SUPPORT DOCUMENT

Pre-apprenticeships in three key trades

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This document was produced by the authors based on their research for the report *Pre-apprenticeships in three key trades*, and is an added resource for further information. The report is available on NCVER's website: <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

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Appendix 1—Reference group membership

Membership of Reference Group

Name	Organisation
Bob Paton, CEO	Manufacturing Skills Australia (Manufacturing Industry Skills Council Ltd)
Tony Palladino Chief Executive Officer	EE-Oz Training Standards
Helen Dempster Director Pre-Vocational Training Section	New Apprenticeship Policy and Programmes Branch National Training Directions Group DEST
David Collins General Manager, State Training Services	NSW DET
John Braddy Executive Director	Automotive Training Australia Ltd La Trobe University Bundoora Vic 3086
Ian Lawrence, Director Education Services, Yeronga Institute of TAFE	TAFE Directors' Association
Stephen Conway, Director Educational Programs & Services, TAFE SA - Adelaide North.	TAFE Directors' Association
Megan Lilley	Australian Industry Group (AiG)
Peter Shinnick	Hunter Valley Training Company Private training provider and GTC
Jamie Mackaway	WA DET

Appendix 2—Details of stages 2 and 3 interviews

Questions for Stages 2 & 3: These questions were used for structured interviews with the range of stakeholders interviewed in these stags of the study. Not all questions were put to all respondents. These interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone.

Core questions:

(The wording of these questions might vary slightly depending upon the type of organisation being interviewed. Some questions might not be appropriate for all stakeholders.)

1. The definition and role of pre-apprenticeships:
    a. How does your organisation define a pre-apprenticeship?
    b. Are there any standards in place that pertain to pre-apprenticeship courses?
    c. What does your organisation see as the difference in focus of pre-apprenticeships and other programs such as pre-vocational and pre-employment programs?
    d. What, in your organisation's point of view, are the uses and perceived relative values of pre-apprenticeships and other pathways?
    e. How well understood do you believe are pre-apprenticeships among the different interest groups?
    f. Would clearer definitions and nomenclature assist in improving the understanding of the role of pre-apprenticeships?

2. What is the role of work placement in pre-apprenticeships?
    a. What use is currently made of work placement to provide authentic on-the-job experience and to meet training package requirements?
    b. What challenges arise in the use of work placement?

3. Pre-apprenticeships – a training program or a labour market program?
    a. Have pre-apprenticeships been targeted at any particular groups for equity or similar purposes?
    b. Have pre-apprenticeships in recent years been used to engage those young people who are either unemployed or underemployed and not in full time education or training, into pathways leading to employment or study?
    c. Could pre-apprenticeships be used in the future for this purpose?

4. Pre-apprenticeships and skills shortages.
    a. Does your organisation believe that pre-apprenticeships have a role in addressing skills shortages?
    b. Do pre-apprenticeships offer advantages over other approaches to encouraging greater participation in and completion of apprenticeships?

c. Are pre-apprenticeship graduates more attractive to employers as apprentices than students from different backgrounds?

Specific questions

1. For State Training Agencies:
    a. Is there a centralised approach in your jurisdiction to establishing the number of pre-apprenticeship places to be funded in a year?
    b. Has your jurisdiction undertaken any evaluations of pre-apprenticeships and, if so, are these available?
    c. How are pre-apprenticeship places funded in your jurisdiction?
    d. What have been the funding trends for pre-apprenticeships over the last 6 years in your jurisdiction?
    e. Does your jurisdiction fund any specific target groups under pre-apprenticeship programs?
    f. Does your jurisdiction have a specific policy position on pre-apprenticeships in relation to similar programs, such as pre-vocational programs?
    g. Under your jurisdiction's apprenticeship regulations what arrangements are in place, such as accelerated completion, to recognise pre-apprenticeship graduates moving into related apprenticeships?

2. For DEST:
    a. Does the Department have a policy position in regard to pre-apprenticeships? If so please provide details.
    b. Does the Department see a relationship between the proposed Australian Technical Colleges and pre-apprenticeship programs?
    c. Has the Department undertaken any unpublished evaluations of pre-apprenticeship and similar programs in the last 5 years to which the researchers could gain access?

3. For peak industry bodies:
    a. Does your organisation have a policy position on apprenticeships and in particular pre-apprenticeships? If so, please detail.
    b. Do your members identify current and expected skill shortages in traditional trade areas?
    c. How well known do you believe pre-apprenticeships are within your industry sector and how widely used do you believe they are?
    d. Does your organisation regard pre-apprenticeships as a suitable pathway for entry into apprenticeships within your industry sector?
    e. What opinions, if any, do your members report on pre-apprenticeships?
    f. Do your members regard pre-apprenticeships as a means for improving the quality of apprentices and improving retention and completion rates in apprenticeships?

4. For training providers:
    a. What pre-apprenticeship courses does your organisation currently provide?
    b. How many enrolments in these pre-apprenticeship courses do you currently have?
    c. What is the duration of these pre-apprenticeship courses?
    d. What has been your experience in recruiting students to pre-apprenticeship courses over the last 5 years?

e. What do you see as the role of pre-apprenticeship courses in relation to other similar programs such as school-based apprenticeships, pre-vocational, pre-employment and VET in school courses?
f. What factors in your view contribute to retention and attrition in pre-apprenticeship courses?
g. Do you believe that school students have sufficient access to information on pre-apprenticeship courses and other similar courses?
h. In your view, are there some trade areas in which pre-apprenticeships are especially suitable and others where they are not suitable?

5. For NACs, GTCs and similar bodies:
    a. What has been your involvement in pre-apprenticeship programs?
    b. What do you see is the role of pre-apprenticeships?
    c. Do you believe that completion of a pre-apprenticeship provides any benefits to the individual in seeking a related apprenticeship? Please detail these benefits.
    d. In your experience are employers likely to favour the recruitment of a pre-apprenticeship graduate over someone else when recruiting apprentices?
    e. In your experience are there differences in retention and completion rates between pre-apprenticeship graduates recruited as apprentices and apprentices without a pre-apprenticeship?
    f. Are there some trade areas in which pre-apprenticeships are especially suitable and others where they are not suitable?

6. For unions:
    a. Does your union regard pre-apprenticeships as a suitable pathway into related apprenticeships?
    b. Does your union have a specific policy position on pre-apprenticeships? If so, please provide details.
    c. Are there any industrial or other issues that affect the provision of pre-apprenticeships, including the provision of work experience?

Organisations interviewed for Stages 2 & 3

Contact	Organisation
Ms Helen Dempster, Director, Pre-Vocational Training Section New Apprenticeship Policy and Programmes Branch National Training Directions Group	Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
Mr Neil Miller, Director, Training Services, Training, Quality & Regulations,	Queensland Department of Employment and Training
Mr David Collins and Ms Pam Christie, current and former General Managers, State Training Services	NSW Department of Education and Training
Mr John Ingram, Divisional Assistant Secretary	CEPU (Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union),
Nick Oklobdzija, National Operations Manager	Australian Council for Private Education and Training
Peter Shinnick, General Manager	Hunter Valley Training Company
Ms Diane Baron, Manager, Education Services & Programs	South Australian Dept of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology
Trevor Smith, Faculty Director, Aeronautical and Automotive	South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE
Peter Staley, Education & Training Adviser	Engineering Employers Association of South Australia
Gary Andrew	Port Adelaide Training Company, South Australia
John Coudraye, Senior Head Teacher	Regency TAFE, South Australia
Martin Bradbury, Senior Head Teacher	Noarlunga TAFE, South Australia
Mr Kent Eising, Program Manager Construction, Manufacture & Transport	Brisbane North Institute of TAFE
John Braddy Executive Director	Automotive Training Australia (Industry Skills Council Automotive)
Bob Paton, Chief Executive Officer,	Manufacturing Skills Australia (Industry Skills Council Manufacturing)
Tony Palladino, Chief Executive Officer,	EE-Oz Training Standards, (Industry Skills Council in

	Electrotechnology)
Barry Dawson, Group Scheme Manager	National Electrical and Communications Association
Norm Cahill, Chief Executive Officer	Electrotechnology Industry Group Training Co Ltd
Stephen Conway, Director Educational Programmes and Services.	TAFE SA Adelaide North
Mr Jim Barron (CEO) and Mr Jeff Priday (Group Training Manager)	Group Training Australia
Ms Megan Lilley	Australian Industry Group

Appendix 3—Pre-apprenticeship project: Survey for apprentices

This survey is part of a national study of pre-apprenticeship funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, a body funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. The study is being jointly undertaken by Charles Sturt University and Dumbrell Consulting Pty Ltd.

