



**OPTIMIZING THE POTENTIAL
OF THE 'OTHER'
CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE**

A research report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

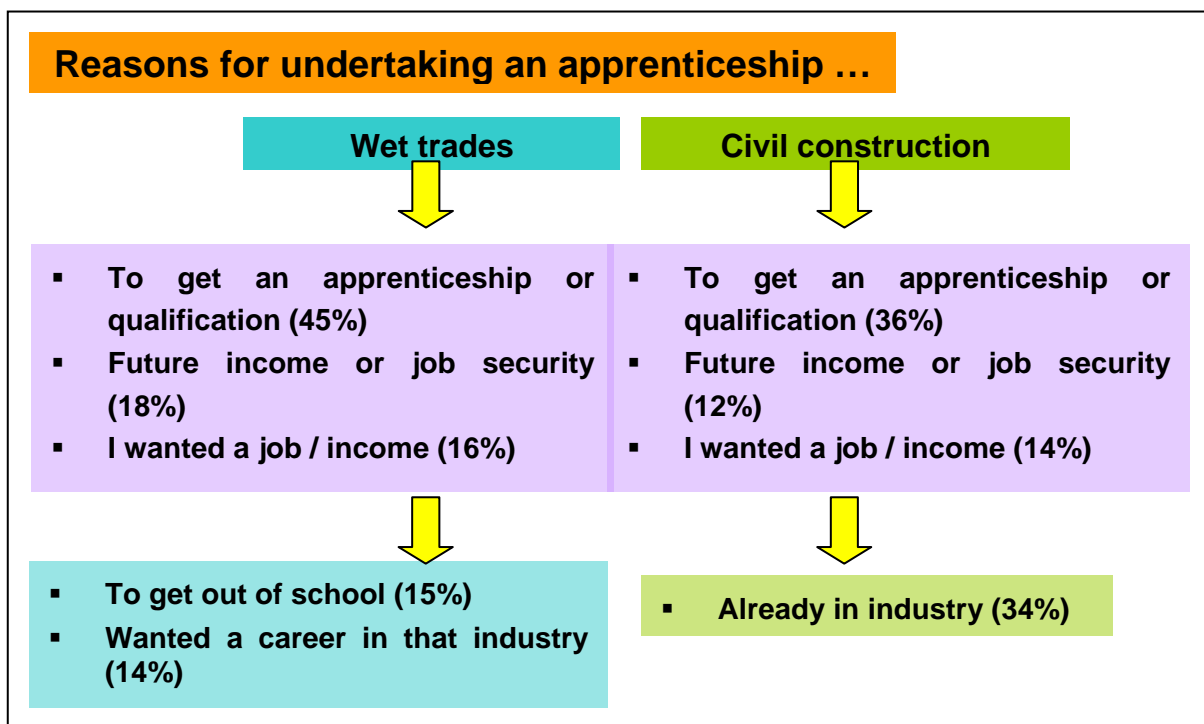
Summary of research findings

There are obvious differences observable between the two samples – wet trades apprentices and civil construction trainees. The executive summary highlights the similarities and differences between the two groups.

1. Reasons given for undertaking the apprenticeship

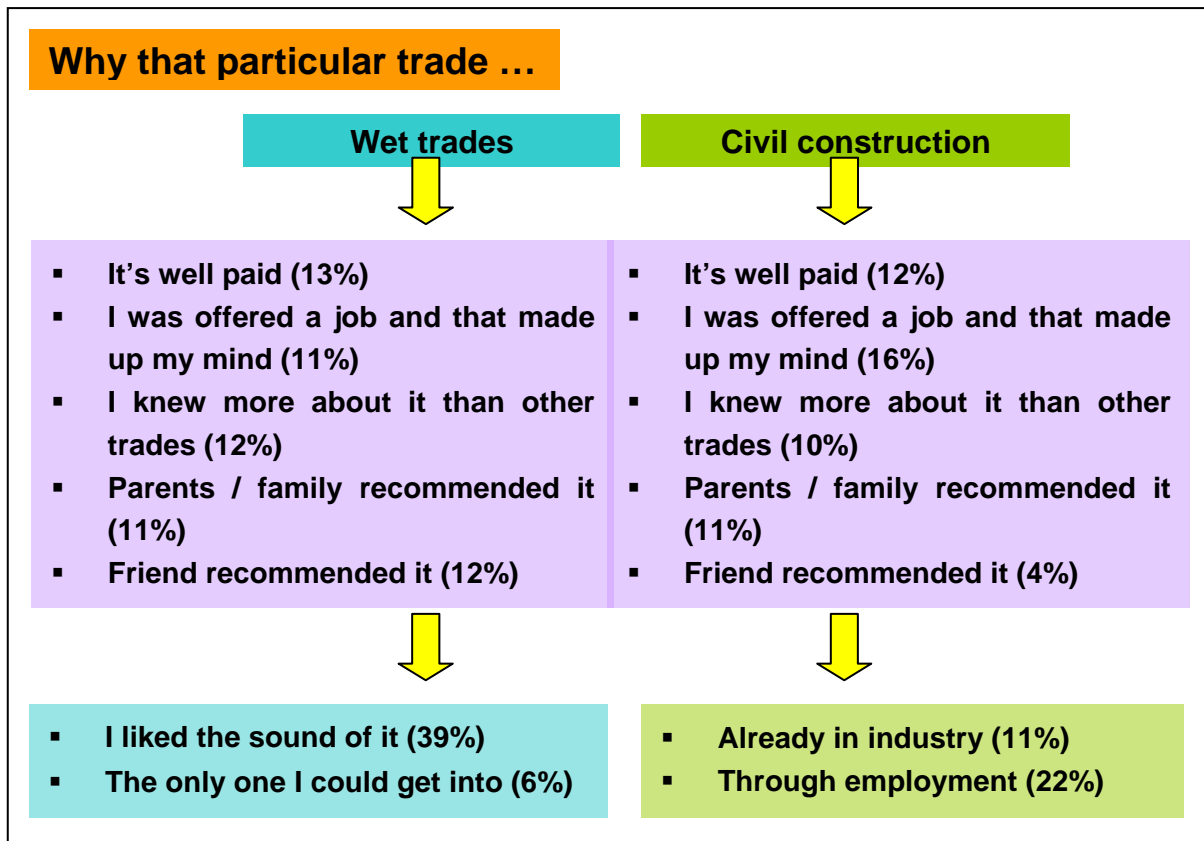
Why they first decided to do an apprenticeship

- ⇒ The two most commonly cited reasons for deciding to do an apprenticeship or traineeship across all respondents were simply to **get an apprenticeship or trade** (22%) or to get a qualification (21%). When sub-totalled, 41% of all respondents said one or the other of these, indicating what a large impetus it is for them to have that formal qualification.
- However, the reasons given for having undertaken an apprenticeship or traineeship were quite different depending on trade, an important finding for this research.



Why they selected that trade over any other

⇒ The main reason for selecting that trade in particular was because of a **personal interest** – they liked the sound of it or were interested in that sort of work with a third (35%) nominating this reason, although this was primarily those in wet trades. Similarities and other differences are shown in the diagram.

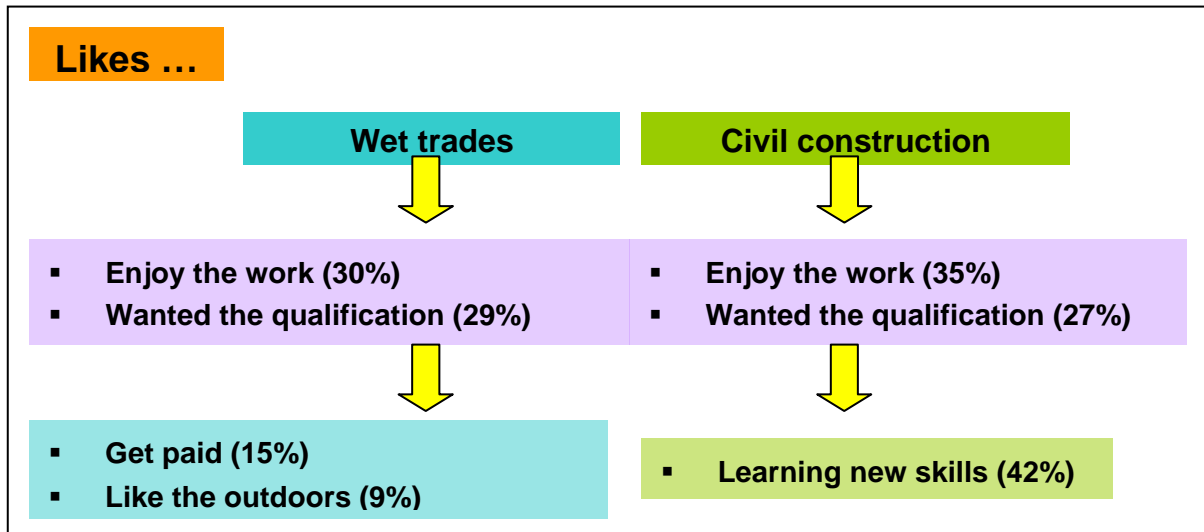


2. Perceptions about the trade

Positive

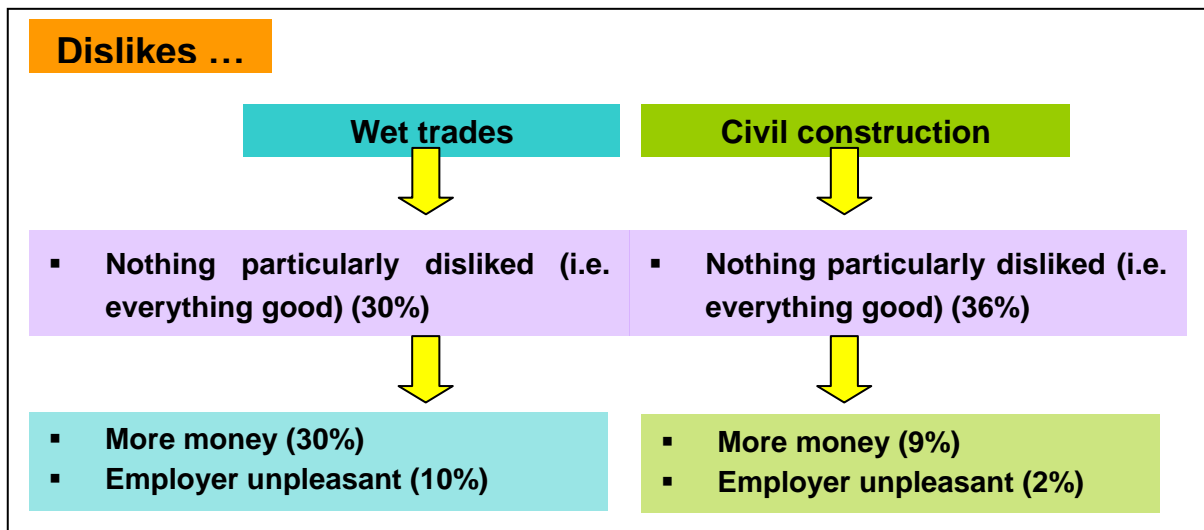
⇒ There were some highly positive perceptions that emerged. The most frequently cited one was that the **work was enjoyable or interesting** (31%), that they **wanted the certificate / qualification / recognition** (28%) or they **enjoyed learning new skills or increasing knowledge** about the job (28%). Not far behind this was that they **wanted to achieve something** (23%).

- Again, although the major perceptions were the same depending on the trade, there were some differences, as can be seen in the diagram on the following page.



Negative

⇒ Although most either felt that everything about it was positive (32%) or could not think of any negative aspects of the trade (12%), a quarter (23%) said that the **money was very poor** (23%). The next most often cited reason was that the **employer or other staff members were unpleasant** (8%).

