OUR PRIORITIES: IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

HIGH EXPECTATIONS, CLOSING THE GAPS

Creating opportunities for people facing barriers

The Smart and Skilled reforms to the NSW vocational education and training system, which commenced on 1 January 2015, provide eligible students with government-subsidised training in courses on the NSW Skills List to gain the skills they need to get a job and advance their career.

The initiative provides fee exemptions and concessions for disadvantaged students and those with special needs, particularly students with disability, Aboriginal students, and Commonwealth welfare recipients in regional and remote locations.

The Smart and Skilled Adult and Community Education Community Service Obligation Program is promoting access and increased training outcomes for those who experience significant barriers to training and employment. For the period January to June 2015, the program delivered training to a total of 3,262 students, of whom 2,519 were disadvantaged.

State Training Services, which transferred to the Department of Industry, Skills and Regional Development on 1 July 2015, is managing the development of two initiatives under the Reskilling NSW strategy including:

- $48 million in fee-free scholarships (200,000 over four years) for concession-eligible 15-to-30-year-olds, with priority given to people in social housing or on the waiting list to undertake government-subsidised training, which was implemented in July 2015
- the $8 million Regional Vocational Education and Training (VET) Pathways Program, which will provide viable pathways into education, training and/or work for disengaged young people in regional areas with high levels of youth unemployment and limited support services, will be implemented in 2016.

State Training Services is also developing the Jobs for Tomorrow scholarship program for students who enrol in vocational qualifications related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This will see $25 million invested into 25,000 scholarships over four years.

In the first half of 2015, applications opened for the Bert Evans Apprentice Scholarships to assist apprentices facing extreme hardship and who face significant challenges in completing their apprenticeship. The scholarships are available to apprentices who were disability, are country-based, are Aboriginal or are female in non-traditional trades.

Ensuring equal opportunities for people with disability

Under Smart and Skilled, students with disability were exempt from paying fees for the first qualification in a calendar year. A concession applies for any subsequent courses the student commences in the same year, up to certificate IV.

In the period January to June 2015, 28,300 students with disability enrolled in vocational education and training in NSW. As at 30 June 2015, there were 2,162 apprentices and trainees with disability.

The Adult and Community Education Community Service Obligation Program delivered training to 838 students with disability in the first six months of 2015.

Improving business and career opportunities for Aboriginal people

Under the Smart and Skilled reforms, which commenced in 2015, Aboriginal students are fee-exempt for government-subsidised qualifications. Training providers also receive a 15 per cent loading on top of the price for the qualification to help meet the learning needs of Aboriginal students.

The Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Program funded state and local government agencies for 109 Aboriginal school-based traineeship positions to increase Higher School Certificate completion rates and to help students successfully transition from school into work.

In the first half of 2015, more than 300 Aboriginal apprentices and trainees were provided with guidance, mentoring, counselling and support services under the Our Way Ahead for Aboriginal People program. State Training Services continued to provide free business advisory support to Aboriginal people wishing to establish their own business through the Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer program. For the period January to June 2015, the program assisted 139 clients and successfully created 19 new Aboriginal businesses.

In addition, the New Careers for Aboriginal People program provided advisory services for more than 454
Aboriginal job seekers across NSW, with 357 people gaining employment and more than 485 people undertaking vocational skills training in the first six months of 2015. From 1 January 2015, the Smart and Skilled Adult and Community Education Community Service Obligation Program is providing access to increased vocational education and training outcomes for those who experience significant barriers to training and employment. The program provided 567 Aboriginal students with vocational training to improve their employment prospects during the period January to June 2015. The number of Community Service Obligation enrolments for Aboriginal students for this period was 2,282.

Removing barriers for women to non-traditional occupations

State Training Services continues communication and support strategies to encourage women into non-traditional trades. In February 2015, the Premier signed a compact with seven of the state’s peak employer and industry groups to train and employ more apprentices. State Training Services will work with these groups to increase apprentice numbers, including women undertaking training in non-traditional trades.

In March 2015, applications for the Bert Evans Scholarships opened, enabling female apprentices in non-traditional trades who are facing significant challenges in completing their qualification to apply. The NSW Training Award for Women in a Non-Traditional Trade or Vocation recognises the achievements of women in traditionally male-dominated trades. The winner of the 2015 award will take on an ambassadorial role, helping to raise awareness and promote these trades as rewarding career pathways for young women.

Targeting training to the needs of rural and regional NSW

The department is negotiating with higher education providers to develop innovative tertiary pathway programs in Aged Care and Early Childhood Studies. It has also been working to provide advice for the NSW Skills Board on the feasibility of building pathways into higher education, as part of apprenticeship training, to assist students who have been under-represented in the higher education system, including those in rural and regional areas.

Under the Smart and Skilled reforms, students are able to enrol in government-subsidised training at the approved provider of their choice and providers are receiving additional loadings to support the delivery of training for students in regional and remote areas.

The Adult and Community Education Community Service Obligation Program further supports the delivery of subsidised training for eligible students in regional and remote communities. Training includes part qualifications in response to locally identified needs or approved full qualifications. For the period January to June 2015, the program delivered training to 756 students who live in regional and remote communities.

Regional VET Pathways were developed in 2015 and will provide viable pathways into education, training and/or work for disengaged young people in targeted regional areas. The program will be implemented in 2016.