This questionnaire is aiming to learn more about apprentices and whether there might be differences between those who have done a pre-apprenticeship course and those who haven't. Any information you provide will be treated as confidential. The information will only be used in aggregate and no individuals will be identified. By completing the survey you are giving your consent to participate.

If you have any questions about this survey please contact:

Tom Dumbrell, Director Dumbrell Consulting Pty Ltd, (02 9489 6305) or

Erica Smith, Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University, (02 6933 2087).

Apprentice Contract Number: ☐

To be completed by employer

1. What type of apprenticeship are you doing (or did you recently finish)?

☐

2. Did you undertake a pre-apprenticeship course before starting your apprenticeship?

Yes ☐ Go to Question 3 >>

No ☐ Go to Question 13 on page 3 >>

If you did a course before your apprenticeship but are unsure if it was a pre-apprenticeship please fill in as many details about it as you can in the box below:

Did you do it at school? YES □ NO □ Name of course: Where was it done?

3. Please write the name of your <u>pre-apprenticeship</u> course (or similar course) and where you did it.

Please write ONE sentence saying why you did a pre-apprenticeship course

4. Please tell us where you found out about your <u>pre-apprenticeship</u> course. Did you get most of your information about it from: *(Please tick one box)*

Your school	
A friend or relative	
A group training organisation	
A training provider such as TAFE	

A website ☐ (Which website?) ☐

Somewhere else (please describe)

5. While doing your pre-apprenticeship course, did you spend any time in a 'real work place' as part of your course?

Yes		No	

6. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement (*tick one box*):

"I learned a lot in my pre-apprenticeship course."

Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure	
Disagree		Strongly disagree			

7. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement (*tick one box*):

"I really enjoyed doing the pre-apprenticeship course."

Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure	
Disagree		Strongly disagree			

8. Did you finish your pre-apprenticeship course?

Yes		No		If no, any comments?	

9. What was the best thing about doing the pre-apprenticeship course?

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10. If you were in charge of that course, what is ONE thing you would change, and why?

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11. Are you doing your apprenticeship off-the-job training at the same TAFE college (or training provider) as where you did your pre-apprenticeship?

Yes		No	

12. Name ONE thing about your pre-apprenticeship course that has helped you now you are in an apprenticeship

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THE REST OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE IS FOR EVERYBODY

13. Please tell us where you found out about your apprenticeship? Did you get most of your information about it from (Tick one box)

Your school	
A friend or relative	
A group training organisation	
A training provider such as TAFE	

A website ☐ (Which website?) ☐

Somewhere else (please describe)

☐

14. Do you plan to get additional qualifications after you finish your apprenticeship?

No ☐ Go to Question 15

Yes ☐ Please select ONE option below

I want to study something related to my trade at TAFE or an RTO.	
I want to study something **not** related to my trade at TAFE or an RTO.	
I want to do a uni course related to my trade.	
I want to do a uni course **not** related to my trade.	

15. Please tick one of the following options to give us your general view about your apprenticeship

I have really enjoyed it and I'm glad I am doing it	
It is satisfactory for me	
It isn't as good as I expected	
I probably should have done something else	

Comment if you wish

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16. Please tick one of the following options to give us your view about the different parts of your apprenticeship

I liked the TAFE/RTO study better than the work	
I like the work better than the TAFE/RTO study	
I like them both about the same amount	

Comment if you wish

Thank you for completing our survey! Please hand it back to the person who gave it to you.

Appendix 4: Pre-apprenticeship survey

This survey is part of a national study of pre-apprenticeship funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, a body funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. The study is being jointly undertaken by Charles Sturt University and Dumbrell Consulting Pty Ltd.

This questionnaire is aiming to learn more about the people like you who choose to do a pre-apprenticeship course and whether such courses are meeting the training needs of people like you. Any information you provide will be treated as confidential. The information will only be used in aggregate and no individuals will be identified. By completing the survey you are giving your consent to participate.

If you have any questions about this survey please contact:

Tom Dumbrell, Director Dumbrell Consulting Pty Ltd, (02- 9489 6305) or

Erica Smith, Associate Professor, Charles Sturt University, (02-6933 2087).

1. About you:

Male ☐ Female ☐

Age ☐

Highest **completed** academic year at school (eg 10, 11, 12)

The year in which you finished school (please circle one)

2006 2005 2004 2003 earlier

2. Do you currently have a part-time or casual job?

Yes		No	

If NO, go to Question 3.

If YES, do you need this job to support you financially while studying?

Yes		No		It helps but is not essential	

If YES, how easy is it to fit your working hours around your study?

Very easy		Easy		A little difficult	
Very difficult					

3. Did you have a part-time or casual job or jobs before starting the pre-apprenticeship course?

Yes		No	

If YES, what industry was it in? ***(Tick one only: if you had several, tick the one you spent most time in)***

Retail/fast-food	
Other – an industry area related to my pre-apprenticeship course	
Other- an industry area not related to my pre-apprenticeship course	

When did you first start work in ANY part-time job?

This year	
Last year	
The year before last	
Before two years ago	
I have never had a part-time job	

4. Did you have a full-time job or jobs before starting the pre-apprenticeship course?

Yes		No	

If YES, what industry was it in? (*Tick one only: if you had several, tick the one you spent most time in)*

Retail/fast-food	
Other - an industry area related to my pre-apprenticeship course	
Other- an industry area not related to my pre-apprenticeship course	

5. Please write the name of your pre-apprenticeship course. (Ask your teacher if you are unsure of the exact title.)

6. We'd like to know where you found out about this pre-apprenticeship course. Did you get most of your information about it from: *(Please tick one box)*

Your school	
A friend or relative	
A group training organisation	
A training provider such as TAFE	

A website ☐ (Which website?) ☐

Somewhere else (please describe)

7. What was your main reason for choosing to do a pre-apprenticeship course? *(Please tick your main reason.)*

It seemed a good way to get into an apprenticeship.	
My parents wanted me to do it.	
I'm not sure if I want to do an apprenticeship and it is one way of finding out.	
It seemed better than staying at school.	
I tried for an apprenticeship but missed out and this was the best option.	
Some other reason … please say your reason	

8. While doing your pre-apprenticeship course have you spent, or will you spend, any time in a 'real work place' as part of your course?

Yes		No	

If YES, please tell us how long you spent, or will spend, in this work place in WEEKS:

If you have spent, or will spend, some time in a real work place, who organised, or will organise, this?

My training organisation	
Myself or my parents	
Someone else	

9. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement (*tick one box*):

"I think that I am learning a lot in my pre-apprenticeship course."

Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure	
Disagree		Strongly disagree			

10. Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statement (*tick one box*):

"I am really enjoying doing the pre-apprenticeship course."

Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure	
Disagree		Strongly disagree			

11. Do you expect to finish your pre-apprenticeship course?

Yes		No		Not Sure	

12. What is the best thing about doing this course?

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13. If you were in charge of this course, what is ONE thing you would change, and why?

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14. What would you most like to do after doing this course?

I will start an apprenticeship and it is already organised.	
I will try to find an apprenticeship.	
I will look for a job not involving an apprenticeship.	

I will do another TAFE or VET course.	
I will do a university course.	
I plan to travel or not look for a job for a while.	

15. Do you have any other comments about your pre-apprenticeship course?

Thank you for completing our survey! Please hand it back to your teacher.

