



AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICE WELLBEING REPORT

2026

A supplementary
analysis of the
National First Year
Experience Survey





October 2026

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Level 7, 8 Chifley Square, Sydney, NSW 2000
ABN 51 602 702 796

ISBN to: 978-1-7639001-0-3

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Apprenticeship Support Australia (2026). National First Year Experience
Survey. Sydney, Australia: Apprenticeship Support Australia.

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INTRODUCTION

The first year of an apprenticeship is a period of significant change for an individual. Apprentices and trainees are learning new skills, adapting to the workplace, building relationships and beginning to shape their future careers. At the same time, regardless of age, they may be navigating financial pressures, study commitments and challenges outside of work.

In 2025, Apprenticeship Support Australia surveyed 12,376 current and former apprentices and trainees. Throughout this report, we refer to them collectively as Australian Apprentices. The survey explored their experiences of life, work and training during this critical first year. The resulting National First Year Experience Survey Report provided a broad picture of what is working well, where challenges remain and the factors that influence whether apprentices stay, progress and succeed.

One of the survey's strongest findings was the role of wellbeing in the Australian Apprentice experience. Psychological wellbeing emerged as

a significant factor influencing retention, while the survey also revealed notable differences in mental health experiences across industries, demographic groups and cohorts.

This supplementary report explores those findings in greater depth. It examines the factors shaping apprentice wellbeing, where experiences differ and the role employers and workplaces can play in creating environments that support Australian Apprentices throughout their journey.

A diverse team of experts contributed to the broader project, including Registered Psychologist Danielle Buckley, who collaborated on the development of this report. Her expertise has informed the interpretation of the findings and provided important context for understanding their practical implications for apprentice wellbeing.

Read the full 2026 National First Year Experience Survey Report.



ABOUT APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT AUSTRALIA

Apprenticeship Support Australia (ASA) operates under a contract with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, delivering trusted advice, services and support to employers and individuals to help them confidently navigate apprenticeships and traineeships.

As an Apprentice Connect Australia Provider, ASA's primary focus is on increasing apprenticeship commencements and completions by guiding employers and Australian Apprentices through every stage of the vocational training journey.

We facilitate training contracts from sign-up to completion, assess and administer incentive payments, and provide mentoring and personal support services at no cost to employers or Australian Apprentices.

In addition, we deliver specialist provider services in various locations to support Women in Trades, First Nations Australian Apprentices and those in Clean Energy occupations, ensuring equitable access to career pathways.

With a combined experience of over 84 years, ASA delivers services across New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia. ASA is part of Australia's business chamber movement, with the backing of Business NSW, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia.



CONTRIBUTING EXPERT

Danielle Buckley **Registered Psychologist**

Danielle Buckley is a Registered Psychologist with extensive experience in coaching and positive psychology. She holds a Master of Applied Science in Coaching Psychology, a Master of Applied Social Research and Policy, a Post Graduate Diploma in Psychology and a Bachelor of Arts (Psychology).

Danielle has worked in Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom and Asia developing and implementing both small and large-scale coaching and behavioural change programs designed to improve wellbeing and performance at work.

Through her long-standing collaboration with Apprenticeship Support Australia, Danielle has built extensive expertise in the wellbeing of Australian Apprentices. She provided the expert psychological analysis for the National First Year Experience Survey Report, including comparing its findings with her analysis of the 2018 Skillsroad Youth Census. She brings this unique combination of sector knowledge and expertise in coaching psychology and behavioural change to help interpret the findings and their implications for apprentice wellbeing.



AUSTRALIAN APPRENTICE WELLBEING AT A GLANCE

What do we mean by wellbeing?

Wellbeing, or positive mental health, is about feeling good, functioning well and adapting effectively.

In the workplace, wellbeing is shaped by the full experience of work – the work itself, the people we work with and the support we receive from our employer. It reflects how these experiences affect employees and their ability to feel and function well at work. For apprentices, this can include finding meaning and satisfaction in their work, feeling connected to others, having autonomy and developing confidence and self-acceptance.

Wellbeing is not the same as wellness. Employee wellness programs typically focus on areas such as exercise, nutrition and workplace experiences. While these can contribute to wellbeing by promoting connection and bringing some fun into work, they are not, on their own, wellbeing initiatives. Wellbeing is about the full experience of work.

Wellbeing is closely connected to retention

Half of Australian Apprentices reported experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry that significantly affected how they study, live or work. Those who had experienced these challenges were 65% more likely to have considered leaving than otherwise similar Australian Apprentices. Psychological wellbeing was the strongest driver of retention risk identified in the analysis.

Progress and positive workplace experiences help apprentices stay

Feeling a sense of progress was the strongest protective factor identified. Australian Apprentices who rated their progress as excellent were 43% less likely to have considered leaving. Enjoying the work, learning from experienced people, receiving excellent workplace training and feeling cared for and supported were also strongly associated with staying.

Wellbeing experiences differ across groups

Overall wellbeing scores were relatively consistent across many groups. However, experiences of sadness, anxiety or worry varied more widely across industries, age, gender and priority cohorts. 70% of Australian Apprentices living with disability reported these experiences, compared with 50% overall. This was also higher among Women in Trades (58%) and First Nations apprentices (55%).

Life outside work can have a significant impact

Financial pressure was strongly associated with mental health experiences. Sadness, anxiety or worry increased from 31% among those not affected by cost-of-living pressure to 69% among those extremely affected. This highlights the broader pressures apprentices may be managing alongside work and training.

The workplace can make a difference

Australian Apprentices experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry reported lower levels of clarity, training, supervision, mentoring and workplace support. Among this group, 77% wanted greater mental health and wellbeing support. 66% wanted employers to have better coaching and mentoring skills, while 56% wanted more regular check-ins or progress reviews.

Support matters throughout the apprenticeship journey

First-year Australian Apprentices reported stronger training, supervision, mentoring and workplace support than those further into their apprenticeship. They also reported lower mental health impacts (44% vs 53%) and were less likely to have considered leaving (21% vs 32%). This highlights the importance of maintaining support as apprentices progress.



WHY WELLBEING MATTERS

Wellbeing is a key driver of retention

Wellbeing is not simply an apprentice welfare issue; it is central to apprentice retention.