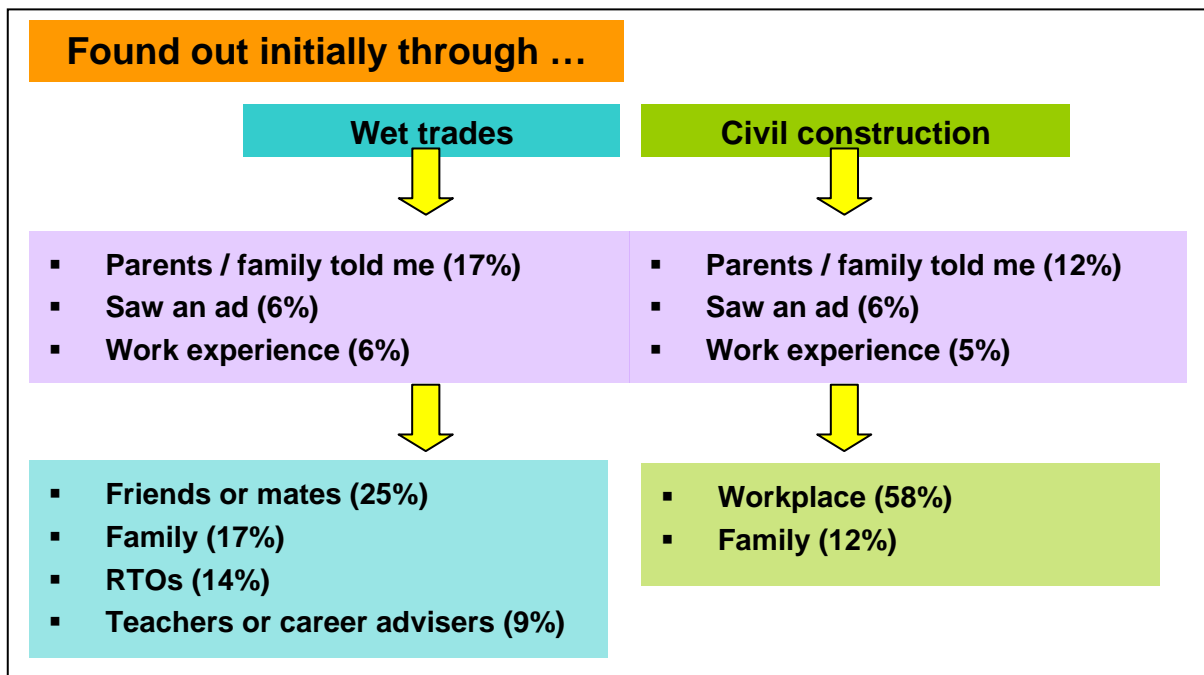


The remuneration was an interesting point – while many apprentices complained about the poor wages, there was an acceptance that this will be for a finite period, and once qualified they will earn more than they otherwise would. This suggests that even though apprentices say that increasing the pay would encourage more to stay on, in reality other more feasible strategies such as accumulating bonus credits to be redeemed for other extra things, may assist in improving the retention rate.

3. Knowledge about the trade course

How they first found out about that trade course

⇒ The most common way in which respondents found out about the particular trade in the first place was through their employer, boss, or the company for which they were already working (24%). Many had been informed through word of mouth, with around one in five respondents (19%) reporting that they had found out through a friend, and a further 15% had been told by parents or another family member.



It would seem that the wet trades are more “obvious” – those not already involved in the industry are more likely to recommend a career in the wet trades than they are in civil construction.

Prior understanding of the trade

⇒ The majority of respondents said they did understand what the trade was all about (76%) whereas only one in ten (12%) said they had not understood.



- A significantly larger proportion of trainees in civil construction (89%) than apprentices in wet trades (69%) said they ***understood the trade before they started***, however this was inevitable because more civil construction trainees had had work experience prior to undertaking the traineeship and in fact had been more likely to have been recruited to the traineeship from their workplace!

Expectations about the apprenticeship

- ⇒ The majority respondents said that the apprenticeship was ***exactly as they had been expecting*** it would be (79%), and a further 7% had worked in the industry previously and from that knew what to expect. Only ten percent felt that only part of it was as they had expected it to be, and half that (4%) found it very different from what they had expected.
- Both wet trade apprentices and civil construction trainees recorded the same degree of congruence in expectation.

Best ways to communicate with apprentices / trainees

- ⇒ The most common suggestion, made by over a quarter of respondents (27%), was to communicate ***through high schools*** including having apprentices or trainees give talks at schools. Other major suggestions were through ***TAFEWA or other training organisations*** (23%), or using ***media*** such as daily newspapers (19%) or more specifically ***television*** (16%), or by using ***online*** methods (15%) or through ***workplaces*** (13%).
- Those in wet trades were significantly more likely than those in civil construction to nominate TAFEWA; whereas those in civil construction were more likely to nominate ***workplaces***.

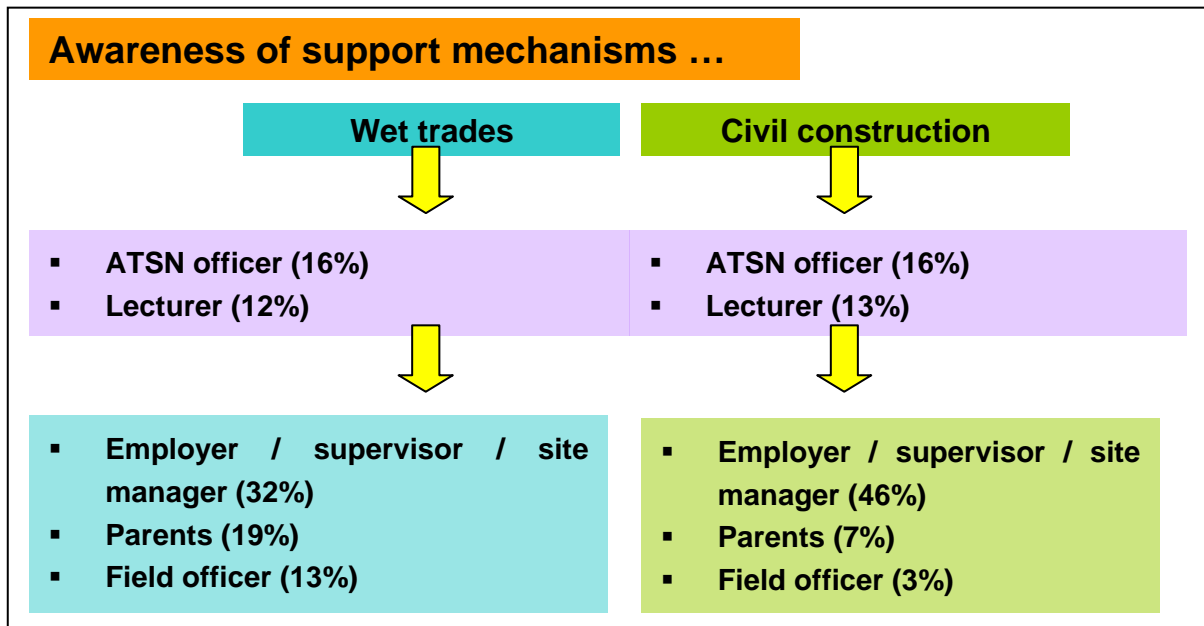
4. Problems encountered and awareness of support mechanisms

Problems encountered

- ⇒ Almost a quarter of respondents who had encountered problems in training (n=48) complained of an ***unsupportive employer*** or being ***hassled by supervisors*** (23%). The next most common reason given was ***bullying*** (19%), issues regarding ***travelling*** (15%), and ***payment*** issues (13%).
- Both wet trades apprentices and civil construction trainees appeared equally as likely to have encountered problems.

Awareness of support mechanisms

⇒ The most frequently mentioned support mechanism was the **employer/ supervisor or site manager** (37%). Other commonly mentioned support mechanisms were the **apprenticeship & traineeship support network officer** (16%), **parents** (15%) or **instructor/ tutor/ lecturer** (13%). One in ten (10%) also mentioned the **field officer**.



5. Reasons for non-completion of apprenticeship

Reasons for non-completion

⇒ Almost a third of those who had dropped out (n=57) overall (32%) said that **they did not get on with their employer** or staff at their workplace, or had experienced some form of bullying. A third of respondents also said that they had not completed their training because of **personal or family reasons** not related to the workplace (32%). Another major reason for withdrawing was that the **wages were too low** (25%).

Suggested ways to help apprentices complete

⇒ The suggestion most frequently made by all respondents about ways to help apprentices and trainees to complete their courses was to increase or **improve the pay** (21%), followed by the suggestion to **shorten the course** (9%), or by increasing support/ help with general **problems** (8%).

6. Addressing the research objectives

How can negative experiences with training programs be minimised?

Since one of the major causes of discontent and drop out amongst those interviewed (regardless of which trade area) were **workplace issues**, attempts to reduce negative experiences will need to include strategies to try to address this. Notably, no employers were interviewed for this research, however past research with employers (on behalf of DET) has suggested that there can be a gap in perceptions between the two parties, as employers are looking for apprentices who are job-ready and able to work hard and some apprentices take time to adjust to what is expected of them. During that period of dissonance the employer-apprentice relationship can deteriorate considerably.

Having said that, some of the apprentices and trainees in this research, and those in several other research projects we have conducted recently, reported that some employers can and do make life difficult for their apprentices.

Even though apprentices and trainees reported knowing about the various support mechanisms, it has become apparent from research (see section 7.2) that ...

- although over a third nominated their **employer** as the main support mechanism, young apprentices or trainees are not really comfortable negotiating with employers and hence may not follow that course of action if a problem were to arise – especially if the problem was related to the worksite
- the younger the apprentice or trainee, the more likely they were to seek help from their **parents**, yet it is known from previous research that parents very often do not know how to help or who to direct their child to – since the vast majority of their information about the apprenticeship comes through their child.

⇒ The important role that **employers** play in achieving a successful outcome for apprentices and trainees cannot be underestimated. BCITF could perhaps consider utilising its relationship with employers to better educate them about the ideal apprentice/trainee-employer relationship, emphasising to them the financial benefits of attaining successful apprenticeship or traineeship outcomes, or allocating some/more of the funding based on successful completion of the apprenticeship or traineeship.

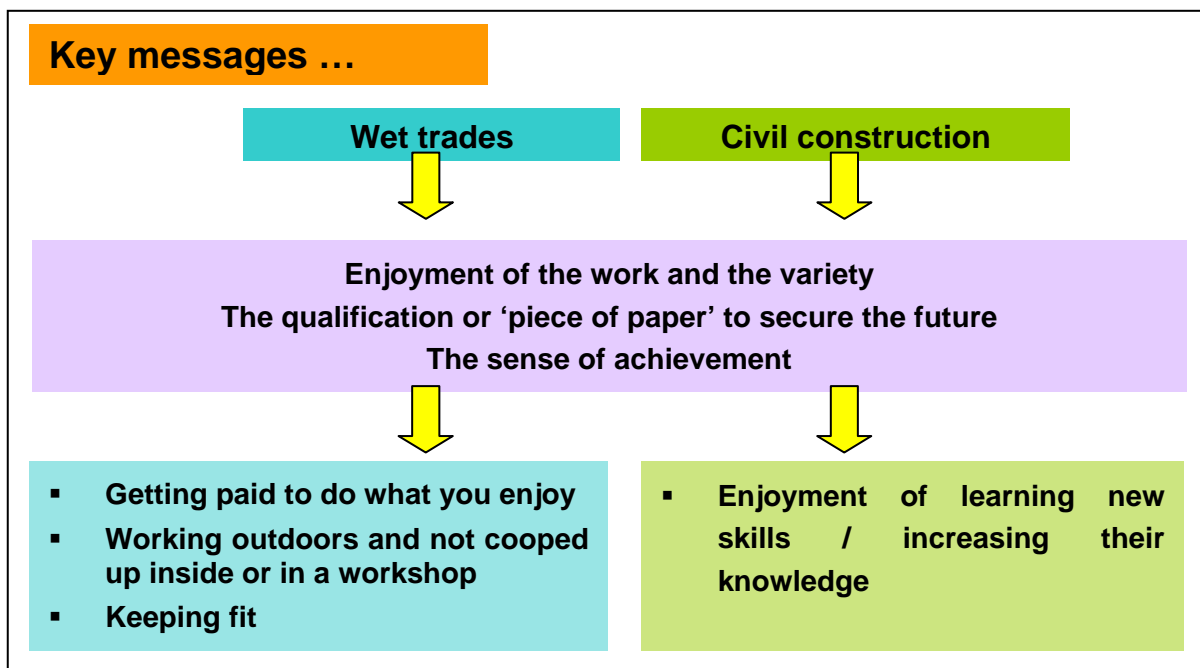
⇒ With regard to **parents**, equipping them with the knowledge about the legal aspects and how the apprenticeship or traineeship operates, and providing them with information about the sources of support or aid that their child can access, may help them to better guide their child when support is needed.

