

Minister for Skills
Question Time Briefs
22-24 June 2021

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ISSUE: ASSISTANCE FOR APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES**Talking points:**

- The ACT Government is committed to supporting apprentices and trainees through the economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Existing support measures include:
 - training subsidies available through the Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) program
 - Additional Support Funding, which allows training organisations to assist apprentices and trainees to complete their qualification
 - training subsidy loadings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and learners with a disability
 - completion payments for eligible apprentices and trainees
 - travel allowances to assist ACT apprentices who need to travel interstate for structured (off-the-job) training
 - Payroll Tax exemption for eligible employers
 - the field officer program, which facilitates engagement between apprentices and trainees, training organisations, industry and other stakeholders
 - the ACT Wage Entitlement Information Service, delivered under contract by the Canberra Business Chamber, to provide employers and apprentices and trainees with access to expert advice and information on workers' entitlements and industrial agreements
 - ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority funding to assist training existing workers and to incentivise employers to take on an apprentice or trainee.

Key Information

- **Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) program** - subsidises the cost of an Australian Apprenticeship (apprenticeship or traineeship). Subsidies are paid directly to the registered training organisation (RTO), reducing the cost to the apprentice or trainee. The program covers a range of industries with nationally recognised qualifications from Certificate II through to Advanced Diploma.

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- **Additional Support Funding** - RTOs may apply for this funding for apprentices and trainees who would not otherwise be successful in completing their course, and where there will be additional costs associated with training.
- **Completion payments** - \$300 payments made to eligible students, on completion. To attract the payment the student must complete a survey which collects data on training and employment outcomes.
- **Travel Allowance** - is available to ACT apprentices and trainees to travel interstate if their qualification is not delivered by an ACT RTO.
- **Payroll Tax Exemption for Australian Apprentices** - Payroll Tax exemption is available to employers with new starters, where the employee is employed in the industry or occupation for the first time and is receiving eligible training for work.
- **The ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority (TFA)** -
 - Up to \$6,000 in employer incentives for employers of a first-year apprentice in designated qualifications.
 - Financial support for group training organisations (GTOs) and funding for employers (including GTOs) that employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners; women in non-traditional vocations; people with a disability; people from a non-English-speaking background, and for language, literacy and numeracy Training.
 - Grants available to individuals and/or organisations where the worker: works for a company that is substantially engaged in carrying out work in the ACT; undertakes training that meets the requirements in an approved RTO/course; or does not meet standard eligibility requirements but may have special circumstances.

Background

- From June 2020 to May 2021, when compared with the same period in 2019-2020, there was a 20.2 per cent increase in the number of commencements.
- In May 2021, in-training numbers are higher than the same period in any of the previous four years.

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Portfolio: Skills**ISSUE: Assistance for Registered Training Organisations****Talking points:**

- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACT Government implemented the following measures to support registered training organisations (RTOs):
 - reinstated 2019 qualification subsidy amounts for the Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) and Skilled Capital programs
 - provided eligible RTOs with access to a 50 per cent unit payment, where a student's assessment was unable to be finalised due to workplace access and social distancing policies
 - reduced compliance burden for RTOs, where possible
 - extended existing Skilled Capital contracts for six months, allowing learners additional time to complete their qualification
 - released an additional 1,965 Skilled Capital training places to address emerging workforce needs and provide learning options for out-of-trade Australian Apprentices
 - released an additional 3,800 fully funded (fee-free) Skilled Capital places in accredited infection control and food handling training
 - launched the JobTrainer program, which is supporting job seekers and young people (aged 17 to 24, who have left school) by providing fully funded (fee-free) training places. It is expected that around 3,000 training places will be funded through the program.
- With restrictions having eased, RTOs have been able to finalise most students' assessments. In cases where workplace access limitations and social distancing policies remain, RTOs can continue to engage with students through other methods such as online delivery and workplace simulation.

Key Information

- As at 10 June 2021, there are 94 registered training organisations (RTOs) with a Training Initiative Funding Agreement. Of these RTOs, 33 per cent have a head office based in the ACT and the remaining 67 per cent are based interstate.