Appendix 5: Details of pre-apprenticeship enrolments

Enrolments in pre-apprenticeship courses, 2000-2004, Australia by highest school level

Vocational course enrolments in selected courses by highest school level completed and postcode region of the student for 2000-2004 – courses identified by authors as probably pre-apprenticeships

	2000						
	Capital City	Other Metro	Rural	Remote	Overseas	Unknown	Total
Year 12	1,260	184	837	66	2	13	2,362
Year 11	951	138	646	69	5	32	1,841
Year 10	1,577	317	1,298	202	1	22	3,417
Year 9 or below	454	107	414	72	0	4	1,051
Did not attend school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	776	94	413	77	2	37	1,399
Total	5,018	840	3,608	486	10	108	10,070
	2001						
Year 12	1352	147	724	75	5	4	2307
Year 11	759	93	414	51	1	4	1322
Year 10	1395	236	944	140	1	12	2728
Year 9 or below	376	90	395	45	0	2	908
Did not attend school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	751	80	221	30	6	14	1102
Total	4633	646	2698	341	13	36	8367
	2002						
Year 12	1,155	169	663	48	8	6	2,049
Year 11	648	102	417	48	1	4	1,220
Year 10	1,208	284	1,043	163	1	10	2,709
Year 9 or below	279	80	459	69	0	4	891
Did not attend school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	764	67	211	11	6	21	1,080
Total	4,054	702	2,793	339	16	45	7,949
	2003						
Year 12	1,048	188	487	39	4	3	1,769
Year 11	506	97	343	34	0	3	983
Year 10	997	217	857	168	2	3	2,244
Year 9 or below	309	116	360	70	0	1	856
Did not attend school	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Unknown	404	50	149	7	3	59	672
Total	3,264	668	2,197	318	9	69	6,525
	2004						
Year 12	738	263	354	36	29	6	1,426
Year 11	365	125	263	50	4	5	812
Year 10	791	255	649	91	14	12	1,812
Year 9 or below	329	185	273	26	1	4	818

Did not attend school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown	399	88	128	7	4	5	631
Total	2,622	916	1,667	210	52	32	5,499

Enrolments in selected courses by sex and indigenous status for 2000-2004 – courses identified by authors as probably pre-apprenticeships

		Indigenous	Non indigenous	Unknown
Males	2000	649	7,267	1,007
Female		85	944	117
Unknown		0	5	1
Males	2001	442	5,669	1,182
Female		60	832	180
Unknown		0	3	2
Males	2002	488	5,519	928
Female		68	779	162
Unknown		0	8	1
Males	2003	448	4,916	543
Female		54	487	75
Unknown		0	2	0
Males	2004	339	4,059	376
Female		39	555	131
Unknown		0	2	0
		2,672	31,047	4,705
Total % distribution		***7.0***	***80.8***	***12.2***

Enrolments in selected courses by age and sex for 2000-2004

		Total	%s
Age 10-14	Male	837	2.18
	Female	145	0.38
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	982	2.56
Age 15-19	Male	24760	64.44
	Female	2534	6.59
	Unknown	5	0.01
	Total	27299	71.05
Age 20-24	Male	3624	9.43
	Female	564	1.47
	Unknown	1	0.00
	Total	4189	10.90
Age 25-29	Male	1415	3.68
	Female	335	0.87
	Unknown	1	0.00
	Total	1751	4.56
Age 30-34	Male	905	2.36
	Female	229	0.60
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	1134	2.95
Age 35-39	Male	720	1.87
	Female	202	0.53
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	922	2.40
Age 40-44	Male	506	1.32
	Female	195	0.51
	Unknown	2	0.01
	Total	703	1.83
Age 45-49	Male	350	0.91
	Female	130	0.34
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	480	1.25
Age 50-54	Male	222	0.58
	Female	124	0.32
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	346	0.90
Age 55-59	Male	132	0.34
	Female	50	0.13
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	182	0.47
Age 60-64	Male	68	0.18
	Female	20	0.05
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	88	0.23

Age 65-69	Male	22	0.06
	Female	6	0.02
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	28	0.07
Age 70-74	Male	12	0.03
	Female	2	0.01
	Unknown	14	0.04
	Total	0	0.00
Age 75-79	Male	7	0.02
	Female	0	0.00
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	7	0.02
Age 80-84	Male	1	0.00
	Female	0	0.00
	Unknown	0	0.00
	Total	1	0.00
Unknown	Male	251	0.65
	Female	32	0.08
	Unknown	1	0.00
	Total	284	0.74
All ages	Male	33832	88.05
	Female	4568	11.89
	Unknown	24	0.06
	Total	38424	100.00

Appendix 6: Data from apprentice survey

Responses to survey of apprentices

Question	Response	Number
Did you undertake a pre-apprenticeship before starting your apprenticeship?	Did pre-apprenticeship	102
	Did not do pre-apprenticeship	150
	Unsure	3
Where learnt of pre-apprenticeship	School	30
	Friend/relative	41
	GTO	12
	RTO	10
	Web	1
	Other	10
Did they have workplace experience in course?	Yes	37
	No	67
Learnt a lot in pre-apprenticeship	Strongly agreed	59
	Agree	43
	unsure	1
	disagree	1
	Strongly disagreed.	0
Enjoyed pre-apprenticeship course	Strongly agreed	42
	Agree	55
	Unsure	5
	Disagree	2
	Strongly disagreed.	0
Finished pre-apprenticeship?	Yes	72
	No	6
Apprenticeship same RTO as pre-apprenticeship?	Yes	56
	No	21
Learnt of apprenticeship	School	27
	Friend/relative	96
	GTO	30
	RTO	15
	Web	18
	Other	44
Did they plan to do extra qualifications after app/ship?	No	33
	Yes	183
	Yes/trade related	144
	Yes/other TAFE	8
	Yes/uni related to trade	48
	Yes/other uni	9
Opinion on apprenticeship	Enjoyed	184
	Satisfactory	29
	Not as good as expected	5

	Should have done something else	7
On v off job	Preferred RTO	9
	Preferred work	104
	Equal	105
Industry sector	Electrotechnology	155
	Engineering	17
	Automotive	83

Appendix 7: Stage 5 protocols and responses

Pre-apprenticeship project: Protocol for Stage 5b case studies

These protocols were used for the case studies of two pre-apprenticeship courses.

First Visit: 2nd week of course

Interview with course co-coordinator/training manager *(speak again at Visit 3)*

- ✧ Own background
- ✧ Description of course, number of times it has run, any statistical data on applications, student outcomes, comments on nature of students and their achievement during the course
- ✧ Funding considerations
- ✧ Any issues involved in staffing the course
- ✧ Any work placements and issues associated with that
- ✧ Views about this group

Interview with teacher(s) *(speak again at Visit 3)*

- ✧ Own background
- ✧ Modules/units taught
- ✧ Nature of students and any learning support needs
- ✧ How they maintain industry currency of what they teach
- ✧ Views about this group

Focus groups with two groups of students *(Speak at Visit 2 and 3)*

- ✧ Bio detail (brief)
- ✧ What were their aims in undertaking the course? What alternatives did they consider?
- ✧ So far, how is it?

Interview with employers (2) *(access employers on any visit)*

- ✧ Own background
- ✧ General discussion on their use of pre-apprentices
- ✧ Skill levels of pre-app graduates
- ✧ Links with this and/or other RTOs and how these are maintained
- ✧ Views about the course-curriculum content, delivery etc

Appendix 8: Stage 5 case studies

Electrotechnology case study: 'CABLE CO', Melbourne

Introduction

'CABLE CO' was a large organisation, serving the electrotechnology trades, which incorporated a Group Training Organisation (GTO) as well as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). The RTO ran courses for apprentices and short fee-paying courses as well as pre-apprenticeship courses. The organisation occupied a large building in an inner suburb in Melbourne. The building contained classrooms, workshop areas and computer rooms as well as student canteen areas, and was constantly busy. Towards the end of the case study research, 'CABLE CO' had taken over another building nearby and was converting it into a workshop area where students could work on projects that simulated the real working environment. The 2006 Commonwealth Games in late March 2006 was causing considerable disruption to the commercial building industry in Melbourne during the first half of the case study, meaning that job opportunities were limited and, indeed, the GTO arm of 'CABLE CO' had many apprentices 'out of trade' during the case study period. These difficulties even reached the national press at one point during the research. At 'CABLE CO', pre-apprentices did not attend the same classes as apprentices at any point. The cohorts were kept separate.

Research method

Three visits were made to 'CABLE CO', in the second week of the course, mid-course and the penultimate week of the course. The visits took place between February and May 2006. 13 students were accessed, and were interviewed in two focus groups. At the last visit only 10 were present.

