

Construction Apprenticeships

Case study summary

Title	An innovative community and enacted social partnership
Description	<p>Construction Apprenticeships (CA) was established in 1986 to support employment and training in the Ipswich region. The difficult economic conditions starting in 1986 were changing and reshaping much of Australian business and industry. Australian industry was short of skilled workers, but economic uncertainty made employers wary of long-term commitments such as apprenticeships. CA was formed as part of the initiative of exploring new and more efficient ways of training the workforce, being the first group training scheme in Ipswich. CA focuses on connecting schools to industry partners to offer school-based and post-school apprenticeships. Its key purposes are engaging youth in employment, improving their employment outcomes and providing career pathways within the VET sector, particularly in the construction trades. Starting within specific geographical locations (i.e., Morton and Ipswich), CA is now operating in the southeast Queensland. It extends its support and services to a wide range of industries (construction, automotive, engineering, conservation and land management, and administration), local businesses and VET sector (i.e., TAFE, RTOs) and promoting the industry (i.e., construction) to local communities.</p>
Governance	<p>CA was governed under the Ipswich-Moreton Community Apprenticeship Scheme (IMCAS) sponsored by Ipswich City Council and the Moreton Shire Council. A board of volunteers was formed by Council and community representatives to establish a legal entity with the objective of finding opportunities for young people to undertake apprenticeships. Thus, CA is a not-for-profit, government-funded, and community-based agency governed by a Board of Directors.</p>
Operation	<p>The abolition of the apprenticeship councils/boards has increased the flexibility in the apprenticeship scheme. Labour hire licensing legislation and an increase in costs and control from state government and other bodies have changed and helped the organisation evolve. CA partners with jobseekers and businesses to meet their employment goals through a variety of services. CA offers opportunities for apprentices and trainees across a broad range of vocational areas as well as recruitment and training solutions for their partner businesses.</p> <p>CA employs apprentices and trainees across a broad range of vocational areas managing the off-the-job training and providing the on-the-job training in partnerships with businesses. CA allows the apprentice or trainee to either complete their entire tenure at the same employer or rotate through a series of employers to gain the full range of skills. It also allows business the flexibility to respond to market demands by returning the apprentice to the group training company during a downturn. The apprentice is then re-assigned to another host employer to complete their apprenticeship. The</p>

	<p>apprentices enjoy continuity of work, and the host employers can respond quickly to labour market demands. This is a win-win for both parties.</p> <p>CA works in partnerships with large RTOs and TAFE Queensland to deliver training programs to meet the needs of local businesses and industry. The goal of the training programs is to provide a skilled workforce for the region. CA recruits and provides support for students to gain industry experience through work placements leading to employment outcomes (e.g., full-time apprenticeships).</p>
Engagement with young people/ workplaces/ educational institutions	<p>CA works closely with schools, students and parents. They provide career advice and work placement opportunities for students via a school liaison officer. CA has a full-time school liaison officer who is available to conduct student interviews and negotiate work experience as requested by the school. An example of successful engagement with students is offering live sites for work experience via Building Futures Project where school-based apprentices were engaged in a 12-month house repair project (BFP) (i.e., repaired and sold the houses to fund the project).</p> <p>They engage with vocational education (VET) teachers and parents to provide insights into industry trends and needs. VET teachers are provided with professional development to maintain industry currency (i.e., insights into industry trends and updates).</p> <p>CA also engaged with industry and local businesses through industry liaison officers to discuss potential partnerships and secure industry hosts (e.g., electrical, carpentry, engineering and cabinet making) for apprentices. These liaison officers also do a reality check of the workplace/enterprise to identify 'the right fit' for students and industry hosts.</p>
Continuity outcomes	<p>The partnership's continuity is premised on several factors, including engagement from different stakeholders and partners and resourcing. Particularly, engagement from schools is critical to build trust in the partnership in collaboratively achieving the intended outcomes for students. Securing parental engagement is challenging yet important as research indicates the significant influence of parents on young people's decision making about post-school pathways. Additionally, as this partnership is government-funded agency and based on the number of apprentice enrolments, continuing funding and increased enrolment number are brought to the forefront in this partnership should it strive for continuity outcomes.</p>

Tentative findings

<i>Using five premises to evaluate the formation and ongoing development of the social partnership</i>	
Factors supporting	Shared values, purposes and goals, and intended outcomes Shared ownership and decision-making and relations with partners Partnership governance and leadership Trust and trustworthiness Capacity building for partnership work
Areas for improvement	Resources (i.e., continuing funding, tools) Securing engagement from schools and parents Increased number of apprenticeship enrolments
<i>Post-school pathways – informing and engaging</i>	
Context	A government-funded agency
Aim	engaging youth in employment, improving their employment outcomes and providing career pathways within the VET sector, particularly in the construction trades
Informing	Information evenings, communicating student progress to parents, advertising on social media
Engaging	School-based and post-school apprenticeships, work placements, visits to work sites, live work site experience (i.e., BFP)