How can BCITF leverage the positive aspects of wet trades and civil construction to attract more suitable candidates?

Both the quantitative and qualitative research indicates that it is the desire for the 'piece of paper' that is a key force driving many of the apprentices and trainees who persevere with their apprenticeships or traineeships, however, of equal importance was the enjoyment of the work. In the discussion groups apprentices and trainees indicated that their enjoyment derived from a number of sources ...

- ***Finding something they liked doing*** – some reported having tried a couple of options before settling into their current apprenticeship
- The ***camaraderie of their work team*** (fellow-workers and the employer) – “bullying” notwithstanding
- The ***feeling of achievement*** – seeing something that you have created (more often mentioned by wet trade apprentices not civil construction trainees)
- The ***variety of work*** – working on many different sites all over the city
- ***Learning new skills*** – continuing to learn new and better ways of doing things from different employers and tradespeople in the same field mean that apprentices and trainees felt they were continually learning, and a growing appreciation that there was a lot to learn

Thus key messages might include the following ...



Several of the wet trade apprentices mentioned in discussion that they were seen as “useful” and “valuable” by their friends and family because they had practical and useful skills that could be utilised to advantage i.e. building fences or BBQs or tiling, etc.

“They love it – you can do work for them.”

Several others mentioned that they themselves wanted to be able to build their own house at some time in the future. Thus for the wet trades the **benefits seem to be more tangible and visible**, whereas for those in civil construction the outcomes related to **less-visible, but nonetheless important, infrastructure for posterity (perhaps)**.

What is the best way of communicating with suitable apprentices?

Marketing strategy

There are at least two approaches to consider in developing strategies to increase uptake of apprenticeships and traineeships:

1. to attract more of the same or
2. to tap into new sources.

It is important for both these approaches to first understand where apprentices and trainees come from, as it was apparent from the research that those currently in wet trade apprenticeships and those in civil construction traineeships found out about them in different ways, as shown previously (see point 3 in this section).

The simplest approach for both is to attempt to bring them closer together by adopting the sources that have been most successful in the other trade, as per the table below.

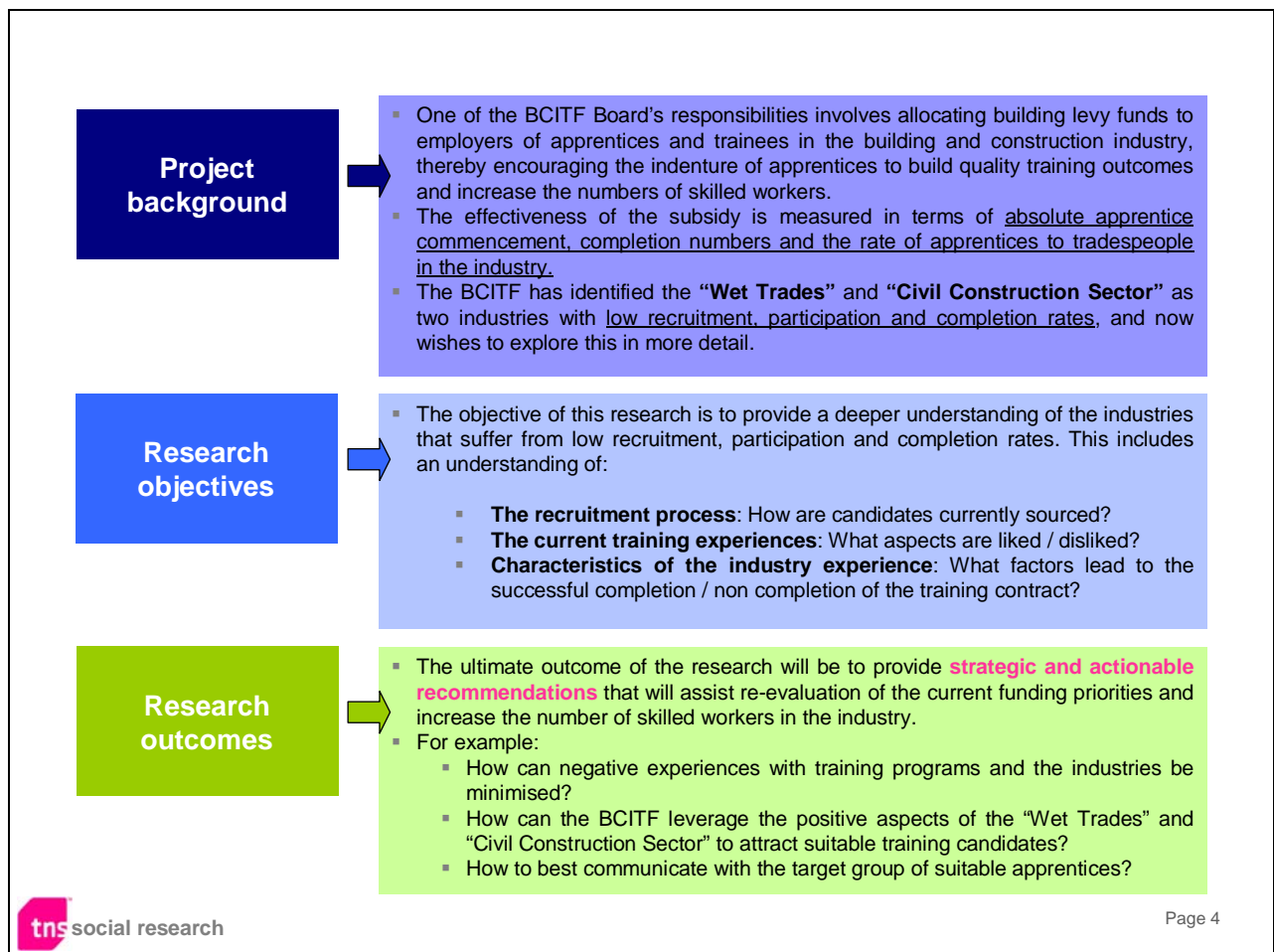
	Wet trades	Civil construction
More of the same	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friends or mates ▪ Family ▪ RTOs ▪ Teachers or career advisers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workplace ▪ Family
New sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Friends or mates ▪ RTOs ▪ Teachers or career advisers

<p>Strategies to consider in order to <u>attract new</u></p>	<p>Workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to promote the benefits to sub-contractors of taking on apprentices and trainees ▪ Ask employers to encourage their un-ticketed labourers to complete an apprenticeship or traineeship in order to gain the 'piece of paper' <p>Friends or mates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage or consider giving incentives to existing apprentices and trainees to bring a mate to the trade ▪ Use real apprentices and trainees to talk to younger potentials at career expos etc. <p>RTOs / Group Training Schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek out and assist with the promotion of RTOs that offer civil construction training or apprenticeships <p>Teachers or career advisers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform career advisers about the numerous opportunities that are available in civil construction <p>Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some parents still need convincing that a trade is a good thing for their child to be undertaking as some still have the perception that university is the better path. Publicity around the recent skills shortages may encourage parents to open their minds to the trades for their children
<p>Strategies to consider in order to <u>retain existing</u></p>	<p>Workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Because the research shows that wet trades apprentices are more likely than civil construction trainees to drop-out due to <i>poor wages</i>, inform employers of the financial benefits to them of retaining their apprentices and trainees for longer and suggest appropriate ways for them to reward their apprentices and trainees ▪ Continue to foster more wholesome workplaces that minimise the culture of bullying or harassment, no matter how 'innocent' <p>Friends or mates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to educate apprentices and trainees about who to talk to if they, or their colleagues, run into problems ▪ Continue to encourage support officers to engage regularly with apprentices and trainees <p>RTOs / Group Training Schemes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group training organisations effectively act as intermediaries between the two parties of an apprenticeship or traineeship agreement, and so also have an important role to play in a successful outcome. Consider negotiating with these agencies to develop incentives for them to better "match" apprentices and trainees with employers, and encourage them to work with employers to develop a "code of practice" for the good management of apprentices and trainees <p>Parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Since parents are a major source of support, engaging them in the apprenticeship or traineeship process may assist. Consideration could be given to developing some 'trouble-shooting' resource materials specifically for parents in order to help them advise their child in the case problems arise

1. Background & research objectives

The project background and research objectives are shown in figure 1, as described in the proposal.

Figure 1. Project background and objectives



2. Methodology

The research was conducted in two phases: first a survey was undertaken with apprentices / trainees during which, those contacted were asked whether they might want to take part in the following phase of qualitative research in the form of focus group discussions.

The methodology and procedure for each phase is described in more detail in the following sections.

2.1. Quantitative research

A telephone survey was undertaken amongst n=300 apprentices and trainees.

2.1.1 Sampling procedure

TNS were provided with a sample list of apprentices / trainees by Department of Training (DET). The officer from DET advised that the names included in the list were extracted by them from their full database.

As it transpired, there were more apprentices / trainees in their database than BCITF were aware of and so in order to reduce the number of letters, DET had drawn a sample from their total apprentice / trainee database by first restricting to the previous two years. As there were still too many cases, the records were then sorted by status (i.e. active, pending, cancelled, withdrawn or completed) and then the numbers for each category were reduced until there was only n=1068 remaining¹. These 1068 apprentices / trainees were then sent an advance letter advising them of the survey and giving them the opportunity to withdraw.

Subsequent analysis of the sample revealed that some of the trades required were not present in the sample and after further negotiations with the Department a second sample of n=147 records was provided containing apprentices and trainees from bridge construction and maintenance (level 3), concreting (level 3), drainage (level 2), plant operations (level 3) and road construction and maintenance (level 3) trades. Advance letters were then sent to these additional apprentices / trainees and they too were given the opportunity to withdraw from the survey.

In total, 1215 records were provided by Department of Education and Training. On receipt by TNSSR the two files were combined and 'cleaned' by:

- Removing all those with no phone numbers (as the survey was to be conducted by telephone, those with no telephone numbers were not viable contacts)
- Removing duplicates

¹ As explained by the person from the Department of Education and Training who had drawn the sample, on 13th July 2006.

Table 1. Size of final sample resulting from combination of two lists

	Sample 1	Sample 2
Sample provided	1068	147
No telephone numbers	104	28
Duplicate names	21	2
Extra duplicates when 2 lists combined	21	
TOTAL REMAINING	1039	

The final sample structure from which the survey was conducted is shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Trade areas and numbers included in the sample

Trade area	Number
Bricklaying	478
Bridge construction	1
Civil construction - plant (level 3)	40
Civil construction (level 2)	87
Civil construction (level 3)	11
Concreting (level 3)	7
Drainage (level 2)	26
Pipelaying (level 3)	10
Plant operations (level 3)	57
Plastering	149
Road Construction (level 3)	17
Wall & Ceiling fix	139
Wall & Ceiling fix (housing)	17
TOTAL SAMPLE PROVIDED BY DET	1039

It was reported to BCITF that the sample did not contain apprentices / trainees from tile laying trade, and that in addition to this, it appeared that there may have been some 'levels' missing, for example, the sample contained no concreting (level 2), pipelaying (level 2) or drainage (level 3), etc. At that time, BCITF made the decision to proceed with the survey amongst those apprentices / trainees contained within the sample provide by DET².

From that starting point, a total of 7 apprentices / trainees contacted TNSSR to have their names taken out of the sample, further reducing the sampled population to n=1032.

² *While not an ideal sample, as some groups appear to be excluded, it was deemed impractical and costly to try to obtain a more complete list of apprentices / trainees from DET.*

2.1.2 Fieldwork dates

The final sample was then forwarded to the field agency and the interviewing commenced on Wednesday 2nd August, 2006. The survey was then 'in field' until 15th August.

2.1.3 Incentives

An incentive of a chance to win 4 prize draws of \$250 were offered for participation in the survey and a \$50 Coles Myer voucher was offered to each person selected to take part in the scheduled focus group discussions.

2.2. Qualitative research

Qualitative research in the form of focus groups was held with active and non-active apprentices and trainees.

Originally it was intended to structure the groups so that there would be 2 groups of 'active' and 2 groups of 'non-active' participants, and the groups were to be held in West Perth. However, it was found in attempting to recruit participants that the intended location was a deterrent and therefore alternative locations were found. In the end, two groups were held in Fremantle (at the Esplanade Hotel) and two groups were held in Scarborough (at the Rendezvous Hotel).

