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SUMMARY PAPER
BUILDING THE FUTURE
WORKFORCE & BREAKING
THE GROUND
FEBRUARY 2026

This paper, prepared by Dr Tracy Vo, CITB's Industry Research Analyst, summarises the key findings of the research project "Building The Future Workforce & Breaking Ground", conducted by Adelaide University in partnership with CITB.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

CITB engaged the University of South Australia (now Adelaide University) to undertake a series of studies exploring the career choices of different population groups. While earlier research focused on the general public, these new studies examine specific cohorts to help the industry develop targeted policies and initiatives that attract more people into construction careers.

This year's research focuses on mature age individuals and women. The first study explores the factors that encourage or discourage mature age adults from entering construction apprenticeships. The second project examines industry participation of females with strong focus on actionable recommendations.



STUDY 1:

BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE: WHAT DRIVES AND DETERS YOUNG ADULTS FROM CONSTRUCTION APPRENTICESHIPS.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The research investigated:

- The overall attractiveness of construction apprenticeships for mature age adults;
- The financial, cultural, and informational factors that motivated or discouraged entry;
- The behavioural segments most receptive to retraining in construction.

SCOPE & APPROACH

The study surveyed 502 South Australians aged 20 to 45. It used a Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE), a widely adopted method for examining preferences that involve trade-offs between several attributes, such as training duration, wages, and future earnings. To explore how different groups within the sample evaluated apprenticeship options, a Latent Class Choice Model (LCCM) was applied. This model identified distinct subgroups with unique motivations, trade-offs, and behavioural tendencies. Together, the DCE and LCCM provide a comprehensive understanding of how mature-age adults make career-related decisions.

FINDINGS

AWARENESS IS HIGH, BUT COMMITMENT REMAINS CAUTIOUS

Awareness of construction apprenticeships among young adults was generally strong. Most participants demonstrated a sound understanding of the core benefits of apprenticeships, including the opportunity to earn while learning, gain practical skills, and enter employment without incurring tertiary debt. Despite this high level of awareness, interest in actively pursuing a construction apprenticeship remained moderate.

For many respondents, interest was constrained by the fact that they were already committed to alternative career or study pathways. These existing commitments reduced the likelihood of reconsidering construction as a viable option, even where perceptions of the sector were broadly positive. Awareness and attitudes also varied across demographic segments, with background, prior exposure to construction, and life stage influencing both interest and perceived relevance.

Uncertainty regarding long-term career outcomes further dampened motivation. Concerns about job security, the sustainability of employment, and the clarity of progression pathways contributed to hesitation. As a result, while construction apprenticeships are well known, this awareness has not consistently translated into concrete action or enrolment.

FINANCIAL, CULTURAL AND INFORMATION BARRIERS SUPPRESS PARTICIPATION

A combination of financial, cultural, and informational barriers was found to significantly limit participation in construction apprenticeships. Financial pressure emerged as the most substantial obstacle, with low wages during the training period widely viewed as insufficient to support living costs, particularly for those with existing financial responsibilities.

Concerns about the physical demands of construction work and perceived safety risks also influenced attitudes, particularly among those with limited prior exposure to the industry. These perceptions were often reinforced by broader narratives about injury risk and the physical toll of long-term manual labour.

In addition, construction was frequently associated with a negative workplace culture. Participants described the sector as male-dominated, with limited diversity, flexibility, and inclusivity. These perceptions were particularly salient for women and individuals seeking work environments that support flexibility or work-life balance.

Finally, a lack of clear and accessible information about career pathways and progression contributed to uncertainty. Many participants reported difficulty understanding how apprenticeships translate into long-term careers, leadership opportunities, or broader mobility within the industry.

PREFERENCE FOR LICENSED, HIGHER-SKILL AND HIGHER-EARNING PATHWAYS

When considering construction careers, participants expressed a clear preference for licensed, higher-skill and higher-earning trades. Pathways such as electrical, plumbing, mechanical services, and civil construction were consistently viewed more favourably, largely due to their perceived earning potential, job security, and clearer progression opportunities.

In contrast, trades associated with higher physical risk or less stable work patterns were viewed less positively. Roles such as roofing and some masonry trades were perceived as more physically demanding, higher risk, and offering fewer long-term opportunities. These perceptions influenced both initial interest and the likelihood of considering construction as a sustainable career option.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The research highlights substantial variation in motivations, expectations and preferences across potential apprentices. This diversity means that a single messaging framework or policy approach is unlikely to be effective in attracting all cohorts. Instead, engagement strategies and interventions will need to be customised to reflect different life stages, career aspirations, and perceived barriers.



Findings point to the need for a targeted and multifaceted approach. Financial incentives remain a central consideration, particularly in addressing concerns about low wages during the training period. However, financial measures alone will not drive participation.

Improving workplace safety, culture and inclusivity is also critical. Perceptions of physical risk, inflexible working conditions and male dominated environments continue to deter some groups, particularly those seeking long term sustainability and work-life balance.

Earlier, clearer and more strategic communication about apprenticeship pathways is required to build confidence and inform decision making. Many young people lack a clear understanding of how apprenticeships translate into stable, long term careers, particularly beyond the training period.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening employer accountability and ensuring apprentices receive consistent, high quality support throughout their training. A positive and well supported apprenticeship experience is central to both attraction and retention within the sector.

