

# The Australian apprenticeship system: informing future directions and solutions



## Mary Cushnahan

2011 Furnishing Industry Association of Australia (Vic/Tas)  
International Fellowship

Fellowship funded by Australian Furniture Association  
(Formerly Furniture Industry Association of Australia)



Australian Furniture Association Inc.



International  
Specialised  
Skills  
Institute

**ISS Institute**  
Level 1  
189 Faraday Street  
Carlton Vic  
AUSTRALIA 3053

**T** 03 9347 4583  
**F** 03 9348 1474  
**E** [info@issinstitute.org.au](mailto:info@issinstitute.org.au)  
**W** [www.issinstitute.org.au](http://www.issinstitute.org.au)

---

Published by International Specialised Skills Institute, Melbourne

Extract published on [www.issinstitute.org.au](http://www.issinstitute.org.au)

© Copyright ISS Institute August 2012

This publication is copyright. No part may be reproduced by any process except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Whilst this report has been accepted by ISS Institute, ISS Institute cannot provide expert peer review of the report, and except as may be required by law no responsibility can be accepted by ISS Institute for the content of the report or any links therein, or omissions, typographical, print or photographic errors, or inaccuracies that may occur after publication or otherwise. ISS Institute do not accept responsibility for the consequences of any action taken or omitted to be taken by any person as a consequence of anything contained in, or omitted from, this report.

# Executive Summary

---

The traditional apprenticeship is a formal employment and training arrangement that originated in Europe, and has increased in popularity over the last two decades. The Fellow investigated the international perspective of a range of issues currently impacting on the Australian apprenticeship system; identify crossovers and differences; and inform future directions and solutions. The issues of apprentice recruitment, retention and completion were targeted.

In Canada and the European and Scandinavian countries visited by the Fellow (Italy, Denmark and Austria), cabinetmaking apprenticeship training content centred largely around the acquisition and perfecting of traditional trade skills. More contemporary skills, such as Computer Numeric Control (CNC) machining and Computer Aided Design (CAD) programs were taught, but there was a consensus that due to differences in individual workplaces and between programs and systems, the bulk of this training was workplace specific and done at the individual workplaces by product specialist trainers. This is also true to a large extent in Australia. However, the emphasis in the formal training of Furnituremaking apprentices across the country has moved away from traditional trade skills, to a greater focus on the skills that employers perceive are needed by their particular enterprise. The apprentices' holistic training and education is perhaps overlooked as employers negotiate training plans, which are enterprise focused.

All countries visited by the Fellow had pre-signup testing of prospective apprentices to gauge their ability to complete the formal side of their training. There was also a completion exam and a post-apprenticeship test, which led to attainment of the Red Seal, Journeyman or Master Craftsman title. These titles varied slightly between countries, but all signify attainment of the highest recognised trade skills level in that industry, post apprenticeship. Australia currently has neither of these testing regimes.

The Fellow's findings show that Europe has a long and proud history of apprenticeships, which are generally understood by all the parties involved (parents, young people, government, employers and training providers). Apprenticeships are valued by the candidate, the employer, and society. Australia and Canada, however, both struggle with the perceived low social status and the validity of a trade apprenticeship as a long and financially rewarding career path. In both countries, trade apprenticeships are often seen as 'second best', or for those who are less academically competent.

Australia appears to be unique in placing huge emphasis, and government funding, in the formal Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Recognition of Current Competence (RCC), and Competency Based Completion (CBC), all of which potentially reduce the term of an apprenticeship. This direction was not shared by any of the countries visited by the Fellow. In fact, the reverse appeared to be true. All countries appeared to greatly value the three to four year fixed term of indentureship and formal training, and understood that it took time to develop skills to the level expected.

All of the countries visited by the Fellow had a range of supports in place to assist people considering undertaking an apprenticeship and formal mentors while they were indentured. Australia has recently designated funding specifically to engage apprenticeship advisors, to work with industry and employers; and apprentice mentors, to work with apprentices to support them through the critical first twelve months of their engagement with the employer.

Australia is also extremely well placed with its established system of Group Training Organisations (GTO), who employ apprentices, and effectively sub-contract them to enterprises who require developing tradespeople. The brunt of responsibility for the apprenticeship contract is carried by the GTO, with 'host' employers being able to access this employee base as needed by their specific enterprise. This arrangement allows for upturns and downturns in the industry, minimising the impact on both the host employers and the apprentice's training contract.

All of the countries visited by the Fellow expressed concerns about ensuring consistency of training and the resulting qualification. The post-trade Master Craftsman exam makes visible to the candidate

## ***Executive Summary***

---

where gaps may be. However, this is too late for the candidate, as they would already have completed their apprenticeship. As there is no consistent, unambiguous EU recognised documented training program, those interviewed by the Fellow expressed difficulties in the mobility of apprentices and qualified tradespeople across the EU, and sometimes even across municipalities. They stated that the sequencing, content and rigor of training could vary immensely, depending on the apprentices' main country (or locality) of training.

Unlike most of the countries visited by the Fellow, Australia is extremely well positioned to ensure consistency of training and the mobility of apprentices within the trade and across the country, because of the use of Nationally Accredited Training Packages. The consistency and integrity of an apprentices training is guaranteed (as much as it is possible to do), because the outcomes of each block of skills (Unit of Competence) is clearly directed. Training Packages are a national system of training recognition, and rather than dictating the training that must be undertaken, they articulate the skills and knowledge which a candidate must be able to demonstrate to be deemed competent. This system allows for differences in individual enterprises, in candidate requirements, in training providers, and ensures consistency of the resulting skills.

The research findings also reflect how similar Australia and Canada's apprenticeship issues are. Canada also faces declining language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) abilities amongst apprentices, and there is similar difficulty in attracting the right people to the right jobs, contributing to similarly unacceptably low completion rates.

While Australia is actively making attempts to improve apprentice recruitment, retention and completions, more needs to be done. Australia has enormous amounts of physical and financial resources dedicated to the training of apprentices. With apprentice numbers close to half a million, and a completion rate averaging around 48 per cent, this highlights both massive waste, and massive scope for improved outcomes. Some 'tweaking' and specific targeting is required to achieve these improved outcomes.

For apprenticeships to gain mainstream acceptance, and indeed social esteem and the recognition they receive internationally, a massive targeted public promotions campaign must be undertaken. For this to succeed, it must engage all facets of society, education and industry. There must be buy-in by parents, teachers, employers, and of course, young people. Raising the social status of apprenticeships can only be achieved when they are truly appreciated, validated, and most of all, valued by society.

# **Table of Contents**

---

<b>i</b>	<b>Abbreviations/Acronyms</b>
<b>iii</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Acknowledgements</b>
1	Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)
2	Fellowship Supporter
2	Fellowship Sponsor
2	Supporters
<b>3</b>	<b>About the Fellow</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Aims of the Fellowship Program</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>The Australian Context</b>
7	SWOT Analysis
<b>11</b>	<b>Identifying the Skills Deficiencies</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>The International Experience</b>
<b>23</b>	<b>Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<b>31</b>	<b>References</b>

# Abbreviations/Acronyms

---

AFA	Australian Furnishing Association
AVETRA	Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association
CAD	Computer aided drawing/drafting
CBC	Competency Based Completions
CMM	Curriculum Maintenance Manager
CNC	Computer Numeric Control, referring to machining and processing centres
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
FIAA	The Furnishing Industry of Australia (now Furniture Australia)
FIAA (Vic/Tas)	The Furnishing Industry Association of Australia (Vic/Tas)
FCJ	Furnishing, Cabinetmaking and Joinery Association
FURNITAC	Furnishing Industry Training Advisory Committee
FurnTAG	Furnishing Teachers' Advisory Group
GTO	Group Training Organisation
ISS Institute	International Specialised Skills Institute
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
LLN	Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) <a href="http://www.deewr.gov.au/skills/overview/policy/tpdh/competencyunits/pages/policy.aspx">http://www.deewr.gov.au/skills/overview/policy/tpdh/competencyunits/pages/policy.aspx</a> 24/10/2011
MSA	Manufacturing Skills Australia
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
RCC	Recognition of Current Competence
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TDC	TAFE Development Centre
TP	Training Package
UoC	Unit of Competence
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETIS	Vocational Education and Training in School
VISTA	Association of Vocational Education and Training professionals

# Definitions

---

## **Competency Based Completions (CBC).**

In the document Apprenticeships in 2011: Competency Based Completion Arrangements, the Victorian State Government states: "Under the new system (Competency Based Completions), the apprenticeship will be completed when the training provider gets confirmation from an employer that their apprentice has demonstrated the competencies necessary to complete their qualification, and by doing so complete their training contract." Victorian Government, Apprenticeships in 2011: Competency Based Completion Arrangements, Victoria, 2011.