Arrangements for pre-apprenticeship private RTO case study visits

	Students	Course co-ordinator	Teacher	Employer
Visit 1	2 focus groups	Interview	Interview	Interview-'CABLE CO' GTO
Visit 2	2 focus groups			
Visit 3	2 focus groups	Interview	Interview	Interview-'Contractor Co'

Total: 6 interviews and 6 focus groups

At the third visit, students also completed a short questionnaire about their destinations and their overall view of the course, as it was decided that it was inappropriate for them to be required to reveal these details to other students. The interview, focus group protocols and questionnaires can be found at Appendix 7. All focus groups and interviews, which all lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, were taped and transcribed, with permission. One of the employers was the manager of the GTO arm of 'CABLE CO', as the GTO employed a large number of apprentices, including, but not only, ex-pre-apprentices from 'CABLE CO' and other RTOs. The other was the apprentice master of a large electrical contracting company. Different

teachers were interviewed because the first teacher was not available on the third visit; however the two interviews provided useful different perspectives.

Electrotechnology pre-apprenticeships at 'CABLE CO'

Pre-apprenticeships were well established here having been offered for around eight years. Students undertook around 600 hours of training, which were divided into modules that were each examined on conclusion of the module through theory or practice tests, or both. The pass mark was 65% and they needed to demonstrate competence as well. The students were given for each module a booklet of learning materials that included information, tasks to compete, and instructions for seeking testing on practical tasks. The course co-ordinator said that the pre-apprenticeship gained about six months credit into apprenticeship off-the-job training. This represented about 160 hours training so a great deal of extra content was provided, much of it relating to communication and job seeking skills, but also extra training in maths because this was a common source of difficulty for apprentices. The course co-ordinator believed that completion of a pre-apprenticeship

'Makes the first year apprentice useful from day one, whereas if they haven't done a pre-apprenticeship course… basically they're a lunch boy or lunch girl and that's all they're good for initially. If they've done a pre-apprenticeship course, they know what a pair of pliers is, they know what a hacksaw is, go to the van, get a drum of cable, they know what type of cable to get, they know the difference between a step-ladder and an extension ladder.'

The students gained a Certificate I at the end of the course.

'CABLE CO' were expecting to train a hundred pre-apprentices in 2006. The course co-ordinator commented that five TAFE Institutes also ran big programs in pre-apprenticeships for electrotechnology. Funding included special weightings for equity groups. Students paid a fee of $600, which was reduced to $180 if the student received government benefits. Payment by instalments was possible. The courses were popular and sometimes they took on more students than they were funded for. 'CABLE CO', along with the TAFE Institutes, did quite a lot of work with secondary schools to alert students to the option of pre-apprenticeships. An aptitude test was given on entry but even if the would-be students did not do well, there were still admitted if not too far below the benchmark. In this case, the student, and his or her parents if the student was aged under 18, would be counselled and advised to seek extra tutoring.

Generally around 75% to 80% of pre-apprentices gained apprenticeships and many of these were with 'CABLE CO"s own Group Training Organisation. All 'CABLE CO' pre-apprentices gained an interview with the GTO but were not necessarily taken on. Most courses lost a few students to apprenticeships and 'CABLE CO' were happy about this – 'because that's what it's about - getting a job'. Quite often the students would then return to 'CABLE CO' to undertake their off-the-job apprentice training.

Most pre-apprentices were young people and around 95% were boys. The typical pre-apprentice was

> The person straight out of secondary school, sick to death of school, Mum and Dad have had many arguments about their son or daughter, they've had a year off bumming around doing nothing, Mum and Dad are fed up with it all, and probably the only way to get a bit of sanity is to decide to do a pre-apprenticeship course.

Applicants who had only finished year 10 or Year 11 were encouraged to go back and finish school because they needed Year 12 to succeed at their studies.

It was difficult to find good teachers and many of the staff had 'portfolio' jobs working on a sessional basis at 'CABLE CO' and also at TAFE colleges, possibly spending some time as

practising electricians as well. Some teachers found it hard to cope with the boisterous adolescent cohort, and the course co-ordinator attributed this partly to the demise of degree-level teaching training in the Victorian VET system. One teacher commented that the pre-apps tended to be allocated sessional teachers rather than full-timers and that sometimes teachers would be phoned to ask to come in and teach with only a few days' notice.

What were the demographic characteristics of the pre-apprentices and how did they come to choose the course?

Thirteen students participated in the research. They were all boys and varied in age from 17 to 23. Most were Year 12 completers with one having finished Year 10 only and two Year 11. The length of time between finishing school and starting the pre-apprenticeship varied from three months to five years.

Most of the group members said that they applied for the course because they knew they had to do a pre-apprenticeship in order to get a pre-apprenticeship. Some of them found out about this at school, some through friends or relatives and some from phoning employers. Reasons for choosing 'CABLE CO' varied from 'I heard it was the best place' to failing to get into TAFE. It seemed that the different training providers recommended each others' courses to make sure that all potential students could get a place. Other careers had been considered: two had turned down university places, another had begun working as a plasterer but found the physical labour too much. One student had been travelling around for several years and decided it was time he settled down; another had previously trained as a school-teacher and worked as such for a year, but decided he would prefer practical work.

About half of the students had part-time jobs while they were doing the course; in hospitality, retail; and one who worked in a factory at weekends. A few students had given up part-time jobs when they started the course because of the long hours. One student had completed a TAFE course part-time.

In general, the 'CABLE CO' staff felt that pre-apprentices lacked maturity and needed assistance to help them become attuned to workplace levels of conduct. Compared with apprentices they tended to lack responsibility; but there was a lot of variation among the individual pre-apprentices. The course co-ordinator and teachers commented that the group in this case study were 'not a bad group' with 'some achievers'. As one teacher said

'There are times when I need to raise my voice, but they're just young lads and they've got raging hormones and testosterone and all of that, so that's all right.'

One reason for the difference between the pre-apprentices and the apprentices was, according to one teacher, that the pre-apprentices did not yet fully appreciate the important of the licensing exam for electricians, while the apprentices realised that if they did not study hard at their RTO they would fail that exam.

What did the pre-apprentices think of their course?

The pre-apprentices' views about their course varied quite a lot over the period in which they were studying. In the beginning of the course they were excited about what they were going to learn and particularly about the prospect of gaining work within the industry. In mid-course they seemed rather 'flat' and had a number of complaints, but at the end of the course they were more up-beat. These differences illustrate the benefit of a longitudinal study rather than just visiting at one point during the course.

The pre-apprentices found the hours long with many travelling a long way to attend. One student said he got up at 5 am to get to 'CABLE CO' and did not get home till 6.30pm. Most felt the time was not fully used. Classes did not always start on time and they felt as much could

be achieved in shorter days. They were generally annoyed that they were not allowed to leave before 3.30pm even if they had been doing a test and had finished. They were also annoyed about some of the practical arrangements, for example inadequate seating in the outside areas where a 'food van' called at break times. However they found that their relationship with each other made the course enjoyable and they generally benefited from the course.

The student who had been a teacher was quite critical of what he saw as lack of organisation. He thought the course would be of a comparable level to senior high school but found it at a 'little bit more lower level' than he expected. In the first half of the course several students complained that the timetable did not seem to be worked out ahead so they did not know what they would be learning the next day. Also they would have preferred to finish one module before starting another. They felt the topics were not structured logically, starting with the foundations and then moving on; and that teachers did not always draw the links between the modules. Another complaint was that there was insufficient learning material available to cater for students that were more able. Some modules, on the other hand, were seen to be too lengthy for the time allocated. For example, a student complained that one had 180 pages and they were only given two and a half days to do it, and the test alone was 26 pages long, yet there were 'little skinny ones that take like 60 hours'. Most people failed the 180-page module the first time. The students were aware that some students 'get it real quick and some are sort of slow' and they said that they were given extra help if they needed it.

At the mid-way point the students were disappointed that there was too much ' theory' and not enough prac, and felt that too much was explained 'on a whiteboard with red lines and green lines'. They felt that the prac work was not sufficiently linked with the theory. For example if something was explained on a whiteboard they thought a model should have been produced to show it working. On the whole they preferred the prac work especially where they had to construct their own electrical circuits. Two students who did a little weekend work for family friends who were electricians was very pleased that half way through the course they became more useful because they understood the work better.

However, as one student pointed out in the initial focus group the reason for dong the course was not so much to enjoy it but to achieve the outcome, ie a better chance of an apprenticeship. They appreciated the fact that the teachers shared with them their experiences as electricians and that because there were so many teachers (which in other ways was a disadvantage) they got a variety of perspectives on the industry.

