

Driving Industry Conversations – Considerations and responsibilities of hiring apprentices

This document summarises discussions from Driving Industry Conversations – Considerations and responsibilities of hiring an apprentice on 08 July 2026. This summary captures the consistent themes raised across these sessions to inform training package reform and broader industry engagement.

Apprentices are critical to the future workforce

Apprenticeships remain one of the strongest pathways into automotive careers, with many graduates progressing into employment and higher-skilled roles. However, significant numbers of apprentices continue to leave before completing their training, highlighting the importance of improving workplace experiences from the outset.

Many reasons apprentices leave are within employer control

Industry data and consultation feedback identified several recurring reasons apprentices discontinue their apprenticeship, including:

- Limited learning opportunities
- Too many repetitive or non-developmental tasks
- Insufficient hands-on vehicle experience
- Poor workplace support
- Lack of mentoring
- Misaligned expectations between employer and apprentice
- Limited structured training and career guidance

A significant proportion of apprentices leave within the first six months to two years, making early engagement particularly important.

Attraction requires proactive recruitment

Successful employers are taking a proactive approach rather than waiting for applicants.

Examples discussed included:

- Building relationships with local schools and TAFEs
- Participating in career expos
- Engaging with sporting clubs and community groups
- Partnering with manufacturers and industry organisations
- Promoting apprenticeship opportunities through Expressions of Interest campaigns

The session also highlighted missed opportunities where interested applicants were not followed up despite strong demand.

Strong onboarding sets apprentices up for success

Effective onboarding should include:

- Structured induction plans
- Clear learning milestones
- Consistent mentoring
- Defined workplace expectations
- Regular check-ins during the first weeks and months

Rather than leaving apprentices to "learn as they go," businesses should intentionally plan their early development.

Leadership has a significant impact on retention

Managers and supervisors play a critical role in apprentice success.

Effective leaders:

- Create psychologically safe workplaces
- Encourage questions
- Adapt communication styles
- Understand different learning preferences
- Provide regular feedback
- Build trust and approachability
- Invest in their own leadership capability

Poor communication and assumptions about apprentice knowledge were identified as common contributors to frustration and disengagement.

Understand individual motivation

Not every apprentice is motivated by the same factors.

Employers were encouraged to understand:

- Career aspirations
- Personal goals
- Preferred recognition
- Learning styles
- Previous experience
- Personality differences

Recognition, responsibility, career conversations and regular encouragement can often be just as motivating as financial rewards.

Apprentices need meaningful learning opportunities

Apprentices consistently reported wanting:

- More practical work
- Greater exposure to vehicle repairs
- Better alignment between TAFE learning and workplace experience
- More structured mentoring
- Clear progression pathways

Businesses should ensure apprentices spend meaningful time developing technical skills rather than completing excessive cleaning or repetitive administrative tasks.

Career pathways should be visible

Apprentices are more likely to remain engaged when they can see long-term career opportunities.

Employers were encouraged to:

- Discuss future career options
- Share personal career journeys
- Identify progression opportunities
- Support continuous professional development
- Reinforce that automotive offers long-term career stability

Career conversations should recognise that not every apprentice wants management responsibilities understanding individual aspirations is essential.

Retention is strengthened through workplace culture

Industry consultations identified several practical initiatives that improve retention, including:

- Mentoring programs.
- Industry networking opportunities.
- Increased responsibility over time.
- Open communication.
- Regular recognition.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).
- Fuel or travel assistance.
- Tool discounts.
- Flexible workplace benefits.
- Paying above minimum award rates where possible.
- Small incentives and reward programs.

Many of these initiatives require relatively little financial investment but can significantly improve engagement and loyalty.

Government support and incentives are available

The webinar highlighted a range of apprentice and employer support programs, including:

- Wage incentives.
- Training support.
- Living-away-from-home assistance.
- Interest-free apprentice loans.
- Completion incentives.
- Employer hiring incentives.
- State and territory funding programs.
- Clean Energy apprenticeship incentives for eligible qualifications.

Employers and apprentices were encouraged to regularly review available incentives, as eligibility and funding arrangements change over time.

Key Takeaways

Industry consultations consistently demonstrated that apprentice retention is influenced far more by workplace culture, leadership and learning opportunities than by wages alone.

Businesses that successfully retain apprentices typically:

- Recruit proactively
- Provide structured onboarding
- Invest in mentoring
- Create clear expectations
- Support continuous learning
- Foster open communication
- Recognise individual motivation
- Provide visible career pathways
- Take advantage of available government support

Creating an environment where apprentices feel supported, valued and able to develop meaningful skills benefits both apprentices and employers while strengthening the future automotive workforce.

The views, claims, and recommendations in this summary are drawn from what was discussed during the Driving Industry Conversations consultations, Workforce Insights 2026 and NCEVR data 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.