A Furniture Making apprenticeship in Victoria has traditionally been a four-year apprenticeship, with the fourth year being fully on-the-job, and the formal training (often at an external training provider) being completed. CBC can therefore result in early completion, or what has become referred to as 'fast track apprenticeships'. The time served in the apprenticeship therefore is determined by the speed with which the applicant becomes competent in the Units of Competence which make up their qualification.

## **Design**

Design is problem setting to meet human needs and wants. Design is a fundamental economic and business tool. It is embedded in every aspect of commerce and industry and adds high value to any service or product – in business, government, education and training and the community in general. <sup>1</sup>

## **Employability Skills**

These are the skills needed to function in a wide variety of life and work settings. They are not technical skills, but are skills that allow people to do their jobs well. They include:

- Communication skills
- Teamwork skills
- Problem solving skills
- Taking initiative and being enterprising
- Planning and organisation skills
- Self management skills, including time management skills
- Ability to learn and understand quickly
- Ability to use and adapt to new technology.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/careers/findwork.htm> (accessed 25/10/11)

## **Innovation**

Creating and meeting new needs with new technical and design styles [New realities of lifestyle]. <sup>2</sup>

## **Skills deficiency**

Skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions. This demand is met where skills and knowledge are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material, or from working and/or study overseas. <sup>3</sup>

There may be individuals or individual firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the IP to themselves; and over time they retire and pass way. Firms likewise come and go.

## Definitions

---

### Sustainability

The ISS Institute follows the United Nations NGO on sustainability, “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>4</sup>

# Acknowledgements

---

Mary Cushnahan would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who gave generously of their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide her throughout the Fellowship program.

### Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc is an independent, national organisation that for over two decades has worked with Australian governments, industry and education institutions to enable individuals to gain enhanced skills and experience in traditional trades, professions and leading-edge technologies.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our Fellows. Under the **Overseas Applied Research Fellowship Program** the Fellows travel overseas. Upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

1. Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions.
2. Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses.
3. Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

Over 200 Australians have received Fellowships, across many industry sectors. In addition, recognised experts from overseas conduct training activities and events. To date, 22 leaders in their field have shared their expertise in Australia.

According to Skills Australia’s ‘Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010’:

Australia requires a highly skilled population to maintain and improve our economic position in the face of increasing global competition, and to have the skills to adapt to the introduction of new technology and rapid change.

International and Australian research indicates we need a deeper level of skills than currently exists in the Australian labour market to lift productivity. We need a workforce in which more people have skills, but also multiple and higher level skills and qualifications. Deepening skills across all occupations is crucial to achieving long-term productivity growth. It also reflects the recent trend for jobs to become more complex and the consequent increased demand for higher level skills. This trend is projected to continue regardless of whether we experience strong or weak economic growth in the future. Future environmental challenges will also create demand for more sustainability related skills across a range of industries and occupations.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the ISS Institute works with Fellows, industry and government to identify specific skills in Australia that require enhancing, where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions or other Registered Training Organisations. The Fellows’ overseas experience sees them broadening and deepening their own professional practice, which they then share with their peers, industry and government upon their return. This is the focus of the ISS Institute’s work.

For further information on our Fellows and our work see <http://www.issinstitute.org.au>.

#### Patron in Chief

Lady Primrose Potter AC

#### Patrons

Mr James MacKenzie  
Mr Tony Schiavello

#### Founder/Board Member

Sir James Gobbo AC, CVO

#### Chairman

Mr Mark Bennetts

#### Board Members

Mr John Baker  
Ms Julie Belle  
Ms Sue Christophers

Mr Franco Fiorentini  
Mr Jack O’Connell AO  
Mr David Wittner AM

## Acknowledgements

---

### Fellowship Sponsor

Mary Cushnahan thanks the sponsor Australian Furniture Association (AFA), (formerly the Furniture Industry Association of Australia (FIAA)) for making this inaugural ISS Institute Fellowship available and enabling her to travel overseas to investigate alternative approaches to furniture apprenticeship training and development. She also thanks the following individuals and organisations who gave generously of their time and their expertise to assist, advise and guide her throughout the Fellowship program:

- Chris Arnold, Manager, Built and Natural Environments, Kangan Institute
- Bryon Stanley, Teacher, School of Design TAFE, RMIT University

### Australian Organisations Impacted by the Fellowship

- AFA formally (FIAA) Vic/Tas
- Cabinet Makers Association (CMA Vic/Tas)

# About the Fellow

---

### Name

Mary Cushnahan

### Employment

Senior Educator, Furnishing, Kangan Institute

### Qualifications

- B. Ed. Visual Arts, University of Melbourne, 1992
- Masters in Education (Work and Learning), Monash University, 2007
- Certificate IV TAE, 2011
- LMF30302 Certificate III in Furniture Making, 2011
- LMF32109 Cert. III in Cabinet Making, 2011
- LMF30202 Certificate III in Furniture Finishing, 2012

### Memberships

- FurnTAG
- VISTA
- AVETRA
- NCVET

With active professional interests in both Furniture Making and VET teaching, Mary Cushnahan has spent the last twenty years contributing to the Furnishing Industry. After eight years as a successful furniture designer/maker (and president of the Victorian Woodworkers Association for three years), Mary decided to embark on a career change, and began teaching cabinetmaking fulltime at a large Victorian TAFE, where she has been for nearly twelve years.

While teaching VET, Mary has had the opportunity to be involved in; the teaching and development of training programs, Training Package reviews, VET in Schools programs (where she has been a member of VET in Schools Furnishing Exam setting panel for six years, and the State Reviewer for five years), trades taster programs, as well as Certificate II (formerly pre-apprenticeship), and Certificate III apprenticeship programs. She has also been active in strengthening dialogue and relationships between the training sector and Industry representative bodies, including the Cabinet Makers Association (inc. Vic/Tas), and the Australian Furnishing Association (formerly FIAA).

In 2008 Mary completed a Masters in Education (work and learning), where she focused on VET trainer development, and the importance of employability skills in VET training. In 2008, Mary received the NCVET New Researcher of the Year Award and was invited to publish an 'Occasional Paper' on the same topic. She has spoken at many State and National conferences on these and similar training topics. Mary is also called upon by Curriculum Maintenance Managers, Industry Training Advisory Boards and other Government and advisory panels for her input and industry knowledge.

Mary is committed to improving Furnishing Apprentice completions in Australia and building on and maintaining the integrity of apprenticeships in this industry.



# Aims of the Fellowship Program

---

The overarching aims of this International Fellowship were to contribute to the body of knowledge around apprenticeships in Furniture Making, and to inform strategies to improve completion rates and advancement to higher level training in Furniture Making in Australia.

The specific research aims were:

- To investigate apprentice recruitment methods outside Australia
- To investigate the alignment of industry needs to training and certification provided in an international setting
- To investigate (first hand and anecdotally) Furniture Making apprentice satisfaction and aspirations (including the impact of apprentice rates of pay on their decision making)
- To report on the social status of apprenticeships and 'master craftsman' attainment, in a range of international settings
- To investigate what (if any) LLN assistance is available to students and its uptake and impact on apprenticeship completion.

The strategies carried out to meet the aims of the International Research Fellowship were:

1. The Fellow interviewed a range of training providers
2. The Fellow interviewed a range of students undertaking a variety of training courses at different stages of completion
3. The Fellow visited several employers, in a range of industries.

# The Australian Context

---

## Existing Australian Training

The United Kingdom/European Union system of apprentice training has existed in Australia for decades. Periodic economic and employment fluctuations often trigger reviews of the effectiveness of the system and its ability to deliver the industry specific trained employees which are required at that time. These reviews often result in changes to policy affecting state and federal funding of apprentices, industrial relations agreements, employment and training contracts and sometimes the training and accreditation requirements and processes. One such review was undertaken in 2011.