Retraining retrenched workers in regional and rural areas

State Training Services continued to provide services to help retrenched workers and those at risk of losing employment develop career transition plans, upskill, retrain and find new employment. Information and advice on vocational education and training options was provided to 220 (75 per cent) of retrenched and affected workers from six companies undergoing structural adjustment. Under the Retrenched Workers Assistance Program, training has been brokered for 70 of these workers linked to job opportunities in the construction, transport, logistics and warehousing industries. Strong industry partnerships were developed to ensure that the training for retrenched workers was relevant to actual job opportunities.

State Training Services collaborates in whole-of-government responses to job losses to determine strategies to assist employers and their affected workers, particularly where large numbers of workers are involved. In the first half of 2015, State Training Services worked with Australian Paper and other agencies to provide information, advice and assistance for 75 workers affected by the Shoalhaven Paper Mill closure at Bomaderry. In Lithgow, State Training Services worked with Centennial Coal management and other agencies to help 48 workers affected by the downsizing of the mine. The assistance included upskilling and retraining options mapped to workers’ career transition plans.

The Continuing Apprentices Placement Service assists apprentices and new entrant trainees in priority industries no longer in employment to find a new employer and complete their training in their chosen career. By the end of June 2015, State Training Services had placed 2,083 (65 per cent) of apprentices and trainees who applied for placement through this service.
THE NSW QUALITY FRAMEWORK SETS THE QUALITY BENCHMARK FOR SMART AND SKILLED TRAINING PROVIDERS.

QUALITY TEACHING AND LEADERSHIP

Improving the quality of vocational education and training

The NSW Quality Framework sets the quality benchmark for Smart and Skilled training providers. Under the framework, providers are assessed on their capacity, capability and performance. Performance monitoring is one of nine principles outlined and incorporates a risk-based approach, coordinated monitoring and performance reviews.

To ensure compliance with the NSW Quality Framework, State Training Services is carrying out performance monitoring on all Smart and Skilled providers. Monitoring includes a review of enrolment data, telephone interviews with past and current students, site visits to training premises to ensure the appropriateness of training facilities and equipment and a review of student records and the complaints process. For the period January to June 2015, State Training Services carried out performance monitoring and site visits for more than 150 Smart and Skilled providers. Appropriate action, including the suspension or termination of contracts, will be taken for Smart and Skilled providers that fail to meet contract standards.

The Adult and Community Education Teaching and Leadership program supported organisations to implement new requirements under Smart and Skilled, with the delivery of eight projects in metropolitan and regional NSW to support adult and community education capability development.

NEW AND BETTER WAYS OF DOING BUSINESS

Smart and Skilled

The Smart and Skilled initiative gives people the opportunity to gain the skills they need to find a job and advance their careers. Around 340 high-quality training providers were contracted following a robust provider application process to deliver quality training in priority skills areas across NSW.

In June 2015, changes were announced that provided employers with a greater choice of providers and increased the flexibility for 259 training providers to deliver training across different geographical regions. Providers were also approved to deliver apprenticeships and traineeships in all regions where they have demand. Contract offers were made to a number of new providers for the delivery of apprenticeships and traineeships, bringing the number of Smart and Skilled providers to more than 400.

The Smart and Skilled website provides a central hub of information on available courses and providers for students and assistance for employers and training providers.

Partnering with industry to meet local skills needs

In 2015, State Training Services reviewed and updated the NSW Skills List, ensuring that priority qualifications for the NSW economy are eligible for funding under Smart and Skilled in 2016. Feedback from industry representatives, peak provider bodies and other stakeholders was considered in the review.

Streamlining apprenticeships and traineeships

State Training Services continued to work with the Commonwealth, states and territories to harmonise apprenticeship and traineeship policy and regulations. This will ensure uniformity across an array of administrative and regulatory requirements.
For the period January to the end of June 2015, more than 21,318 apprentices and trainees completed their training contracts with more than 53 per cent finishing early through competency-based completion.

State Training Services continued to develop industry engagement strategies to improve completion rates for apprentices and trainees in NSW.

In February the Premier signed an apprenticeship compact with seven key industry stakeholders. The compact is a key plan of the NSW Government’s Reskilling NSW strategy to develop a highly skilled workforce. Through the compact, the NSW Government is partnering with industry to encourage more businesses to take on apprentices and trainees, increase apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates and create a more streamlined and accessible apprenticeship and traineeship system for employers and learners. Compact members include the NSW Business Chamber, Australian Industry (Ai) Group (NSW), Civil Contractors Federation, Australian Constructors Association, Master Builders Association (NSW), Housing Industry Association and Motor Traders Association of NSW. Individual strategic delivery plans are being developed for each compact stakeholder. It is expected the plans will be finalised by mid-September 2016.

Building an effective and coordinated tertiary education system

The department is continuing to work with industry representatives, employers and tertiary education providers to develop innovative pathway programs leading to higher education qualifications in Aged Care and Early Childhood Studies as well as to innovative apprenticeships. These pathways will provide effective, work-related entry pathways to higher education as an alternative to direct entry from the Higher School Certificate and build links between the vocational and higher education systems. The pathways will benefit students across the state including those disadvantaged by their socioeconomic background or by rural and regional isolation.