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- The ACT Government administers payments to RTOs as a contribution towards the cost of training. The subsidy is divided by the minimum number of units applicable for the training place and RTOs are normally paid upon reporting the successful completion of each unit. Some units may require employer endorsement or mandatory workplace assessment to successfully complete. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the payment arrangements were amended to provide 50 per cent of the eligible unit amount to be paid to the RTO where the student cannot finalise assessment.
- 1,965 additional Skilled Capital training places were released on 27 May 2020. Over 1,000 people enrolled during the first three days.
- 25 RTOs with an ACT Training Initiative Funding Agreement have nominated to deliver fee-free training under the Infection Control Training Fund. As at 1 June 2021, 1,502 learners had enrolled, with 761 completions reported. There are six different infection control courses available.
- The JobTrainer program has seen high demand for full qualifications. The funding made available through the Skilled Capital stream has been fully committed, with more than 500 enrolments.
- Skills Canberra has published a set of COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), including information on RTO viability measures, and flexible arrangements for Skilled Capital students, employers, and their Australian Apprentices.

Background Information

- RTOs accessing a government subsidy for delivering training in the ACT (for the Australian Apprenticeships program and Skilled Capital) must have a Training Initiative Funding Agreement (TIFA). The TIFA is the contractual arrangement between the ACT Government and RTOs for the delivery of government subsidised training in the ACT. The TIFA sets out the terms and conditions under which the ACT Government may make funds available to RTOs for the delivery of training and assessment for a range of training initiatives including the Infection Control Skill Set training and JobTrainer.

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Portfolio: Skills**ISSUE: Infection Control Training****Talking points:**

- The ACT signed the Project Agreement for the National Infection Control Training Fund (the Fund) in May 2020.
- The ACT's share of the Fund is \$1.34 million, based on a 50:50 co-contribution by the Australian and ACT governments.
- The Fund provides 3,800 fee-free infection control training places for ACT customer-facing workers. Funding is prioritised for those working in the retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning, security service, aged and disability sectors.
- This training will accelerate the uptake of new accredited skill sets in infection control to support the confident and safe conduct of business in the COVID-19 environment.
- 25 registered training organisations with an ACT Training Initiative Funding Agreement have nominated to deliver this accredited infection control training in the ACT.
- As at 31 May 2021, 1502 learners had enrolled, with 764 completions reported. Training places are available until 30 June 2021, or until the total funding allocation has been exhausted.
- In addition, funding has been allocated to CIT for delivery of non-accredited practical infection control workshops to complement the accredited training options available through the Fund.
 - As at 31 May 2021, 28 workshops have been held.
 - The workshops were attended by 179 participants from priority industries including: supported independent living, share accommodation providers, alcohol and other drug residential services, mental health residential services, disability providers and airport workers involved with repatriation flights.

Key Information

- In May 2020, the Australian Government established a joint Commonwealth-State fund to deliver infection control training, prioritising customer-facing workers.

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- The objective of the fund is to encourage the accelerated uptake of new nationally accredited infection prevention and control training skill sets, or equivalent nationally accredited training, to support businesses to re-open safely as COVID-19 restrictions allow.
- The Australian Government has committed \$40 million, which states and territories are required to match, providing a national pool of \$80 million to deliver at least 80,000 training places. Australian Government funding has been distributed to states and territories on an equal per-capita basis.
- The ACT is required to match funding up to \$670,000, once the Australian Government contribution is exhausted, by making an equivalent number of training places available to meet demand until 30 June 2021.
- There is no penalty to the ACT if demand does not see the ACT contribute an equal share of funding.
- The fee-free infection control training places are available to customer-facing employees (including business owners and supervisors) in any industry, with funding prioritised for workers in retail, tourism, transport and logistics, hospitality, cleaning, security services, and aged and disability care.

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Portfolio: Skills**ISSUE: JOBTRAINER FUND****Talking points:**

- The ACT Government will consider the Australian Government's recent offer, announced in the Federal Budget, to extend and expand the JobTrainer Fund with a further \$1 billion nationally over the next two financial years.
- Under our current agreement, JobTrainer represents a \$16.75 million joint investment with the Australian Government to deliver approximately 3,000 training places to job seekers and young people (aged 17 to 24, who have left school) in the ACT.
- This is a significant initiative to deliver skills development and achieve our ambitious target of growing Canberra's employment base to more than 250,000 local jobs by 2025.
- To date, 25 registered training organisations have enrolled students in 81 different courses in areas such as hospitality, security, environmental management and sustainability, community services and construction.
- As at 11 May, there have been approximately 1,630 enrolments in JobTrainer training places, with 833 of these students identifying as job seekers.
- The Canberra Institute of Technology will deliver up to 2,500 of the training places, including full qualifications across a range of industry sectors, pre-apprenticeship programs and online short courses.
- The Ginninderry SPARK program is being expanded to provide accredited training options and wraparound support for young people and cohorts who experience barriers to education, training and employment.
- More than 500 JobTrainer training places are being delivered by private training organisations under the existing Skilled Capital program.

