

MEDIA RELEASE

Declining apprenticeship starts jeopardise future construction workforce pipeline

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New figures show construction apprentice activity in the ACT declined in the March 2026 quarter, raising concerns about the Territory's future building and construction workforce.

Data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows 301 new construction apprentices commenced training in the ACT during the March 2026 quarter, an 11.7 per cent decrease on the March 2025 quarter. Over the year to March 2026, 894 new apprentices started, down 3.5 per cent on the previous year.

Completions in the ACT bucked the national trend, with 101 apprentices successfully finishing their training in the March quarter and 521 completing over the year to March 2026, an increase of 9.7 per cent year-on-year. Withdrawals fell 13 per cent in the quarter to 147, and were down 4.2 per cent over the year to 572.

Nationally, 16,018 new construction apprentices started in the March 2026 quarter and 8,602 completed their training, but over the year to March 2026, 28,125 construction apprentices withdrew from training nationally, more than the 28,020 who successfully completed.

Master Builders ACT CEO Anna Neelagama said the local figures showed a mixed picture for the Territory.

'The increase in completions is genuinely good news. More Canberrans are finishing their apprenticeships and entering the workforce as qualified tradies,' Ms Neelagama said.

'But the drop in new starts is a warning sign we cannot ignore. An apprentice starting today won't be qualified for several years, so every quarter of declining commencements is a future skills shortage in the making.

'The ACT has ambitious housing and infrastructure targets, and we simply can't deliver them without a strong domestic training pipeline.'

Ms Neelagama said retention was critical to securing the Territory's workforce.

'Losing apprentices before they qualify is a waste of potential for the individual and a loss for the whole industry. We need practical measures, like completion incentives, better supervision standards, and support for small and medium builders who carry much of the training load, to keep apprentices in training and on the tools.'

The independently reviewed [Future Workforce Blueprint](#) released by Master Builders Australia last week makes 32 recommendations, with Master Builders ACT also calling on the ACT government to seriously invest in skills to address current and future skill shortages.

Ms Neelagama urged both the Commonwealth and ACT Governments to act without delay.

'Governments cannot afford to wait. Any delay in reform will only make future workforce shortages worse.'

Master Builders ACT is currently undertaking a *Build Your Future* campaign targeted at attracting new entrants to building and construction through the Certificate III in Carpentry program offered by MBA Training. A free carpentry information session is being held for prospective apprentices and parents on Wednesday 30 September at 4.30pm. Participants can register [here](#).

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