A further difficulty with the recruitment of suitable participants was in attaining numbers for the 'non-active' group. 'Non-actives' were defined as those who had withdrawn or been suspended from their apprenticeship / traineeship. It was found that this group of ex-apprentices / trainees were less interested in taking part in the research, and therefore fewer could be convinced to attend than for the 'active' group, so the 'non-active' groups were supplemented with extra 'actives'. In addition, as it turned out, they were more likely to not attend the group also, with the result that the two 'non-active' groups were less well-attended than the 'active' groups.

In the end, four groups were held and in total, nineteen people attended.

The groups were held on 11th and 14th of September, the first commencing at 6pm followed by the second at 7.45pm.

2.2.1 Incentives

Each participant was given a \$50 Coles/Myer voucher for taking part in the qualitative research.

2.3. Reporting note

Sub-group analysis

The data have been analysed by various demographic variables such as age and other variables such as 'status' and 'trade area' and 'previous work experience', etc. Where differences that are statistically significant are seen, these are commented on in the text. Other variations are not noted. The reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis of each question by these variables.

'Respondents' versus 'participants'

As is normal practice, when discussing the results for those who took part in the quantitative research, the word 'respondent' is used, whereas when relating findings from the qualitative research, the term 'participant' is used.

Apprenticeships versus traineeships

While this research incorporated both apprentices and trainees, for brevity, throughout the text those who took part are referred to as apprentices and the trade courses are referred to as apprenticeships. In the qualitative research all participants confirmed that they identified with the term 'apprentice' regardless of whether technically they were actually 'trainees'.

RESULTS

3. Profile of apprentices / trainees in the research

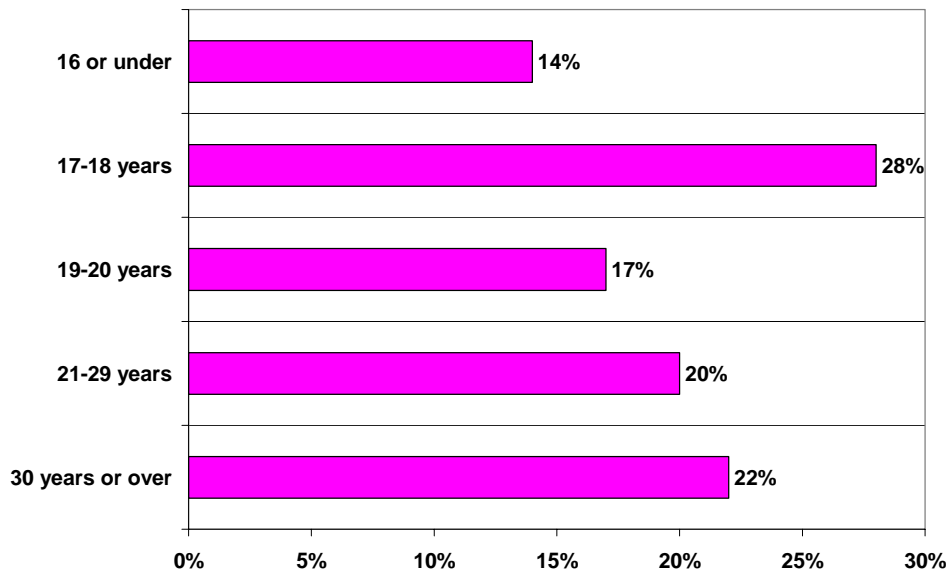
3.1. Quantitative research

The profile of those who took part in the survey is discussed in this section.

3.1.1 Age group

Figure 2 below shows the age of respondents.

Figure 2. Age groups



Base: all respondents, n=300

Q18. In which of the following age groups are you?

As can be seen from the figure over half of respondents were under the age of twenty one (59%). Interestingly, one in five respondents (22%) was aged 30 years or older.

Sub-group differences (not shown in figure)

- **As age increased, so too did the propensity to be enrolled in civil construction trades** such that very few in the civil construction trade were aged 16 or under, whereas over half (59%) were aged 30. The reverse was true of the wet trades; i.e. those in that trade area tended to be younger, as can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Age by trade area

Age	Wet trades	Civil construction
16 or under	19%	2%
17-18	36%	11%
19-20	20%	10%
21-29	21%	18%
30+	4%	59%
TOTAL	100%	100%

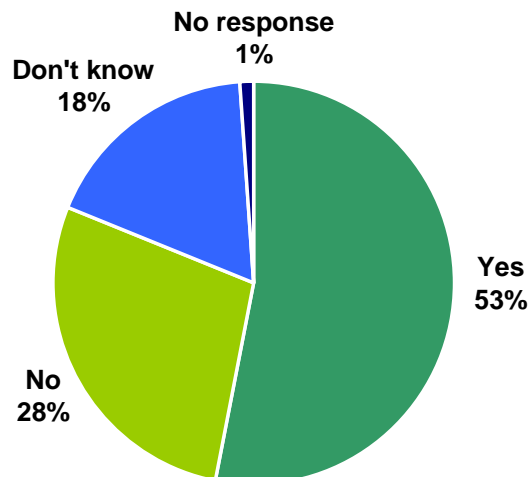
- Not unexpectedly, the older group (i.e. those aged 30+) were significantly more likely to have **had work experience** (32%) than most other age groups, and conversely those aged 16 or under, as well as those aged 21-29 were least likely to have had work experience (19% and 25% respectively).

The reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis by sub-group.

3.1.2 Group training scheme

Those who were in a group training scheme are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Group training scheme



Base: all respondents n= 300

Q5 Are / were you with a Group Training Scheme (while you were doing your apprenticeship/traineeship)?

Approximately half (53%) of the respondents interviewed were or had been with a Group Training Scheme during their apprenticeship.

Sub-group differences (not shown in figure)

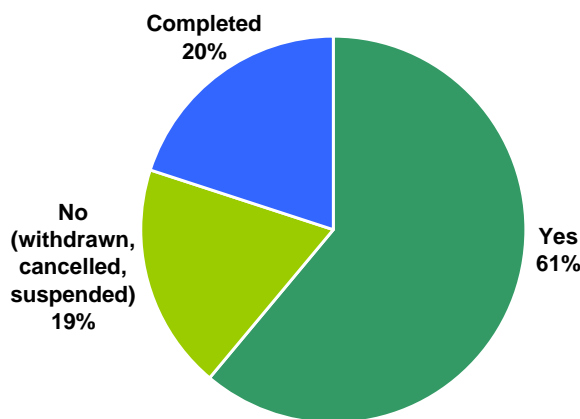
Respondents **aged between 19-20** years were less likely to have been with a Group Training Scheme (38%) than were either the younger or older age groups (all over 50%).

There were no other notable variations evident however the reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis by sub-group.

3.1.3 Current status

Respondents were asked whether they were currently enrolled in or working towards an apprenticeship. Results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Current enrolment



Base: all respondents, n=300.

Q1a. Are you currently enrolled in or working towards an apprenticeship/ traineeship?

The majority of respondents (three in five) were still enrolled in or working towards an apprenticeship at the time of the research (61%). A further one in five had completed their apprenticeship. The final one in five (19%) were no longer enrolled i.e. had withdrawn, cancelled or been suspended from their apprenticeship.

Sub-group differences (not shown in figure)

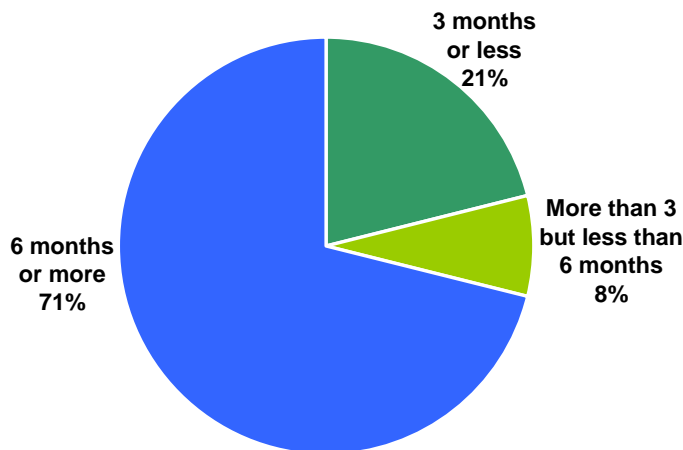
- Those who were currently enrolled were significantly more likely to be **in a group training scheme** than were those who were no longer enrolled (65% versus 42% respectively).
- Those who were currently enrolled were significantly more likely to say that the **training was as they expected** than were those who were no longer enrolled (64% versus 45% respectively).
- Not surprisingly, a significantly higher proportion of **respondents who had experienced problems** during training had ceased training (42%) compared to respondents who had not experienced any problems while training (15%).

The reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis by sub-group.

Different questions were then asked of each of these respondent types to attain further information about their status.

Those who said they were no longer enrolled (i.e. were suspended, had withdrawn or had their apprenticeship cancelled and those who had already completed) were then asked how long it had been since they had ceased the apprenticeship. The results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. How long since stopped or completed apprenticeship



Base: not currently enrolled in an apprenticeship/traineeship (n=117)

Q1b How long has it since you stopped doing / completed your apprenticeship/ traineeship?

Of those who were not currently enrolled in or working towards an apprenticeship, the majority (71%) had ceased or had been completed for 6 months or more.

There were no meaningful variations by sub-group however the reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis by sub-group.

3.1.4 Trade areas of respondents

An analysis of the trade areas of those who took part in the research is shown in Table 4. The two columns at the right show the entire sample (i.e. those who were currently enrolled as well as those who were not), while the two columns at the left show further detail for those who were not currently enrolled (i.e. those who were suspended or withdrawn (n=57) and those who had already completed (n=60)).

Table 4. Trade areas of respondents

	<i>Withdrawn/ suspended/ Cancelled (n=57)</i>	<i>Completed (n=60)</i>	<i>Not currently enrolled (n=117)</i>	<i>Currently enrolled (n=183)</i>
Wet trades	75%	37%	56%	75%
<i>Wall and ceiling fix</i>	14%	8%	11%	17%
<i>Plastering</i>	14%	8%	11%	25%
<i>Bricklaying</i>	47%	20%	33%	34%
Civil construction	25%	63%	44%	25%
<i>Road construction</i>	4%	20%	12%	3%
<i>Drainage</i>	7%	13%	10%	4%
<i>Plant operations</i>	5%	12%	9%	5%
<i>Engineering/ General construction</i>	2%	5%	3%	1%
<i>Maintenance</i>	-	5%	3%	1%
<i>Railway construction</i>	-	3%	2%	2%
<i>Earth moving</i>	-	3%	2%	3%
<i>Carpentry/ joinery/ roof carpentry</i>	-	3%	2%	2%
<i>Tunnel construction</i>	-	2%	1%	1%
<i>Concreting</i>	2%	-	1%	2%
<i>Electrical</i>	2%	-	1%	
<i>Pipe laying</i>	-	2%	1%	1%
<i>Civil</i>	-	2%	1%	2%
<i>Mining</i>	2%	-	1%	-
<i>Mechanic/ Automotive</i>	2%	-	1%	-
<i>Surveying</i>	-	2%	1%	-
<i>Trench technology / underground construction</i>	-	-	-	1%
TOTALS	100%	100%	100%	100%

Base: All respondents n=300

Q1c In what trade area was your apprenticeship/ traineeship?

Q4 In what trade area are you doing your apprenticeship/ traineeship?

In terms of those currently enrolled – the vast majority were in the wet trades (75%) rather than in civil construction (25%).

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- The **older group** of respondents (aged 30+) were significantly more likely to be in civil construction than in the wet trades (94% versus 6%). The reverse was true for every other age group, with vastly more of the younger apprentices in wet trades than in civil construction.

The reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed analysis by sub-group.

For those who were not currently enrolled in an apprenticeship, just over half (56%) had been enrolled in a wet trade compared with 44% who had been in civil construction.