Key Information

- The ACT's share of JobTrainer Fund is \$16.75 million (including an \$8.375 million ACT Government contribution).
- The ACT's JobTrainer program includes three streams to allow for speed to market and training options that meet target cohort needs. The first ACT JobTrainer training places were released on 5 November 2020 and the ACT had met all performance targets associated with the Australian Government's funding contribution.

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- The program has seen high demand for full qualifications and the funding made available through Skilled Capital has been fully committed, with more than 500 enrolments.

Background Information

- JobTrainer targets young people, aged 17 to 24, and job seekers.
- The intent is to provide these learners access to a range of quality learning opportunities in current and emerging skills needs areas; and employers with access to a skilled and adaptive workforce with a broad range of capabilities.
- JobTrainer courses include full qualifications, pre-apprenticeships and online short courses in key industries and occupations, including community services, healthcare, renewable energy and sustainability, digital and cyber security, construction and hospitality.

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Portfolio: Skills**ISSUE: Skilled Migration****Talking points:**

- The Australian Migration Program enables the ACT Government to address skill shortages and labour market needs in the Territory.
- The Program allows the ACT to attract and retain appropriate and sustainable levels of skilled and business migrants to contribute to Canberra's economy and society, and to support strategic industry growth in the region
- The Australian Government allocates the ACT a fixed number of nomination places each financial year. The 2020-21 allocation is 1,430 nomination places.
- ACT nomination does not guarantee a migration outcome. Rather, it triggers a formal visa invitation by the Department of Home Affairs.
- On 9 June 2021, the Minister for Immigration confirmed ACT's allocation of 2030 nomination places for the 2021-22 Migration Program.
- The 2021-22 Migration Program will continue to provide flexibility to ensure Australia can respond effectively to uncertain public health and economic challenges arising from COVID-19. A continued focus on onshore visa applicants in 2021-22 will help to stabilise Australia's population while travel restrictions remain in place to manage the spread of COVID-19.

Key Information

- 5 December 2020 – the Australian Government announced the total allocation of nomination places for 2020-21. The 1,400 allocation of skilled 490/491 places was retained, with a 60 /40 percent split in favour of permanent 190 nomination, while the Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP) places doubled to 30. Processing of the nominations is on track to meet the allocation by 30 June 2021.
- 15 January 2021 – The ACT Skilled Migration program reopened with the *ACT Critical Skills List January 2021* in effect. The List was updated in May 2021 updated to ensure that the ACT Migration Program eligibility criteria adapts and responds to evolving critical skills needs.

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- On 9 June 2021, the Minister for Immigration wrote to the Chief Minister confirming the nomination allocations in State and Territory nominated visa categories for the 2021-22 Migration Program:
 - Skilled Nominated visa (subclass 190): 600 places
 - Skilled Work Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 491): 1400 places
 - Business Innovation and Investment Program (BIIP): 30 places
- The total allocation of 2,030 nomination places aligns with ACT's request, supported by ACT Treasury, for an increase in skilled nomination places, with a 70 percent split in favour of provisional 491 nomination.

Background Information

- Skilled Migration in the ACT occurs under the *Territory Migration Agreement*, which allows the ACT to access the following visa pathways:
 - Skilled Nominated (permanent) (subclass 190) visa (*802 nomination places*)
 - Skilled Work Regional (provisional) subclass 491 visa program - may transition to permanent residence after three years of living and working in regional Australia if they meet Home Affairs eligibility criteria. (*598 nomination places*)
 - BIIP provides an avenue for ACT to nominate successful overseas businesspeople to conduct business or investment activity or undertake entrepreneurial activity in Canberra (*30 nomination places*).

ACT Critical Skills List

- On 7 August 2020, the Australian Government directed that state and territory nominations focus on applicant profiles critical to Australia's economic post-pandemic recovery, and applicants residing in Australia.
- The ACT Occupation List was replaced by the *ACT Critical Skills List (for migration purposes)* in line with the directive from the Australian Government.
- The List identifies current and future critical skills essential to support the ACT's post pandemic recovery. It calculates a score based on vacancy rate trends, vacancy rate growth, employment level, projected employment growth, predicted retirement, and latest number of program graduates.

Key dates

- 30 June 2020 - the Australian Migration Program was suspended pending the Australian Government Budget announcement (October 2020) of the Migration program settings for 2020-21. As a result, the ACT Migration Program also was suspended.