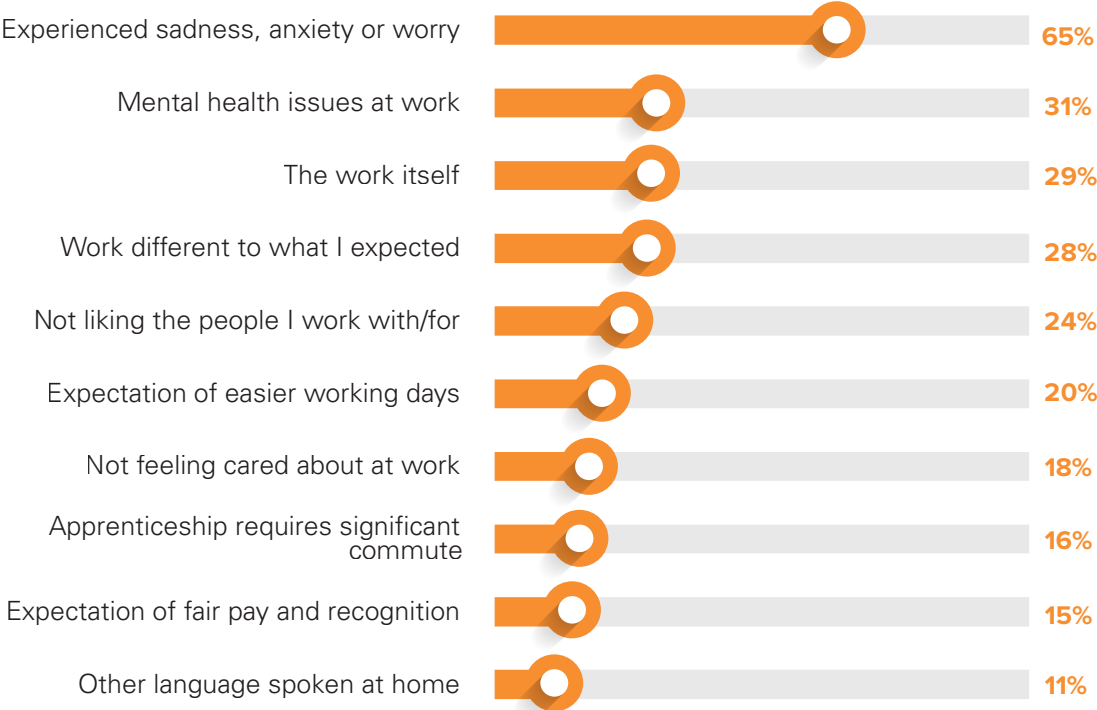
The National First Year Experience Survey Report found psychological wellbeing to be the strongest driver of retention risk, even after controlling for factors including age, gender, industry, location and training context.

Australian Apprentices who had experienced sadness, anxiety or worry were 65% more likely to have considered leaving than otherwise similar apprentices. This was ahead of factors including dissatisfaction with the work itself, work being different from their expectations and not feeling cared for at work.

While the findings show an association rather than cause and effect, they highlight the important role wellbeing plays in the overall apprenticeship experience.

Creating a workplace that supports wellbeing therefore requires a more intentional approach. It means considering wellbeing across the whole apprenticeship experience – from recruitment and induction through to everyday workplace practices such as coaching, mentoring and supervision.

Figure 1
Factors associated with a higher likelihood of considering leaving
Relative increase in likelihood of leaving



The factors that help apprentices stay

Feeling a sense of progress is the strongest protective factor. Australian Apprentices who rated their progress as excellent were 43% less likely to have considered leaving than otherwise similar apprentices.

Enjoying the type of work was also strongly associated with staying, reducing the likelihood by 33%, as was learning from experienced people or mentors (31%) and receiving excellent workplace training (29%). Feeling cared for and supported at work, building confidence and independence, becoming qualified and getting paid while learning were also protective factors.

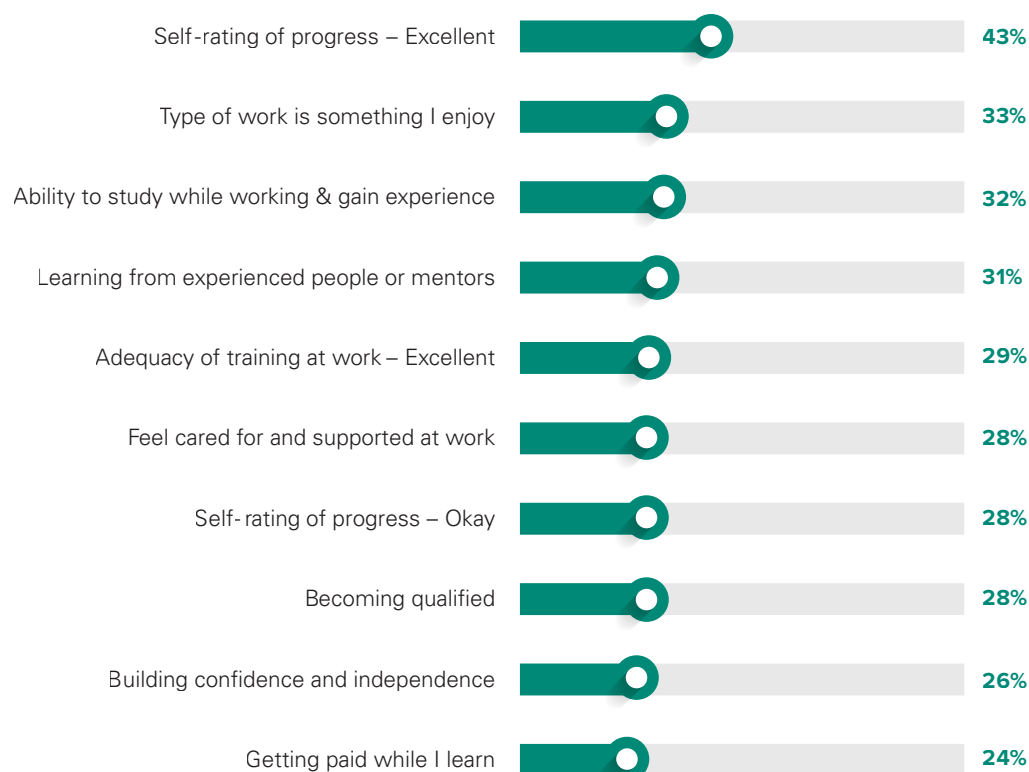
Together, these findings show that apprentices are more likely to stay when they can see themselves progressing, enjoy and find purpose in their work, have opportunities to learn and develop, and feel supported by the people around them.

Quality coaching, mentoring and supervision can help embed these protective factors throughout an apprenticeship. Regular one-on-one conversations provide an opportunity to set goals and monitor progress, discuss how things are going and explore how their workplace experience aligns with formal training. They also provide an opportunity to ask questions, seek help and exchange feedback. For this support to be effective, it is important that the people responsible for coaching, mentoring and supervision have the right skills to provide quality support.

Employers should also ask directly how they feel. "Do you feel you are progressing as you thought you would?" and "Do you feel you have the support you need?" If the answer is no, the next question should be what could be done better or differently. This gives employers the opportunity to adjust their approach based on the individuals needs.

Figure 2

Key protective drivers for retention



Strong foundations already exist in many workplaces

Positive workplace relationships are already providing a strong foundation for wellbeing. More than nine in ten current Australian Apprentices said they communicate well with their supervisor, have a friend at work and feel comfortable raising concerns. 90% reported receiving adequate mentoring, while 83% felt cared for and supported during their first year.

These are important strengths to build on. Positive relationships at work can help employees feel connected, supported and safe to speak up.

Strong relationships also make it easier to give and receive feedback openly. Investing in relationships does more than feel good. It can have a ripple effect across a range of other workplace behaviours.

Understanding what is already working well is just as important as identifying where support may be lacking. Wellbeing is a shared responsibility, so feedback upwards is equally important. Asking employees what they value about their workplace relationships, what their employer or supervisor does well and what they would like more of can help employers build on the practices already contributing to a positive workplace experience.