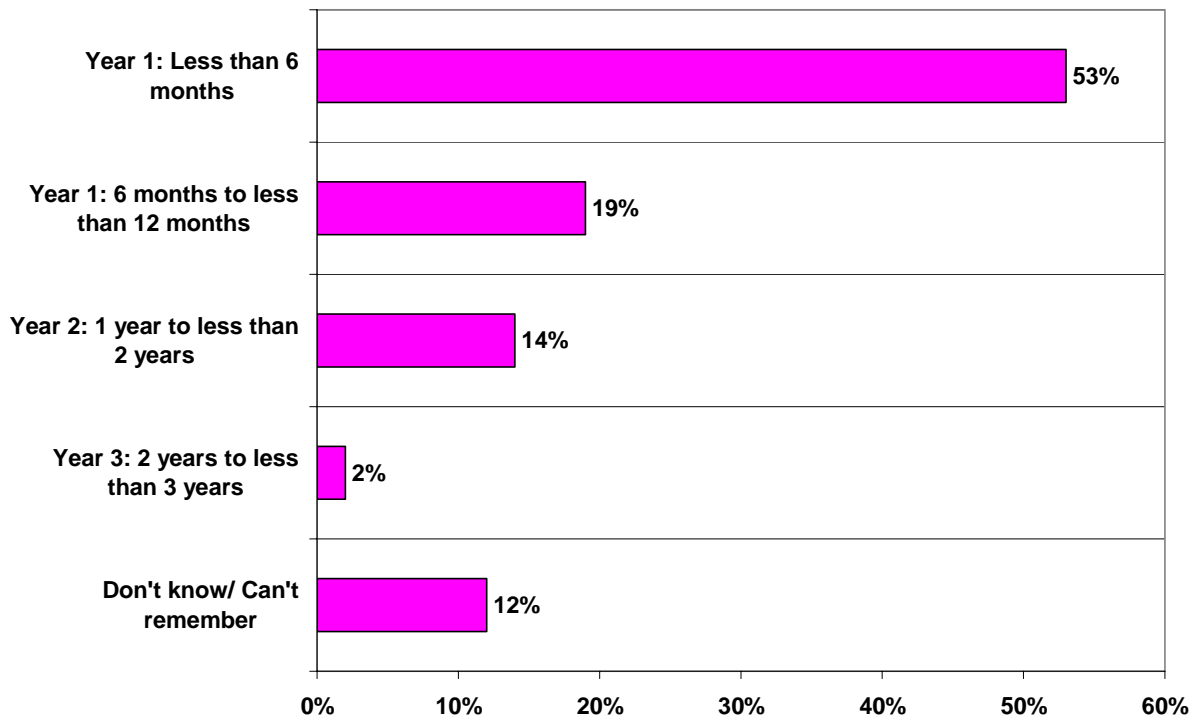
Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- Looking in more detail at those not currently enrolled, those who had ceased their apprenticeship or traineeship, were more likely to have been from the wet trades (75%) than civil construction (25%), whereas the reverse can be observed amongst those who had completed their apprenticeship. In that group more were likely to have completed a civil construction traineeship (63%) than a wet trade (37%).

WITHDRAWN, SUSPENDED OR CANCELLED

Figure 6 illustrates the breakdown of how long those who had withdrawn, suspended or cancelled their training had been training.

Figure 6. How much of training completed



Base: withdrawn, suspended, cancelled n=57

Q3. How much of your apprenticeship/ traineeship did you complete?

Of those respondents who had withdrawn, the majority had done so within the first 6 months (53%).

Because of the small sample size for some sub-groups, detailed analysis is not possible.

NOT CURRENTLY ENROLLED

Respondents who were not currently enrolled in or working towards an apprenticeship (i.e. had either completed or ceased) were asked whether they were still employed in the trade area of their apprenticeship / traineeship (Q1d). Most indicated that they were still employed in the trade or the same area of training (64%), although 34% said they were no longer working in that trade area and 2% said they were not working at all.

Sub-group differences

- Those who **had completed** were significantly more likely to still be employed in the trade area of their training than were those who were no longer enrolled (88% versus 39% respectively).
- There was also some indication (significant at the 90% level) that **those who had done a pre-apprenticeship** were more likely to still be employed in the trade area of their training than were those who had not done a pre-apprenticeship (74% versus 59% respectively).
- In a similar vein, those who said they had **understood what to expect** when they entered training were significantly more likely to still be employed in the trade area of their training than were those who had not known what to expect (71% versus 35%).
- Not surprisingly, **those who had encountered no problems during their training** were also significantly more likely to be still employed in the same trade than those who had encountered problems (72% versus 36% respectively).

3.1.5 Prior work experience

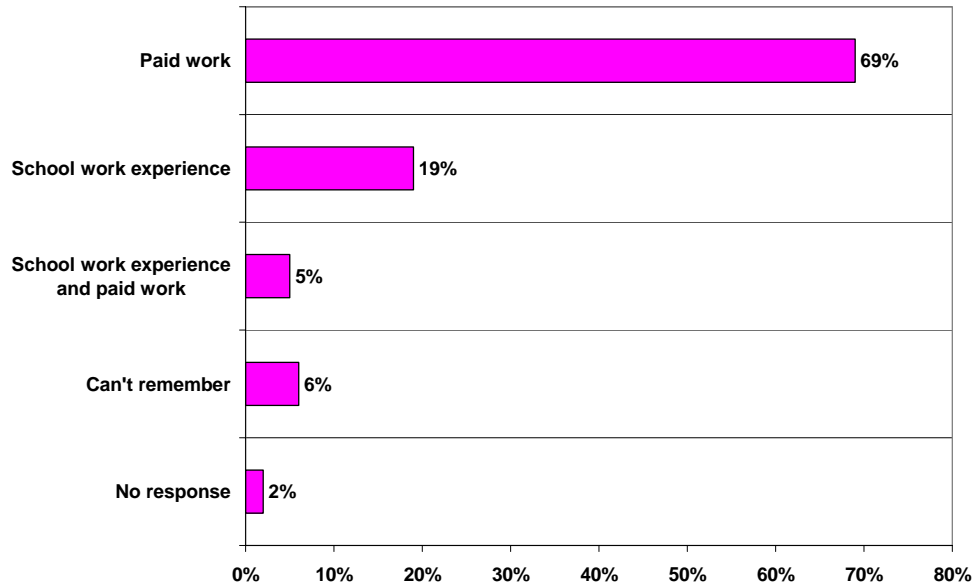
Respondents were also asked whether they had had any work experience prior to starting their apprenticeship / traineeship. There was an almost even distribution between respondents who had previous experience in similar work before starting the apprenticeship (52%) compared to those who had not (48%).

Sub-group differences

- A larger proportion of respondents within **civil construction** (67%) had had previous experience, compared to respondents from wet trades (45%).
- Of note, a significantly smaller proportion of respondents who had dropped-out (38%) had had previous experience in similar work, compared with **those who had completed their apprenticeship** (63%). Fifty three percent of those who were still undertaking their training had also done some prior work experience.
- Interestingly, **those who had encountered no problems during their training** were more likely to have undertaken prior work experience than those who had experienced problems (55% versus 40% respectively).
- About the same proportion of **those who had done a pre-apprenticeship** as had experience from other sources had undertaken prior work experience (49% versus 53% respectively).

Those who had undertaken work experience were then asked what type of work experience it had been. Results are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Type of experience prior to apprenticeship / traineeship



Base: Had prior experience doing similar work, n=157.
Q8b. Was that school work experience or paid work?

Of those who had undertaken prior work experience, just over two thirds were paid for it (69%) compared with one in five (19%) who did it as part of a school work experience. A small proportion (5%) indicated they had done both paid and school work experience.

Sub-group differences (not shown in the figure)

- **Civil construction trainees were more likely (77%)** than wet trade apprentices (64%) to have undertaken paid work experience. [Significant at the 90% level]. Conversely, a significantly larger proportion of apprentices from the **wet trades** (24%) than from civil construction (11%) had undertaken school work experience.
- Those who said **they had understood the trade before they started** were significantly more likely to have undertaken paid work experience (73%) than were those who said **they had not understood** (56%). This indicates that, not unexpectedly, paid work experience contributes more to the perception of “understanding” than does school work experience.
- Of those who had undertaken previous school work experience, a larger proportion was significantly more likely to say they had **done a pre-apprenticeship** (29%) than not (15%).
- More of those who had **done a pre-apprenticeship** (29%) than had not done a pre-apprenticeship (15%) indicated that they had undertaken previous school work experience, showing that the bulk of pre-apprenticeships were school-based.

All respondents were asked whether they had done a pre-apprenticeship, and only a quarter (26%) said they had.

Sub-group differences

- More respondents in **wet trades** (35%) had done a pre-apprenticeship compared to those in civil construction (7%).
- Unlike those who had previous work experience in similar areas, those who had done a pre-apprenticeship did not necessarily understand the trade before they started any better than those who had not. Twenty-four percent of respondents who had done a pre-apprenticeship said they **understood the trade** before they started compared to almost a third (31%) of respondents who said they only partly understood or did not understand at all.

3.2. Qualitative research

A range of trades were represented in the four groups, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Trade areas of qualitative research participants

Trade area	Number
Bricklaying	9
Civil construction - general	1
Drainage	2
Plastering	3
Railway construction / earthworks	1
Wall & Ceiling fix	1
Plant operations	2
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	19

Most of those who took part were still engaged in their apprenticeship / traineeship.

While most of the attendees were at the younger end of the spectrum, there were a number of participants who were aged 30 or over.

4. Reasons for undertaking apprenticeship

4.1. Reasons for first undertaking apprenticeship

All respondents were asked why they had first decided to undertake an apprenticeship. Their first mentioned response was recorded first to ascertain what was most salient, and then all the other reasons mentioned were recorded. The most common *first* mentions were:

- To get a qualification (13%)
- Through employment / Already in industry / Part of their job (11%)
- To get an apprenticeship / trade (9%)
- To get out of school / Got kicked out of school (9%)
- Wanted a job/ income (8%).

Total mentions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Reasons for undertaking apprenticeship – total mentions

Reasons for undertaking apprenticeship – total mentions			
Reason for undertaking	% who gave reason	Reason for undertaking	% who gave reason
To get an apprenticeship/ trade	22%	Parents/ family wanted me to/ made me/ suggested it	9%
To get a qualification	21%	To get some skills, training/ Thought trade would be useful	8%
Future income/ job security	16%	Someone offered me a job in the area	7%
I wanted a job/ income	16%	Wanted to work outside	7%
Through employment/ Already in industry/ Part of job	12%	A mate/ friend suggested it	7%
To get out of school/ Got kicked out of school	11%	I had done some work experience in the area	6%
I enjoy the type of work	10%	To earn some money	4%
I wanted a career in that industry	10%		

Base: all respondents, n=300

Column totals exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Q6: Why did you first decide to do an apprenticeship / traineeship? What sparked your interest?

The two most commonly cited reasons for deciding to do an apprenticeship / traineeship across all respondents were simply to get an apprenticeship or trade (22%) or 'to get a qualification' (21%). When sub-totalled, 41% of all respondents said one or the other of these, indicating what a huge impetus it is for them to have that formal qualification.

Other common reasons were for the future income / job security (16%) or simply because they wanted a job or income (16%).

Sub-group differences

Several differences were noted by trade area.

- Those in wet trades were more likely than were those in civil construction to say **to get an apprenticeship or trade** (28% versus 10% respectively) or **to get out of school** (15% versus 4% respectively) or **they wanted a career in that industry** (14% versus 2% respectively).
- Those in civil construction were more likely than wet trades to say they had come to it **through employment** or previous work (34% versus 1% respectively).
- Interestingly the need to **get a qualification** increases with age, such that only 10% of those aged 16 or under mentioned this, increasing gradually up to 30% of those aged 30 or more.
- The 21-29 year olds were most focused compared to other age groups on **future income concerns** (32%).

There were no other consistent, significant variations between sub-groups.

Qualitative research

Reasons for undertaking the apprenticeship

Overall, apprentices in the discussion groups largely confirmed the findings of the survey by most often stating when asked about their main motivation for undertaking an apprenticeship, that it was the **qualification** that was their primary driver ...

“To get the piece of paper ...”

There was also a suggestion by some that they saw the apprenticeship as an interim career as they expected to try other things.

“Do something else and then come back to it ...”

For a few, the alternative career might simply have been to become their own boss by becoming a sub-contractor with their own team of workers (almost exclusively wet trade apprentices) or for others to later progress into being a supervisor.

However, even though pursuing this alternate pathway might have been an intention, the ‘piece of paper’ or ‘qualification’ from their trade was seen as a form of insurance, in case they ever needed to return ...

“Something to fall back on ...”

So that if that alternative career did not work out, the thought that they always had the capacity to be able to return to their qualification i.e. being a “brickie” and go back to working as part of a team, was reassuring.

