

Tool time for students in the trades push for skills

By [Eva Kolimar](#)

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Industry and education combined at Kingsgrove this month as part of a program for students to develop skills in trades.
Picture by Chris Laner

A group of high school students from across St George and Sutherland Shire took their lessons outside of their classroom walls and into the trades industry for a skill building workshop.

The Year 10 students - 15 of them, from Georges River College Peakhurst, Marist College Penshurst, Port Hacking High School, Lucas Heights Community School and St John Bosco Catholic College were on site at a business in the community to build toolboxes as part of a trade tester day to inspire career pathways into timber craftsmanship.

It was a hands-on experience for the 'crafting sustainable futures: timber windows and doors' workshop, where students learn how to use hammers and nails, and glue and sand wood.

The initiative was launched by the Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP) program, which connects schools with employers and industry. Kingsgrove company NICCO Timber Windows & Doors hosted the students.

Since the start of COVID-19, joiners and wood machinists were listed on the national skills shortage list. NICCO's John Toskas said the skilled talent pool almost became non-existent. "Our industry is facing a significant and detrimental skills shortage while also experiencing an increase in demand for our offering - with timber being the only sustainable and renewable option for window and door fabrication," he said. "We would advertise for positions and were lucky to receive any applications - and those who did apply were not even qualified or have any relevant experience."



John Toskas of NICCO Timber Windows & Doors at Kingsgrove keeps a watchful eye on students at work. Picture by Chris Lane

RIEP Officer Trevor Adams says co-designing the program with the employer, RIEP has been able to directly address their talent needs while providing students with invaluable hands-on experience and exposure to real-world careers.

"Seeing NICCO not only meet but exceed their goals in filling critical talent pipelines and offering more apprenticeship opportunities than anticipated is a testament to the success of the Regional Industry Education Partnerships" he said. "It shows what can be achieved when schools and businesses collaborate closely.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our local economy, driving growth and creating job opportunities. It's essential for students to connect with these businesses early on, so they

can see the diverse career paths available and develop their skills locally, ensuring a bright future for both themselves and the community."

Mr Adams said the aim was to bridge the gap between education and industry. "This program has done just that," he said. "By fostering early connections, we've empowered students with the knowledge and skills they need, while also creating a steady stream of future talent.

"When we align the curriculum with industry needs, we help employers build a strong workforce and students to gain a crucial head start in their careers. [It has] helped an employer solve critical talent shortages but also provided our students with direct pathways to employment."

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