



CIVIL CONTRACTORS
FEDERATION
VICTORIA

**CCF Victoria submission to the Legislative Assembly
Economy & Infrastructure Committee inquiry into
student pathways to in-demand industries**

August 2025



Acknowledgement of traditional owners

Civil Contractors Federation Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and live. We recognise Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and the traditional owners of this land. In recognising their connection to our land and waterways, we pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.



1. Introduction

Civil Contractors Federation Victoria (CCF Victoria) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry on student pathways into the civil construction industry.

Representing over 450 contractors and associate members, CCF Victoria is the peak industry body for the state's civil construction sector. Our members play a critical role in delivering the enabling infrastructure on which Victoria depends: roads and rail; utilities, water and sewerage systems; energy projects and housing-enabling infrastructure. Without civil contractors, major infrastructure works would not be possible.

This inquiry is timely. The civil construction industry is an in-demand industry. It is also facing an acute workforce shortage. Two-thirds of our members report that they cannot find appropriately skilled workers.

These shortages compromise the delivery of major projects, inflating costs and directly threatening Victoria's ability to meet key policy objectives, including affordable housing targets, resilient infrastructure, and the renewable energy transition.

What's more, we continue to face a critical shortage of skills in civil infrastructure, owing to a number of factors including challenges with cuts to industry skills funding. **This alone undermines genuine efforts to train and upskill existing workers and equivalent efforts to create a compelling and attractive career option for today's students – tomorrow's generation of workers.**

Without accelerated efforts to expand skills training and increase accessibility of qualifications in civil construction – in collaboration with industry - infrastructure delivery and ongoing maintenance, urban development and housing targets will be at risk.

2. Systemic failures in the current training and education system

2.1 Over-concentration of skills funding in public TAFE

The Free TAFE initiative, while well-intentioned, has produced market distortions by concentrating skills funding almost exclusively within the public TAFE system. This approach effectively excludes private and industry-led Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) from accessing **sufficient funding support** to deliver civil construction training at scale required by industry.

Of significant concern, this directly contravenes the spirit and intent of key Victorian policies, including the Economic Growth Statement¹, the new Victorian Industry Policy², and the Local Jobs First Policy³.

On this point alone, industry RTOs are also businesses in their own right. As such, they should – as per the Government’s own assertion, “**Every Industry, Every Community**”, in the Economic Growth Statement⁴ - be given “full and fair opportunity” to participate equally, as also clearly stated in the Local Jobs First Policy⁵.

Industry RTOs have every right to exist and they play a critical role in helping to create job opportunities, including for apprentices, trainees and cadets⁶. Independent RTOs generally comprise subject matter experts immersed in the industry, delivering currency and knowledge of modern workplace practices, in an agile manner that suits the operational rhythms of industry.

Moreover, industry RTOs have deep experience and flexible delivery models that make them ideally placed to help grow the skilled construction workforce that Victoria desperately requires. This includes supporting student pathways into in-demand industries, including civil construction, given the unique skill profiles of civil occupations—which are often better taught in applied, on-site environments that industry RTOs offering tailored training products and services can provide, compared to the public institution modelling.

We urge the Committee to recommend that the Free TAFE initiative and associated funding mechanisms be opened to private and independent RTOs who can demonstrate industry alignment, quality outcomes, no intake wait times and links to genuine employment opportunities. This can only complement TAFE training delivery and ensure the Victorian Government meets, if not exceeds, its expectations and targets for future workforce development.

¹ <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/Economic-Growth-Statement.pdf>

² https://djsir.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2398975/Victorian-Industry-Policy.pdf

³ <https://localjobsfirst.vic.gov.au/about/local-jobs-first>

⁴ <https://www.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-12/Economic-Growth-Statement.pdf>

⁵ <https://localjobsfirst.vic.gov.au/about/local-jobs-first>

⁶ <https://localjobsfirst.vic.gov.au/about/local-jobs-first>

2.2 Lack of federally-funded Apprenticeships for Civil Occupations

Civil occupations such as mobile plant operators, pipelayers, and concreters continue to be excluded from priority apprenticeship funding programs due to their misclassification under outdated occupational standards, that do not recognise these roles as trades. These roles are wrongly categorised as low-skill, despite requiring Certificate III-level training, technical precision, and high safety compliance.

This exclusion has created a perverse incentive structure—where stop-go traffic controllers can be fast-tracked into roles with minimal training, while skilled plant operators building billion-dollar infrastructure are denied the same training subsidies.

Adding insult to injury and distorting the market in a way that deters students from pursuing rewarding careers in civil infrastructure, trades and vocations of a low skill base or low priority – such as dog handler or interior decorator – are rated a higher priority than tunnel constructors and earthmoving plant operators. To put this in perspective: curtains and blinds installers are not going to solve the cost of living crisis nor fix the state’s skills shortages in priority sectors!

***‘Interior decorators
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Fixing this begins with properly classifying civil occupations as **Skill Level 3 trades** under the new OSCA framework and ensuring they are included in national apprenticeship lists and supported by federal and state funding initiatives.

We urge the Committee to recommend that the Federal Government changes the classifications of civil trades to help lift the appeal of careers in civil construction in the eyes of students considering their working futures.

3. A shrinking pipeline of skilled workers

Without meaningful action and intervention, Victoria is forecast to face a **shortfall of 160,000 construction workers** by 2034⁷, with plant operators and tradespeople in greater shortage than engineers. The problem is compounded by a skewed state procurement system that favours large contractors and excludes or reduces participation opportunities for smaller, regional businesses.

Furthermore, investment in “last kilometre infrastructure” such as roads, sewerage and drainage has declined, housing commencements have stalled, and the workforce pipeline has failed to keep pace with population growth.