This formal qualification that could be attained seemed to be the thing that helped some of them to weigh up the pros and cons of their apprenticeship – i.e. to help them assess whether it was worth them sticking around or not, especially if things got tough. This was also reflected in what apprentices said they would advise someone who was thinking of doing an apprenticeship in the same trade as them – to focus on the end point and not the voyage. They said things like:

“Whatever problems you encounter – just get through them because it will be worth it in the end ...”

“You might just have to put up with the first few years but it will be alright in the end ...”

Qualitative research

Reasons for undertaking the apprenticeship...

Another frequently mentioned reason was that the apprenticeship would allow them to **work outside** and / or in **different locations**. At least one apprentice had been intending to become a mechanic and had gone to a workshop for their work experience or pre-apprenticeship, only to find that they did not like it.

Several of the apprentices in the groups said they were **asked to do the traineeship or apprenticeship by their employer**. However, in at least one of those cases gaining the qualification was still a major consideration in the decision to do so.

"I've been driving machinery for the same company for years. But I have no papers – I can't go anywhere else ..."

This suggests that it may well be that getting a qualification is a particularly pertinent impetus even when the apprenticeship has been the employer's idea.

Other reasons given by participants in the discussion groups were the **challenge to continue learning ...**

"I learn something new every day even though I have been working for years..."

...and to **circumvent the requirement to Work for the Dole**.

In terms of why they chose one trade over another – the primary driver was **their interest in that trade**.

"Life is what you make it. Need a challenge to keep you interested and increase your knowledge. It's not always about money..."

Most of the apprentices in the groups were adamant that in undertaking an apprenticeship a person had to be doing **something they liked** because otherwise they would have a hard time making a success of it.

"It depends on what they enjoy doing the most because that's the most important thing..."

"You must enjoy what you're doing otherwise you will end up resenting it."

4.2. Reasons for picking this trade over another

All respondents were asked why they had chosen that particular trade over any other. The most common *first* mentions offered by respondents were:

- I liked the sound of this trade / it interested me (27%)
- I was offered a job in this trade and that made up my mind (9%)
- My parents recommended it / family members in trade (9%)
- Through employment / already done some work in this trade (7%)
- It is well-paid (7%)

The total mentions across all respondents are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Reason for picking particular trade – total mentions

Reasons for picking this trade – total mentions			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
I liked the sound of this trade/ It interested me	35%	A shortage of qualified workers in trade/ Knew I'd get a job	7%
It is well-paid ³	13%	Was already working in industry	4%
I was offered a job in this trade and that made up my mind	13%	Nothing else appealed/ Other trades sounded boring	4%
I knew more about it than other trades/ Don't know others	11%	I didn't choose - the only one I could get into at the time	4%
My parents recommended it/ Family members in the trade	11%	Don't know/ Can't think of anything	3%
A friend recommended it	9%	Easier than other trades/ No maths/ Easy to get into	3%
Through employment/ Already done some work in this trade	8%		

Base: all respondents, n=300

Column totals exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Q12: Why did you (initially) choose to do this particular trade over another trade?

³ Based on the answers to other questions and the information provided in the discussion groups, it is assumed that apprentices at this time were thinking of their future potential earnings, rather than current earnings.

The most commonly cited reason for choosing that particular trade over any other trade was because they **liked the sound of it** or were interested by it (35%). Other common reasons, although much less often cited, were because it is **well-paid**, or they were **offered a job in this trade** (both cited by 13% of all respondents). See the table above for other less often mentioned reasons.

Note: Interestingly the second most mentioned reason was that the trade was well paid. This suggests that although apprentices may complain about the poor wages while they are training, there is an understanding that when they finish their apprenticeships they will be well paid.

Sub-group differences

Several differences were noted by trade area.

- Those in wet trades were more likely to say the **job interested them** or they like the sound of it than were those in civil construction (39% versus 25% respectively) or that it was **the only trade they could get into at the time** (6% versus 0% respectively).
- Those in civil construction were more likely than those in wet trades to say they had come to it **through existing or previous employment** (22% versus 2% respectively saying had **already done some work in the trade** and 11% versus 1% respectively saying they were **already working in the industry**).

The reader is referred to the full set of data tables for detailed sub-group analysis across all the reasons given.

Qualitative research

Why this trade and not any other ...

Consistent with the reasons given for undertaking an apprenticeship in the first place was the desire to do **something that interested them**, and this was apparent amongst everyone in the groups. Many confirmed that these trades are hard work and if you did not like whatever it is then it wasn't worth continuing and it would be better to try something else.

"You won't know until you try. If it's not for you then try something else..."

Some of them however, had "found" themselves **in the trade by chance**, and for most this was serendipitous – i.e. those for whom this was true talked about loving what they did. This is also consistent with the survey results where over one in ten (13%) said that they had come to the trade largely because they were offered a job in it.

"I applied to be a bricklayer but the course was full. There was one place left on the plastering course so I took that instead. I loved it. And I am good at it."

5. Perceptions about the trade

All respondents were asked what they thought the most positive things were about the trade course. Again their first response was recorded separately to measure salience. The most common *first* mentions were:

- I wanted the certificate/ qualification/ recognition (21%)
- I enjoy learning new skills/ Greater knowledge of job (17%)
- I enjoy the work/ Interesting/ Like the variety (11%)
- I get paid well/ Good money (7%).

Their total mentions are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. Positive aspects about the trade course – total mentions

Positive aspects about the trade course			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
I enjoy the work/ Interesting/ Like the variety	31%	I want to get a permanent job	9%
I wanted the certificate/ qualification/ recognition	28%	It's a good industry to work in	8%
I enjoy learning new skills/ Greater knowledge of job	28%	I like the work environment	8%
I feel like I am achieving something / Sense of achievement	23%	Like working outdoors/ Keeps me fit	6%
I get paid well/ Good money	21%	Family encouragement/ support	6%
I like the people I work with	12%	Job opportunities/ Many directions/ Job security	5%
I get paid/ The income/ I need the money	11%		

Base: all respondents, n=300

Column totals exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Q13: What are (were) the most positive things about doing an apprenticeship in that trade?

There were some highly positive perceptions that emerged. The most frequently cited one was that the **work was enjoyable or interesting** (31%), that they **wanted the certificate / qualification / recognition** (28%) or they **enjoyed learning new skills or increasing knowledge** about the job (28%). Not far behind this was that they **wanted to achieve something** (23%).

The remuneration issue is interesting in that some apprentices claim they are paid well and others that they are not. This may relate to the fact that many apprentices come to the apprenticeship direct from school where they are not being paid at all and others may come from other jobs or even from the jobseeker allowance.

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- Those in civil construction were more likely to say they **enjoy learning new skills** than were those in the wet trades (42% versus 21% respectively).
- However, those in wet trades were more likely to say that the fact that they **got paid** was important (15% versus 3% amongst civil construction trainees) or that they **like working outdoors** (9% versus 1% respectively).
- Not surprisingly those who were no longer enrolled indicated that attaining the **certificate was less important** (14%) than did those who were still enrolled or had completed (32% each).
- Those who thought the training was as they expected were more likely than those who did not to say they enjoyed the work (34% versus 14% respectively) and also that it was **a good industry to work in** (10% versus 0% respectively).
- Those who understood the trade before they started were more likely than those who did not to say they **enjoy learning new skills** (31% versus 18% respectively) as they were to say that they **felt like they were achieving something** (26% versus 12% respectively).

Qualitative research

Positive factors/incentives

As for the reasons for undertaking the apprenticeships in the first place, the positive aspects were that the work continued to be **something to enjoy** ...

"You must have fun and enjoy it"

Most apprentices in the group were generally positive about their apprenticeship and **proud** to be doing it.

"Yeah, I'm proud to be in this trade. I wouldn't be doing it if I wasn't."

Qualitative research

Positive factors/incentives (continued)

Several of the wet trade apprentices mentioned in discussion that they were seen as “useful” and “valuable” by their friends and family because they had practical and useful skills that could be utilised to advantage i.e. building fences or BBQs or tiling, etc. Several others mentioned that they themselves wanted to be able to build their own house at some time in the future.

Apprentices also mentioned the continuing **challenge of learning** - that it is not as simple as some might think. Aside from the sheer physical hard work, there is also a lot to know in becoming a skilled tradesperson...

“Anyone can lay bricks, but you need to know a lot more than that.”

But that was all part of the challenge, and most seemed proud that they were able to do the work that was required. There was an obvious sense of achievement.

There also seemed to be a belief and acceptance that the **boss can make life a whole lot easier financially** by paying them in cash for some additional tasks or things done on weekends, and in fact this was said to already be widespread practice.

“...Can't negotiate better pay as there's a set apprentices rate, but you can get bonuses on top. The boss can give you cash.”

All respondents in the survey were then asked what they thought the most negative aspects were about the trade course. Their responses are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9. Negative aspects of the trade course

Negative aspects of the trade course			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
Positive: Nothing negative/ It's good	32%	Too much theory/ bookwork/ reading/ assignment work	4%
More money/ The money is (was) bad/ Inadequate	23%	The long hours/ Have to get up early	4%
Don't know/ Can't think of anything	12%	No response	3%
My employer/ other staff/ work team are (were) horrible	8%	Apprenticeship too long	3%

Base: all respondents, n=300

Column totals exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Q16: What are (were) the most negative things that you would have liked to change if you could?

Although most either felt that everything about it was positive (32%) or could not think of any negative aspects of the trade (12%), a quarter (23%) said that the money was very poor. The next most often cited reason was that the employer or other staff members were unpleasant (8%).

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- Those in the wet trades were significantly more likely than those in civil construction to say that the **wages were poor** (30% versus 9% respectively) as they were to say that their **employer was unpleasant** (10% versus 2%).
- As could be expected, those who were no longer enrolled (i.e. had dropped-out) were significantly less likely (12%) than those who have completed (35%) or those who are still enrolled (38%) to say there was **nothing negative** about the apprenticeship. They were also significantly more likely (26%) than those who have completed (2%) or still enrolled (4%) to say that their **employer or colleagues were horrible**.
- Those who thought that the training was what they had expected were significantly more likely (35%) than those who did not (14%) to say there was **nothing negative** about their apprenticeship. Conversely those who thought that the training was NOT what they had expected were significantly more likely (21%) than those who did not (5%) to say that their **employer was unpleasant**.
- Following on from this, those who had had problems with their apprenticeship were significantly less likely (16%) than those who did not (36%) to say there was **nothing negative** about their apprenticeship and conversely they were significantly more likely to say that their **employer was unpleasant** (29% versus 4% respectively).

Qualitative research

Negative factors/barriers

One major factor that was nominated as a disincentive to continue was the **poor pay** they received, and some apprentices talked about those they knew who had chosen to quit the \$200 per week apprentice pay for \$700 a week as a labourer. But it was clear to most that this choice would take them out of contention for the 'piece of paper' and as that was the driving factor for most, this seemed to be adequate incentive to keep them engaged in the apprenticeship. For most, this seemed to be a 'hump' that they knew had to be got over.

"The money is not flash but you should get the hard low-paying part of the job done while you're young..."

"The money is crap, but it gets better as you become better at your job."

It is important to note that very few of those who had dropped-out could be engaged to attend the discussions, and it may be that those in the groups were relatively content with their workplace and / or employer and thus the major issue for them was the money. In the quantitative survey the major reason given by those who had dropped out was workplace issues (see section 8).

When asked what were the other negative aspects of their apprenticeship, group participants then nominated **worksite issues** (i.e. having to work hard on sites that were physically 'difficult' or challenging; having to clean up after other trades people e.g. plasterers having to clean up after brickies in order to be able to do their own work; having to do what they called the "shit" work; etc).

The boss was also seen by many as having the capacity to be a major disincentive:

"If the boss is happy, everyone is happy. If the boss is crappy ..."

However, most in the groups reported that their bosses were or had been 'good'.

A 'good' boss was regarded as one who:

- Gave them something for nothing (i.e. paid them for 8 hours but let them go home after 7½)
- Paid them cash for some of the smaller jobs or for Saturday work (said by some to be a regular occurrence)
- Gave them petty cash if they got them to do domestic chores

Qualitative research

A 'bad' boss was regarded as one who:

- Had too high a level of expectation of a beginner
- Made apprentices work late for no extra money
- Made apprentices do domestic chores that were not related to their apprenticeship. This in particular was not seen as 'fair'.
- There was also one apprentice who said that he had been 'bullied' by his employer, so bullying was something that was also raised as a negative (although without that person present this issue may not have been so salient)

Bullying / teasing on the worksite

Interestingly there was widespread acceptance of being 'ragged' on the worksite – i.e. it was generally expected that fellow-workers would tease and 'rib' the newer apprentices but this was regarded as just part of the process.