Figure 3
Most apprentices report strong workplace relationships and support nationally and regionally

	OVERALL	REGIONAL
Comfortable raising a concern	92%	93%
Consider a colleague a friend	92%	92%
Felt cared for and supported in first year	83%	84%
Good communication with supervisor/manager	92%	92%
Received adequate mentoring at work	90%	90%



RED CEDAR (CONSTRUCTIONS):

Keeping apprentice wellbeing simple

For Red Cedar Constructions, supporting apprentice wellbeing does not require a formal HR department or complex program. It starts with a simple principle: apprentices should enjoy their work and feel comfortable speaking up when something is not working. Director Trent Clark introduces that conversation at the start of every apprenticeship.

“When we have them into the office to sign their training program with Apprenticeship Support Australia, I make sure to discuss with them enjoying what they do,” Trent says.

For those who join the business, that openness is backed by practical, day-to-day support. Red Cedar has 18 employees and typically staffs each project with a site supervisor, carpenter and apprentice, giving apprentices regular access to experienced tradespeople and one-on-one learning.

This supportive approach is reflected in an apprentice completion rate of around 80%, well above the national average.

“We have a great team of senior guys, they really nurture the apprentices, training them as best they can,” Trent says.

Although Trent spends much of his time in the office, he stays connected with site teams and works alongside them on some Saturdays, helping keep the lines of communication open.

That regular contact is important because, without a dedicated wellbeing team, Trent relies on conversation to recognise when an apprentice is struggling and tailor support to the individual.

“Over the years there’s been scenarios we’ve had to deal with, and I find it just starts with talking about it. And then see where we go.”

That approach helped when one apprentice struggled with the move from school to work. Trent suggested he take two weeks to consider whether the trade was right for him. Six days later, the apprentice returned and continued his apprenticeship with renewed enthusiasm. For Trent, this kind of support is inseparable from the quality of Red Cedar’s work.

“We produce high-quality projects, so we need to make sure the team is OK if we want to produce the best work.”

The same principle shapes the wider team culture. Monthly barbecues, clear expectations and performance reviews create practical opportunities for feedback, recognition and connection.

Alongside these internal routines, Trent is realistic about what a small business can manage alone. Red Cedar seeks help from Apprenticeship Support Australia on training contracts and uses external HR support when needed. Knowing when to seek assistance is another part of supporting apprentices effectively.

Together, these practices show how other small employers can take a similar approach without significant resources: set expectations early, keep conversations regular and make it clear that apprentices can speak up.

Ultimately, Red Cedar shows that apprentice wellbeing can be part of everyday work, built through strong relationships, meaningful training, regular communication and a willingness to listen.



WELLBEING ISN'T EXPERIENCED EQUALLY

Wellbeing is multidimensional. To understand the different factors that contribute to it, the National First Year Experience Survey used the same multidimensional wellbeing model as the **2018 Skillsroad Youth Census**. This provided an opportunity to build on the earlier research and explore how wellbeing experiences may have changed over time.

The model is based on the Well-Being Profile (WB-Pro) and measures 15 dimensions of wellbeing, including emotional stability, resilience, optimism, autonomy, clear thinking, positive relationships, vitality and self-acceptance. Together, these dimensions contribute to an overall wellbeing score.

The survey also asked Australian Apprentices whether they had experienced sadness, anxiety or worry that significantly affected how they study, live or work. Looking at these measures together provides a broader picture of wellbeing and how experiences vary across industries, workplaces and different groups.

Wellbeing across different industries

Overall wellbeing was relatively consistent across industries, with scores ranging from 112 to 118. There was greater variation in reported mental health experiences, with sadness, anxiety or worry ranging from 39% in Information Media and Telecommunications to 58% in Education and Training.

These findings should not be used to generalise experiences within a particular industry. Instead, they can prompt employers to look more closely at what is happening in their own workplace, whether those experiences are shared and what could be done better or differently to support wellbeing.



Figure 4

Wellbeing across industry sectors

Note: Based on total sample (current + completed)

