

Working with your electrical apprentice



Foreword

This brochure is designed to provide you with useful information and advice that will assist you to ensure a positive experience for your apprentice and yourself. It contains links to further information which can help you understand your legal rights and responsibilities and provide help to resolve issues that may arise with your apprentices.

This brochure is also available online at www.skills.vic.gov.au

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Your Apprenticeship

Rights and Responsibilities

Taking on an apprentice means making an investment in both the apprentice and your own business. One of the most effective ways of getting the most out of this investment is to recruit well. More information on recruiting is available from www.skills.vic.gov.au

You will have signed a legally binding Training Contract with the apprentice and a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

Your apprentice has the right to:

- be properly trained and supervised on the job
- work under conditions which comply with the relevant laws
- be paid wages according to their award and receive pay slips
- be released to attend formal, structured training
- work in a safe workplace that is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Your apprentice has a responsibility to:

- attend formal structured training
- work under instructions at agreed working times and follow the employer's rules
- take care of workplace property and resources

- maintain record books and work evidence as required.

Finding the balance between these rights and responsibilities will help to achieve a successful outcome for both your business and your apprentice.

Expectations

Many of the problems faced by employers and apprentices are caused by differing expectations. Your expectations of what your apprentice should be doing and how they should behave will not always be the same as those of your apprentice and this is when things can go wrong. The following information provides advice on how to deal with problems in the workplace to help you manage an apprenticeship.

Communication

Effective communication is a key to success in any workplace. Many of the problems that occur with apprentices are caused by miscommunication. Remember that if you have a “Generation Y” apprentice they may well have different ideas about what they need to know and how to find out.

When talking to “Generation Y” workers it is best to:

- Keep it short and informal. This is a generation of the electronic age and they are used to getting their information quickly.
- Use terms and ideas that make sense to the apprentice, particularly if you are talking about something you are not happy with. Your apprentice will learn more if you tell them why their performance is not what you expect rather than just telling them ‘it’s not good enough’.
- Make sure your apprentice has understood what you have said and what you expect. Be prepared to answer questions, remember this is the “Y” generation. It’s better to spend a few extra minutes to explain what you want than to have a potentially dangerous or costly problem because the apprentice hasn’t fully expected what is required.

Younger workers will also have a different level of maturity to older workers and when they are new to the workforce they are less likely to have developed the work habits that you expect. Every workplace has its own procedures and these are often not written down or spelled out. Make sure your apprentice knows:

- who to contact if they are running late or are sick

- how you prefer to be contacted. Do you expect a phone call or will a text message do?
- their start time and location and what clothes, tools or equipment they should have with them
- how long and when lunch and tea breaks are and if they are expected to stay on site
- if you allow mobile phones to be used during work hours.

Fair Treatment

There can be times when apprentices think they are being treated unfairly. It is always best to deal with these issues in the workplace as soon as they are raised. It may be that the issue has arisen because of poor communication and can be easily resolved or it may be something more serious that you as an employer need to become involved in. If issues of unfair treatment are raised try to listen to the problem calmly as when emotion becomes involved things can get out of hand. If you are unable to discuss the issue with your apprentice or any other employee who may be involved you can get help from your local **Apprenticeship Field Officer** (AFO). Call 1300 722 603 for contact details of AFOs or get more information at www.skills.vic.gov.au/apprentices/contact_AFO

Disputes

Disputes can happen when you and your apprentice have different expectations about what the apprentice should be doing, what they should be paid, their conditions or behaviour at work. If you have a dispute with your apprentice try to resolve it with a direct approach before it becomes a serious problem that affects your business and your apprentice. Taking the direct approach to resolving disputes means:

- being clear about the problem
- making a time and place to talk about it so you can explain the problem
- listening to what the apprentice has to say before taking any further action.

If none of these things is possible or you try them and they don't work you can contact your Apprenticeship Field Officer (AFO) for help.

Harassment or Bullying

If you think your apprentice is being harassed or bullied at work you need to take action. Harassment is defined as *'any form of behaviour that is unwelcome, usually repeated and personally offensive to the recipient'*. It is not simply 'a bit of fun' as it can have serious personal, financial and safety consequences. A definition of

workplace bullying is: *'the repeated less favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which may be considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. It includes behaviour that intimidates, offends, degrades or humiliates a worker'*. If you or your apprentice thinks there is harassment or bullying in your workplace you can:

- take the direct approach by telling those responsible that their behaviour is unacceptable
- advise your workers of the possible consequences.

If the issue can't be resolved in the workplace you can contact the **WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on 1800 136 089**.

Training

Within 3 months of taking on your apprentice you should have signed a Training Plan agreed to by you, your apprentice and the RTO. The Training Plan gives you information about the training and assessment and should be treated as a working document which can be amended during the apprenticeship. If you have any questions about the Training Plan you should talk to the RTO. It is your responsibility to provide on the job training and supervision and to

release your apprentice to attend formal structured training with their RTO. The RTO is responsible for the formal structured training and assessment of the apprentice. The more time you put into the on-the-job training, particularly in the early stage of the apprenticeship, the more benefit you will get from your apprentice. Here are some suggestions to help you get the best out of the on-the-job training:

- demonstrate and explain what jobs need to be done and how they should be done
- allow your apprentice time to practise
- watch, coach, motivate and correct
- provide variety in training where you can as this builds confidence by letting the apprentice apply their skills in different situations.

There can be times when your apprentice thinks that the jobs you want them to do have nothing to do with their trade training. Your apprentice might think that cleaning up is not part of their job. While this is not a trade skill it is part of being an electrician and this should be explained to your apprentice. You or your other workers can also lead by example and clean up occasionally.

Feedback

Feedback on performance is part of training and work but needs to be constructive to be effective. Feedback helps the apprentice work out that they need to improve on and also motivates them to improve. Skills and confidence are less likely to develop in a vacuum. The longer it takes your apprentice to develop their skills and confidence the longer it is before they become productive to your business.

Supervision

It is your responsibility to make sure that your apprentice is adequately supervised. Levels of supervision will vary according to the working conditions and the apprentice's level of confidence and ability. Supervision is also an important aspect of your responsibilities under workplace safety, particularly where electrical work is involved.



Assistance

Assistance for employers is available from a range of authorities and agencies. At the following website you can find information on:

- Roles of various players
- What to do – at a glance
- Apprenticeships available
- How to find a Registered Training Organisation
- Financial incentives
- Responsibilities
- Training tips
- Sample training plans www.skills.vic.gov.au



Safety

WorkSafe Victoria enforces Victoria's OHS laws and helps prevent workplace injuries. If you have questions relating to safety at work you can phone 1800 136 089 (toll free) or get more information from www.workcover.vic.gov.au

Financial Help

Both the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments provide a range of financial help for both employers and apprentices in the form of allowances and incentives. More information is available from www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au and www.skills.vic.gov.au

Wages

You should provide your apprentice with regular pay slips which must give the detail of a range of items. If you are unsure of what you should be paying your apprentice more information is available from **Fair Work Online** at www.fairwork.gov.au

Support and Advice

Apprenticeship Field Officers (AFOs) can advise on concerns or disputes in the workplace. You can get contact details for your local AFO by calling 1300 722 603 or you can get more information from www.skills.vic.gov.au/apprentices/contact_AFO

Australian Apprenticeships Centres (AACs) provide information, administration services and support to employers and apprentices. More information is available from www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au

For a comprehensive guide to **Apprenticeships** go to www.skills.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/84087/A-Guide-to-Apprenticeships--and--Traineeships.pdf