Apprenticeships in Australia are considered by the Government to be essential in the training of skilled labour (McDowell, 2011). There are currently approximately 425,000 apprentices and trainees in the Australian VET system, which represents roughly 3.8 per cent of the workforce (McDowell, 2011, p8). However, the need to review and improve the system has also been identified. In the Final Report of the Expert Panel on Apprenticeships for the 21st Century, McDowell states, "The Australian Apprenticeships system will require significant improvement to performance such as retention, completion outcomes and its impact of productivity and innovation, if Australia is to respond effectively to the challenges of competing in a global marketplace. A skilled and flexible workforce that can meet these challenges will be critical to Australia's future standard of living" (McDowell, p8).

The report points out a completion rate of Australian Apprentices of around 48 per cent, which represents an enormous waste of enterprise and government time, money and resources. McDowell cites the reasons for non-completion to include, "workplace or employer issues, lack of support, low wages and not liking the work" (McDowell, p9). With these issues identified, the challenge is now to effectively and strategically target them, which necessitates a review of our current system and an unwavering commitment to implementing change.

## Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of the Australian Furniture Industry training

### Internal Environment

#### Strengths

- There is both capacity and will for improvement within the Furnishing Industry and training providers
- Australia has a nationally regulated training system, and nationally recognised qualifications, which delivers consistency in both content and training content
- Furniture Making is recognised by Victorian Government as an official 'skills shortage' industry
- FURNTAG is actively engaged with industry to better align training to their needs
- Recent establishment of FJC means a stronger and united front to bring about change and lobby Government for strategic funding.

#### Weaknesses

- Difficult and slow to make changes to Training Packages
- Comparatively small numbers of apprentices in this industry
- Historically, low levels of engagement of employers with training
- Content of Training Packages is the result of dialogue between Industry and Government. This can result in training being skewed massively toward industry's immediate requirements, at the expense of traditional skills

- There are some employers (anecdotal remarks supplied to the Fellow from some employers) who take on apprentices, because it is cheaper for them to employ an apprentice than it is an unskilled labourer. If this trend is widespread, then there will be little motivation for employers to embrace CBC.

### External Environment

#### Opportunities

- Furnishing Training Package currently undergoing a full review which calls for input from all interested parties, and allows for minor and major changes to Units of Competence, qualifications, and structuring rules
- Government provision of Apprentice Advisors and Apprentice Mentors which could directly increase retention and completion.

#### Threats

- Downturn in manufacturing in Australia, which would impact on production, for domestic and export markets
- Continued global economic downturn, directly impacting on exports and public sentiment toward spending
- Downturn in employment, resulting in reduced capacity of consumers to purchase
- The appeal to some employers of faster delivered and lower quality training being offered by some training providers
- Continued strength of Australian dollar, making exports more expensive, imports cheaper and could impact the sustainability of some enterprises.

### Economic and Market Incentives

The rapidly expanding and advancing manufacturing economies of China, India and others, mean greater pressures on price and 'options'. Changes in technology, equipment, the internet and contractual and liability law mean that furniture makers must not only work more efficiently, they must also work smarter. There is also much greater product awareness by consumers, who are beginning to demand to know the provenance of raw materials; access to supplier and manufacturers environmental (green) and social credentials; hi-tech hardware and 'options'; waste and 'end-of-life' strategies; and the cost implications of currency fluctuations and policies such as the Australian carbon tax. By better skilling our workforce Australia is better arming and preparing it to survive the challenges of open markets, manufacturing competition and advancing technologies.

While Australia's geographic isolation often appears to shield it from much of what happens in Europe and America/Canada, it is interesting to note how similar our economic and employment markets can be. The issues identified with the Canadian Apprentice system set out below are almost identical to those identified in Australia:

Sharpe notes in the 2005 Research Report, *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, that, "The Canadian apprenticeship system has been under review in the past decade due to concerns in a number of areas, including the low number of completions relative to total registrations. This debate has centred on the apprenticeship system's role with respect to two related but distinct sets of issues. The first is the school-to-work transition agenda, which is concerned with supporting youth entering the work force in an increasingly demanding and complex labour market. From this perspective, apprenticeship has a valuable

role to play as an educational alternative for youth who currently do not pursue post-secondary education. Currently, negative public perception of the trades, among other factors, has kept youth participation marginal in the apprenticeship system such that most apprentices are currently over the age of twenty-four.

The second motivation for discussion is the concern on the part of certain organizations that Canada may face an impending skills shortage, particularly in the skilled trades. From this perspective, inadequate numbers of registrations and completions, combined with the aging workforce, could result in skilled labour scarcity in the near future. Consequently, it is argued that the apprenticeship system should greatly increase registrations and completions in order to ensure adequate supply of skilled labour to the economy." A Sharpe *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, CSLS Research Report 2005-04, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canada, 2005 p.6.

Sharpe goes on to articulate one of the main economic reasons for an enterprise to engage an apprentice,

"Apprenticeship is an institutional means of reducing the cost to training for employers, where the apprentice offsets some of this cost by offering labour at reduced wages." A Sharpe *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, CSLS Research Report 2005-04, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canada, 2005 p.7.

Sharpe also notes, "A negative perception of the trades is often cited as having a detrimental effect of registrations. A number of reports have stressed that both parents and student viewed apprenticeship as inferior to university, because they believed the trades to be second-class careers with poor wages, unstable employment and little possibility for career advancement. The secondary education system also has an academic bias, such that students are both prepared and encouraged to enter university rather than apprenticeships. Consequently, employers often lament the quality of apprentice candidates, which translates to less labour value to offset the cost of investment". A Sharpe, *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, CSLS Research Report 2005-04, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canada, 2005 p.9.

The paper goes on to suggest that rather than quantity, it is the quality of apprenticeships that will both improve completion outcomes and how the trades are viewed. They also suggest that financial incentives should be paid to employers rather than apprentices, and that there needs to be strong 'sectoral committees' which determine program content, and are responsible for promoting apprenticeship with firms. The apprenticeship system should be 'laddered' or integrated into the post-secondary system, which the authors believe "would draw higher quality apprentices and encourage employer investment. It would also affirm the value of apprenticeship training relative to other post-secondary education and reduce the negative image of the trades". A Sharpe *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, CSLS Research Report 2005-04, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canada, 2005 p.11.

# Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

---

## Skills Deficiencies

The current skills deficiencies in which this particular research is focused are outlined in this section to offer industry stakeholders insight into why the research is being undertaken leading to the research conclusions and recommendations.

## Skills and knowledge deficiencies

The Fellow identified three main skills and knowledge deficiencies on which to focus, that contribute to a deficiency in knowledge to inform strategies for improving Furniture Making apprentice completion rates.

### **1. There is a lack of informed understanding around how to effectively promote and attract new employees, young people and older career-changers, into the industry and how to retain them.**

There is currently no public profile of Furniture Making and this void is filled by career and employment advisers (and well intentioned family and friends) by small amounts of very subjective personal knowledge of the industry. This information is often outdated, insufficient and in many instances incorrect. By understanding why people enter the industry as a career choice, it is proposed by this Fellow that we can more effectively develop a large scale media campaign which will most effectively hit the target market and bring the right people into the trade.

Misko (2007) identifies,

“The current information and guidance available to school students is a potential barrier to greater interest in apprenticeships among young people. Apprenticeships were not widely promoted at school and specific information was not always easy to obtain. Relatively few students were encouraged by their teachers and counsellors to pursue an apprenticeship”. It goes on to say, “Many school students are not attracted to apprenticeships because they believe pay of tradespeople to be too low (by comparison with pay for professionals). In contrast, those part way through an apprenticeship believe the main barrier to continuing is the training wage, which is low relative to what they might earn elsewhere. It is likely that this is contributing factor to uptake and perhaps to non-completion”. J Misko, et al, Doing an apprenticeship What young people think, NCVET, Adelaide 200, p8.

Misko goes on to state,

“There are various implications we can draw from the findings of this study. First, a trade is not for everyone, especially high academic achievers. Second, students already in a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship are substantially more likely to consider moving into a traditional four-year trade apprenticeship, once their schooling has been completed”.