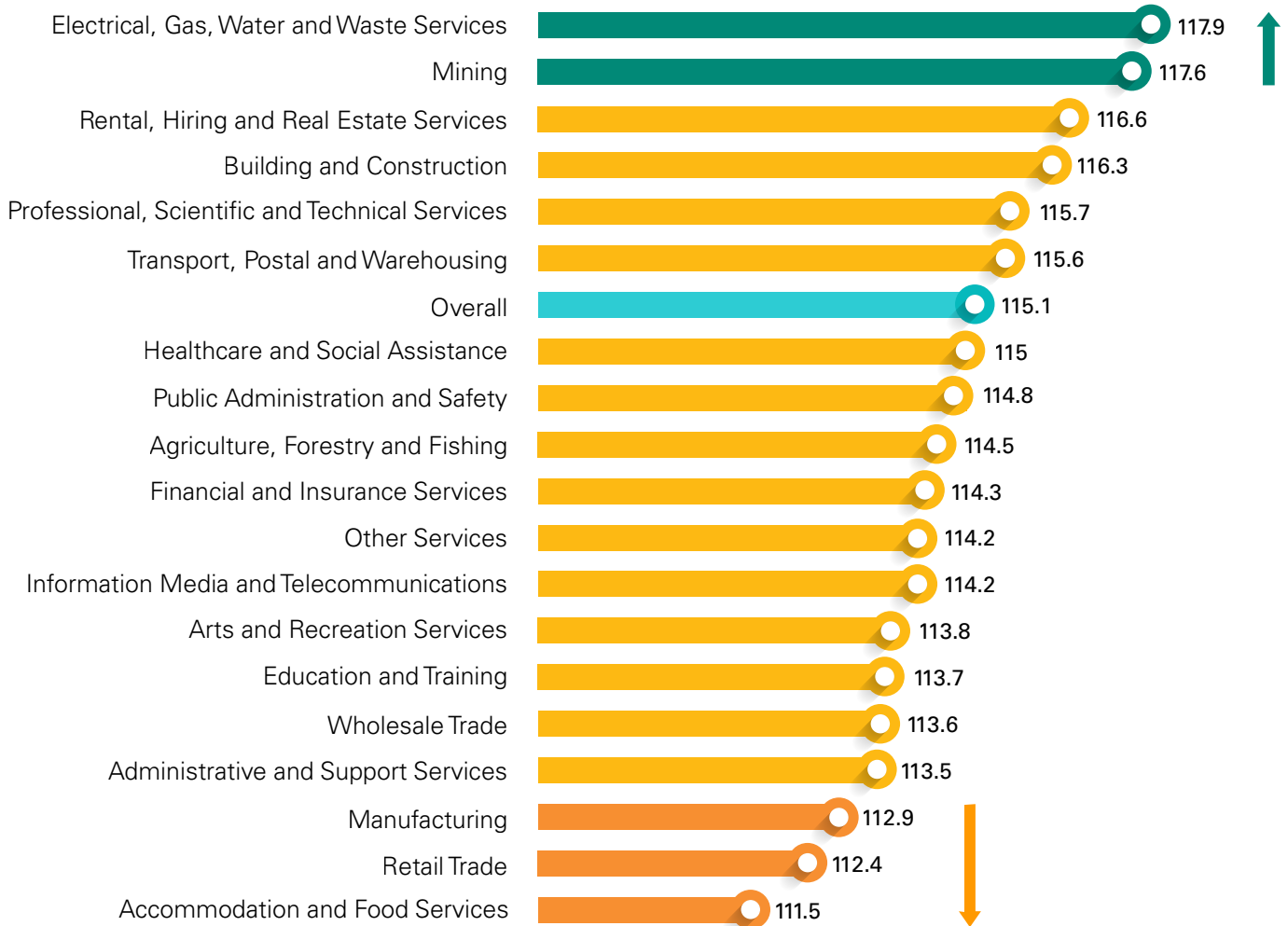


Figure 5

Mental health experiences vary more widely across industries

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
Overall	50%	38%	12%	N/A
Education and Training	58%	30%	12%	8%
Administrative and Support Services	55%	33%	12%	5%
Financial and Insurance Services	54%	43%	3%	4%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	54%	35%	12%	4%
Retail Trade	54%	32%	13%	4%
Accommodation and Food Services	53%	33%	14%	3%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	53%	36%	11%	3%
Arts and Recreation Services	52%	34%	14%	2%
Public Administration and Safety	51%	33%	16%	1%
Other Services	50%	36%	14%	0%
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	49%	39%	12%	-1%
Wholesale Trade	49%	33%	17%	-1%
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	48%	47%	6%	-2%
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	47%	40%	13%	-3%
Manufacturing	47%	38%	15%	-3%
Building and Construction	45%	43%	12%	-5%
Mining	44%	44%	12%	-6%
Electrical, Gas, Water and Waste Services	43%	44%	13%	-7%
Information Media and Telecommunications	39%	45%	16%	-11%

Overall 50% ■ 5% or more above the overall ■ -5% or less below the overall.

Wellbeing matters in workplaces of every size

Reported mental health experiences were evident across workplaces of all sizes, with relatively little variation between them. The proportion of Australian Apprentices experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry ranged from 46% in workplaces with 2–10 employees to 52% in those with 11–50 employees, with most other workplace sizes sitting between 47% and 49%.

This suggests mental health and wellbeing are important considerations regardless of the size

of the workplace. What support looks like in practice, however, may differ. Smaller employers may have closer day-to-day relationships with employees but fewer formal support resources, while larger organisations may have more established systems and infrastructure.

The presence of these resources alone does not necessarily translate into better mental health outcomes. What matters is how effectively support is embedded into the apprentice's everyday workplace experience.

Figure 6**Mental health experiences are relatively consistent across workplace sizes**

Note: Based on total sample (current + completed)

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
2-10	46%	41%	13%	-4%
11-50	52%	36%	12%	2%
51 - 200	49%	38%	13%	-2%
201 - 500	47%	44%	10%	-3%
501 - 1,000	48%	40%	12%	-2%
More than 1,000	48%	38%	13%	-2%

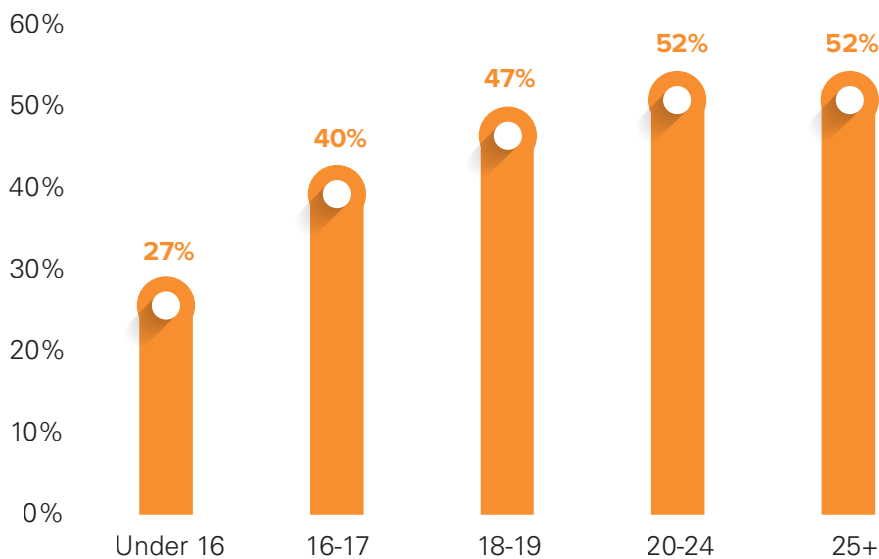
Mental health experiences across age and gender

Mental health experiences also varied across demographic groups and life stages. 59% of female Australian Apprentices reported experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry, compared with 45% of males. Reported experiences also increased with age, from 27% among those aged under 16 to 52% among both 20–24-year-olds and those aged 25 and over.

These differences reinforce that Australian Apprentices are not a single, uniform group. Their experiences of wellbeing can differ according to their circumstances and stage of life, highlighting the importance of recognising that the support one individual needs may not be the same as another.

Figure 7**Mental health experiences differ by gender**

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
Female	59%	30%	11%	9%
Male	45%	42%	13%	-6%

Figure 8**Reported mental health experiences increase with age****A closer look at priority cohorts**

Overall wellbeing scores were relatively consistent across priority cohorts, but there were greater differences in reported mental health experiences. 70% of Australian Apprentices with disability reported experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry, compared with 50% of apprentices overall. This was also higher among Women in Trades, at 58%, and First Nations apprentices, at 55%.

Looking beyond the overall wellbeing score also reveals differences across individual dimensions of wellbeing, including emotional stability, resilience, optimism, autonomy, clear thinking and positive relationships.

The First Nations cohort reported the largest gaps in resilience, emotional stability and vitality, while social connection remained a relative strength.

For those living with disability, the largest differences were in autonomy, optimism and clear thinking, despite their overall wellbeing score being relatively close to the broader cohort. The picture for Women in Trades is different again. Their overall wellbeing score was the same as the overall cohort at 115, but emotional stability and resilience were notably lower.

These differences highlight the importance of looking beyond averages. Similar overall wellbeing scores can mask different experiences and areas of need, reinforcing the value of tailored support.

Future reports will explore the experiences of priority cohorts in greater detail, providing a deeper understanding of their wellbeing, apprenticeship experiences and support needs.

