

‘War for talent’: Crafting Sustainable Future program tackles tradie shortage

NSW students are putting down their pens and picking up the tools to “try a trade” amid a concerning drop in people taking on apprenticeships and a national skills shortage.



Elizabeth Pike

follow

2 min read

September 16, 2024 - 1:56PM

St George Shire Standard



The Crafting Sustainable Futures Program was hosted at NICCO in Kingsgrove. Picture: Supplied

Students from across southern Sydney have picked up the tools to “try a trade” amid a nationwide shortage of new trade apprentices.

A cohort of promising Year 10 students were selected from the St George region to build their own tool boxes as part of the trade tester day at NICCO Timber Windows & Doors in Kingsgrove on September 12.

The Crafting Sustainable Futures program aims to address the declining numbers of Aussies going into the trade industry by connecting students with local prospective employers before they leave school.

Chief project officer Trevor Adams said businesses were desperate for young employees but faced an uphill battle in the “war for talent” between universities and the trade sector.

“Universities have cornered the market for what (students) should do when they leave school, but in fact, sometimes the jobs aren’t actually there,” Mr Adams said.



The cohort of Year 10 students were selected from schools across the St George area. Picture: Supplied



The trade tester day aims to inspire career pathways in vocations listed on the National Skills Shortage list. Picture: Supplied

“Some people are so much more practical that learning skills that are in demand is actually a much better pathway for them.

“The program not only helps an employer solve critical talent shortages but also provides our students with direct pathways to employment. It’s a win-win for everyone involved.”

Mr Adams said the program was co-designed with businesses like NICCO, a custom-made timber windows and doors manufacturer, after timber craftsmanship was identified on the National Skills Shortage list.

NICCO marketing director Stacey Toskas said the imbalance in supply and demand was the key obstacle for businesses, with ads for tradespeople lucky to get any bites, compared to a recent posting for a junior architectural drafter which received more than 500 applications.

“That just says to me there’s an imbalance in what people are studying and graduating in versus the opportunities that are available,” Ms Toskas said.

“People aren’t looking at, you know what skills are actually needed on the National Skills Shortage lists.



The students learnt about timber craftsmanship by building their own toolbox. Picture: Supplied



Students tried their hand at the new trade amid a 22 per cent decline in apprenticeship commencements. Picture: Supplied

“We have a massive skill shortage in our space and we were trying to address it because, since Covid, we don’t have the same level of skilled migration ... and without a program like this, the future of our industry is in jeopardy.”

Ms Toskas said the small business hoped to hold out against automation – and a reliance on overseas workers – by employing local students and keeping local Australian manufacturing alive.

Program participant and Canterbury Boys student Nicholas Lacalandra, 15, encouraged fellow students to “keep an open mind” and try out the trade pathway amid a 22 per cent drop in apprenticeship commencements for 2022-2023.

“If they’ve never done this before it might be a new experience and they might try it, like it, and change their mind,” he said.

“I think it’s good if you want to be hands-on ... like meeting new people, asking questions, and gaining more knowledge.”

The Crafting Sustainable Futures program is run by the Department of Education’s Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP), and partners with more than 100 business and thousands of school students.

<https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/newslocal/st-george-shire/war-for-talent-crafting-sustainable-future-program-tackles-tradie-shortage/news-story/b5affe411da2f312ab6ce8563c28899c>