⁷ <https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/news/economy/student-pathways>

The solution is two-fold:

1. Prioritise **civil apprenticeships and traineeships** by classifying them properly, funding them appropriately and supporting effective career and recruitment marketing to appeal to a wider student base.
2. **Rebalance procurement** to include smaller-scale projects that enable SMEs to train and employ young workers.

4. Culture settings not prioritised

To paraphrase the saying ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’, culture also overrides training. Students can be taught the technical skills required for a role but their mindset, values and culture settings in their workplace or training environment are an entirely different matter.

Training interventions most often fail at the employer’s level, rarely the training program or learner themselves, as employers struggle to understand the support required to embed learning. In construction, we are also battling long-standing culture issues, which overrides training intervention (i.e. “this is how it’s really done”).

To address this and plug a significant gap in the training regime, CCF Victoria developed **Pathways – Shaping Careers, Reshaping Industry**, a bespoke apprentice support program that provided a wide range of structured wraparound support services and tools for both **worker (learner) and employer** across civil and diversity cultures. The reality of this is that employers and apprenticeship providers need to offer more than the basic 25 units of competency of a typical civil construction apprenticeship and superficial wraparound products. CCF Victoria’s Pathways program achieved outstanding results in attraction to industry, recruitment, placement and most importantly, meaningful retentive employment and apprenticeship completion rates leading to life-changing careers.

Addressing the topic of culture within the apprenticeships and training arena will not only increase successful completion rates but also enhance and support the promotion of civil construction as an in-demand industry and an attractive career option for students.

We urge the Committee to recommend that Government skills funding be appropriately and proportionately redirected to invest in the support mechanisms that will increase the value and appeal of career pathways into an in-demand industry such as civil construction. CCF Victoria has demonstrable evidence that providing equal investment in workplace preparedness and mental and physical safety culture increases retention in industry.

**‘Culture
overrides
training’**

Furthermore, through our **Pathways – Shaping Careers, Reshaping Industry** program, CCF Victoria identified the significant pressures placed on subcontractors to meet the primary project consortia Major Project Skills Guarantees (MPSG) and other Social Procurement requirements

when not having the resources or specialised internal knowledge to develop. This does not set up both contractor and new employee for success. The recent CCF Victoria program supported contractors Social Policy Posture and implementation maturity in these areas that significantly enhanced and supported careers and the surrounding workforce.

5. Recommendations

Issue	Recommendations
Funding equity for industry training providers	<p>Extend free TAFE initiatives to include accredited industry-led RTOs that deliver civil construction qualifications, expand student choice and increase training outcomes.</p> <p>Establish competitive access to skills funding based on delivery capability, not provider type, that eliminates waitlists for predominantly off-the-job institutionalised training models.</p> <p>Reverse the trend of cuts to subsidies and numbers of apprenticeship and training placements for independent RTOs to increase training outcomes, workforce growth and capability, and boost productivity complementing both public and private infrastructure projects.</p> <p>Utilise existing independent industry RTO assets and facilities and leverage available industry training expertise and capacity to accelerate skills and workforce growth, in turn accelerating government project delivery for greater productivity gains.</p>
Fix civil apprenticeship recognition	<p>Reclassify civil occupations such as plant operators, pipelayers and concreters to Skill Level 3 within OSCA.</p> <p>Ensure these occupations are eligible for state apprenticeship funding programs.</p>
Create clearer student pathways and increase student choice	<p>Fund dedicated civil construction VET-in-schools programs, delivered in partnership with industry.</p> <p>Promote structured career pathways through work experience, micro-credentials, and transition-to-work programs led by employers.</p>



In consultation with industry, fund the development and endorsement of transferable skills and a career pathways framework that harmonises introductory programs; allowing job seekers to retain and make choices in careers along their journey aligned to their favoured specialisation.

Create and support workplace cultures of work roles intended to support Apprentices

Promote and fund the development of proven civil industry and social culture programs for workplaces that support effective and safe physical and mentally healthy workplaces

Promote and fund the development of industry standards and procurement policy posture support, including funding implementation support programs for workplaces intending to meet primary consortia MSPG and like targets.

Align procurement with workforce development

Require that government infrastructure contracts include workforce development obligations (e.g. training targets, apprenticeships).

Fund “small project” procurement streams (<\$500m) that support SMEs and regional contractors who are well placed to train local new entrants.

Outcomes / Benefits for the Victorian community

- Greater student choice and affordability of VET pathway options
- A VET system that supports jobs creation and strong economic development, in line with the Economic Growth Statement, Local Jobs First Policy and Victorian Industry Policy.
- Long term, stable and secure employment outcomes that support community aspirations such as increased housing affordability and choice.

6. Conclusion

Civil construction is foundational to Victoria’s housing, transport, energy and economic future. Yet we cannot build what we cannot resource with the appropriate personnel.

Without targeted reforms to skills policy and student pathways, we risk further delaying critical infrastructure and excluding a generation of young Victorians from high-demand, high-value careers such as civil construction.

The civil construction industry is ready and willing to partner in delivering the workforce Victoria needs. What we need from government is policy alignment, funding equity and recognition of the skilled civil trades that deliver our infrastructure.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute and stand ready to provide further input, including our availability to appear in person as required.

Lisa Kinross

CEO
Civil Contractors Federation Victoria
lkinross@ccfvic.com.au
31 July 2025

Simon Mossman

Executive Manager – Policy & Communications
Civil Contractors Federation Victoria
smossman@ccfvic.com.au
31 July 2025



**CIVIL CONTRACTORS
FEDERATION**

VICTORIA

CIVIL CONTRACTORS FEDERATION VICTORIA

**9 BUSINESS PARK DRIVE
NOTTING HILL
VIC 3168**

**P 03 9588 7600
WWW.CCFVIC.COM.AU**