The following tables show the variation in enjoyment and learning between the second and third visits. Unfortunately data for the first visit were not gathered properly due to tape recording difficulties.

Changes in pre-apprenticeship students' enjoyment of their course – 'Cable Co'

Overall enjoyment		Theory	Prac
Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 3	Visit 3
8	8	7.5	9
7.5	7	6	8
7	9	7	9
8	7	6	8
8.5	7.5	5	5
8.5	8.5	7	9
8	8	7	8.5
8	9	8	9
8			

7			
Average:	**Average:**	**Average:**	**Average:**
7.85	**8.0**	**7.6**	**8.2**

Changes in pre-apprenticeship students' assessment of their learning – 'Cable Co'

Overall learning (self-rated)		**Theory**	**Prac**
Visit 2	**Visit 3**	**Visit 3**	**Visit 3**
6.5	9	8.5	9
6.5	9	8	7
7.5	9	9	9
7	8	7	8
9	7	6	6
7.5	10	10	10
7	9	9	9
8	10	9	10
7.5			
6			
Average:	**Average:**	**Average:**	**Average:**
7.25	**9.0**	**8.3**	**8.3**

Note: Individual students' responses cannot be read across from one visit to another.

In terms of difficulty, the eight students who attended the final focus group on average rated the difficulty out of 10 as 4.7. Individual ratings varied from 3.5 to 6 out of 10.At the beginning of the course they had anticipated a little more difficulty; answers to a question about anticipated difficulty ranged from an outlier of 2 or 3 out of 10 to 7 out of 10, with most students answering 6.

Students on the whole felt that a pre-apprenticeship was the best way to move into an apprenticeship. They said that they needed to know the basics before they could become useful, that they needed to know about the dangers 'so you don't go out there and hurt yourself', and that once out at work 'they haven't got time to teach you … because they're on the job as well'. The only benefit of going straight into an apprenticeship would have been the pay; as one put it 'I'm living on baked beans and spaghetti'!

The general feeling was that the course was a little too long – although a few disagreed - and that four days a week would have been more appropriate, with those four days filled better with activities. The day off a week would enable students to catch up on their work or to look for work experience. More practical work and less 'theory' would have been appreciated. For example they learned about wiring but not about how to attach wires to the switchboard. They mentioned that the prac work would be improved for future students because of the new workshop that 'CABLE CO' were building nearby. These students had heard about Australian Technical Colleges and said that they definitely thought pre-apprenticeships were a better way of getting into a trade. They were interested in the research project and all the students at the final interview asked to be notified when the report was published.

What is the role of work placements in pre-apprenticeships, to provide authentic on the job experiences and to meet Training Package requirements?

The course did not involve work placement. 'CABLE CO' was a little wary of offering the chance for employers to exploit the students by receiving 'free labour'. Cases were mentioned where employers had rung up to ask for a pre-apprentice to 'try them out' but in fact they had really been used for cheap labour and when they returned to the course they were too far behind

to catch up with the other students. The course co-ordinator thought that many of the pre-apprentices would have undertaken work experience in the industry while at school.

Among the pre-apprentices there were no strong feelings about the lack of work placements. One student said 'It would have been like more on the practical side o things. You would learn a bit more,' but another pointed out that the course was quite short and there was already a lot to fit in. The students realised, however, that much of what they needed to learn would take place one they began work as apprenticeships.

Does the completion of a pre-apprenticeship facilitate entry to apprenticeships, in the same or different industry areas?

The course co-ordinator was quite convinced that in the electrotechnology industry a pre-apprenticeship was essential. He said

> If I went out and spoke to employers, I think the first thing they'd say is "Give us a young person that we can use on Day 1 – or at least Week 1."

He felt that at the current time because of changes in the secondary education system over the decades, students were leaving school with few hand-tool skills, and that it was too big a gap for them to make between secondary school and an apprenticeship.

Close contact was maintained with employers, who would contact 'CABLE CO' to find out likely apprentices who lived in their area. In fact the pre-apprentices reported at the end of the course that two had been recommended to an employer by 'CABLE CO', had undertaken interviews that had gone well, and were confident of getting work with that employer.

Of the eight students who completed the final survey, three had apprenticeships lined up and apart from one who said he was not sure what he wanted to do next, all of the remaining students were going to look for one. They planned to work in other jobs until they found one. The reasons they gave for not being able to get an apprenticeship yet were lack of vacancies (which was generally attributed to the Commonwealth Games), and to the fact that they believed that employers generally wanted the pre-apprenticeship completed before they would consider applicants. There was general agreement that having undertaken the course was a considerable help in getting an apprenticeship. Those who had got apprenticeships lined up were adamant that they would not have succeeded if they had not done the course; and those who had not yet been successful said that the course gave them 'more understanding about the trade'; and 'I didn't know anything when I first started'.

Two employers were interviewed. One was the GTO that was also part of 'CABLE CO', which employed about 400 of apprentices and trainees in a range of industry areas. The majority were in electrotechnology, approximately 260, meaning an annual recruitment of about 70. The other employer was a major contracting firm, 'Contractor Co', who employed 36 electrical apprentices from a total workforce of around 400 staff, mainly electricians.

The GTO had been operating since 1991 as a result of a joint initiative of the employer association (NECA) and the union (ETU). The electrical apprentices were mainly trained at the 'CABLE CO' RTO, with around 20% going to TAFE Institutes around the city. 'CABLE CO' GTO preferred to recruit people who had completed pre-apprenticeships and 'hand-picked' applicants not only from 'CABLE CO' RTO but also from TAFE Institutes. Because of the need to maintain relationships with TAFE this could prove delicate because by recruiting apprentices to the GTO they were more than likely to end up studying at 'CABLE CO' RTO, and not at TAFE. So there was always discussion about how many should be recruited. There was also a need to balance recruits geographically to ensure that enough apprentices could travel

to where the host employers were. Recruitment was steady through most of the year to ensure that the GTO could meet the needs of employers.

When recruiting for apprentices, 'CABLE CO' GTO advertised widely and put all applicants through an aptitude test. Occasionally apprentices were taken on who did not achieve the required mark, but this was in the full knowledge that they would then need extra support. Pre-apprentices were not treated more favourably than non-pre-apprentices. They would be separated, however, when attending 'CABLE CO' RTO because the pre-apprentices did not have to complete as many units of competency. But in practice pre-apprentices generally performed better in the aptitude test and interview than those who had not completed a pre-apprenticeship. They were also more likely to be able to present themselves well to a host employer because of the job seeking and communication skills component of the pre-apprenticeship. The manager thought that host employers got a better deal from an ex-pre-apprentice although the GTO might suffer financially because of the complex charge-out arrangements.

The apprentice master at 'Contractor Co' said that he liked to have a close relationship with the training providers and that 'CABLE CO' was one of two that he liked to deal with. He did not consider any applicants for apprenticeships that had not done pre-apprenticeships. Recruitment took place annually after the NECA exam results were released. Normally around 100 people applied, about 25 were interviewed, and about 6 were recruited for Melbourne operations and about 2 for Geelong. The recruitment process for apprentices was rigorous; they had to undertake an interview, a maths test, and complete a short paper on why they wanted to work in the electrotechnology industry. He also considered the comments that the training provider had made about the pre-apprentice. Steady part-time work was also looked on favourably. The company also employed mechanical apprentices, although a much smaller number, and again those that had done pre-apprenticeships were favoured.

Because pre-apprentices had to do six months' less training at an RTO the normal pattern at 'Contractor Co' was that in the second half of the third year, when otherwise they would still have been finishing their off-the-job training they tried to obtain their E Grade licence through EPIC. The company gave them release to be trained for this.

The advantage of an ex-pre-apprentice was that the person had 'a taste of the electrical trade'. Before the pre-apprenticeship course was available, companies would be concerned about the possible failure rate of apprentices and often accepted people on personal recommendation. However such recommendations often consisted of young people who did not really have an interest in the trade. Having completed the pre-apprenticeship showed that the young person was interested and also that he had been prepared to spend money on the course (the apprentice master was aware of the precise fee charged). He suggested that pre-apprenticeship was an industry-wide requirement among larger companies

Most of the large companies like ourselves will do the same. It's as simple as that. If they want to get a job in the industry, that's what they've got to do.

