

A guide to retaining apprentices during work shortages



Foreword

This brochure is designed to provide you with information and advice that will assist you to retain your apprentices in times of economic downturn.

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

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The economic downturn

Times of economic downturn can make it difficult for employers to keep their apprentices on. When employers have work shortages they often think the only answer is to cancel the training contract. There are a number of things that you can do to keep your apprentice and cancelling the training contract should be seen as a last resort.

If as an employer you find you do not have enough work for your apprentice there are options available. All are preferable to losing apprentices to the trade which can result in a skills shortage when work picks up.

The number of apprenticeships usually reduces during times of economic downturn and industry can take years to return to pre-downturn levels when the economy picks up. Employers who have not been able to retain their apprentices find it more difficult to respond when the economy picks up because of a shortage of qualified tradespeople.

The following information provides alternative options for your business if you don't have enough work to keep your apprentice on full time.

Share your apprentice

You can share your apprentice with another employer in the same trade provided the employer who signs the training contract takes responsibility for complying with all requirements. Many employers have networks within their own trades and it is worthwhile talking to other employers to find out if anyone is able to share your apprentice.

Reduce work hours

You can reduce your apprentice's working hours over a weekly or monthly period and reduce their wages in proportion to the reduction of hours for the corresponding period. While the hours of work and pay can be reduced they may not fall below 13 hours per week.

Note that you must still pay for your apprentice's off-the-job training attendance.

Suspend the Training Contract

The Training Contract can be suspended for a specific period which means that an apprentice does not work for the specified time of suspension. This should be a last resort option and a Training Contract can only be suspended with the permission of the Victorian Skills Commission.

Note that applications for suspension of Training Contracts made during the probationary period are rarely approved as it is generally felt that the employer should not have taken on an apprentice if they are unable to give them less than three months work.

Try a Group Training Organisation

Group Training Organisations employ apprentices, place them with host employers and rotate them through other host employers in the same trade when there are work shortages. Contact Group Training organisations in your area to find out if they can assist.

To find a Group Training Organisation call 1800 819 747 or go to www.gtaltld.com.au

Off-the-job Training

Your apprentices can continue their off-the-job training during the time their Training Contract is suspended.

Who can help?

Your local Apprenticeship Field Officer (AFO) can give you further advice on your options and can help you follow the required process to vary your arrangements with your apprentice. To contact your local AFO call the Apprenticeship Administration Branch on 1300 722 603 or go to www.skills.vic.gov.au/industry/contact_AFO