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- 18 August 2020 - the ACT migration program reopened with an interim allocation of 299 nomination places and new 'critical skill' eligibility criteria.
- 6 October 2020 - the Australian Government Budget maintained the Migration Program 2020-21 planning levels at 160,000 places. However:
 - national skilled stream places decreased by 26.8 per cent; within this stream, state/territory nominated places decreased by 55.2 per cent
 - national family stream places increased by 81 per cent, which is expected to help clear a large partner/spouse case backlog.

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ISSUE: SKILLS NEEDS LIST (SNL)**Talking points:**

- Each year, Skills Canberra develops the *Skills Needs List* (SNL) to identify occupations in demand, and the ACT and vocational education and training (VET) qualifications that best fit those occupations.
- The SNL informs ACT Government training subsidies for the Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) and Skilled Capital programs.
- Skills Canberra releases a draft SNL for consultation with employers, registered training organisations (RTOs) and key stakeholders to identify priority areas, and target subsidies accordingly.
- The draft 2021-22 SNL contains 59 qualifications and 86 occupations.
- The final 2021-22 SNL, incorporating stakeholder feedback, will be published in June 2021.

Key Information

- A draft SNL Survey was sent to all registered training organisations (RTOs) operating in the ACT, and to employers, peak bodies, industry associations, unions, community organisations, regional development agencies and other stakeholders to validate the draft list and to identify additional skills needs.
- A link to the survey is also provided on the Skills Canberra website.
- The consultation process on the 2021-22 draft SNL ran from 12 April to 7 May 2021.
- Skills Canberra received 361 useable responses. The main respondents were employers (229), RTOs (51), ACT Government Directorates (21), community organisations (17), peak bodies (7), and industry associations (6).

Background

- The List is informed by the Forecasting of Industry Needs and Entitlement (FINE) model, ACT Government economic and social priorities derived from the budget papers, regular consultation across ACT Government and, this year, by feedback received during the JobTrainer consultation.

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ISSUE: Master Builders ACT (MBA)**Talking points:**

- The ACT Government recognises that a **thriving building and construction industry is vital** to building and maintaining the infrastructure needed to meet the needs of a growing population and supporting economic growth in the region.
- Building and construction work in the ACT has **increased 3.6 per cent** (seasonally adjusted) in the March quarter 2021.
- The ACT's building and construction workforce is seasonal, with sharp increases to workforce numbers occurring during the construction of major infrastructure and residential projects over the last ten years. This was reflected during the 2019 calendar year with the completion of Light Rail Stage 1.
- Construction industry employment (private and public) is at **15,100 in February 2021**, compared to the ten-year average of 15,500.
- Access to skilled workers in the building and construction sector is a problem faced around Australia, particularly at this time of record infrastructure investment by all governments.
- The ACT Government is working to address this and ensure that the construction workforce has the skilled pipeline it needs to deliver our **record \$14 billion** infrastructure plan.
- The Government subsidises training according to the **ACT Skills Needs List**. The List is developed through stakeholder consultation and labour market analysis. In this way, government funding is allocated to support emerging and changing skills needs across the ACT, including in the building and construction industry.
- The **ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority (TFA)** also provides employer incentives, and funding, to support training for new and existing workers in the ACT building and construction sector.
- To date, Government-subsidised training has resulted in a **strong pipeline** of skilled workers in the ACT through the **Australian Apprenticeships system**.
 - The number of annual Australian Apprenticeship commencements in the ACT building and construction industry has increased by 41 per cent since 2015 (from 906 in 2015, to 1,276 in 2020).

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- The number of building and construction apprentices in-training in the ACT has increased by 37 per cent since 2017 (1,839 in March 2017 to 2,525 in March 2021).
- The number of female apprentices in-training increased by 426 percent from March 2018 to March 2021 (34 to 145), while the ratio of female apprentices compared to total apprentices increased by 310 percent in the same period (1.85 to 5.74 percent from March 2018 to March 2021).
- More young women are starting apprenticeships through our Australian school-based Apprenticeship (ASBA) program. So far this year, there have been 20 female and 57 male ASBA commencements in building and construction.
- In 2018, the ACT Government established the **Women in Trades Grants Program** to implement a 2016 election commitment.
- Approximately \$800,000, in ACT and Commonwealth funding, was made available through two funding rounds in 2018 and 2019:
 - The eight successful projects provided pre-apprenticeship opportunities targeted to women in the construction industry, as well a range of activities to reduce the barriers faced by women in, or wanting to enter, trades.
 - Participants in the programs received access to workshops to improve perceptions of women in trades, mentoring, as well as training in the form of pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and other relevant training (e.g., the Certificate II in Construction).
- The **Future Skills for Future Jobs Grants Program** provides funding for innovative projects which aim to increase the number of commencements across pre-apprenticeship, pre-traineeships, Australian Apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships.
 - In 2019-20, the Women in Construction Pathways Program received \$163,000 to create Australian School-based Apprenticeship opportunities for young women wanting to commence a career in the building and construction industry.
 - In 2020-21, \$100,000 was allocated to the Mentorships to Power Apprenticeships Project to provide a digital mentoring and learning platform to support the retention of apprentices building and construction industry.
- The federal **Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements** wage subsidy works alongside ACT Government measures to support businesses and Group Training Organisations (GTOs) take on new apprentices and trainees.