WHO NEEDS WHAT - FOUR YOUNG ADULTS SEGMENT



FAST-TRACK PRAGMATISTS

Prefer short training and strong salary outcome; already anchored in existing careers.

16%



WAGE-DRIVEN OPPORTUNISTS

Highly sensitive to pay; need strong financial support to enter and stay in training.

28%



FUTURE-ORIENTED PLANNERS

Financially secure, long-term thinkers; low motivation to switch careers without clear progression.

25%



INTEREST-DRIVEN SEEKERS

Most enthusiastic; motivated by interest but need strong safety, stability, and support.

31%



STUDY 2:

BREAKING GROUND: A SCOPING REVIEW OF WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The research aims to:

- Review the extant literature on barriers and enablers of women working in construction;
- Develop a set of actionable recommendations founded in established literature.

SCOPE & APPROACH

This report draws on analysis of extensive academic and grey literature from Australia and comparable countries to develop recommendations.

FINDINGS

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CONSTRUCTION

The research finds that barriers to women's entry, retention and progression in construction are deeply embedded and systemic. Persistent masculine workplace cultures, discriminatory practices and inflexible work structures continue to shape women's experiences across the industry. These challenges are compounded by inadequate facilities, weak institutional supports, and entrenched gender norms within education and training systems all of which limit access, progression and long term career sustainability for women.

Rather than operating in isolation, these barriers interact and reinforce one another, creating cumulative disadvantage across the career lifecycle. As a result, efforts that focus on isolated interventions are unlikely to deliver lasting change without addressing the broader system in which these barriers are produced and maintained.

ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S ENTRY, RETENTION AND PROGRESSION

Improving women's participation in construction requires coordinated, multi level action that addresses cultural, structural and systemic barriers simultaneously. The research identifies a set of critical enablers that operate across education, training, workplaces and industry governance.

At the individual and organisational level, early school engagement, equitable recruitment practices, inclusive training environments, safe workplaces and flexible work arrangements are essential to supporting women's entry and retention. These measures help counter exclusionary norms and create conditions in which women can build skills, confidence and career identity.

At a system level, broader levers such as policy reform, procurement requirements, regulatory standards and sustained industry–government partnerships play a crucial role in shifting norms at scale. When aligned, these mechanisms reinforce organisational accountability and help embed gender equity as a core industry expectation rather than an optional initiative.

Together, these enablers form a comprehensive blueprint for a more inclusive construction sector—one in which women are not only able to enter the trades, but are supported to build long term, rewarding careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FROM EVIDENCE TO ACTION

A central focus of this research is the development of actionable recommendations grounded in evidence. The findings point to the need for integrated, systemic change across individual, organisational and societal levels. Addressing gender inequity in construction requires coordinated interventions that operate across the full career pipeline, from early exposure through to leadership and long term retention.

Table 1 summarises the key recommendation themes and the evidence underpinning them.

Level	Theme	Key Insight	What the Evidence Shows
Individual	Role models, mentoring and networks	Visibility and connection matter	Women benefit from visible role models, structured mentoring, peer networks and supportive communities that strengthen confidence, identity and resilience in male dominated environments.
	Career guidance and skills development	Early clarity supports informed choices	Targeted career guidance, early exploration programs, skills development and resilience training help women understand pathways, build capability and progress into meaningful roles.
	Confidence, identity and long term engagement	Early support drives retention	Early support helps women develop the confidence and career identity needed to enter and remain in construction, countering isolation and structural inequities.
Organisational	Inclusive culture, safety and strong HR systems	Culture and systems shape experience	Organisations must eliminate discrimination and harassment, implement strong HR policies, provide safe facilities, ensure transparent processes, deliver diversity and bystander training, and foster respectful workplaces.
	Flexible work and work–life supports	Flexibility enables retention	Flexible hours, part time roles, job sharing, childcare supports, parental leave, return to work programs and post maternity retention initiatives are critical to sustaining women's participation.
	Career development and leadership pathways	Progression must be visible and fair	Equal access to training, structured promotion processes, leadership opportunities and visible women leaders help overcome glass ceiling barriers and support long term career growth.
	Recruitment reform and diverse talent pipelines	Entry points must be redesigned	Gender aware recruitment, inclusive advertising, pre apprenticeship programs and age inclusive practices broaden the pool of women entering construction.
	Retention focused interventions	Retention requires active management	Retention is strengthened through addressing workplace abuse, providing structured support programs, investing in career development, collecting feedback and evaluating program effectiveness.
Societal	Early exposure and industry engagement	Stereotypes form early	School engagement, industry visits, project based learning, involvement of parents and counsellors, and funded school–industry partnerships help shift gender norms and expand girls' awareness of construction careers.
	Cultural change and challenging gender bias	Norms extend beyond the workplace	Broader cultural change requires confronting stereotypes, promoting the benefits of diversity, increasing shared domestic responsibilities and reshaping construction's public image.
	Policy, advocacy and structural supports	Systems enable scale	Gender equity policies, procurement levers, measurable benchmarks and systems thinking approaches enable industry wide transformation.
	Long term system coordination	Change takes time and leadership	Multi decade, multi stakeholder collaboration across government, unions and employers, supported by national leadership, is required to dismantle entrenched structural barriers.



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