Such findings have implications for how apprenticeships are marketed to school students. Promotional campaigns or recruitment drives should concentrate primarily on students outside the high academic achieving group, including those in school-based apprenticeships. J Misko, et al, Doing an apprenticeship, What young people think, NCVET, Adelaide 2007, p.11.

Misko goes on to summarise that students who intended to go on to trade apprenticeships generally had not discussed this option with teachers and career advisers. It appeared in the research results that the combination of teachers not informing students and students not asking questions about apprenticeships were the two main contributing factors to this lack of discussion around students taking up trades (Misko, 2007, p.31).

### 2. Lack of knowledge around how other countries deal with supporting and training apprentices (and potential apprentices) who have Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) difficulties.

LLN levels amongst Furnishings apprentices (anecdotally) are dropping. This decline in the cohorts' ability to read, understand and interpret instructions, data and safety requirements poses real threats to both safety and productivity. It also has direct employment and progression implications for the individuals involved. With Australia's employed population being relatively small, the Fellow believed it would be valuable to get an understanding of the impact of this issue (and indeed if it was an issue) and strategies employed in international settings.

The European Commission's 2010 paper, Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, identifies, "Education, training and lifelong learning: A quarter of all pupils (in European schools) have poor reading competencies, one in seven young people leave education and training too early. Around 50% reach medium qualifications level but this often fails to match labour market needs". European Commission, Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels, 2010, p.10.

Austin and Macphail in their paper, Post-school education and labour force participation in Canada and Australia, note in their key findings,

"The authors speculate that the Australian VET sector provides students with low educational outcomes or what are from less advantaged family backgrounds with educational opportunities that are not present in the Canadian system, in contrast to the Canadian college system, the Australian VET system is not considered an educational pathway of choice for higher achieving school students or those from more advantaged backgrounds". S Austin, Post-school education and labour force participation in Canada and Australia, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, NCVER, Adelaide 2010, p 3.

### 3. Lack of knowledge around how to promote and encourage the progression from apprenticeship qualification (Certificate III) to higher level trade qualifications.

Manufacturing and marketing in today's environment, both nationally and internationally, often requires advanced drawing, processing, machining and marketing skills. These are often only gained post-apprenticeship. The formal training (and certification) of these skills also often involves 'fee for service' arrangements, which necessarily have an immediate financial cost to the enterprise, the individual, or both. However, these are often the skills and training that businesses need to maintain market edge, or to simply remain viable. There are many post-apprenticeship qualifications within the Furnishings Training Package; however these are seldom taken up. Without targeted data, it is impossible to know if this lack of take-up is due to financial constraints, lack of knowledge about what is available, and in some cases that there is government assistance available to train, or a general perception within the wider industry that the training will not return at least the monies outlaid. The Fellow believed that an international perspective would also be valuable in informing future strategies for promoting and recruiting learners into these programs.

Joslin, H (2011) notes in Implementing Higher Apprentices – Learning from Practice, that, "Higher apprenticeships have been the missing member of the apprenticeship family, and their development will play an important role in legitimating the apprenticeships route as a real alternative to full-time education and training. In the future, as apprenticeships start to progress in numbers through advanced level apprenticeships to higher apprenticeships and on to honours degrees and beyond, real parity of esteem will be established". Hugh Implementing Higher Apprenticeships – Learning from Practice, Centre for Work-based Learning, University of Greenwich, London, 2011 p.4.

In Australia the Furnishing Training Package allows for a clear distinction to be made between Furniture Making (often solid timber, free-standing pieces furniture, including dining suites, desks, bedroom furniture) and Cabinetmaking (often made from veneered board or sheet material, is often built-in, and includes kitchens, office fit-outs, laundries and bathroom vanities and cupboards). Through the selection of electives it is possible to 'blend' the two areas, nominating to undertake Units of Competence from both streams. It is often the employer who negotiates which stream the apprentice will go into and what electives are nominated, often with the apprentice having little or no say.

It is worth noting that there is no such distinction made between Furniture Making and Cabinetmaking in the countries visited by this Fellow. All apprentices undertake a 'Cabinetmaking' apprenticeship, regardless of what they do in the workplace, and this focuses on traditional trade skills, mainly using solid timber. There are very few opportunities within the four years of the formal trade training at the Technical College to nominate to do projects which are more what we in Australia would call Cabinetmaking.

### Destination: Centro Studi 'Cultura Sviluppo' (CSCS), Pistoia, Italy

#### Contacts

- Giovanni Crisonà, Director, Gruppo CSCS
- Palle Dalskov Aabentoft, assistant, Gruppo CSCS

#### Objectives

The Fellow wanted to gain information from the training provider and 'mobility' facilitator, the trainees and apprentices undertaking the experience, and industry placement providers, the value of location and employer flexibility within the course of an apprenticeship.

#### Outcomes

CSCS is both directly involved in the training of trainees and the facilitation of the placement of trainees and apprentices in a variety of industries. These young people are participants in the EU's Mobility program. The Mobility strategy was established in around 2000, to widen trainees and apprentices' language and culture, education and work experiences through international placements within the EU.

While CSCS is a registered training provider, in more recent years its focus has turned to coordinating placements for international trainees and apprentices. Giovanni Crisonà, one of the two company directors, explained the significance of Mobility as an EU strategy and their resolution to dramatically increase participation in the program. The EU has set their goal at providing Mobility to everyone. While this will not be logistically possible, they are committing millions of Euros in finding to this strategic direction, believing it will increase the experience for the learner and create a more mobile and flexible workforce.

Crisonà is a member of the EU Mobility committee and believes that the experience of spending two or three months in another country, immersed in their language and culture and working in their industry, benefits both the young person and their employer when they return home. Expenses are covered by EU Mobility funding and there is an extremely high participant success rate. The experience is also valued by the international host employers, as they have access to partly trained workers, who are often very keen to learn.

The Fellow had the opportunity to talk with two placement participants Andrea Terrazas Dominquez from Spain and Palle Dalskov Aabentoft from Denmark. Both participants had very good spoken English (and indeed, both spoke at least four languages) and were extremely happy for the opportunity to talk



about the program. Dominquez had initially arrived in Italy through CSCS to work in the marketing area. However, with the placement not giving Dominquez the range of experiences she had wanted, the opportunity arose for the participant to undertake the placement within the CSCS organisation. Dominquez was extremely happy with this arrangement and was working on developing a multi-media website for young people in Spain to view and apply for Mobility placements. The participant could not extol the virtues and benefits of the Mobility experience enough. Dominquez said it had opened her eyes to the world and the possibilities that were open to her and anyone who was eligible.

Dalskov Aabentoft was now employed by CSCS, working directly with potential Mobility placement participants from all around Europe. The interviewee was very passionate about the program, and said it "changes lives" and particularly during the current economic challenges, it opened up many new opportunities for young people. Dalskov Aabentoft said that participation in the Mobility program often invigorated the young people and they saw that their opportunities were even greater if they completed their training and gained their trade certificates. The interviewee also said that although not every business was prepared to participate in the placement program, the response was generally very good and they were usually able to find placements in the applicants industry area.

### **Destination: Copenhagen Technical College (KTS), Taastrup, Denmark**

#### **Contacts**

- Ole Rømer, Principal, Copenhagen Technical College
- Jerome Weijers, International Coordinator (Cabinetmakers)

#### **Objectives**

The Fellow wanted to interview trainers, apprentices and senior staff at one of Europe's most highly respected Furniture Making Apprentice training centers.

#### **Outcomes**

The Copenhagen Technical College (KTS) sits in one of the most renowned furniture design districts in the world. Danish designed furniture became famous around the world in the 1950's and continued to have the world's attention for its clean lines, pure designs and traditional construction methods. They are perhaps even more appreciated for their dedication and commitment to continuously producing some of the best furniture designers and designs in the world. Many of these designers got their start at the Copenhagen Technical College.