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Key Information

- The ACT Government's *Jobs and Economic Recovery Plan* prioritises employment growth across key sectors including construction and housing. Many young apprentices are already gaining valuable industry skills on infrastructure projects, such as the Canberra hospital renewal project.
- The ACT Government provides funding to support the training of new and existing workers in the ACT building and construction industry through:
 - Australian Apprenticeships (User Choice) program
 - Skilled Capital Program
 - Canberra Institute of Technology 'profile' funding
 - the Training Fund Authority.
- Skills Canberra conducts annual consultation to determine skills needs areas, the VET qualifications that respond to these and the appropriate training subsidies. The way subsidies are funded is reviewed annually and adjusted to reflect emerging demand and priorities.

Women in Trades Grants Program

- The Women in Trades Grants Program launched on 29 March 2018. Funding of \$770,400 was allocated to eight projects, comprising \$500,000 of ACT Government funding over two years from 2017-18 to 2018-19, and additional funding of \$270,400 from the National Partnership on the Skilling Australians Fund.
- The first funding round was administered in April 2018 with a total funding allocation of \$204,285 for the following projects:
 - MBA Work Insight Program – Master Builders Association of the ACT
 - Women in Power – National Electrical and Communications Association (ECA) Training
 - Future Trades Women – Australian Training Company Ltd (ATC)
- A second funding round was administered in November 2018 and finalised in March 2019 with a total funding allocation of \$560,920 for the following projects:
 - Unapologetic - Girls with Grit – Canberra Institute of Technology
 - Building Women for Construction – LJS Constructions
 - Skilling Women Program 2019-2020 – Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT)
 - Women-in-Power - Engagement Project – National Electrical and Communications Association (ECA) Training
 - Women Working in Trades – UnionsACT
- This program is now complete, however some projects are ongoing in 2021.

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Training Fund Authority (TFA)

- TFA is responsible for providing funding for the training of eligible workers in the ACT building and construction industry. TFA collects a training levy of 0.2 per cent of the cost of applicable building and construction work in the ACT.
- The Authority uses collected funds to invest in projects and training that directly support the industry's skills base, in accordance with TFA's annual training plan.
- Funding for training is targeted at developing new skills for entry level (Australian Apprentices) and existing workers in the industry, and provided to employers, including GTOs.
- Peak Bodies, including MBA, are invited to consult on the draft TFA Training Plan. The 2020 The TFA's 2020 Training Plan priority areas included:
 - work health and safety – mandated compliance and health and mental wellness training
 - apprenticeships – support for apprentices and their employers
 - general construction – short-gauge steel usage, carpentry
 - finance, business and management – digital literacy, human resource management
 - electrotechnology and energy - renewable energy, data and technical communications, electrical standards and safety.
- TFA provides funding for employers who employ a first year Australian Apprentice (AA) in specific qualifications: \$3,000 each at the three- and twelve-month milestones.
- TFA also provides financial support to GTOs for each AA.

Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy

- Through the subsidy, any business or that engages an AA between 5 October 2020 and 31 March 2022 may be eligible for a subsidy of 50 per cent of wages paid to a new or recommencing apprentice or trainee for a 12-month period from the date of commencement, to a maximum of \$7,000 per quarter. There is no cap on the number of eligible trainees/apprentices.

Background

- In May 2021, MBA provided a submission on the 2021-22 ACT Budget. The submission urged the ACT Government to consider proposals on commercial and building activity; civil construction works; residential building activity; infrastructure investment; skills and training; and mental health.

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- The MBA proposal sought:
 - increased User Choice funding
 - targeted wage support for employers in the construction industry who hire unemployed ACT residents from COVID-impacted industries
 - \$2,000 contribution to GTOs, per apprentice, for the provision of pastoral care
 - exempting GTOs from the labour hire licensing scheme
 - ongoing funding of \$100,000 for each of the MBA Women in Trades Program (previously funded through ACT Government's Women in Trades grants program), MBA Women in Civil program and MBA mentoring program.

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