Figure 9**Mental health experiences vary across priority cohorts**

	OVERALL	REGIONAL	FIRST NATIONS	WOMEN IN TRADES	CLEAN ENERGY	APPRENTICES WITH DISABILITY
Experienced sadness, anxiety or worry impacting daily life	50%	50%	55%	58%	44%	70%↑
Wellbeing score	115	115	109↓	115	118↑	113



Figure 10

Different wellbeing dimensions reveal different areas of need

Note: Wellbeing scores rated out of 10

	OVERALL	REGIONAL	FIRST NATIONS	WOMEN IN TRADES	CLEAN ENERGY	APPRENTICES WITH DISABILITY
Empathy	6.7	6.7	6.6	6.8	6.6	7.0
Vitality	6.9	6.8	6.0↓	6.8	7.2	6.9
Emotional Stability	7.3	7.3	6.6↓	6.9	7.7↑	7.2
Resilience	7.4	7.4	6.4↓	7.0	7.6	7.3
Self-acceptance	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.7	7.2
Positive Emotions	7.7	7.7	7.0↓	7.7	8.0	7.5
Optimism	7.7	7.7	7.7	7.8	7.9	7.2↓
Autonomy	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.8	7.9	7.3↓
Meaning	7.8	7.8	7.2↓	7.7	8.1	7.7
Engagement	7.8	7.9	7.6	7.9	8.0	7.9
Clear Thinking	7.9	7.8	7.1↓	7.7	8.1	7.6
Self-Esteem	7.9	7.9	7.4↓	8.0	8.1	7.8
Competence	8.2	8.2	7.8↓	8.0	8.3	8.0
Pro-social Behaviour	8.3	8.3	8.4	8.4	8.4	8.4
Positive Relationships	8.4	8.4	8.0↓	8.5	8.5	8.2
Total Wellbeing Score	115	115	109↓	115	118↑	113

↓ Significantly lower positive score

↓ Significantly lower negative score

↑ Significantly higher positive score

↑ Significantly higher negative score

What this means for employers

While wellbeing experiences differ across industries, workplaces and groups, the foundations for supporting wellbeing are relevant in every workplace. Wellbeing can be embedded from recruitment and induction through to everyday workplace practices.



1

RECRUITMENT

Supporting wellbeing starts before the first day. Being clear about the full requirements of the role – including physical demands, work hours, pay, customer interaction, job security and study requirements – helps Australian Apprentices make an informed decision about whether the role is right for them. Recruitment can also explore interests and job fit, alongside factors such as location and whether the work provides a sense of meaning and purpose.

2

INDUCTION

Induction provides an opportunity to establish expectations both ways: what is expected of the employee and what they can expect from their employer. This can cover workplace behaviours, education attendance, work practices, supervision, coaching, mentoring and relevant HR and WHS requirements.

3

ONGOING SUPPORT

Regular coaching and supervision provide opportunities to check progress and identify where additional support may be needed. Create an environment where they feel safe to speak up. Pay attention to changes in behaviour, engagement, or performance that may prompt you to check in and adapt your support as their needs change.

WELLBEING EXTENDS BEYOND THE WORKPLACE

An apprentice's wellbeing is shaped by more than what happens at work. Financial pressure, where they live and work, and the responsibilities they carry outside their apprenticeship can all form part of the picture.

The survey shows clear relationships between these broader life circumstances and reported experiences of sadness, anxiety or worry.

Cost-of-living pressure can affect wellbeing

Cost-of-living pressure is not unique to Australian Apprentices. It is a broader challenge affecting households across Australia. The survey data, however, shows a clear relationship between increasing financial pressure and reported mental health challenges.

More than half of Australian Apprentices (55%) said they were quite or extremely affected by cost-of-living pressures. Among those not affected by cost-of-living pressure, 31% reported experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry. This increased to 69% among those who were extremely affected.

Financial pressure also differed considerably by age and living circumstances. The proportion who were extremely affected increased from 4% among those under 16 to 32% among those aged 25 and over. Apprentices living independently were more than twice as likely to be extremely affected as those living with parents or guardians (31% compared with 13%). Mature-age apprentices may be managing greater financial responsibilities, housing costs, mortgages, children or other family commitments.

Financial pressure can extend beyond concerns about money. It can affect concentration, stress levels, fatigue, sleep and eating. These pressures may sit alongside the demands of work and training.

Employers cannot remove cost-of-living pressures. They can, however, create opportunities for employees to raise concerns. Regular coaching and mentoring conversations can help identify when financial pressure is affecting wellbeing. Employers can then connect them with relevant financial assistance, incentives or other support.



Figure 11

Cost of living and financial pressures

More than half (55%) say cost of living is quite or extremely affecting them



Figure 12

Cost-of-living pressure increases with age

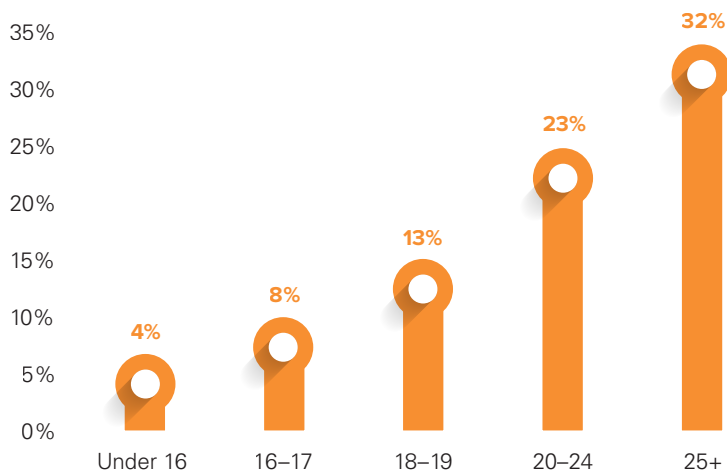


Figure 13

Cost-of-living pressure increases with independent living

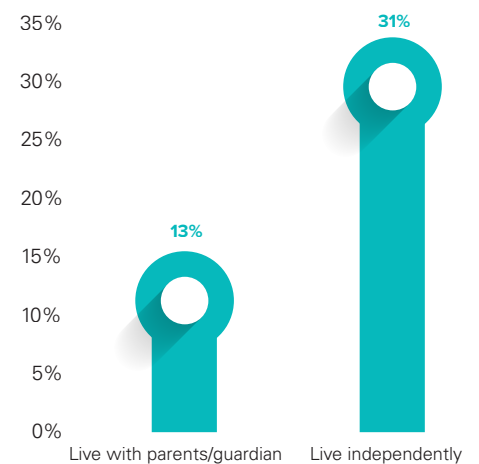
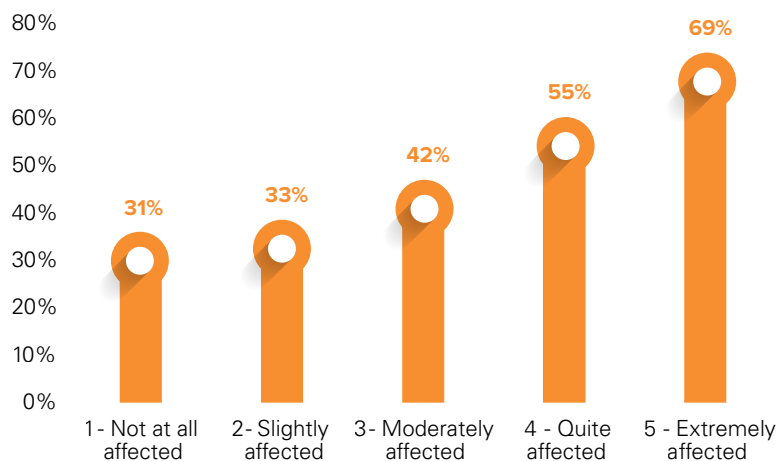


Figure 14

Mental health experiences increase with cost-of-living pressure



Commute, relocation and apprentice wellbeing

Where Australian Apprentices work in relation to where they live may also play a role in their wellbeing.