What factors contribute to attrition in pre-apprenticeships?

The case study offered little insight into this question as there was not much attrition from 'CABLE CO' courses, although one staff member commented that sometimes students enrolled to keep their Centrelink benefits and after a few sessions went 'back on their merry way'. He also felt that a few students attended to learn hand skills rather than being committed to a career in the industry. One of the teachers said that with pre-apprenticeships they were able to anticipate problems that apprentices might face, that could lead to attrition in the subsequent

apprenticeship, and deal with them. The inclusion of maths in the course was a major example. In the apprenticeship, maths had now become integrated with other units, but people delivering pre-apprentices saw this as a problem and teaching maths separately in the course meant that they could be sure that all students had developed these skills before going on to an apprenticeship.

What could be improved and what lessons can other industries learn?

The course co-ordinator said that, if resources were unlimited, a bigger prac area would help the students get more of a feel for working on the job:

> a 'real life prac area where the guys can in actual fact utilise ladders and step ladders and so forth to actually undertake skills that would be required out there on the job from Day 1 … if they had all the frames and the different structures that you'd find out there (in the workplace), it would be great that they had an understanding of how a wall is made and if you are going to drop a wire down from the roof space.. what is hidden in that wall and all that sort of thing.'

An interesting comment that was made about credits into the apprenticeship was that the trade was reluctant to allow credits for the really central units of the first year of an apprenticeship. By implication, the trade was advising against including the most important units (in this case Applied Electricity 1 and Applied Electricity 1) in a pre-apprenticeship. The fear was 'that they might not grasp them and yet they might get a pass'. This might help to explain why the students were sometimes frustrated that they were not quite getting at the core parts of an electrician's job.

When asked about what advice he would give to another industry area that was wanting to set up pre-apprenticeships, the course co-ordinator said that there were several features that he would recommend. Firstly, the course should provide credit into an apprenticeship. Secondly the course should have as a central feature the idea of helping the pre-apprenticeship become more mature. Thirdly the course should have as much practical work as possible because this differentiated it from secondary education with which many of them were dissatisfied. All non-trade components of the course should have trade relevance. Job seeking skills needed to be included.

To other industries, the course co-ordinator would recommend raising awareness among employers through industry associations and other stakeholders, through trade magazines, and through direct mail-outs to employers who already took on apprentices. For 'CABLE CO' the latter strategy had worked well and meant that the employers regarded the pre-apprenticeship course as a future source for recruitment of apprentices. He also recognised the importance of keeping the course up to date

> … we've just got to make sure that we keep up with the times and keep looking at our course and we aren't giving them obsolete old dinosaur stuff, and that we are making them well prepare for an electrical apprenticeship.

One of the employers would have liked to have seen more consistency across pre-apprentice providers. Although all providers delivered the same modules, he observed a great deal of variation both in the standard of teaching and in the standards of assessment. The other employer trusted those RTOs with whom he had good relationships to provide an appropriate curriculum. He did not approve of providers that put pre-apprentices into large classes to work in a self-paced manner; he wanted them to be taught in a face to face manner with smaller classes. At a recent meeting at 'CABLE CO' he had suggested that pre-apprentices should be offered some extra training, for example in welding, that they could do after hours. This would enable them to progress more quickly in their companies and become more marketable. He also felt that additional practical skills would keep the pre-apprentices' interest and attention.

Conclusion

In this industry it was clear that pre-apprenticeships were regarded as an integral part of the apprentice landscape. Employers wanted to employ ex-pre-apprentices because they knew that they had a grounding in the industry and, very importantly, that they were more likely to be able to cope with the difficult off-the-job training that was involved in the trade. The pre-apprentices understood this situation and although they were not always altogether satisfied with the content of the course and its delivery, they knew that the course must be finished if they were to work in the trade. In the absence of work placements, which seemed problematic in this industry, a more realistic simulated workplace would assist in retaining the interest of the pre-apprentices.

Automotive case study: 'Country town' TAFE campus, rural NSW.

Introduction (Note: the name of the college has been replaced with "Country town" to preserve anonymity.)

Country town TAFE was a small campus in a town of 9,000 people, with a population of 12,000 living in the district. The town was badly affected by the drought of the early 2000s and the local economy was depressed. The campus offered a small range of courses and it was evident that college staff had personal knowledge of many of the students as well as all of the local businesses. The automotive section was well set up, with classrooms and workshops. The pre-apprentices took most of their classes with the automotive apprentices, apart from a few classes where the curriculum diverged. The pre-apprentices took extra subjects such as job seeking, while the apprentices did more practical work such as welding. The pre-apprentices often worked on their own cars for practical classes.

Research method

Visits were made during March-June 2006, with the first visit in the third week of the course and the final visit in the penultimate week. Eight students were regular attendees at the course, and were interviewed as one focus group. For logistical reasons the third visit was 'virtual', with teachers interviewed by phone and students completing a survey containing the same questions as that administered at the other case study college, with some additional questions that would have been discussed in the group.

Arrangements for pre-apprenticeship Country town TAFE case study visits

	Students	Course co-ordinator	Teacher	Employer
Visit 1	Focus group	Interview	Interview	
Visit 2	Focus group	Interview		Interviews-Showroom motors and automotive parts co
Visit 3	Extended survey	Interview	Interview	

Total: 7 interviews, 2 focus groups

All focus groups and interviews, which all lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, were taped and transcribed, with permission. As at the other case study, different teachers were interviewed because the first teacher was not available on the third visit. Of the employers visited, one was the manager of a retail sales showroom and repair workshop, and the other the manager of an automotive spare parts shop.

Automotive pre-apprenticeships at Country town college (how does the training provider view the purpose of pre-apprenticeships?)

The head teacher had been working hard to establish automotive courses at Country town TAFE and two other towns. The distances made it hard to build relationships with employers, who preferred face to face contact, because the budget did not allow for a great deal of travel. Much of the budget was eaten up with expenses that related to TAFE requirements such as the need to employ a storeperson who was not really needed. As the head teacher put it 'we've got to do a job with our hands tied behind our backs'. But an investment in pre-apprenticeship courses made business sense at it was likely to lead to higher enrolments in apprenticeships. He said that employers preferred to take on apprentices that had already completed pre-apprentice courses and tended to phone TAFE to enquire about good students. The three campuses had around 70 automotive students including apprentices, pre-apprentices and VET in school students. There were two full-time teachers including himself and six part-time teachers who covered the campuses. One worked almost full-time and all had extensive industry experience. The full-time teachers took the higher level students while first year apprentices and pre-apprentices were taught by part-time teachers. Teachers were hard to find and generally were approached in the industry and persuaded to try teaching.

Apprenticeships tended not to be attractive to young men, because the wages available locally at other types of work were much higher; for example working at the local abattoir brought in three times an apprentice's wage. Pre-apprentice courses had been run every year for four of the previous five years, but in 2005 there was no funding available for the second semester. This was expected to have a knock-on effect to lower apprentice enrolments in the second semester of 2006. Courses were always filled, but a fair amount of work had to be put into recruitment and occasionally the start needed to be delayed by a week or more until numbers were made up. Teachers attributed the continuing popularity of the course to word of mouth and to the fact that 'everyone loves their first car'.

The head teacher explained that the pre-apprenticeship course covered about 90% of the off the job training in the first year of an apprenticeship. But despite this he still felt that an ex-pre-apprentice needed four years as an apprentice because the on the job learning component was so great. Thus ex-pre-apprentices were seen to be attractive to employers who paid apprentice wages for four years but did not lose apprentices to TAFE for the final two years (as opposed to the final year). In the final year, as he put it, 'he (the employer) can still charge $60 an hour (to customers) and only pay him (the apprentice) $10.'

Students paid $185 TAFE administration fee to undertake the course but it was free if they were unemployed. They had to purchase their own text books 'if (they) really want to get into it.'

What were the demographic characteristics of the pre-apprentices and how did they come to choose the course?

