotional support for TAFE's and training organisations to increase training enrolments.
- Provide Step Out Programs to secondary school students. This 40 hour program provides students with hands on experience in bricklaying to enable young people to make an informed choice to commence an apprenticeship.
- Support for people completing pre-apprenticeship (pre-vocational) training by fee payment or incentives on starting an apprenticeship.
- Subsidise bricklayers and builders with $6,000 for directly employing a new bricklaying apprentice.
- Subsidise bricklayers and builders for employing a new bricklaying apprentice through a Group Training Company.
- Mature age financial support is provided to employers or apprentices in some States.
- Support up-skilling of existing bricklayers to gain skills and qualifications.
- Support for apprentice travel (over 100 km) and accommodation costs incurred in attending apprenticeship training in some States.

[10] ABBTF Information Sheet
[11] http://www.becomeabricklayer.com.au/frequently_asked_questions

According to Victorian Development and Administration Manager, Jane Alexander, the ABBTF is intended to achieve two things – to make students, parents and careers teachers aware of bricklaying as a valuable career choice; and to encourage employers to take on and train apprentices to address the issue of the aging bricklaying workforce.

Status:

The ABBTF commenced operations in Victoria in 2003 and, in 2005, Geoff Noble the ABBTF General Manager, was asked to extend the organisation nationally. Offices were opened around the country, with Western Australia and South Australia completing the national coverage when they came on board in 2007. Each State and Territory is now serviced by one of the ABBTF personnel who are actively engaged with employers, Group Training Organisations (GTOs), RTOs, schools and the industry in general. The ABBTF now supports the employment of 1700 apprentices.

The Development Managers in each State work actively with the various sectors of the industry, spending much of their time on the road. This involves visiting employers to promote the apprenticeship system and to make them aware of the financial incentives available to them should they take on an apprentice. The Development Managers also work closely with State ITABs (in those States which support these organisations), State Departments of Education and Training, the Housing Industry Association, Master Builders' Association, secondary schools, TAFEs and private RTOs, and Australian Apprenticeship Centres. As well, the Development Managers process the paperwork involved in subsidy payments to employers and incentive payments to apprentices.

They also work in partnership with RTOs who deliver the ABBTF funded Step Out program in the secondary school system, and attend careers expos and other functions to 'sell' the trade to prospective apprentices and their parents.

Benefits:

Queensland Development Manager, Tony Bishop, believes that the partnering arrangements developed with TAFEs and other RTOs are vital in marketing the brick and blocklaying trade. In order to achieve this, he is also involved in the Worldskills competition, and uses this as a vehicle to promote the trade.

Dean Pearson, Western Australian Development Manager, discusses the importance of the Step Out program in creating greater awareness of the trade, and as a 'feeder' program into the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs.

Geoff Noble believes that the work being done by the ABBTF to promote the industry is critical. He states that 'selling' the career path options to parents is an important strategy in improving the profile of the trade and in increasing the take up of apprenticeships.

He also believes that pathways into becoming a builder, or into other roles in the construction industry, should also be advertised strongly, and that the ABBTF has an important role in doing this.

According to Jane Alexander, 'ABBTF's primary benefit is to achieve an increased workforce of fully trained qualified bricklayers within the industry to address the skills shortage'.

Lessons Learnt:

Jane goes on to describe some of the challenges the ABBTF has faced, and is still facing. These include:

1. Gaining the support of parents and careers teachers that bricklaying is a valued trade and getting students to consider bricklaying as a career choice
2. Getting employers to appreciate the value an apprentice can add to their business if trained well and, that our new generation of young people expect to be trained and given an opportunity to excel in their trade and not used as cheap labour.
3. Gaining the TAFE's trust and confidence that ABBTF was genuine about addressing the skill shortage and getting them to run more pre-apprenticeship programs.
4. Correct marketing and promotion of bricklaying. This had never been done before so we needed to get it right from the beginning to build respect for the trade and show bricklaying as a career pathway into the building and construction industry.

Tony Bishop also describes the challenges imposed by the 'boom/bust' cycle of the industry.

Future Plans:

Geoff and his staff see a number of possibilities for the future. These include increasing the promotional activities of the ABBTF to build the importance of the bricklaying qualification. Geoff believes that, currently, the industry does not sufficiently value this qualification and that work needs to be done in this area if the industry is to increase the numbers of qualified bricklayers in the trade. Jane also states that work needs to be done to 'support the upskilling of people out there doing bricklaying, but who have never achieved their qualification'.

Opportunities also exist for the ABBTF to support the RTOs in developing training resources, and in examining the training needs of bricklayers after they become qualified and have worked in the industry for a while. According to Geoff, 'the Certificate III shouldn't be the end of the training road. It should be the beginning'.

Dean Pearson would also like to see the organisation grow to include Field Officers who are able to 'bridge the gap between apprentices/potential apprentices and employers'.

Contact(s) for further details:

Contact: Geoff Noble
ABBTF
Tel: (03) 9209 5995
Email: geoffn@holmesglen.vic.edu.au

Conclusion

In undertaking this project, it has been refreshing to realise how many organisations and individuals are passionate about the bricklaying trade, and who are implementing a range of innovative practices.

In conducting the research, it also became obvious that those organisations featured in this report were very willing to share information about their 'best practices' and were also very keen to learn from others. This desire, by all sectors of the bricklaying trade, to continually learn and improve the trade experience for apprentices should stand the system in good stead for the future.