Those who secured work close to home reported the lowest prevalence of sadness, anxiety or worry, at 47%. This increased to 55% among those with a significant commute and 56% among those who had relocated for work.

A long commute can bring additional travel time and cost. Relocation can involve greater disruption, including establishing new routines and moving away from existing relationships and support networks. This can increase the risk of loneliness

and social isolation, adding another potential pressure as Australian Apprentices adjust to a new workplace and community.

Around eight in ten Australia Apprentices were able to secure a role close to home. For those who cannot, recognising the additional pressures associated with commuting or relocation may help employers identify where extra support is needed. For those moving away from home, early conversations and planning can consider how they will establish connections and support outside the workplace. This might include helping them connect with other colleagues, identifying local social or community networks, or simply checking in regularly about how they are settling into life outside work. employers identify where extra support is needed.

Figure 15
Most apprentices secure work close to home

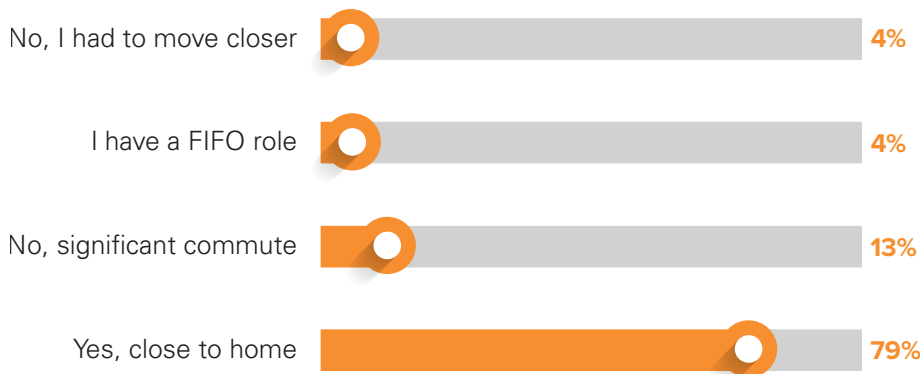


Figure 16
Mental health experiences vary by commute and relocation

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
Yes, close to home	47%	41%	12%	-3%
No, significant commute	55%	31%	14%	5%
No, I had to move closer	56%	31%	13%	6%
I have a FIFO role	44%	44%	12%	-6%

THE ROLE OF THE WORKPLACE IN SUPPORTING WELLBEING

Not every mental health challenge begins at work. Australian Apprentices may be managing financial pressure, personal circumstances or other challenges outside the workplace. Their experience at work can, however, play an important role in supporting wellbeing.

How workplace experience shapes wellbeing

Australian Apprentices experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry consistently reported lower levels of workplace training and support. This does not mean the workplace caused these challenges, but it does highlight differences in workplace experience between the two groups. The largest gaps were in clarity around expectations and ratings of workplace training, with an 18-percentage-point difference between the two groups.

64% said they knew what was expected of them, compared with 82% of those who had not experienced these challenges. Similarly, 68% rated their training as good or better, compared with 86%.

The pattern continued across other areas of support. 76% felt cared for and supported, compared with 93%, while 70% rated their supervision as good or better, compared with 87%. Adequate mentoring was also lower, at 84% compared with 96%.

Clear expectations, quality training, supervision and mentoring are all part of the everyday experience at work. Feeling cared for and supported can also make it easier for employees to speak up when something is not going well.

Employers are not responsible for preventing or resolving every mental health challenge. Their role is to create a workplace where apprentices feel supported, know what is expected of them and have someone they can turn to when they need help.

Figure 17

Apprentices experiencing mental health challenges report lower levels of workplace support

	OVERALL	EXPERIENCED SADNESS, ANXIETY OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED SADNESS, ANXIETY OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	GAPS
Quite/extremely affected by cost of living	55%	66%	39%	27%
Knew what was expected of them during the first year	71%	64%	82%	-18%
Adequacy of training rated good +	76%	68%	86%	-18%
Felt cared for and supported	83%	76%	93%	-17%
Supervision rated good +	77%	70%	87%	-17%
Adequate mentoring	90%	84%	96%	-12%
Comfortable raising concerns	92%	89%	96%	-7%
Consider a colleague a friend	92%	90%	94%	-4%

What apprentices experiencing mental health challenges say they need

Australian Apprentices experiencing sadness, anxiety or worry were clear about the support they would value. 77% wanted greater mental health and wellbeing support. 66% wanted employers to have better coaching and mentoring skills, while 56% wanted more regular check-ins or progress reviews.

These findings point to support that is part of the everyday workplace experience. Regular check-ins create opportunities to discuss progress, identify concerns and identify when something has changed.

Skilled coaches, mentors and supervisors also have an important role to play. They can recognise when additional help may be needed and connect employees with the right support.

Employers do not need to become mental health professionals. They can, however, create an environment where employees feel comfortable speaking up and respond appropriately when concerns are raised. They can also make sure Australian Apprentices know where to go for further support.

Figure 18

What Australian Apprentices experiencing mental health challenges value

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
Greater mental health and wellbeing support for apprentices and trainees	77%	15%	9%	27%
Employers have better coaching and mentoring skills	66%	25%	9%	16%
More regular check-ins or progress reviews between employer, apprentice and training provider	56%	30%	14%	6%
Easier working days	54%	32%	14%	4%
Having a clear pathway for progression	43%	39%	18%	-7%
Being guaranteed ongoing employment with my employer at the end of completing my apprenticeship/traineeship	43%	42%	15%	-7%
Reduce time to complete the apprenticeship or traineeship	41%	46%	13%	-9%
More positive promotions of the VET space	37%	43%	20%	-13%

For national average refer to Figure 9



JMH:

Creating a support network around apprentices

For JMH, apprentice wellbeing is not the responsibility of one person. It is supported by a network of supervisors, managers, HR professionals and support staff who work together to help apprentices succeed both on and off the job.

As a family business that has grown steadily over the past 15 years, JMH understands that apprentices can face challenges both inside and outside the workplace. Director Jaydon Hirst says regular communication is the foundation of the business's approach.

"We have morning pre-start meetings every morning, and we have daily check sheets for apprentices to keep track of their progress and keep them on track throughout the day," Jaydon says.

These daily conversations are supported by more formal review processes. Apprentices participate in quarterly performance reviews, with additional monthly or weekly check-ins introduced when extra support is needed. This gives JMH regular opportunities to identify concerns early and provide additional support before issues become larger challenges.

Apprentices also have access to JMH's dedicated HR department, providing another avenue to raise concerns and seek assistance. The business uses HR management software that allows employees to raise concerns and access support.

JMH also provides guidance and training for managers and supervisors in mental health awareness, supportive conversations and early intervention.

That approach is reflected in the way the workshop team operates day to day. Rather than apprentices having to rely on one person, there are several people they can turn to for support.