With its long and illustrious history for producing groundbreaking and respected furniture designers and makers, the current KTS Principal, Ole Rømer, said there is constant pressure to ensure the number and quality of apprentices. One way of ensuring this is the annual summer school, 'Branching Out'. Copenhagen Technical College offers an innovative four week course in June and July (2012). Cabinetmaker students and professionals are given the opportunity to develop and create unique pieces of furniture in close cooperation with leading furniture architects and designers. The new furniture products that arise from the Branching Out course are exhibited at leading museums around Denmark such as at the Trapholt, Museum of Danish Design (KTS Branching Out information brochure, 2011). The participants pay €1,500 for the designers to have their designs prototyped or sometimes even produced and for the makers to work hand in hand with some of the country's past and current top designers. There are now so many wanting to participate, that Rømer has had to cap the numbers of both designers and makers. Many of the makers are current and graduating apprentices, who see this as an opportunity to work with famous designers, to have their work exhibited in some of Denmark's top galleries and museums. It is kudos for their employers and to start getting their own names out into the market. This event is definitely an incentive for apprentice students to achieve over their years of training.

KTC has a traditional 20 week pre-trade qualification, similar to the Furniture Certificate II in Australia. During this time there is a very strong focus on traditional craftsmanship and quality. There is very little focus on 'industry requirements', with the acquisition of quality hand skills and an understanding of the materials given priority. Professional assistance is offered to young people with reading and writing difficulties, with the Copenhagen School for Dyslexia providing part of the teaching. There is also assistance available for learners struggling with Danish (this course is also open to international students) and mathematics.

To further add to the quality and continuance of the Danish design and Furniture Making tradition, in 2011, KTS introduced two new programs. The first of these is EUX, which "is a combined VET/ upper secondary school program that during the four year long education, qualifies the student both as a trained professional in his or her chosen field while at the same time giving the student an upper secondary exam, qualifying him or her to study in higher education program" (KTS Taastrup information brochure 2011). This program goes far beyond the VET in Schools program offered in Victoria, where students can get a Certificate II or pre-apprenticeship. The EUX gives secondary school students access to the same four year training program as apprentices. They graduate with a full trade certificate. According to Rømer, this acts as an incentive to high school students to stay on and complete their studies, while offering them alternatives when they do. This trade certificate and the subjects the students undertake in their main-stream studies can also assist them in getting into one of Denmark's prestigious design schools.

The second new program launched in 2011 was the 'CDC Basic' course. This is a 30 week introductory course, which has been specifically developed for non-Danish speaking learners. Danish language studies are a significant part of the program. The course has a common 10 week foundation course, after which learners must specialise in carpentry, cabinetmaking or joinery. After week 19 the learners must specialise further within their chosen industry area. At the successful completion of the 30 weeks, learners are then prepared to enter the mainstream training system and must find an employer to continue their apprenticeship training.

With all levels of the Danish education system being free for all Danish citizens, there is a definite understanding by learners that they will continuously leave and re-enter the education system. Lifelong learning is a given and learners are prepared to wait to undertake certain parts of their training. The Fellow spoke with eight in-house apprentices. These Cabinetmaking apprentices did not have an external employer, but rather had employment contracts with KTS and worked part-time for the in-house business. This business was run out of one of the workshops and engaged learners in all parts of the business. They dealt with the external customers, they designed and ordered materials, they set-up machines, created the product and supplied it, along with invoices, to the customer. These apprentices had the option of undertaking short term employment contracts with external employers, as needed, but many did not take up these opportunities. Of the eight apprentices interviewed all were articulate, motivated and conscientious. Upon completion of their training in 2012, three intended to start their own furniture designer/maker businesses and two intended to apply to go to a design school (for which they now had an excellent chance of being accepted). It did however, mean at least another four or five years of full-time study for these young people. They openly said that this was not a deterrent and that they knew it would take at least that long for them to be considered entry level designers.

Of the remaining three students, one intended to restore furniture and wanted to specialise in classic Danish designed pieces. One learner was applying to a design college to undertake a broad based design degree and then specialise in jewelry making. The final student intended to go back to academic studies at university. He considered his four year Cabinetmaking apprenticeship as solid grounding and was unsure if he would use his trade, his academic qualification, or a combination of both, in the future.

When told about structure of apprenticeships in Australia, the interviewees were generally surprised that there were so many sign-ups and that there were so many non-completions. The interviewees were also surprised that the young people going into traditional trade apprenticeships appeared to not value the opportunity as much as they themselves did. This was echoed by both Rømer and Weijers.

In Denmark, and many other EU countries including Italy, Germany and Austria, there is an apprenticeship entrance exam, an exam at the end of the training and often exams at the end of each year level. In Denmark the final 'exam' is project based. Completing apprentices are given a design brief, from which over several weeks they must produce drawings, a portfolio and make a prototype. They are then interviewed for around twenty minutes by the panel of three assessors, which is made up of a teacher, an employer and a senior qualified tradesperson. If the panel are satisfied with the assessment evidence so far and the candidate has convinced them of the merit of their design and portfolio, then the apprentice may continue in the assessment process. The next and final stage is to make the product. The assessment of the final product is centered on 'industry quality' and 'salability' of their product and must be supported by the pre-production portfolio. The assessment is scored and according to Weijers, the competition is fierce. There is a substantial amount of kudos attached to getting the highest score in KTC, both for the apprentice and for the employer.

All projects which pass the final exam at exhibited at the Copenhagen Home Show and graduates are able to promote themselves and their product. During their training, all apprentices build their own website and are encouraged to aim at starting their own businesses. This is also often supported by their employers, as many apprentices leave their employer upon graduation. The enterprises workforce is not greatly depleted by this, as it would be unusual for a workplace to have more than one apprentice at any time. According to Weijers, the bulk of workers in Cabinetmaking enterprises are not formally qualified tradespeople. Their training would be done on the factory floor, and many, like in Australia, would be process workers or trained to undertake a specific limited range of tasks and further trained on other tasks as needed.

There is a very strong tradition in Denmark, and indeed many parts of Europe, of independent professional designers. These professionals have their own companies where they design products. They then approach manufacturers or small makers, to prototype and often manufacture their product. The product then becomes either a joint venture between the two businesses, or the manufacturer buys the design and produces it, or the designer uses the manufacturer, but keeps ownership of the design. It is rare for this system to occur in Australia, especially amongst Furniture Designers. It is most common for a designer to work for a manufacturer, either on an 'as needed' basis, or fulltime, with the designs remaining the property of the manufacturer.

On successful completion of their trade qualification, apprentices sit an optional graded external exam which will give them the title of 'Journeyman', or 'Master Craftsman'. Although this exam is optional, almost all apprentices without exception nominate to sit it. If an apprentice is unsuccessful the first time, they may re-sit the exam, at an additional cost to them. Most apprentices choose to do this. There is a great deal of kudos attached to gaining this title and many of the students the Fellow interviewed could not see the point in undertaking and completing an apprenticeship if you were not aiming for this title.

### Destination: Blum, Hoescht, Austria

#### Contacts

- Christian Scherzler, Area (Australasia) Sales Manager
- Mathias Otz, Sales Assistant (Australasia)
- Daniel Schuetzelhofer, Grundausbildung Metall (Metal apprenticeship coordinator)

#### Objectives

The Fellow wanted to discuss the status of apprenticeships, recruitment and retention strategies with one of Europe's best examples of community responsible training, employment and manufacture.

#### Outcomes

Blum is a large family owned Cabinetmaking hardware manufacturer, based in Austria. The company was started by Julius Blum, a blacksmith, in 1952. The Blum company turnover 2011/12 was €1.261bn, and it employs more than 5,000 people worldwide.

Along with seven state-of-the-art manufacturing plants in Austria, Blum has plants in several other countries in Europe and around the world. This significance of this is that Blum design and manufacture almost every single component for every single piece of hardware they produce. They train their own designers and technicians, as well as their own apprentices in engineering, tool making, electrical and polymers. It was the apprenticeship side of the business that the Fellow wanted to explore.

As part of their preparation for subject selection and career direction, all year four and year eight students are taken on a tour of at least one of the Blum factories. As a major employer in the area, most young people are already aware of the brand and what the company produces.

Blum invite every year nine student in the locality (around 350 students) to do a 10 x two day work placement, working with the engineering trainers and alongside the first year apprentices. This serves the dual function of exposing young people who are still at school to a range of trade career options, as well as brand exposure through these young students and the schools. During this time the young students learn how to use some of the machinery, they are taught how to problem solve and work logically, they make a small practice piece applying their learned skills and knowledge and their behaviour and participation are assessed. There is also a formal test of their technical knowledge and problem solving skills. Students receive a mark for their product and participation.