Narrative analysis

Context for the social partnership

There are three types of social partnerships according to Billett and Seddon (2004) and these are: community, enacted and negotiated partnerships. In the context of Construction Apprenticeships (CA), it seems likely that the organisation would be captured within the geneses of the community and enacted partnerships. From the perspective of a community partnership, CA serves the southeast Queensland corridor, particularly the region of Ipswich to support employment and training in the region. CA focuses on connecting schools to industry partners to offer school-based and post-school apprenticeships. Its key purposes are engaging youth in employment, improving their employment outcomes and providing career pathways within the VET sector, particularly in the construction trades. Further to this, CA can also be considered as an enacted partnership as it was intentionally established and enacted by government and non-government agencies for the specific objective of finding opportunities for young people to undertake apprenticeships. CA is governed under the Ipswich-Moreton Community Apprenticeship Scheme (IMCAS) and sponsored by Ipswich and the Moreton Shire Councils. In summary, CA is a not-for-profit, government-funded, and community-based agency governed by a Board of Directors. It is a fairly young organisation, having been established in 1986.

Evaluating the partnership work

Factors supporting

CA works in partnerships with large Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and TAFE Queensland to deliver training programs to meet the needs of local businesses and industry. The goal of the training programs is to provide a skilled workforce for the region. CA recruits and provides support for school-age students to gain industry experience through work placements leading to employment outcomes (e.g., full-time apprenticeships). The organisation prides itself on its relationship with partners guided by its vision of shared values, purposes and goals, and intended outcomes for students. As partnership continuity is premised on several factors, including

engagement from different stakeholders and partners and resourcing, collaboration and open communication with all partners is a critical component to the success of the organisation. In particular, engagement from schools is critical to build trust in the partnership in collaboratively achieving the intended outcomes for students. The comments made by the TAFE teacher interviewee highlight the necessary communication and relationships required to ensure all parties are connected. "It sounds like a cliché, but open communication is the biggest thing that has worked."

In addition, other communicating channels such as newsletters, parent information evenings, career day events, industry days, and presentations at schools are offered by CA to further cement communication with all stakeholders. As an example the school liaison officer reported that:

We had a stall like we would at the normal school career day. We set up a table with all of our Flyers and information on it and expression of interest forms and then that way that's how we capture applicants.

Trust and trustworthiness are also highly regarded as important factors in supporting the success for students. In particular, ensuring their best interests are at the forefront with all stakeholders is deemed essential to the success in completing work placement, a Certificate 1 in Construction, or a school-based apprenticeship.

Parents, TAFE, the school, the student and representatives from CA all have a role in regard to student safety and pastoral care. As stated by the CA liaison officer:

We have a great employment consultant team, our sales team, they're very open to supporting the young people because that's our main aim. I think my knowledge and advice to the students and educating them and the parents, it's making sure everybody sort of understands the processing going forward because it's not always easy getting everybody to be on the same page.

In addition, capacity building for partnership work is also considered as a major factor to supporting the success of the program. CA relies on the capacity to build working relationships with industry so there is opportunity for all students to experience on the job training. Due to the need for a greater industry work site experience for students, Building Futures was formed as a separate but connected organisation to CA. In summary, Building Futures, purchase a 'derelict' home and then engage school students in a program to give them onsite experience or work site experience as opposed to learning in the classroom. The purpose of Building Futures as stated by the project manager is for "young people in our local and connected areas to be provided with [onsite learning] opportunities and giving them actual links into industry."

From these examples, there are a number of factors that support the success of CA. It has student success as its main focus and realise that effective collaboration and open communication is necessary to ensure ongoing social partnerships with industry as a pathway to that success.

Areas for improvement

While CA can be proud of its ongoing success with student post school pathways, there are areas that not necessarily require improvement but are recommendations to further enhance the program.

In particular, student behaviour on site is an on-going concern which stems from communication issues between them and the adult site worker/s. An example by the project manager where CA is able to assist in overcoming this issue is explained below:

So there's a degree of frustration when a young person shows up to a job site that where the job site is moving at a particular rate and the young person is a lot slower for very good reasons that they haven't been on site before. So regardless of the introductions to a work site in a lab environment i.e., school classroom, sometimes it's just not that the student is not prepared enough, especially when there are adults who are speaking and sometimes are very different language or a derivative of English and understanding that is sometimes quite different, and then young people talk is very different to an older generation talk. So what they talk about in their interests are quite different. So it's very hard for them to connect even from a social perspective sometimes. So that's where we come in. We help that."

More resources being made available for the students is also highly recommended. To have to share one drill among 4-5 students is not productive or conducive to quality output of work. As mentioned by the TAFE teacher: "There is a slightly disproportionate sharing of tools available for apprentices. This needs to be addressed so that they get a fair opportunity. You don't like to see five kids lining up to use one drill, but it doesn't particularly mean you need 20 everywhere because costs are real."

Higher literacy and numeracy skills is another important consideration. At a school level, the project manager suggested:

Understanding basic literacy principles, also, not even principles, but understanding and being able to comprehend our written language that we use in Australia and understanding simple maths would be so much more important than, say doing a biology class or a multistrand science or something along those lines. So I think that there are many more activities that take place within a school and we could simplify the class time if that makes sense.

Securing further engagement from schools and parents and increasing the number of apprenticeship and enrolments particularly for girls were also considered as areas for improvement.