For JMH, supporting apprentice wellbeing also means recognising when someone may not be suited to the career path they have chosen. Jaydon says the initial excitement of starting an apprenticeship can give way to uncertainty once the reality of the job sets in.

"I think it's recognising if someone's not in the right trade," he says. "They've had the honeymoon period, then they settle down on the job and think, 'This is actually pretty hard.'"

Rather than encouraging apprentices to simply push through, JMH promotes honest conversations about career fit and long-term goals.

"We have had to have open conversations. If you're not happy, find something else, don't just stick it out if you're not enjoying it," Jaydon says.

JMH also partners with local schools through school-based apprenticeships, giving students the opportunity to start an apprenticeship part time while completing their final years of high school.

These early experiences can help young people understand what a career involves before committing to a particular pathway. Combined with regular communication and multiple avenues for support once they enter the workplace, this approach helps create an environment where apprentices feel connected, supported and confident to speak up when they need help.



BUILDING WELLBEING ACROSS THE APPRENTICESHIP JOURNEY

Apprentice wellbeing needs can change throughout the apprenticeship journey. The support that helps someone enter working life may differ from what they need as their skills, confidence and responsibilities grow. Understanding these stages can help employers provide the right support at the right time.

Preparing Australian Apprentices for the transition into work

The transition into an apprenticeship starts long before the first day on the job. Having a sense of choice and control over our decisions is an important part of wellbeing. Clear and balanced career advice can help young people understand their options and make informed decisions about their future.

Just under half (49%) of current and former Australian Apprentices said they received good information at school about all available career pathways. Among those who received good information, 43% reported sadness, anxiety or worry. This increased to 58% among those who wished they had known more about their options.

Employers can support the transition by providing realistic information about the role, workplace

expectations, apprenticeship pathway and study requirements before the first day.

Starting work brings new routines, relationships and responsibilities. For some it may be their first experience of full-time work. Adjusting is rarely linear. Setbacks, frustrations and mistakes are part of learning, and those with little work experience may need additional guidance learning how to navigate working life.

This can include practical advice on sleep, rest, nutrition and hydration, alongside the relationships and workplace support that help sustain wellbeing.

Clear expectations also provide greater certainty. In their first year, 21% said expectations were only sometimes clear and 8% said they were not clear. Work being different from expectations was also associated with an increased likelihood of considering leaving.

Psychologically safe workplaces can help identify misaligned expectations and support early intervention. Employees need to feel comfortable asking questions, admitting when they don't understand something and asking for help. Alongside formal supervision, informal conversations can build relationships and support the adjustment to working life.

Figure 19

Half of apprentices received good information about all career pathways. We asked if they felt well informed about their career pathway options at school.

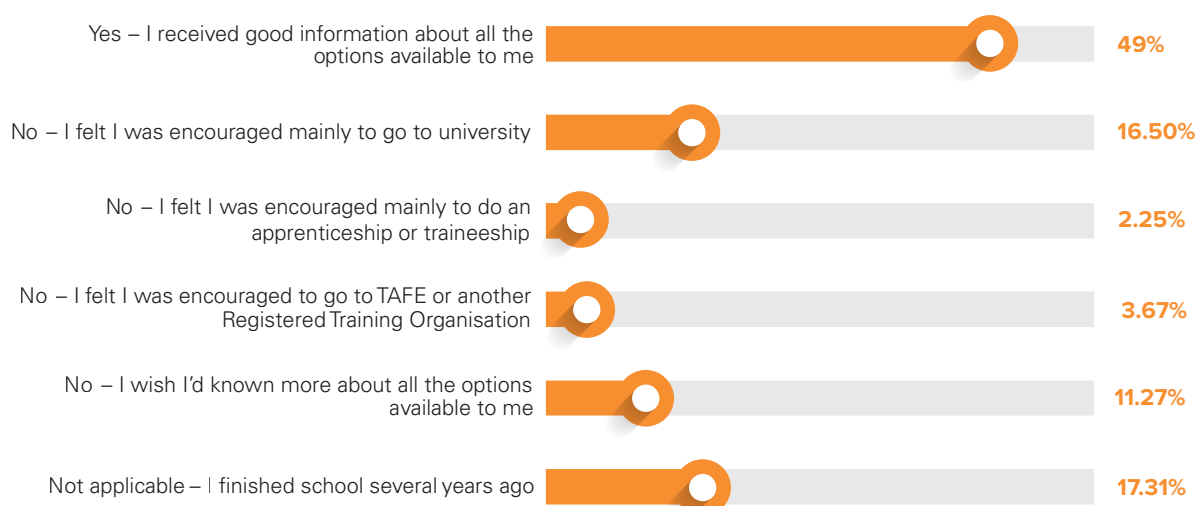


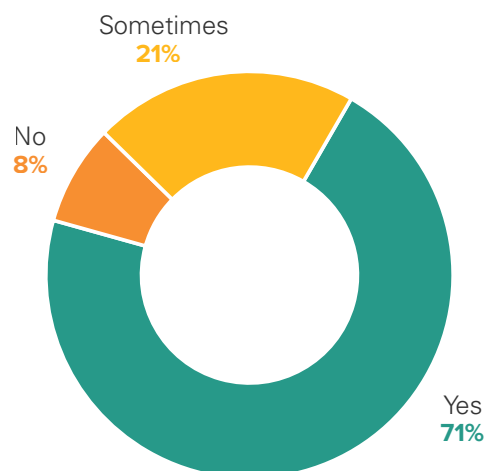
Figure 20

Access to quality career advice at school is linked to better mental health outcomes

	EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	HAVE NOT EXPERIENCED ANXIETY, SADNESS OR WORRY IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS	NOT SURE	VARIANCE TO NATIONAL AVERAGE (50%)
Yes – I received good information about all the options available to me	43%	45%	12%	-7%
No – I felt I was encouraged mainly to go to university	54%	35%	12%	4%
No – I felt I was encouraged mainly to do an apprenticeship or traineeship	52%	34%	13%	2%
No – I felt I was encouraged to go to TAFE or another Registered Training Organisation	54%	30%	15%	4%
No – I wish I'd known more about all the options available to me	58%	26%	16%	8%
Not applicable – I finished school several years ago	50%	39%	11%	0%

Figure 21

Most apprentices report clear expectations during their first year



Building on a strong start

As Australian Apprentices gain experience, they become more capable and independent. The type of support they need may change, but the need for support does not disappear.

First-year Australian Apprentices reported stronger workplace experiences than those further along in their apprenticeship. They rated training more positively (81% compared with 72%), and reported stronger supervision (81% compared with 74%), mentoring (92% compared with 87%) and feeling cared for and supported (86% compared with 80%).

Differences were also evident in mental health and retention. 44% of first-year Australian Apprentices reported sadness, anxiety or worry, compared with 53% of those further along. They were also less likely to have considered leaving (21% compared

with 32%). While these findings do not establish cause and effect, they highlight the importance of support beyond the first year.

As needs change, support can evolve with them. Early support may focus on learning the role, understanding expectations and building confidence. Later, it can shift towards strengthening technical skills, taking on coaching or mentoring roles and developing greater independence.