In addition to the year nine work placements, Blum produce posters and a flyer, which are also distributed into every high school in the area of Vorarlberg, explaining the range of jobs that Blum have to offer apprentices and young people who want to apply to join the company.

Blum also sponsors the purchase of hand tools and equipment in schools, again reinforcing the company's name with a link to education and training.

In 2010/11 Blum spent €1 million on recruitment. This included paper based posters and flyers, try-a-trade days for school students, internet and websites and a thirty second television commercial that regularly aired immediately before the evening news.

To secure an apprenticeship with Blum, young people (apprenticeships are only offered to young people) must complete a test and be interviewed. Their high school reports are also taken into consideration. Successful applicants are virtually guaranteed a job for life once they are fully qualified. Blum co-pays learners Technical College fees and any other expenses; they buy the apprentices work clothes and a sports uniform and sponsors extracurricular and out of work hours activities. All apprentices have a sport session for approximately two hours every morning and participate in the interdepartmental

football competitions. They may join the company's running and marathon teams, where they are also supported and compete all around Europe and in the USA.

There are additional incentives; for example gifts for high academic and technical results in the Technical College exams and a cash payment of over €1,500 at the successful completion of their apprenticeship if they do not smoke. There is the opportunity for apprentices to participate in national and international exchange training programs (Mobility). In addition to this, the most talented apprentices are encouraged and supported in entering WorldSkills, where they are often extremely successful.

Blum believes that apprentices need to be trained on the most up-to-date machinery available, so when new plant and machinery is purchased, it is set up in the apprentice training center for their exclusive use. The machinery it is replacing is then moved to the factory floor. This ensures that newly qualified tradespeople are intimately familiar with the machines they are using on the floor and are then also able to train existing workers on the equipment.

Blum has an extremely high retention rate, averaging around 90% who stay on after completing their training. Schuetzelhofer believes that it is the company's strong focus on participation, support and sense of belonging which result in both the very high apprentice retention and completion rates and employee retention rates. During the recent global economic crisis the family owners of Blum made the commitment to all employees that no one would lose their job and they managed to achieve this. This company commitment to its employees is seen very much as an investment now and for the future.

### **Destination: British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), Vancouver, Canada**

#### **Contacts**

- Paul Schmid, Acting Chief Instructor, Joinery Department, School of Construction and Environment

#### **Objectives**

The Fellow wanted to interview a head teacher, to get an overview of strategies to retain apprentices, complete apprenticeships and get an understanding of how employers select apprentices.

#### **Outcomes**

BCIT Cabinetmaking has an apprentice average completion rate of 90%. Schmid believes that there are many factors which contribute to the extremely high completion rate, including students being informed and choosing the right career in the first place, the reputation of the qualification and the Institute, the preliminary testing and entry requirements, a focus on building quality hands-on traditional trade skills and 'block release' or weekly blocks of training at the Institute.

Schmid thinks that having students who are at the same year level in each group, an interesting range of projects and 'chalk and talk' theory classes all suit the style of learners. Although there is a push by BCIT to put resources, training materials and testing online, this is being resisted because as Schmid said, when the apprentices are asked how they prefer to learn, the response is usually that they prefer to have someone explaining things to them in person and they can ask questions and see hands-on demonstrations. The theory testing is computer based multi-choice and broken into two, three hour blocks per week. Students who complete the tests early may also use the time to review or catch-up on theory if they are behind. Students have indicated to Schmid that they do not mind doing the testing on computer, but that they do not want the learning to be computer based.

Training days for apprentices at BCIT are six hour days and begin at 7am. The early start is not usually a problem, as most apprentices live on-campus for the week. BCIT is the only Technical College in British Columbia that delivers the third and fourth years of apprentice training. Apprentices often begin

their training in regional Technical Colleges and must then go to BCIT in Vancouver to complete their training. There is financial assistance available to apprentices to help cover the cost of living away from home.

In Canada, employers do not pay the apprentice for the four weeks per year that they are at the Technical College. Apprentices are paid at an unemployment benefits rate for these weeks. This rate is only slightly lower than their normal wage, so it does not usually create a great deal of hardship for the apprentices. At BCIT, all tools and equipment used by apprentices is provided for them, for use during their training.

There is a rigorous entry test into BCIT, weekly revision testing within the department, an annual end of year exam and upon successfully completing all of the requirements for their apprenticeship, there is an external 'IP' or 'Red Seal' exam, which allows the graduate to call themselves a 'Master Craftsman' or 'Journeyman'. The Red Seal exam is a timed, scored, paper-based multi-choice exam. It is based on the theory and practical components and students must achieve a minimum of 70% to pass. Apprentices may re-sit the exam as many times as necessary, at a cost of several hundreds of dollars each time.

There is a big Industry Awards night, where outstanding employers and apprentices are recognised. The evening is covered by the local press and is well attended by employers, apprentices, trainers, training organisation representatives, industry groups and local government officials.

Approximately four times a year there is a meeting of a group of employers, government representatives and Institute representatives, to discuss the state of the Industry, training and plan for the current and following year. According to Schmid, there are rarely any substantial changes from year to year.

BCIT offers a Cabinetmaking foundation level qualification, which runs for 26 weeks and if successfully completed, gives those who go on to gain apprenticeships a year off their training, which means they can qualify in three years. Although there is some assistance available to learners with learning difficulties, this is sometimes difficult to access and some learners who should do not take up this assistance.

The Cabinetmaking foundation group starts with 16 students (of which there is competition for places) and usually decreases to 13 or 14 over the duration of the course. Of these, an average of 12 students usually successfully completes the course. This pool is then drawn on by employers looking to engage an apprentice. Unskilled labourer's wages are not as high as in Australia, so there is often not a huge difference between the wages of apprentices and labourers. The labour laws in Canada also allow for flexible short term contracts; which means if an enterprise is extremely busy and an apprentice is booked in to attend Technical College, the business can employ temporary labourers to cover the work load.

According to Schmid, apprentices are not encouraged to complete their apprenticeship early (less than four years) and this is supported by Industry. Formal recognition of prior learning (RPL) is not encouraged by industry or the training authority. Although rare, an employer may request additional blocks of training at the Institute in the same year, if things are particularly slow at work. This is not encouraged and if requested, must be agreed to by all parties.



### Destination: Camosun College, Victoria, Canada

#### Contacts

- Cam Russell, Chair, Architectural trades, instructor Fine Furniture Program

#### Objectives

The Fellow wanted to investigate the differences between training in a 'regional' setting and what problems they deal with and strategies they use.

#### Outcomes

Camosun College delivers the pre-apprenticeship and first and second year level Furnituremaking trade training only. Apprentices attend the College for the equivalent of four weeks per year, for one or two years and complete their trade training years two and three at BCIT in Vancouver. BCIT is the only training provider that offers the final two years of training (and full trade certification) in British Columbia and training is only delivered 'face to face'. Therefore, all second and third year apprentices must travel to and stay in Vancouver for four weeks per year. The four weeks are delivered as weekly blocks and spread out over the year. There is funding available for apprentices to offset the cost of travel and accommodation (which is available at subsidised cost on campus at BCIT). Also, as an incentive to all students to attend classes, every enrolled student at Camosun College receives a public transport pass for the duration of their study (this equates to approximately \$C65 per month saving for pre-apprentices who attend College every day). First and second year apprentices receive government incentive payments of approximately \$C1,000 per year.

There is a foundation entry test which all students take, however low scoring students are not eliminated. The test is used mainly to identify the potential level of support learners may need if they are accepted. Fulltime pre-apprentices, who attend the College for approximately ten weeks, are made up of a combination of young people and older 'career changers'. Employability skills, written literacy and mathematics skills are the focus of the non-trade subjects. There is an 'open door' mathematics assistance program, where students can receive two hours of mathematics tutoring a day. This is available three afternoons and two evening per week and according to Russell, is very well patronised. Learners may work on anything they need to and there is no set curriculum. There is also support for high school non-completers to get their high school certificate while undertaking another course at the Institute. This can be done alongside their trade training and there are very nominal fees attached. According to Russell, this option is also valued and taken-up by many pre-apprentices across a range of trades.

