



Door open for trade training

By SHARON KEMP

AFTER four years of consecutive falls in apprenticeship numbers, there are opportunities in traditional trades and traineeships, according to a Bendigo vocational training specialist.

But Apprenticeships Matter regional manager Ivan Crisp said not only were most local secondary students unaware of how to get onto the career path, but scores of students he had talked to knew nothing about the modern award.

Mr Crisp said not all local high schools promoted vocational training as a career path despite vocational training gaining entry to nine of the top 10 fastest growing occupation fields in Australia.

He said vocational training had a reputation of being less than a higher education even though graduates attracted higher starting wages, and enjoyed far higher employment rates.

His experience is supported by conclusions drawn by research on behalf of Skilling Australia Foundation that "compared with

university, VET is often considered the poor second cousin, seemingly receiving less positive attention in the media, among career counsellors and, significantly, with parents".

"A recent national survey of 1010 Australians found that four in five parents would prefer their children go to university after leaving school rather than undertake a vocational training pathway," the report, titled *Perceptions are not Reality* and published last month, said.

Providers in the Australian Apprenticeship Sup-

port Network were funded for the first time in 2015 to guide school leavers into VET courses and support them to completion.

Another \$1.5 billion was set aside in the 2017 federal budget after apprenticeship and traineeship uptake in 2016 dropped to the lowest since 1998 and there were fewer completions since 2002, according to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

At the same time, enrolments in university have steadily increased.

The federal government's 2017 funding will be targeted at priority occupations and growth industries including tourism, hospitality, health and ageing, agriculture, en-

gineering, manufacturing, building and construction and digital technologies.

Mr Crisp said many parents and secondary educators thought apprenticeships related to the traditional trades such as in the construction industry.

But VET training was diverse and included creative occupations such as floristry, hairdressing, framing and digital technologies.

Employers who offer an apprenticeship in an occupation listed on the National Skills Needs List could also qualify for incentives, and rural and regional employers for additional payments.

"It is a matter of educating secondary students about their options," Mr Crisp said.



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