

MASTER BUILDERS ACT

Transcript

Summary

Alice Matthews interview with Anna Neelagama, the CEO of Master Builders ACT discussing the decline in construction apprenticeship commencements, the rise in completions, and ongoing skills shortages.

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Transcription

ALICE MATTHEWS: So, it seems more Canberrans are finishing their construction apprenticeships. Completions are up this quarter by nearly 10 per cent, which is great. But fewer seem to be taking up the training in the first place. So, this quarter that has seen a near 12 per cent decrease. Anna Neelagama is the CEO of Master Builders ACT. Anna, thank you so much for being here.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Thanks for having me. Great to be with you.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Okay, so those taking up construction apprenticeships, that number is declining. So, are we looking down the barrel of a skills shortage here?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: We're already living in a skills shortage crisis, Alice. But what the new data shows us is that compared to the same time last year, there's been an 11 per cent decline on the number of people entering apprenticeships here in the ACT.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Ok. And if we look beyond this quarter at that number, I guess across the longer term, is the longer-term trend just as concerning?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Absolutely. And generally speaking, we've had some great news for this March quarter. But generally speaking, only about four in ten people that come into construction trades actually end up completing them. So, about six people for every ten people that start drop out along the way. And that's really contributing long term to a deficit in our workforce needs.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Well, here I was thinking there was good news in that completions are up this quarter. But obviously that's coming from a low baseline.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Yes, it's sort of bucking the trend. And the ACT in particular is bucking the trend nationally, where they mostly went down. So, I think that's a good thing. It's something to be celebrated. Certainly we want more apprentices to complete, but there is a big structural problem in and around the construction trade system, generally speaking, which is contributing to an already existent skills shortage.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Well, structural issues in construction, not good.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: I think you've spoken about them before.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Well, I was just going to say. So, what are those issues? What's the reason that people aren't starting up apprenticeships and aren't finishing them?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: There's a few factors. The first is attraction. Making a career in construction an attractive proposition not only for young people but also for their parents. So, they're encouraged at home to actually enter into construction. And the second is really getting the employment conditions right on site, so it's a great place to learn and enjoy and move through your trade and establish a career in construction.

ALICE MATTHEWS: This is 666 ABC Canberra. You're hearing from Anna Neelagama, the CEO of Master Builders ACT. Just reflecting on some figures, incremental figures, the quarter just gone. More Canberrans did finish up their construction apprenticeships, but we're seeing fewer

taking up training in the first place. I know Master Builders is doing a bit to try and turn these figures around. What are you up to?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: We're throwing the kitchen sink at our skills problem. Recently we've launched a new school holiday program, getting people in as young as possible and making sure that they're aware of pathways, school-based apprenticeships or post-school apprenticeships. We, of course, do offer apprenticeship training. We go into schools. We're very active in schools, both in terms of advising on the range of different careers, the very many careers you can have in construction, but also ensuring that students have their basic tickets to work. White card, silica, asbestos. And more broadly speaking, our main focus is advocacy because it's going to take a whole social movement to fill these construction gaps, making sure governments are resourcing attraction and recruitment campaigns and making sure employers indeed have the right support in this economy to have the confidence to bring on and pay for apprentices throughout their whole learning journey.

ALICE MATTHEWS: And I know that you are particularly targeting carpentry. New entrants into carpentry. There's an information session coming up. What do listeners need to know?

ANNA NEELAGAMA: That's on the 30th of September. You may have seen our roadsides around Canberra, and on that evening we'll have employers, we'll have our dedicated carpentry trainer team and we'll have industry advisors and employment centres on hand to answer questions, both for young people, mid-career people and also parents and families.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Anna, thank you so much for the update.

ANNA NEELAGAMA: Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

ALICE MATTHEWS: Cheers. Anna Neelagama there, the CEO of Master Builders Act.

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