

A new infrastructure traineeship program boosts job opportunities for NSW youth

A two-year traineeship program in the infrastructure sector provides paid training opportunities for NSW school leavers. Designed by School infrastructure NSW (SINSW), in collaboration with government infrastructure agencies, the Infrastructure Traineeship program provides trainees with valuable industry exposure and a greater understanding of the important role each stakeholder plays in the successful delivery of public infrastructure.

SINSW recognised a need for alternative end-of-school pathways for young people, and to provide further training in infrastructure skills to meet future demand in this area. Program development began in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it was recognised that the pandemic would have a disproportionate impact on young people.

The program's design drew on the extensive training experience within NSW Government, through initiatives such as the NSW Government Graduate Program and the Transport for NSW Graduate Program. Learnings from these programs were adopted, including rotating trainees between different organisations and providing opportunities to gain nationally recognised qualifications.

The Infrastructure Traineeship program is unique in that trainees rotate across both government and industry sectors, spending eight months each with a government agency, a contractor and a consultant organisation while also formally studying a Certificate IV course at TAFE in disciplines such as Project



Management, Business or Procurement. This structure provides a comprehensive lifecycle of work experience over two years.

The program has been a model of collaboration. A senior advisory committee consisting of high-ranking leaders from across NSW Government and industry meets quarterly to provide advice. A working group of government agencies led by SINSW also met fortnightly to coordinate the delivery of the program.

The program is managed by a private group training organisation (GTO). Trainees are formally employed by the GTO, who are responsible for recruiting and supporting them to complete the program and gain their qualifications. Training Services NSW funds relevant training, including first aid and white card courses. Each participating government agency funds the trainee's salary plus the GTO service fee throughout the program. The partners in private infrastructure volunteer to take trainees and support them with real-world working experience.

The initial intake in the program was significantly oversubscribed, with more than 2,000 applicants applying for 137 positions. Targets were set to offer 50% of traineeships to women and 15% to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At commencement, 47% of trainees were women and 13% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In addition, 12% came from regional areas of NSW and 16% were based in Newcastle or Wollongong.

This innovative training model meets the expressed needs of young people, with feedback from current trainees being overwhelmingly positive. It shows that the sector continues to innovate with employment models for training and building skills. In 2022, the program is hosting a second intake of trainees, with more agency partners and new infrastructure industry partners.

“The traineeship provided me with an excellent opportunity to learn and grow.” – 2021 trainee

This traineeship partner model helps the sector develop talent, and can be rolled out to other sectors facing skills shortages, including information technology and health. It provides alternative pathways for school leavers and a model to build the practical skills of young people throughout NSW.

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