

The Daily Telegraph

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Apprenticeship training in NSW will become fee-free thanks to a new \$285 million initiative from the NSW Government.

From 1 July 2018, apprentices and employers will no longer have to pay the up-to-\$2000 fee for an apprenticeship qualification – this will be covered by the government.

The move is expected to boost the take-up of new apprenticeships from 75,000 to 100,000 over the next four years. It will also provide NSW with the pipeline of skilled workers it needs to service the state's record infrastructure boom, which will see more than \$80 billion invested.

Casino-based apprentice plumber Matthew Nagas is embracing his opportunities through vocational education and training (VET).

The 31-year-old was employed as a labourer on the John Holland-led Lismore Base Hospital Redevelopment project when local company Laser Plumbing and Electrical offered him work as a plumbing trades assistant, then took him on as an apprentice.

Today, Matthew is part of the crew working on the Clarence Correctional Centre near Grafton, the construction of which is also contracted to John Holland.

"I'd been labouring since I was 16, but I knew I had to get something under my belt," says Matthew, who is in his first year of a Certificate III in Plumbing

Building the future with 100,000 fee-free apprenticeships



Apprentice plumber Matthew Nagas. Photo: Jamie Williams

at TAFE NSW Coffs Harbour. "I'm enjoying it and learning heaps."

Apprenticeships are a proven career pathway – 92 per cent of VET graduates who did a trade occupation course are employed after training. Construction is among Australia's top five growth industries, with 120,700 new construction jobs expected in the five years to 2022.

Opportunities for thousands of apprenticeships throughout NSW are now a reality with the government also announcing that 20 per cent of trade roles on all future construction projects will be filled by apprentices.

Both Lismore Hospital and the Clarence Correctional Centre fall under the government's Infrastructure

Skills Legacy Program (ISLP), which aims to create greater opportunities in construction for local people including young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and women.

Fee-free apprenticeships will help remove the financial barrier to others taking up a trade, and shows the government's commitment to improving skills and training for the construction sector.

For Matthew, his partner and their 18-month-old son, the opportunity to live, train and work regionally is one of many benefits. "When I get my trade I could even try and start my own business," he says. "I could help my nephews and their friends. It'd be good to open their eyes to it."

Fee-free apprenticeships

- Apprenticeship courses in NSW are fee-free from 1 July 2018.
- Students and employers will no longer pay the up-to-\$2000 training fee, this will be covered by the NSW Government.
- There are more than 120 apprenticeship courses available, in a range of industry areas where skilled workers are in demand.
- 92.2 per cent of graduates in a trade occupation course are employed after training, according to the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2017).

BENEFITS

- Earn while you learn
- Get valuable industry knowledge and experience
- Large number of professions to choose from
- Finish with nationally-recognised qualifications
- Get trained in skills highly relevant to your field
- Make professional contacts which can lead to employment
- Finish your studies debt-free

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