What matters is that support continues. Regular coaching and supervision, opportunities to discuss progress and a psychologically safe workplace can help maintain the positive relationships and meaningful support that contribute to wellbeing. The approach does not need to be complex; it simply requires a sustained commitment to the factors we know matter to Australian Apprentices at work.

Figure 22

First-year apprentices report stronger workplace support

	FIRST YEAR	OTHERS	DIFFERENCE
Were concerned about balancing work/study	35%↑	21%	14%
Considered leaving	21%	32%↑	11%
Cost of living impact (quite/extreme)	49%	58%↑	9%
Best thing about apprenticeship is becoming qualified	29%	20%	9%
Adequate training	81%	72%↑	9%
Mental health impact (sadness/anxiety/worry)	44%	53%↑	9%
Employer/potential employer influence on decision	23%	16%	7%
Supervisor rated good +	81%	74%↑	7%
Felt cared for and supported	86%	80%↑	6%
Adequate mentoring	92%	87%↑	5%
Friends influence on decision	20%	24%	4%
Decided after school	56%	53%	3%
Wellbeing	116	114	2
Rate progress excellent	77%	78%	1%



CONCLUSION

Australian Apprentice wellbeing is shaped by many factors. Some sit within the workplace, while others reflect the financial, personal and life circumstances individuals bring with them.

The findings in this report show why both matter. Psychological wellbeing is closely connected to retention. Australian Apprentices experiencing mental health challenges also report different experiences of training, supervision, mentoring and workplace support. At the same time, pressures such as cost-of-living, commuting and relocation can add to what apprentices are managing outside of work.

Employers cannot control every factor affecting an apprentice's wellbeing. They can create a workplace that provides clarity, connection and support. They can also recognise when an apprentice may be struggling and help them access further support when it is needed.

Importantly, there is already a strong foundation to build on. Most Australian Apprentices report positive relationships with supervisors, access to mentoring and feeling comfortable raising concerns. The opportunity is to build on these strengths and make wellbeing part of the apprenticeship experience from the beginning.



What employers can do

1

Set clear expectations from the start.

- Be realistic about the role, training requirements and workplace expectations during recruitment and induction.

2

Invest in good coaching, mentoring and supervision.

- Give the people supporting apprentices the skills and confidence to have regular, meaningful conversations.

3

Keep talking about progress.

- Help apprentices see how their skills are developing, recognise achievements and understand what comes next.

4

Recognise that every apprentice is different.

- Age, life circumstances, financial pressures and individual experiences can influence the support an apprentice may need.

5

Maintain support as apprentices progress.

- Greater capability and independence should change the type of support provided, rather than signal that support is no longer needed.

6

Know when to connect apprentices with further help.

- Employers do not need to be mental health professionals. They do need to know where appropriate support is available and make it easier for apprentices to access it.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The National First Year Experience Survey Report was developed by Apprenticeship Support Australia to better understand the needs and experiences of Australian Apprentices during their first year.

The research explored how Australian Apprentices experience life, work and training. It also looked at the factors that may influence whether they stay, progress and succeed. These insights can help inform how Australian Apprentices are supported throughout their journey.

Conducted online in late 2025, the survey received 12,376 completed responses from current and former apprentices and trainees across Australia. Respondents came from every state and territory, with representation across industries, employer sizes and demographic groups.

What the survey explored

- the Australian Apprenticeship experience
- access to information, support and incentives
- training and education
- workplace conditions and support
- wellbeing and mental health
- retention, continuation and future intentions

For more information about the research methodology and broader findings, see the 2026 National First Year Experience Survey Report.

Who took part

TOTAL
POPULATION
12,376



Figure 23

Age



Figure 24

Gender

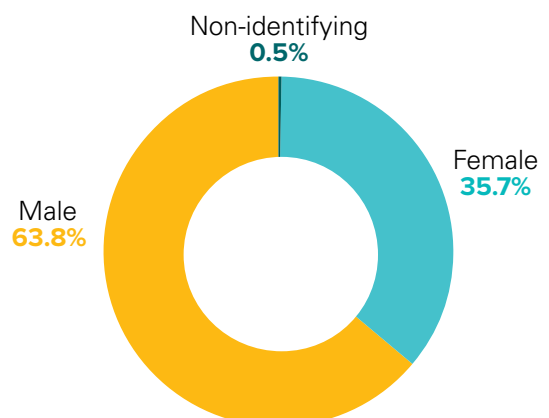


Figure 25

Regional/Metro



Figure 26

State

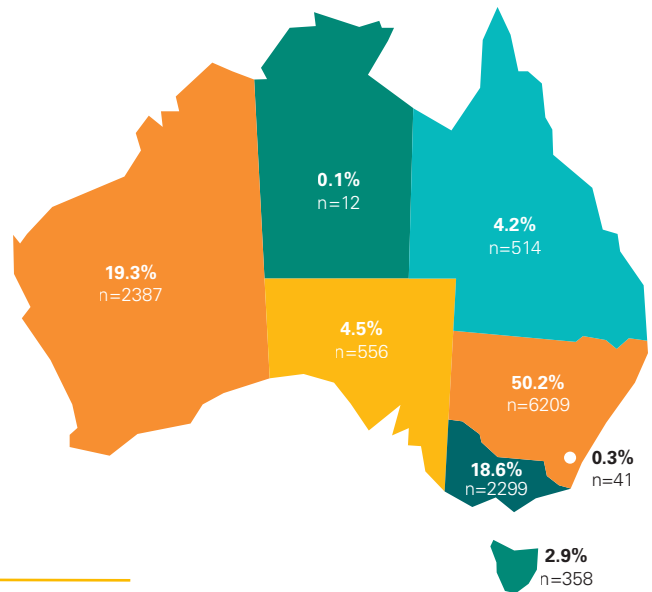


Figure 27

Size of organisation

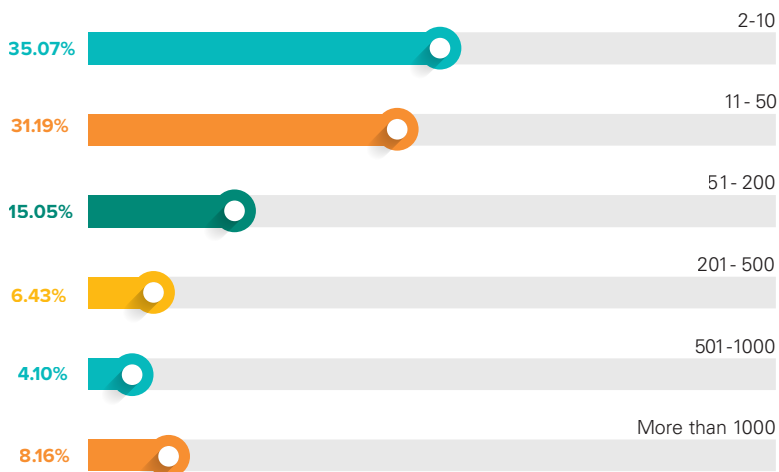


Figure 28

How far along are you in your apprenticeship or traineeship journey?

