

# Strategic Review of the AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICESHIP INCENTIVE SYSTEM

2024



## Final report – Fact sheet for Women Apprentices in male-dominated trades

*Apprenticeships provide a great pathway for women into a range of trade careers. However, women experience challenges with sexism, isolation, and being harassed or disrespected in the workplace. They need more opportunities to enter trades, better mentoring and improvements to work culture.*

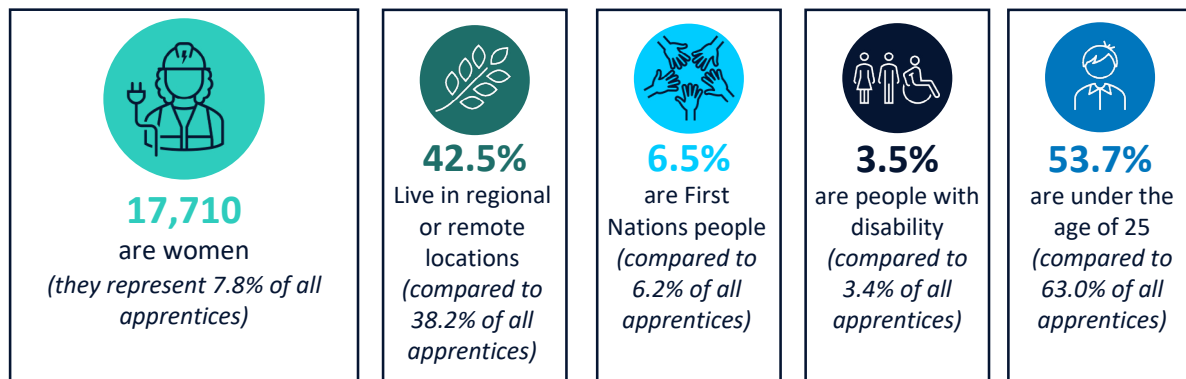
### Background

The Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System, led by Dr Iain Ross AO and Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, considered the effectiveness and efficiency of the current incentive system in supporting the uptake and completion of Australian apprenticeships. In particular, it considered the incentive system with regard to addressing Australia's skills needs and its ability to deliver on economic priorities and social equity objectives.

*For more details on the review as a whole, please refer to the Overview fact sheet.*

In the 12 months to 31 December 2023, a total of 62,745 women commenced an apprenticeship, representing 36.9% of total commencements (170,370). Women are much more likely to undertake an apprenticeship in a non-trade occupation, with only 19.1% of women starting training towards a trade occupation (NCVER 2024).

### Women in male-dominated trade occupations



Source: Review analysis based on NCVER (2024) apprentices and trainees data.

## Key Issues

**The review identified the following issues that affect women in male-dominated trades:**

- Apprentices, like many workers, are struggling to meet cost-of-living pressures. Low training wages can deter people from taking up an apprenticeship. Women are more likely to start an apprenticeship later in life when training wages may make it difficult to afford the cost of housing and supporting family.
  - Additionally, many employers will opt for younger apprentices, as their wages are lower. This disproportionately affects women.
- Young women are often deterred from taking up trades such as plumbing and carpentry based on gendered assumptions of their ability to perform the work.
- Apprentices expect good on-the-job training, a safe workplace and to be respected by their employer. However poor working conditions is the main reason women drop out of an apprenticeship: 14% of women compared with just 7% of men (NCVER 2019). Women in trade occupations were also twice as likely to observe bullying (46%) than men (24%) (NCVER 2019).
- Many women in male-dominated trades can be the only woman apprentice on a worksite or part of a very small minority. They often experience challenges navigating a masculine work culture that has not adapted to accommodate a more gender equitable workplace.
- Those considering an apprenticeship later in life are often deterred by the lack of recognition for their experience. This can have a disproportionate effect on women.

## Recommendations

**The final report made 34 recommendations that aim to address the key issues identified through the review. The following is a summary of recommendations relevant to women in male-dominated trades:**

- Address the behaviour of employers who are not providing an appropriate working environment for their apprentices.
- Utilise the Australian Government's procurement policies to improve workplaces for women.
- Use existing apprentice data systems to better connect apprentices with support services.
- Work with industry stakeholders to address workplace culture issues and improve the working environment for apprentices.
- Create more opportunities for women to enter male-dominated trades.
- Develop ways to recognise previous experience and fast-track apprenticeships to make apprenticeships more appealing to those entering an apprenticeship later in life.

*For details on recommendations that are beneficial to all apprentices, please refer to the [Apprentice fact sheet](#).*

## References

NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) (2019) [Apprentice and trainee experience and destinations 2019](#), NCVER.  
NCVER (2024) [Apprentices and trainees 2023: December quarter](#), NCVER.