Only eight students participated in the research. Others in the group (which began with 17 students and finished with 14) were less regular attendees, and the low proportion present on research days was probably accounted for by the fact that visits took place on a half-day. This group of pre-apprentices was quite varied in nature. There were two women in their mid-twenties, both with children, one male in his mid-twenties, and five males that had left school within the last three years. Reasons for enrolling were also varied. They ranged from a definite desire to work in the industry, to a wish to be independent and save money in servicing their own cars. All participants had a genuine interest in cars, but did not necessarily have definite career plans in automotive. The older male had started and abandoned an apprenticeship in painting and decorating. Several had considerable experience with vehicles on family farms, commencing in their early years; for example, one said 'We've got a paddock full of cars up there.' The females appreciated the fact that the course was held within school hours. In general the students seemed to have more of a family and lifestyle reasons for undertaking the course than the other case study electrotechnology students. It is difficult to say whether this was because the course was in a small town rather than a city, or whether it was the industry area.

Students had a range of previous work experience and some had done a series of TAFE courses in different fields of education. The older male said 'I've always done a TAFE course every year … even when I lived in Sydney.' Several had family members or friends that had done the automotive pre-apprentice course and one was related to one of the teachers. Two of the students had completed VET in schools courses in automotive but did not find the pre-apprentice course repetitive; they said they thought they were 'getting into it a bit more'. However, it transpired that they did have to repeat the same modules they had done while at school. None of the students had formal part-time jobs while they were studying although three did casual work mainly farm-related, one working the three days a week that he was not at TAFE.

The co-ordinator commented that the case study group was one of the better pre-apprentice groups. Sometime the students were difficult to handle. He thought there were two reasons why some students resisted the teachers in the course. One reason was that at school the students were allowed to indulge in poor behaviour but in this course they needed to be curbed because of safety issues. The other was that he felt that at school 'they never fail' whereas the students knew they could fail parts of the TAFE course. In some semesters the pre-apprentices were of such poor quality that he needed to separate them from the apprentices. Generally he preferred to keep the two groups together because it lifted the quality of the pre-apprentice' work. He said it made them competitive, wishing to do better than the apprentices.

What did the pre-apprentices think of their course?

On the first visit, students were fairly satisfied with the course. One of the females found the physical aspect of it difficult at first. Most of the students found the 'theory' difficult, with only one enjoying theory work as much as practical. The main problem with the 'theory' was 'sitting still in a classroom'; one student commented that he appreciated the fact that they did theory for half the day and then practical work. This contrasted with a previous apprenticeship he had started where there was a block of theory to start with which he found trying.

The nature of the teachers clearly contributed to students' enjoyment and learning. The students said that 'if you don't understand it, they will explain it until you can understand.' They found that compared with school they got more attention and it was 'a lot more casual'. It was observed by the researcher that students tended to arrive late and leave class if needed for personal reasons; this did not mean that effective learning was not taking place. Teachers said that students caught up by working through the required worksheets when others were doing prac work. In addition, revision was a feature of all classes. Students had work books where they 'copied out all the (work)sheets' and there was a range of textbooks and reference manuals that could be referred to at any time.

Students enjoyed having continuity of teachers, with only two teachers involved in the group. One student that had literacy difficulties received extra help from the teacher when writing down answers to questions. There was also a literacy support teacher, although students did not mention this additional support. Students were asked to rate their enjoyment and learning on scales 1 to 10, at each visit. While this was of course a subjective measure, it gave a good indication of how they perceived the course. The ratings for enjoyment showed a small increase through the life of the course, while 'learning' scores had a slight dip in the middle. In both cases, though, there was an average of between 8 and 9 at all times with only one student rating below 8 at the time of one visit.

Changes in pre-apprenticeship students' assessment of their enjoyment –Country town TAFE

	Overall enjoyment		Theory	Prac.
Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 3	Visit 3
9	8	10	8	10

9	8	8	8	8
8.5	8	9	9	10
8.5	9	9	9	9
9	10	10	9	9
7.5		8	9	7
6		8	8	8
8.5				
Averages:		**Average:**		
8.3	**8.6**	**8.9**	**8.6**	**8.7**

Changes in pre-apprenticeship students' assessment of their learning –Country town TAFE

	Overall learning (self-rated)		**Theory**	**Prac.**
Visit 1	**Visit 2**	**Visit 3**	**Visit 3**	**Visit 3**
9	8	9	9	10
9	8	9	9	10
8.5	8	8	7	9
8.5	9	9	9	9
9	9	9	8	8
7.5		8	9	7
10		9	8	9
8.5				
Average:		**Averages:**		
8.8	**8.4**	**8.7**	**8.4**	**8.9**

The students found the curriculum more complex than they expected; there were areas of knowledge that they had not expected. They found there was more written work than expected too. This is reflected in the scores that they gave for 'difficulty' with theory rating a difficulty rating of average 6.1 out of 10 while prac was only rated 4.0, on average, out of 10. There were variations in both scales, however, the difficulty of theory ranging from 5 to 9 out of 10 and for prac rating from 2 to 7 out of 10. These ratings were given at the last case study visit.

Pre-apprenticeship students' assessment of course difficulty –Country town TAFE

		Difficulty (Visit 3)
Overall	**Theory**	**Prac.**
3	6	2
5	5	5
4	9	2
6	6	3
5	5	4
7	7	7
5	5	5
Averages:		
5.0	**6.1**	**4.0**

Note: Individual students' responses cannot be read across from one visit to another.

The students often worked on their own cars as exemplars. They found this very useful:

> You feel more confident working on your own car rather than someone else's. If you stuff your own car, it's only your time and that, but if you do it someone else's you've gotta worry about it … and you're getting to know your car as well.

The only down side was that they discovered things wrong with their cars that needed fixing and needed to purchase the parts. They also practised on cars belonging to their families and family friends.

The level of satisfaction with the course seemed high; in the final survey, which was completed by seven students, they could think of nothing that was missing from the course that they had expected to learn. When asked for one thing they would change, they nearly all asked for more practical and less theory work. One student commented that the course was too short. This student found there was more theory than he or she expected and that not enough time was available to understand it fully. As one teacher explained 'you have to go through the whole car, from the front bumper to the back.'

The students were asked how much they thought they had learned from the course. Comments ranged from 'a bit more than I did before' to '70-75%'. The general consensus seemed to be that they had made a sound start but that there was a lot more to learn. When asked how the course compared with being an apprentice, several said they were not in a position to say, but two made specific comments as follows:

- (the pre-apprenticeship is) not as strict on the work.
- You gain the knowledge, though not being an apprentice I do not apply what I have learnt as much.

Three said they would have preferred to have gone straight into an apprenticeship if they had been able to get one, but the others preferred not. It was clear that this related partly to lack of confidence: one said 'maybe after a couple of these courses'. One even commented 'no, not at the moment. though for getting the most out of the course, yes' implying that he or she felt that learning would be improved if off the job training was combined with work, but that he or she was not personally ready for working.

What is the role of work placements in pre-apprenticeships, to provide authentic on the job experiences and to meet Training Package requirements?

The teachers found placements only for the better students in the class. By the time of the second visit it seemed that only one student, one of the women, had been recommended for a placement and this quickly turned into a paid part-time job; it was in a spare parts dealership. There was an understanding that a 'new course' that was coming in would involve a compulsory two week work placements. At present the work placements were really for employers to 'try before you buy'. The teachers found that the quality of placements was quit variable; but that those who learned a lot talked about it to other students which assisted their learning too. They forced the students to make the approach to the employer, giving them an option of several employers to approach. But the teachers did the 'ground work behind the scenes without them knowing.' The reason for keeping this secret was that it boosted the self-esteem of the students if they thought they had gained the place through their own efforts. The teacher commented that the student who was working was encouraging other students to approach employers.

Students were asked in the final survey whether they though there should be a compulsory work placement, three said no and four said yes. Two of the 'no' respondents made comments; one to the effect that people should not be made to do one if they did not want to, and the other said 'because individuals might not want to do it cause they only want to learn about their own car.' The 'yes' respondents commented as follows:

- More insight into trade.
- Get more understanding in the work place.
- To apply what has been learnt and to help decide what part of the trade the person is interested in.
- More hands on.

Working on real cars was felt in some way to substitute for work placements. The teacher explained that students generally formed into groups of three or four and they worked on each others' cars in turn. He said that this was the only way to gain the attention of pre-apprentices who would never be able to focus in class if parts of the car were dealt with in isolation.

Does the completion of a pre-apprenticeship facilitate entry to apprenticeships, in the same or different industry area?