However although the topic was usually mentioned when the issue of bullying in the workplace was raised in the discussion, the practice was seen as a necessary part of the bonding process. 'Bullying' *per se* was said by many to "*not happen very often*".

Although apprentices laughed about it, it was also apparent that many were looking forward to the time when there would be a newer apprentice than them on site to be teased, and in fact many indicated that they themselves expected to take part in the teasing when the time came.

6. Knowledge about the trade course

6.1. How respondents first found out about trade course

All respondents were asked how they had first found out about the trade course. Their responses are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. How respondents first found out about trade course

How respondents first found out about trade course			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
My employer/ boss asked me/ Already working for company	24%	Pre-apprenticeship	3%
A friend or mate told me	19%	Newspaper advertisement/ West Australian	2%
Parents/ family told me/ Family member in the industry	15%	Word of mouth (general)	1%
Registered Training Org (RTO)/ Group Training Scheme/ TAFE	11%	Through industry association	1%
I saw an advertisement (unspecified where)	9%	Training office/ Work safety office	1%
Through my teacher/ Career adviser	6%	Internet	1%
Work experience organised by school	6%	Previous experience	1%
Employment agency eg. CES, Joblink, Skillshare, Centrelink	4%	Other	1%
Don't know/ No comment/ Can't remember	3%		

Base: all respondents, n=300

Q7: How did you find out about this particular trade course in the first place?

Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

The most common way in which respondents found out about the particular trade in the first place was through their employer, boss, or the company for which they were already working (24%). Many had been informed through word of mouth, with around one in five respondents (19%) reporting that they had found out through a friend, and a further 15% had been told by parents or another family member. One in ten (11%) found out through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Group Training Scheme or through TAFEWA, or had seen an advertisement (9%). Even fewer found out from their career advisor or school teacher or through work experience (6% each).

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- Those in civil construction were significantly more likely than those in the wet trades to have been **informed by their employer** (58% versus 7% respectively), whereas those in wet trades were significantly more likely to have been told by their mate or a friend (25% versus 6% of those in civil construction). Wet trade apprentices were also more likely than those in civil construction to have found out through a **Registered Training Organisation** (RTO), Group Training Scheme or through TAFEWA (14% versus 3%) and also through their career advisor or school teacher (9% versus 0%).
- Those who had withdrawn were significantly less likely than those who were still engaged (still enrolled or completed) to have been **informed by their employer** (14% versus 26% respectively).
- Those who had had previous work experience were significantly more likely than those who had not had experience to have been **informed by their employer** (33% versus 13% respectively). Those with no previous work experience were significantly more likely than those with work experience to have found out through a **Registered Training Organisation** (RTO), Group Training Scheme or through TAFEWA (17% versus 5%).
- Those who understood the trade before they started were more likely than those who did not to say they had been **informed by their employer** (28% versus 10% respectively).

It was apparent from the research that those currently in wet trades and those in civil construction found out about the apprenticeship in different ways.

Qualitative research

How apprentices initially found out about the apprenticeship

As was indicated in the quantitative research the major avenues of entry to the apprenticeship were **personal contact** ...i.e. people who were known to them, whether that was employers, parents, family, friends, etc.

“My parents said – it’s either get out and get a job, or stay at school. You’re not sitting at home on the couch...”

“My boss asked me whether I wanted to get the qualification.”

“My dad had a business doing drainage and I used to help him on the weekends.”

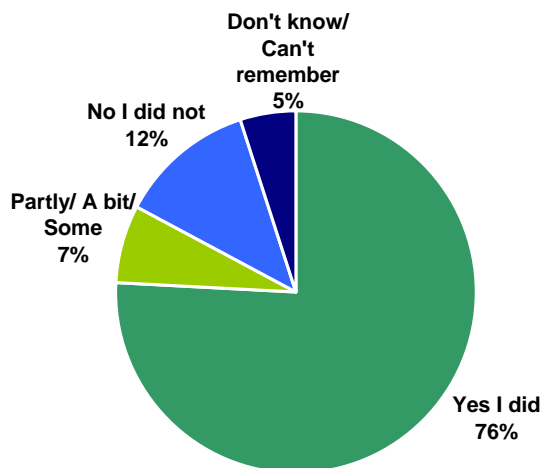
Some had also seen **advertisements in the employment section** of the newspaper, and had enrolled in some form of introductory training course. Silver Trowel was mentioned a number of times in this regard.

None of the young apprentices in the groups mentioned the school careers adviser giving them any information about any particular trade.

6.2. Respondents' understanding of trade prior to starting apprenticeship

All respondents were then asked whether they understood what the trade was about before they had started their apprenticeship / traineeship. Their responses are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Understanding of trade prior to apprenticeship



Base: all respondents, n=300

Q10a: Would you say you understood what this trade was all about before you started?

The majority of respondents said they did understand what the trade was all about (76%), and a further 7% had at least partial understanding prior to undertaking the trade. One in ten (12%) said they had not understood.

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- A significantly larger proportion of apprentices in civil construction (89%) than wet trades (69%) said they **understood the trade before they started**, however this was likely to be the case because more civil construction trainees had had work experience prior to undertaking the apprenticeship and in fact had been more likely to have been recruited to the apprenticeship from their workplace.
- Significantly more apprentices who said the trade was as they had expected (78%) than said it was not what they expected (62%) said **they understood the trade before they started**.
- The level of understanding about what the trade was appeared to increase with age such that only 61% of those aged 16 or under professed understanding whereas 89% of those aged 30 or more did.

Those who said they had not fully understood what the trade was about were then asked to nominate the reasons why they had not. Their responses are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Major reasons for not understanding the trade

Reasons given for not understanding the trade	% who gave reason
The fundamentals of the job/ No experience	47%
Physical work	10%
Structure of the course/ How it would take shape	7%
How to do measurements/ maths	7%
More complex, harder than it looks	7%
(Positive) Didn't know much, but OK/ Learned on the job	7%
Long hours	5%
Plan reading	5%

Base: those who had only partially understood or had not understood what the trade was about, n=58

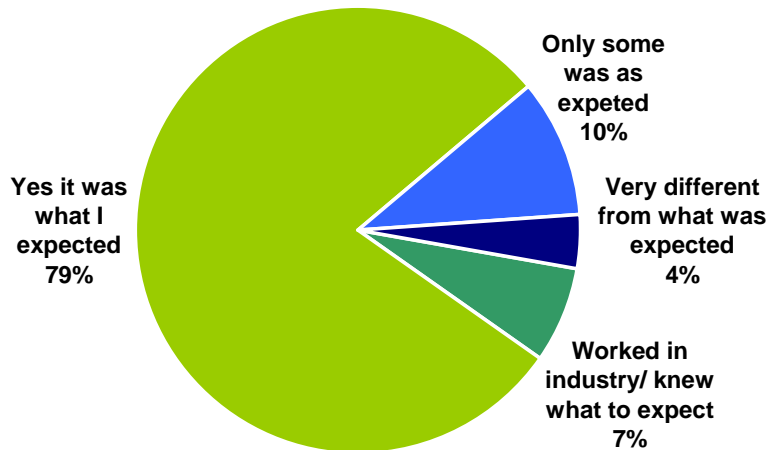
The reason given by almost half of those who had not understood (47%) for why they had not understood the trade prior to commencing was that they had not know about the fundamentals of the job. The next major area was the physical nature of the work (10%).

The sample size is too small for further detailed sub-group analysis on this question.

6.3. Respondents' expectations about the trade

Finally respondents were asked whether the trade was what they had expected it would be. Their responses are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Course matched expectations



Base: all respondents, n=300.

Q11a. Looking back, is/ was the apprenticeship/ traineeship what you expected it would be?

The majority said that the traineeship/ apprenticeship was as they had been expecting it would be (79%), and almost one in ten had worked in the industry previously and from that knew what to expect (7%). Only ten percent felt that only part of it was as expected it to be, and half that (4%) found it very different from what they had expected.

Sub-group differences (not shown in table)

- A significantly larger proportion of apprentices who were still engaged (currently enrolled or completed) (84%) than those who had dropped-out (58%) said that it **was what they had expected**.
- As with understanding of the trade, accurate expectations of the traineeship/ apprenticeship correlate with fewer problems during training. A significantly higher proportion of apprentices who had not had problems during training found the apprenticeship **was as they had expected** (84%), whereas only 54% of respondents who had problems during training felt it was as they had expected.

Those who said that it was not what they had expected were then asked to nominate the reasons why it was not. Their responses are shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Ways in which training differed from expectations

Ways in which training differed from expectations			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
Too much work, pressure/ More work than expected	19%	More hands on work	5%
Less money than expected/ Poor pay	12%	Other	5%
Expected less basic tasks/ Expected real, interesting work	12%	More basic than expected/ Knew more than everyone else	2%
Lack of supervision on site/ Lack of support/ Alone	10%	Got more out of the course than I thought	2%
No response	10%	Made a lot of friends	2%
Harassment from employer, other staff/ Staff not nice	7%	Haven't started apprenticeship/ traineeship yet	2%
Not as hard physically/ not as stressful as expected	7%	Not relevant	2%
Course was too long/ Should get through it quicker	5%	Don't know/ No comment	2%
Supervisors unhelpful	5%		

*Base: Those for whom training differed from expectations, n=42.
 Q11b: In what ways was it different (to what you had expected)?
 Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.*

The most common reason behind training not being as expected was because of **too much work or pressure**, with one in five (19%) claiming this. Other major reasons were the **poor pay** and the expectation that the **tasks would be less basic** (12% each).

The sample size is too small for further detailed sub-group analysis on this question.

Qualitative research

Apprentices' prior understanding and expectations about the apprenticeship

Aside from those who were recruited from the workplace, it seemed to be that unless an individual apprentice knew someone who was in the trade prior to their own admission into it, the only way they were likely to have any prior knowledge about that trade was through work experience or a pre-apprenticeship.

"I had no expectations. Should go in with an open mind."

But, with the wet trades at least, apprentices talked about getting on site and then discovering all the other trades that are involved so that if they decided they did not like the particular trade they knew what others were around that they could also try.

"You see all the trades at the building site. Find out more about other trades."

When asked about what they would do if they didn't like it some said that they had a three month probationary or trial period at the commencement of the apprenticeships so that if they found that it did not suit them they could withdraw or transfer into something that was more appropriate.

6.4. Best ways to communicate with apprentices/ trainees

All respondents were asked to nominate the best ways to get information about building trade careers to others like them. Their responses are shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Best ways to communicate with apprenticeships/ trainees

Best ways to communicate with apprenticeships/ trainees			
Method	% who mentioned	Method	% who mentioned
Through high schools/ Apprentices to give talks at schools	27%	Talking to employers	3%
Through TAFEWA	23%	In special interest magazines	2%
In daily newspapers	19%	Brochures/ newsletters direct from companies	2%
On TV	16%	Brochures in shops/ youth centres/ recreation centres	2%
On the web/ www/ Internet/ Online	15%	Through Joblink	1%
Through workplaces	13%	Through friends	1%
On radio	9%	Career days	1%
Through RTOs/ Training organisations	6%	Through Centrelink	1%
Word of mouth (general)	5%	Parents	1%
Don't know/ Can't think of anything	3%	Through recruitment agencies (eg Skill hire)	1%

Base: all respondents, n=300.

Q19: What are the best ways to get information about building trades to others like you?

Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

The most common suggestion made by over a quarter of respondents was either through high schools or by having apprentices give talks at schools (27%). Other major suggestions were through TAFE or other training organisations (23%), or using media such as daily newspapers (19%) or television (16%), or by using online methods (15%) or through workplaces (13%).

Sub-group differences

- Those in the wet trades were significantly more likely than those in civil construction to nominate **TAFEWA** (30% versus 9% respectively).
- Those in the civil construction were significantly more likely than those in wet trades to nominate **workplaces** as a source of information (26% versus 7% respectively).
- Those who had done a pre-apprenticeship were significantly more likely than those who had not to nominate **TAFEWA** as a source of information (35% versus 19% respectively), whereas those who had not done a pre-apprenticeship were more inclined than those who had to nominate **workplaces** as a source of information (15% versus 7% respectively).
- Those who had done a pre-apprenticeship were also significantly more likely than those who had not to nominate **high schools** as a source of information (29% versus 20% respectively).
- Those who said they had understood what the apprenticeship involved were more inclined than those who had not to nominate **workplaces** as a source of information (16% versus 4% respectively). Similarly, those who said they had NOT understood what the apprenticeship involved were more inclined than those who had to nominate **schools** as a source of information (34% versus 25% respectively).

