Mining and Automotive Skills Alliance

Driving Industry Conversations – Women in Automotive

This document summarises discussions from Driving Industry Conversations – Women in Automotive on 28 October 2026. This summary captures the consistent themes raised across these sessions to inform training package reform and broader industry engagement.

Key discussion points

1. Attraction and recruitment

- Women remain underrepresented in technical automotive roles, highlighting opportunities to strengthen workforce participation.
- Early exposure through schools, industry visits, work experience and visible female role models is essential to challenging perceptions of automotive careers.
- Employers were encouraged to adopt inclusive recruitment practices, including gender-neutral language, clear job descriptions and promotion of training and development opportunities.
- Industry and employers must proactively promote automotive career pathways rather than relying solely on prospective applicants.

2. Workplace culture and retention

- Retention was identified as a critical workforce challenge, with Trades Women Australia highlighting significant attrition among women undertaking trade apprenticeships.
- Supportive workplace cultures, appropriate amenities, correctly fitting PPE, psychological safety and addressing unconscious bias were identified as fundamental expectations.
- Structured onboarding, effective mentoring and opportunities to apply skills learned through formal training can improve apprentice confidence and engagement.
- Employers were encouraged to recognise individual circumstances and provide flexible working arrangements where operationally possible.

3. Career progression and leadership

- Automotive offers diverse career pathways extending beyond traditional technical roles, including specialist technical positions, training, management and customer-facing opportunities.
- Ongoing professional development, meaningful recognition and regular career conversations were identified as important retention strategies.
- Leaders and supervisors play a significant role in creating inclusive environments and ensuring employees have access to appropriate mentoring and development.
- Supporting employees through different life stages, including parental leave and return-to-work arrangements, can help retain experienced workers.

4. Financial and industry support

Sarah Curley outlined Trades Women Australia's initiatives supporting women entering and remaining in skilled trades.

- The Trades Women Australia Community Foundation provides scholarships, mentoring and networking opportunities to address financial, personal and workplace barriers.

- The Victorian Apprentice Bus Mechanic Scholarship Program offers eligible women and gender-diverse heavy vehicle apprentices $2,500 annually towards work-related expenses.
- Financial assistance was highlighted as particularly important for mature-age apprentices managing living expenses, training costs and family responsibilities.
- AUSMASA also highlighted its support for two Auto Women scholarships targeting emerging female talent and experienced women pursuing leadership development.

Key themes and industry insights

Three recurring themes emerged throughout the discussion:

- ***Retention requires greater attention:*** Increasing female apprenticeship commencements alone will not address workforce shortages without improvements in workplace culture, support and apprenticeship completion.
- ***Inclusive practices benefit the broader workforce:*** Mentoring, flexible arrangements, structured training and supportive leadership can improve engagement and retention for all employees.
- ***Industry-wide collaboration is essential:*** Employers, training providers, industry associations and support organisations have shared responsibility for removing barriers and improving long-term workforce participation.

Outcomes and impact

The webinar provided practical guidance for employers and training providers to review existing recruitment, onboarding and retention practices.

Engagement with Trades Women Australia strengthened awareness of available scholarships, mentoring programs and collaborative opportunities to support women throughout their trade careers.

The discussion also reinforced the importance of using industry intelligence and lived experiences to inform workforce development strategies, particularly in addressing systemic barriers to female participation and progression.

Recommended next steps

1. Encourage employers to review recruitment language, workplace amenities, onboarding processes and mentoring arrangements.
2. Promote available scholarships and support programs through AUSMASA's industry engagement networks.
3. Continue collaborating with Trades Women Australia and other women's industry networks to strengthen support and career pathways.
4. Capture ongoing stakeholder feedback to inform future industry engagement, workforce initiatives and training product considerations.
5. Promote continued participation in AUSMASA's Driving Industry Conversations series and the upcoming Charge for Change - The Road Ahead Summit in March 2027.

Overall summary

The webinar reinforced that attracting women into automotive is only the first step; retaining and supporting them throughout their careers is essential to achieving sustainable workforce participation.

Through industry collaboration, inclusive employment practices, mentoring and targeted financial support, employers and training providers can help address workforce shortages while creating more accessible and rewarding automotive career pathways for women.

Key links

Trades Women Australia links:

Links to Scholarship Programs that support women to stay and thrive in their automotive apprenticeships:

Annual Scholarships Program - encouraging organisations to partner with us and donate if possible to provide critical life-changing financial and social supports for women in all types of trades (including automotive) to be retained in their chosen trade - https://tradeswomenaus.com/tradeswomen/programs/apprenticeship-scholarship-program/

Apprentice Bus Mechanics Scholarship - for women undertaking the AUR31120 apprenticeship in Victoria, provided with yearly financial support to cover any work-related costs and support them to stay until qualification - https://tradeswomenaus.com/tradeswomen/programs/bus-mechanics-apprenticeship-scholarship-program/.

Reach out to Sarah Curley if you would like to talk further about the work at Trades Women Australia, have questions, want to partner, or have their own programs or initiatives that they think would be able to support the women we are working with - sarahc@twaus.com.au.

AUSMASA is proud to support

2 national Auto Women Scholarships, helping women across Australia's automotive industry develop their leadership skills and advance their careers.

Applications are now open, with 2 pathways available:

1. **Sprint Hurdles:** for early-career women, to build confidence and leadership foundations
2. **Ascension:** for experienced leaders ready to take the next step.

Applications close on 30 November 2026.

https://autowomen.com.au/scholarships/

The views, claims, and recommendations in this summary are drawn solely from what was discussed during the Driving Industry Conversations consultation and do not necessarily reflect the official position of AUSMASA. They are presented to capture industry feedback and inform further discussion, not as AUSMASA policy or endorsement.