The college made efforts to steer the students into apprenticeships. The staff members kept in close touch with local employers and said that informal feedback was that they would be wary of putting on apprentices if they had not completed a pre-apprenticeship first. A staff member from a group training company talked to the class in around the forth week and gave them some leads to follow up. At the mid-week visit, two students had arranged trials with employers in Canberra. Another student had applied to the army for a related apprenticeship. Another student wanted to go onto the next stage of the course and did not seem to understand that it needed to be attached to a job. At this stage the students were clear that the course had helped them understand what an automotive job would be like, and this was especially so as they were working alongside the apprentices in most of their classes and listened to them talking about their jobs, both in class and during meal breaks.

Of the seven students who completed the final survey, in the penultimate week of the course, two had apprenticeships secured, two hoped to get apprenticeships, one had a part-time job in an automotive parts shop which she was going to supplement with study of a spare parts certificate, one was set on repeating the course, and one was unsure. All were adamant that the pre-apprenticeship course had or would help them get an apprenticeship or other job. Those who did not have jobs lined up said that the lack of vacancies was the reason they had not secured one. The woman with a job in spare parts said that she had enjoyed learning about the industry through the course but it had made her decide she did not 'want a hands-on mechanical apprenticeship'. When asked what would help them find an apprenticeship, most said they would like more information about vacancies while one simply said 'look harder'.

After the end of the course the course co-ordinator contacted the 14 students who had completed, and found the following outcomes which indicated that the outcomes were more favourable than the students had feared before they finished:

- 6 in automotive apprenticeships (in light, vehicle, agricultural and plant vehicles)
- 4 had part-time jobs in automotive related jobs (spare parts, auto dismantlers etc)
- 2 enrolled in welding course
- 1 moved interstate
- 1 could not be contacted

This was a high retention of students in the trade or related work, especially considering the depressed employment market locally.

Teachers at Country town were also interested in the non-work outcomes of the course. The head teacher mentioned one past participant at length. This story also illustrates the influence of family members on participation in this country college:

> I had some guy a couple of years ago, he was 60, he did the pre-apprenticeship, did quite well, obviously because he wanted to be there and it was the best thing he'd ever done he said. And now he tinkers around the home and he helps his Country town blokes. So he actually talked to his Country town bloke who … the pre-apprenticeship too because his father told him about it. And that kid, XXXX is his name, he loved it so much. And XXXX had actually been on the dole, long term unemployed. On drugs, all this sort of stuff. Family, Centrelink benefits virtually all his life. Did the pre-apprenticeship course, absolutely loved it. He found his passion. And he sort of couldn't quite get a job because of his appearance, he had earrings everywhere and all that, long hair. But he was a really nice kid and during that time we told him you've got to lift your game. You've got to have no drugs, blah, blah, blah. And he did that. But he didn't get a job at the end of that year. So I said to him, look you can start second year if you actively look for a job. Within two months he, like he was coming to TAFE and he used that as a positive when he went and saw an employer, and he's been employed at Y Motors ever since. Got a hair cut, never touched the drugs, that I know of, and he just had to complete his, well his work evidence stuff in his fourth year. But that's because he couldn't get it done in his second year. So he was, you know, he's now a fully qualified mechanic and he got student of the year… and if we never offered the apprenticeship that would be one less tradesman.

One of the teachers displayed a similar attitude:

> The best part of this job is getting people jobs … when you get a kid or a (local) person a job; it makes you feel good. I've done it hundreds of times and that's the best part.

The close relationships built up over the period of the full-time pre-apprenticeship clearly benefited students who need additional help besides being taught in order to get jobs. The teachers were also concerned about helping students find 'their passion' and would suggest other courses to them if automotive did not seem to quite fit.

The two interviews with employers revealed that the pathway to apprenticeships was possibly more complex than it first appeared. One of the businesses was an automotive spare parts retail outlet and the other was a car dealership that had a small workshop. In the case of the latter, there were from time to time vacancies for mechanics but the pre-apprentice course was more often us to supply spare parts salespeople, which was the case in the former business as well. The automotive knowledge that the students gained in pre-apprenticeships was very useful in gaining spare parts jobs but the outcome was not an apprenticeship. In the case of the retail outlet the manager said that they might employ somebody with an automotive background (including a qualified mechanic) or equally somebody with a retail background. This business was currently employing a student from the pre-apprenticeship course part-time. Her experience in the course was a definite asset:

> Her knowledge of what she's picked up so far in the apprenticeship(sic) has definitely helped her in the spare parts, identifying different parts of a vehicle… knowing what a ball joint is or what basic oil fluid is, rather than coming to me knowing nothing… she can look up parts books, mark stock off knowing what the product is..

When asked would he prefer a recruit who had completed a pre-apprentice course compared with someone who had completed a whole automotive apprenticeship, this employer on balance preferred a pre-apprentice because they could be trained more to the needs of the business. But it would be a finely-balance decision. He definitely preferred a pre-apprentice rather than a spare parts trainee; having tried that route once, he realised that a trainee had no knowledge and had not proved an interest in the industry.

The car dealership used various avenues for recruiting apprentices and spare parts salespeople and did not always choose pre-apprentices. The decision in the end depended on the written application and interview, with a large emphasis on evidence of willingness to learn, and also on previous recruitment experience. Sometimes they chose recent school-leavers including local ex-

pre apprentices but if they had a bad experience with one, they tended to choose an older person the next time. He said that as it was a small business it was very important that the person would fit in with other staff, whereas in a big business hiring decisions might be made on different grounds. It was certainly an advantage, however, if somebody had some automotive experience because it meant that they were unlikely to become dissatisfied and leave quickly.

The managers of both businesses reported intermittent but not close contact with the TAFE college. As they were small businesses, their need for staff was not constant.

What factors contribute to attrition in pre-apprenticeships?

According to the course co-ordinator, often pre-apprenticeship students were 'sent by Centrelink' to fulfil their obligations in receiving unemployment benefit, and these students often only attended for a few days. As he put it:

> Generally the ones that are really keen you can tell within a week or two. And the ones that aren't are either just there cause their Mum told them they've got to be there. You can tell those as well.

However in this course, 17 students had commenced the course and only three failed to complete, two found jobs, one in building and one as an auto-electrician, and one could not finish the course because of travel costs. This one was returning the following semester to complete the course.

The head teacher commented that while women constituted a substantial number of students in pre-apprentice courses, and according to him 'make better mechanics', few gained apprenticeships. He attributed this entirely to discrimination in the part of employers. He said this was not overt but employers were anxious that girls would disrupt work: 'too much testosterone'.

What could be improved and what lessons can other industries learn?

The teachers were asked what they would change in the course given unlimited resources. The head teacher said he would organise more time in industry for the students. This was impossible at present because of the money and time involved. Time in industry need not be work placements. It could encompass visit to workshops and dealerships and so on. A new Training Package was about to be brought it and he reported that there was a feeling among employers that competency-based training meant that students could get through at a lower standard. He definitely thought that employers liked to see the grades gained. It seemed that up till this point the teaching had not been competency-based, and that in this industry area in TAFE competency-based training seemed to exclude the possibility of grading.

The main learning point for other industries, he felt, was the need for close contact with employers. The course needed to be relevant to local needs. He said that employers complained that schools were not encouraging local people to go into trades. The VET in schools programs were proving popular and starting to compensate for what he saw as the lack of effective careers advice.

A suggestion from the spare parts retail manager was that pre-apprentices would be of more value in his type of environment if their course included elements of dealing with the public and working with spare parts books. Inclusion of such items in the curriculum, although of course the curriculum is already crowded, would ensure a wider range of jobs to choose from.

Conclusion

This course clearly assisted the participants either to get apprenticeships or to get other work. Some enrolled in other courses and this may have been because they did not feel ready to face the job market. Attendance was not constant during the course but most of the pre-apprentices

finished the course although there seemed to be a core of regular attendees of about 50% of those enrolled. At the first interview the head teacher said that 'we'll have the full house here by the end' and his prediction was fulfilled.

The favourable features of the course were as follows:

- ✧ The close-knit atmosphere of a country college and associated pastoral care;
- ✧ Close attention from a small core of teachers;
- ✧ Close contact between teachers and local employers;
- ✧ The practical utility of the course in its application to personal and family vehicles;
- ✧ Teachers' understanding of the diversity among the students; and
- ✧ Availability of information about other courses in the college.