Employers contact the Furniture training department directly to assist them in selecting the appropriate pre-apprentices for their business and use the course to aid their recruitment process. This means that the trainers are able to talk directly with employers about the skills of individual pre-apprentices, find the most suited combinations and thereby improve apprentice retention rates. Employers are also confident that the potential new apprentice has some skills and formal training and is therefore better informed about the industry and more likely to stay in the industry if offered an apprenticeship. It is a very beneficial arrangement for all parties.

The Furnishing Industry is promoted to schools through careers flyers and posters and there is someone designated from the College as the school liaison contact person. The College also promotes itself through television commercials which appear before the evening news.

### Destination: Thompson River University (TRU), Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada

#### Contact

- Paul Scholtz

#### Objectives

The Fellow wanted to compare responses from this second large regional (mainland) college to those of Camosun and BCIT. The interviewee was unavailable to be interviewed in person, however responded in writing to questions put to them.

#### Outcomes

The interviewee confirmed that many of the issues identified in Australia were similar to those in Canada. Apprenticeships were often being entered into by enterprises as a way of getting access to cheaper labor and less often for the opportunity to pass on much valued knowledge and skills to the next generation of tradespeople. Scholtz agreed that the social status of the trade is not as high as registered trades, such as plumbing or electrical.

Unlike Australia, however, numbers of apprentices are extremely low and have historically been so. The interviewee trains Furnituremaking pre-apprentices and over the last three courses, which run for six months, has had an average of nine students in each group. Scholtz stated that this was not unusual, as demand is consistently low; however, there is an extremely low drop-out rate. Once completed, if employed as an apprentice, a full twelve months credit is given for the pre-apprenticeship course. Post pre-apprenticeship training is then undertaken at BCIT in Vancouver.

# Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

---

The outcomes of this research will be presented to the Furnishing industry in a range of forums, including presentations at furnTAG, AFA and CMA general meetings (as appropriate), presentation to AFA board of management, and other forums as requested.

# Recommendations

---

## Education, Training and Mentoring Recommendations

1. The Fellow recommends that the structured work placement Unit of Competence used in Victoria in both VET in Schools and Pre-Apprenticeship programs (which has been superseded by Certificate II Furnishing) be re-instated, rolled-out Nationally and become a compulsory part of the Certificate II in Furnishing program. The Certificate II is intended to be used by those who want to gain an insight into the industry and allow them to make an informed decision about pursuing a career in it or not. Exposure to the real workplace is essential both in assisting potential apprentices make informed decisions about their future and also to open up the range of opportunities the Industry can offer to them. This experience cannot be replaced by 'simulated' work environments either in a Registered Training Organisation or at school. It also builds essential employability skills (and identifies those which need more attention) and again, this cannot be fully explored except in the real work environment.
2. It was clear to the Fellow that all the countries visited valued traditional trade skills. The vast majority of employees in the Furnishing Industry of the countries visited by the Fellow, were not formally fully qualified tradespeople, or Master Craftsmen. Apprenticeships were considered precious and only offered to those who the employer considered had the potential to gain Master Craftsman status. The employers' reputation and standing was being put on the line when formally engaging an apprentice.

## Industry Recommendations

1. The Fellow recommends that the Australian Furnishing Industry consider the definition and intention of a formal apprenticeship and ensure that they are valuing it as it was intended:
  - By reviewing how apprenticeships are used in by the Furnishing Industry there is the potential to improve apprentice outcomes and completions
  - By ensuring that appropriate candidates are selected, the workplace is actively participating in the skills development of the apprentice
  - The apprentice is being given a range of experiences and opportunities to maximize their learning Employers must consider the time and practice apprentices require in order to truly master some of the skills they require and should consider this 'down time' as part of the apprenticeship and make allowances for it.
2. The Fellow recommends the Furnishing Industry engages a professional 'skills profiler' to identify the traits and attributes needed in an employee to undertake specific tasks. Many of the tasks in modern manufacturing involve a range of skills; from minimally trained process workers, assemblers and dispatchers, to more highly skilled installers, machine programmers and those directly dealing with clients and customers. It is as inaccurate and unfair to label the industry as entirely made up of process workers, as it would to insist that all new entrants must have successfully completed Year 12. A clear guide of what is required to undertake each task would allow employers to more effectively target and recruit new employees. If employees are better aligned to a specific range of tasks, there may be higher job satisfaction, increased productivity and improved retention of staff.
3. The Fellow also recommends the Furnishing Industry consider how the Certificate II qualification could be re-invigorated and used to more effectively develop new entrants into the Industry. This qualification is used extensively in upper high school VET in Schools programs (Victoria) and within RTOs nationally, as an intensive 'pre-apprenticeship' training program and to lead into employment in the trade. Historically there has been some resistance from industry regarding the training mapping and industrial relations implications of this qualification. With the Furnishing Training Package currently undergoing a full review, this would be the appropriate time to revisit the Certificate II qualification. It may be possible to adapt it to be more effectively used for fulltime

employees, whom are currently not being considered as candidates for apprenticeships; or as foundation level training for all employees, which can be added to in the future and possibly lead to recognition of a full Certificate III. Industry should also look upon candidates who have the Certificate II (from school or an RTO) as having an employment advantage over someone who does not. These young people are coming in with some level of industry knowledge and some industry specific skills. It would also be advantageous for industry to have closer links to schools and RTOs who deliver this training, as they could then work with teachers and select the most appropriate candidates for their enterprise. This would reduce the cost, time and effort lost in enterprises advertising in newspapers and online, hoping to hit the target audience.

4. The Fellow recommends the Industry review the higher and post-apprenticeship qualifications available under the current Furnishing Training Package for appropriateness and currency and make recommendations to the Training Package review panel, which will improve the uptake and relevance of these qualifications.
5. The Fellow also recommends the acquisition of traditional trade skills continues to be valued by employers and apprentices. The Fellow found that in Canada and the European countries visited, formal training at a Technical College or Institute was highly valued for developing the skills that the apprentice could not be exposed to at work. Much of this training in all of these countries included a large component of traditional trade skills. If the Canadian and European experiences of the Fellow are to be considered, then emphasis should also be placed on the acquisition of exemplary traditional trade skills. Guild entry or Master Craftsman status (these elite institutions do not yet exist in Australia for the Furnishing Industry) should also be the ultimate goal of employers and apprentices. In Australia there is a strong swing away from the acquisition of these traditional skills in favour of what the apprentice is doing on the job right now.
6. The Furnishing Industry in Australia needs to ensure that it does not lose sight of the apprentice as an individual and consider the holistic development of the apprentice and where they may go in the future. That the apprentice's training needs to take them into the future, develop them as a qualified tradesperson and not only focus on what the enterprise immediately requires. Apprentices are employed by enterprises and like all employees, they are an expense to that business. Specific skills 'on the job' training is given to most employees, however an apprentice is indentured to the employer for four years (often at lower wages than other employees) to gain as broad and comprehensive knowledge and skills base as possible. It would be short sighted and short-changing apprentices if the focus of their apprenticeship training was purely on what the enterprise wanted and lost sight of the craftsman they contractually agreed to develop. Although there may be no obvious immediate application of some of these traditional skills in the contemporary workplace, they also develop in the apprentice the quality and attention to detail, which would be valued by all employers.
7. The Fellow recommends the industry fully support and actively engage in the two Government initiatives of 'Apprentice Mentors', and 'Apprentice Advisors', Both of these roles are specifically designed to support new apprentices (on an individual level) during their first year of employment and training. It is often the transition from school to work which young people find most difficult. If the Furnishing Industry is serious about improving apprentice completions, than these initiatives are both timely and appropriate, and the fellow strongly suggests the industry engage with them.
8. The Fellow recommends that the Furnishing Industry collaborate with RTOs in developing a pre-apprenticeship test and LLN early intervention program. There is a three month period prior to an apprentice being formally engaged, which is considered a 'trial' period for the employer and potential apprentice. The Fellow suggests that immediately upon engagement with the enterprise, the apprentice undertakes a rigorous 'test' to determine their current LLN ability. The new employee would then be released from work one day per week (or duration to be determined) and attend

industry specific intensive LLN classes, for the three month period. There would be another test at the end of this time, in line with many other countries 'pre' apprenticeship entrance testing. At the end of the trial period the employer and the potential apprentice will have a sound and informed accurate understanding of their ability to cope with an apprenticeship. There could also be the opportunity for contact with an 'Apprentice Mentor' to support the potential apprentice in their first three months of employment (whom for many may have come directly from school). The Fellow believes that the pre-testing, intensive LLN and mentor support will all greatly add to the engaging of the most appropriate apprentice candidates and improve retention and completion.

### Government Recommendations

1. The Fellow recommends that apprenticeships promote the Industry as not only a valid and worthwhile career choice, but also to begin to raise its public profile and improve its social status within society. Apprenticeships are often perceived as the career path for those who are unable to complete Year 12 at school, who are 'good with their hands' and not academic and as second best behind academic pursuits or a university education/qualification. This could begin with a Nationally funded (or co-funded) advertising campaign and should promote apprenticeships as an opportunity to be valued by both employers and those undertaking them.
2. That a National 'Master Craftsman Guild' or register be established to test and accredit those who complete an apprenticeship and want to be acknowledged as 'Masters' of their trade. This exists in Europe and Canada, and those who attain 'Master' status are entitled to promote themselves with that title and use the accompanying logo on all professional correspondence and promotional material. It also carries a great deal of pride and status for the candidate and the employer. The awarding of 'Master' status is a substantial formal evening, with dignitaries, Industry leaders and the press in attendance. This not only increases the profile and credibility of apprenticeships as a desirable career, but also acknowledges those who excel in their trade areas.
3. The introduction of a national minimal apprentice testing, to ensure that those who are about enter into an apprenticeship contract have the minimum LLN skills to be able to successfully complete and ensure they are not being 'set-up to fail'. Currently, with no formal LLN assessment prior to the signing of their apprenticeship contract, the candidate's LLN skills are unknown. This could mean that if there are significant gaps in their LLN abilities, they could potentially not be able to complete their apprenticeship training, regardless of the support (often limited by government funding) they can be offered by the training provider. Those who do not meet the minimum LLN testing requirements could be offered pre-apprenticeship options, where they are given additional tutoring and assistance and are able to re-sit the apprentice entrance exam. This system exists in parts of Europe and Canada and ensures that any gaps in the candidates LLN skills are identified and addressed, where practicable.
4. That there is a restructuring of the incentives paid to employers. In both Canada and parts of Europe, the employer did not pay the apprentice on the days they attended formal training. The apprentice was instead paid by the government. If the government incentives which are currently paid to the employer were redirected to pay the apprentice wage on training days, there would be no cost to employer for the apprentice to attend formal training. This would reduce costs of taking on an apprentice and reduce the hindrance to apprentices attending formal training on their designated days or weeks.
5. The Fellow recommends the Government investigates the possibility of a much more flexible employment arrangement to allow employers to 'back-fill' when apprentices are attending formal training. This could possibly mean that three or four employers employ a single worker and that worker attends one of the four workplaces while their apprentice is in formal training for the day or week. This 'back-fill' position could also be an apprenticeship position, giving the apprentice

exposure to more than one workplace. The European system of 'Mobility' of apprentices is considered extremely valuable to Governments, communities, employers and apprentices and is being supported by the EU to the value of more than €2 billion. An investment on this scale has surely been thoroughly considered and determined to be worth while.

### Research

1. The Fellow recommends research to collect empirical data to identify why people undertake apprenticeships in the Furnishing Industry; how prepared and informed they are for both the world of work and this particular Industry; and why employers take on apprentices and their level of commitment to the formal training of that candidate. There is currently a lack of understanding around why young people decide to undertake an apprenticeship in the 'non-licenced' trades covered by the Furnishings Training Package. Non-licenced trades are those where it is not necessary to have any formal qualifications or training to either work in that industry, or start up a business in it. Currently in Australia, anyone can make and sell furniture, they can start a business polishing furniture and they can make and install kitchen cabinets. With no current national licensing or registration requirements, why then do people (young and career-changers) undertake an apprenticeship, which often requires up to four years of indentureship and almost always has low wages as part of the contract?
2. The Fellow recommends further research into the assessment and structure associated with the acquisition and recognition of 'skills sets'. These can be formally assessed and accumulated by employees and over time result in Units of Competence and Certificate level qualifications. There are often specific 'packets' of knowledge or 'skills sets' which an employee needs to learn to undertake a task. The employee may accumulate many of these 'skills sets' over time and when reviewed, these 'skills sets' may equate to partial or entire Units of Competence, which when added together could be the equivalent knowledge and skills as a full qualification. These 'skills sets' may also be acquired over a range of work places or experiences. An employer may need an employee to undertake a specific task and only want that amount of training to take place (there may be the need for external training or a trainer to come onsite, which would attract an additional cost).
3. The Fellow recommends research into the impact of Structured Work Place Learning (work placements) in VET in Schools programs in Victoria, and the uptake and success of full qualifications, post completing high school. There are now more sixty-seven thousand students in the VET in Schools program in Victoria, through which students undertaking their final two (and in some cases three) years of high school can also complete or partially complete a pre-apprenticeship or Certificate level trade qualification. If this training is done at the high school and there is no mandatory work placement, it is possible for the student to complete a trade recognised qualification having never entered a workplace and having no idea what the industry is actually like. It is this structured and regulated 'real' work place exposure which value-adds and validates the awarding of a genuine 'trade' recognised skills set or qualification.
4. The necessity to research completion rates and satisfaction levels of students who undertake all or part of their VET in Schools training at an RTO (in 'real' workshops, using 'real' equipment and surrounded by 'real' apprentices who are also in training), to identify if funding for RTO delivery could improve outcomes for students and satisfy Industry who rightly demand genuine demonstrable competence of UoC's and/or qualifications that these young people are being awarded.

### Community

1. The Fellow recommends an exerted community campaign to promote apprenticeships as valid, valuable and worthwhile and as a real option to academic pursuits, not as second best. To be truly successful, this attitudinal paradigm shift will require complete support from all levels of the education system and all facets of society. This will only happen over time. The immediate focus needs to be on young people leaving secondary education and those in lower high school who are making subject selections which will impact on their career choices. A targeted and relevant multi-media promotional campaign aimed at these young people and their families, needs to be immediately undertaken. Any such campaign necessarily requires collaboration with industry, training providers, adolescent psychologists and marketing experts. Young people are savvy and discerning and this rebranding or marketing campaign needs to 'hit the mark' to be effective.

### ISS INSTITUTE INC.

1. The Fellow recommends that more Fellowships are awarded in this area of study to enable further advances in the area of apprenticeships in Australia so that Australia can benefit from the latest international examples.

# References

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Sustainable Policies for a Dynamic Future*, Carolynne Bourne AM, ISS Institute 2007.  
Note: This is a reference to a manual report held on file by ISS Institute.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> *Directory of Opportunities. Specialised Courses with Italy. Part 1: Veneto Region*, ISS Institute, 1991.  
Note: This is a reference to a manual report held on file by ISS Institute.
- <sup>4</sup> “The United Nations Non Government Organisation (NGO) has worked for many years to create a global buy-in on sustainability. Starting with the definition developed in 1987 this organisation is now working on many fronts to ensure that sustainability is understood and adopted by all sectors of Government, Industry, Education and the Community”.  
  
The following web site link will enable connection to the activities of this UN NGO that are relevant to this report. <http://unngosustainability.org/>
- <sup>5</sup> Skills Australia’s *Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010*, pp. 1-2. [http://www.issinstitute.org.au/pdfs/WWF\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.issinstitute.org.au/pdfs/WWF_strategy.pdf)

## Reports

- Austin, S., MacPhail, F. 2010 *Post-school education and labour force participation in Canada and Australia*, Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, NCVER, Adelaide
- European Commission, 2010 *Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020, A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels
- Hugh, J. 2011 *Implementing Higher Apprenticeships – Learning from Practice*, Centre for Work-based Learning, University of Greenwich, London
- Misko, J, et al, 2007 *Doing an apprenticeship What young people think*, NCVER, Adelaide
- Sharpe, A., Gibson, J 2005 *The Apprenticeship System in Canada: Trends and issues*, CSLS Research Report 2005-04, Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canada
- Victorian Government, 2011 *Apprenticeships in 2011: Competency Based Completion Arrangements*, Victoria.