Qualitative research

Best ways to communicate with apprentices

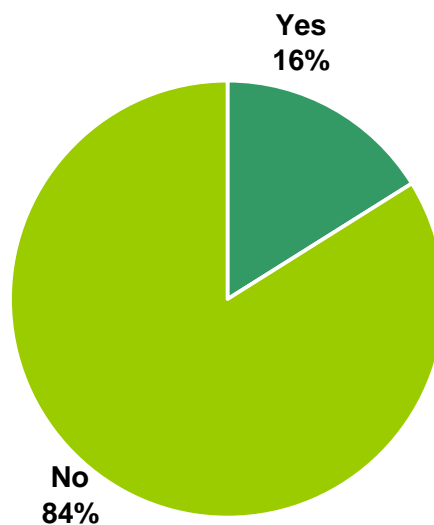
Typically, apprentices said the best way to communicate with them and others like them would be to advertise. Some did see ads in the paper for training organisations advertising short training courses linked with employment outcomes on completion however those persons were looking for work, and were not necessarily those who were still at school. In addition these apprentices included people who were older (at least one was approaching retirement!). Thus, there was not one 'best' way of communicating with apprentices per se; the best way would need to be determined based on which particular segment of the group they were from: School students would need to be reached through their schools and/or parents; Job seekers through employment avenues (Job Network agencies, RTOs and the like); and those already in employment through their workplaces.

7. Problems encountered and awareness of support mechanisms

7.1. Problems encountered

All respondents were asked whether they had encountered any problems during their apprenticeship / traineeship. Their responses are illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Problems encountered during training



Base: all respondents, n=300.

Q14a. Have you encountered/ Did you encounter any problems in your apprenticeship/ traineeship?

Only 16% of all respondents said that they had encountered problems during their apprenticeship / traineeship.

Sub-group differences

- Both wet trades apprentices and civil construction trainees appeared equally as likely to have encountered problems.
- Not surprisingly, there was a higher proportion of those who had withdrawn, cancelled or suspended their training with **problems** (35%) than those who were still enrolled (13%) or had completed the training (8%).
- A significantly larger proportion of apprentices who said that the training was NOT what they had expected than that it was what they had expected said they had had **problems** (50% versus 10% respectively).
- Those who had previous work experience were less likely to have encountered **problems** in training (12%) compared to those who had not had previous experience (20%) [significant at the 90% level].

Those who said they had encountered some problems were then asked what those problems were. Their responses are shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Reasons for encountering problems in training

Reasons for encountering problems in training	
Reason given	% who gave reason
Employer unsupportive/ Hassled by supervisors	23%
I was bullied	19%
Difficulty travelling/ Car broke down/ Too far to travel	15%
Not paid on time, enough/ DK about leave pay, allowances	13%
Don't practice what learned/ TAFE out of line with workplace	6%
Finding time for off-the-job training/ fitting in TAFE	6%
TAFE correspondence/ Hard to communicate with TAFE	6%
I lost my driver license so couldn't get to work	4%
Long work hours	4%
Got bored/ Need more variety	4%
Bullied by workmates/ Poor relationship with workmates	4%
Got sick/ Had an injury	4%
Technical problems (eg. problems with machinery)	4%
Boss went bankrupt	2%
Other	2%
No response	2%

Base: those who had problems, n=48.

Q14b: Can you please tell me what the problems were?

Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Almost a quarter of respondents who had encountered problems in training complained of an unsupportive employer or being hassled by supervisors (23%). This was followed by complaints of bullying (19%), issues regarding travelling (15%), and payment issues (13%).

The sample size is too small for further detailed sub-group analysis on this question.

Qualitative research

'Problems' mentioned in the groups

The only major problem that was mentioned in the groups seemed to be a case of **major misunderstanding between apprentice and employer**, however it was not possible to delve too deeply into the matter as the apprentice was not comfortable to discuss in front of others. He did talk briefly about having something thrown at him by his boss and being verbally abused.

However judging by the comments written on the idea writing sheets that were utilised in the groups, others had experienced the negative side of their apprenticeships.

"Keep your head high even when times may seem bad."

"...once you learn more it all becomes easier."

Despite the incidence of workplace issues or bullying measured in the quantitative research (up to 42%), few apprentices spontaneously raised negative aspects of the workplace as 'problems'. However, bullying and workplace dissonance are discussed more in section 5.

7.2. Awareness of support mechanisms

All respondents were then asked what support mechanisms they were aware of that could help them with any problems in their apprenticeship / traineeship. Their responses are shown in Table 15.

Table 15. Awareness of support mechanisms

Awareness of support mechanisms			
Support source	% who mentioned	Support source	% who mentioned
Employer/ Supervisor/ Site manager	37%	No support/ Nothing available	2%
Apprenticeship & Traineeship Support Network (ATSN) Officer	16%	Mentor	2%
Parents/ Mother/ Father	15%	HIA	1%
Lecturer/ Tutor/ Instructor	13%	Apprenticeship Board/ Apprenticeship Manger	1%
Field Officer	10%	Project Coordinator	1%
Don't know/ Can't think of anything	9%	Counsellor	1%
Support Office	7%	Workmates	1%
Group training/ Training organiser	5%	Friends	1%

Base: all respondents, n=300

Q15: What sorts of support mechanisms are you aware of to help you with any problems in your apprenticeship / traineeship?

Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

The most frequently mentioned support mechanism was the employer/ supervisor or site manager (37%). Other commonly mentioned support mechanisms were the apprenticeship & traineeship support network officer (16%), parents (15%) or instructor/ tutor/ lecturer (13%). One in ten (10%) also mentioned the field officer.

Sub-group differences

- Those in civil construction were significantly more likely than those in wet trades to nominate the **employer, supervisor or site manager** (46% versus 32% respectively), whereas those in wet trades were significantly more likely than those in civil construction to nominate **parents** (19% versus 7% respectively).
- Those in wet trades were also significantly more likely than those in civil construction to nominate a **field officer** (13% versus 3% respectively).
- Those who had dropped out were significantly less likely than those still engaged (still enrolled or completed) to nominate the **employer, supervisor or site manager** (23% versus 40%). This is

consistent with answers to the previous question where the employer was the source of problems for many apprentices.

- By age, the propensity to use the **ATSN** increased with age such that 7% of those aged 16 or under mentioned this compared to 21% of those aged 30 or more. Conversely the propensity to seek aid from **parents** decreased with age, with 29% of those aged 16 or under mentioning this option compared to only 3% of those aged 30 or more.

Qualitative research

Support mechanisms

In the discussion groups the **employer** was seen as a source of support insofar as they could make life easier or more difficult for apprentices. Apprentices did talk about discussing things with the employer if there were issues, but it was not clear how comfortable the younger ones would be with this. Judging by the large difference in level of communication skills across the attendees (may be primarily based on level of maturity) it is debatable how effective some would be at negotiating anything but the simplest issue with their employer.

Many of the younger apprentices in the groups mentioned their **parents** when asked about the sources of 'support' they received in doing their apprenticeships.

For those to whom it was applicable, the **Group Training field officer** was not seen as especially valuable – while most apprentices had not used them, the one person who had, had had a negative experience:

“They don’t believe you anyway. They take the side of the employer – that’s who’s paying them.”

8. Reasons for non-completion of apprenticeship / traineeship

8.1. Reasons for non-completion

Respondents who had not completed their apprenticeship were asked why they had not completed. Their first mentioned response was recorded separately to better ascertain which issues were most salient. The most common first mentions were:

- Didn't get on with employer/ staff/ workplace bullying (25%)
- Wages too low (14%)
- Personal/ Family issues (11%)

A summary of all mentions is shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Reasons for non-completion – total mentions

Reasons for non-completionv – all mentions			
Reason given	% who gave reason	Reason given	% who gave reason
Did not get on with employer/ staff/ Workplace bullying	32%	Poor work environment (eg facilities, equipment, hazards)	5%
Personal/ family reasons	32%	Too many hours	5%
Wages too low	25%	Lack of training	4%
Disliked/ got sick of the work	12%	Got offered a job in industry elsewhere	4%
Offered another/ better job (eg left to work in mines)	12%	Got sick/ Had an injury	4%
Employer was not teaching me	11%	Don't know/ No comment	4%
Employer went bankrupt, closed/ could not pay me	9%	Got bored	2%
Decided I didn't like the industry	7%	Didn't like company	2%
Too much travel/ Too hard commuting/ Lost licence	7%	TAFE fees too expensive	2%
Dismissed/ Failed the tests/ Sacked	5%	Other	2%

*Base: those who had withdrawn from, been suspended or had cancelled, n=57
Q2: What was the reason you did not complete the apprenticeship / traineeship?
Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.*

Almost a third of respondents overall (32%) said that they did not get on with their employer or staff at their workplace, or had experienced some form of bullying. A third of respondents also said that they had not completed their training because of personal or family reasons not related to the workplace (32%). Another major reason for withdrawing was that the wages were too low (25%).

The sample size is too small for further detailed sub-group analysis on this question.

8.2. Suggested ways to help apprentices complete

All respondents were asked what sorts of things might make it easier for apprentices / trainees to complete their apprenticeship. Their responses are shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Suggested ways to help apprentices/ trainees complete course

Suggested ways to help apprentices/ trainees complete course			
Suggestion given	% who suggested	Suggestion given	% who suggested
Don't know/ Can't think of anything	26%	Workplace bullying needs to be stopped	3%
The pay needs to be better/ Not enough money	21%	Need financial assistance, help/ Book, travel allowance	3%
Course needs to be shortened/ Takes too long	9%	More training/staff at TAFE/ Update course	3%
Need to have support to help with problems (general)	8%	Keep positive/ Have the right mindset/ Just hang in there	2%
Work experience opportunities at school	7%	Nothing (positive)/ Doesn't need improving/ Satisfied	2%
Employers should know more/ Better employer relationship	6%	Too much reading/ Textbook stuff	2%
Up-front information needs to be more accurate	5%	Better off-site training/ More training before go onto site	2%
More/better on-site training/ More hands on experience	5%	More time to complete TAFE work	2%
The theoretical stuff is too much/ unnecessary	4%		

Base: all respondents, n=300

Q17: What sorts of things can be done to help apprentices / trainees in that trade complete?
Column totals may exceed 100% as multiple responses were permissible.

Over a quarter of respondents (26%) could not think of anything that could be done to help apprentices/ trainees in that trade complete. The suggestion most frequently made by respondents was to increase or improve the pay (21%), followed by the suggestion to shorten the course (9%), or by increasing support/ help with general problems (8%).

Sub-group differences

- Not surprisingly, those who had dropped out were significantly more likely than those still engaged (still enrolled or completed) to nominate **assistance with problems** (19% versus 5%).

Qualitative research

Making the apprenticeship better

Apprentices were asked for their suggestions about what would make their apprenticeship better or easier to complete, and the most supported suggestions included:

- Flexible work hours (i.e. being able to start earlier and finish earlier)
- Getting more money (also cash-based incentives or existing allowances such as the tool allowance were highly appreciated)
- Having an underling to do the dirty work

Other suggestions included:

- Getting aid with chiropractic or back pain relief
- Being given financial assistance with transport

Apprentices were presented with the suggestion that maybe the TAFEWA part made apprenticeship seem hard, however apprentices said that was not the case:

“The TAFE bit is the easy bit – it’s like 2 weeks ‘off’ ... having a holiday. It’s the onsite bit that’s hard.”

What was apparent though was the immense value of the one-on-one employer support that assisted in making apprentices feel like they were valued:

- Being paid a bit of extra cash “on the side”
- Having Friday beers provided
- Being given a bit of free fuel (*“A tank a week helps a lot, especially with the current price of fuel.”*)
- A paid day-off from work every now and then
- Occasionally being let off early – especially if they have worked particularly hard

Amongst those in wet trades, it was clear that there was a pecking order in their team, with them (mostly) at the bottom. Consequently they all looked forward to the time when there was someone who was “under” them.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE