

27 March 2018

Media Release

The well-paid career path that parents don't want their kids to take

What do you want to be when you grow up? It's an eternal question and often young people nominate practical, outdoors or active careers. Ask parents what they want for their children career-wise and answers will include rewarding – both financially and personally - with opportunities to progress and work-life balance.

A career in a trade can deliver all of this and more – working outside on challenging projects, earning good money and having the satisfaction of seeing your efforts contribute to society through much-needed infrastructure or housing and even ensuring people's safety.

But I fear children are missing out on the opportunities offered by this career path due to societal misconceptions and parental bias towards university.

Government figures show apprentice numbers dropped 5.6 per cent over the year to September 2017, and the number of apprentices in training - at just under 262,000 compares with 443,000 in 2012. There is some debate around the figures as the type of training that is counted as an apprenticeship has changed during that period, but it is a useful yardstick.

As well as having broad and adverse economic implications, this indicates to me that we're limiting the opportunities we're offering our young people.

There are many answers why apprentice numbers are dropping but there is one important factor that is rarely explored; the influence of parents, who don't realise their hopes for their children can be achieved with a career in a trade.

I hear time and again that young people are being put off apprenticeships by well-meaning parents who want to see their children in traditionally well-paid and respected white-collar roles – lawyers, accountants, general managers etc.

This is especially true of the parents of young women, who often think a building site isn't a place for their daughters.

We are the first to concede that more needs to be done by the profession to encourage young women to enter a career in the trades. But we need the support of parents. We want them to look at the benefits of a trade for their daughters and be open to the idea of them working on a construction site, delivering technical projects.

More broadly, we need parents to think about their child and the sort of career they'll excel at rather than just assuming they need to go and get a university degree.

A quick look at the numbers explains why. NECA provides electrotechnology apprenticeship training, with around 90 per cent of our apprentices successfully completing their apprenticeship and almost all of them finding a well-paid job straight after graduation. This compares favourably to university graduates: only 71 per cent of graduates secure a job straight out of university. Fifteen per cent are still unemployed four years after graduating, and median starting salaries are just \$54,000. And students are saddled with large debts with once they enter the workforce.

Add to this the opportunity to work outdoors on challenging projects, and establish and run your own business, and an electrical apprenticeship is even more compelling.

The electrotechnology industry is increasingly embracing initiatives that will help support and develop apprentices during their apprenticeship. For example, NECA has teamed up with the Federal government to run the Industry Specialist Mentoring for Australian Apprentices scheme.

Mentors are no longer the reserve of aspiring tech entrepreneurs or professional services firms, and ISMAA is connecting experienced tradespeople with apprentices, benefiting both parties.

It's therefore not surprising Ms Hanson is advocating for more apprenticeships – it is an excellent career option. So, next time there's a career discussion consider an apprenticeship; a career path which can fulfil parents' and children's ambitions.

-ENDS-

NECA media contact

Lynda Proude 0458 726 355, lynda.proude@neca.asn.au ski

Notes for editors

- 1. NECA is the peak industry body representing the interests of electrical and communications contractors Australia-wide.*
- 2. Membership comprises over 5,000 contracting companies with over 50,000 employees.*
- 3. NECA wholly-owns Registered Training Organisations and Group Training Organisations in NSW, VIC & WA, the EcoSmart Electricians initiative, ACRS (a national cabling registrar) and has a joint venture with NESS Super in NSW.*
- 4. NECA employs around 2,000 apprentice electricians, training a further 2,000.*