

## TILERS! WANT TO MAKE MONEY? PUT ON A MATURE APPRENTICE.

Working on the idea that “**If apprentices made money for you, everybody would want one!**” the Australian Tile Council is launching a unique system which will increase the number of tile layers in Australia.

For most tilers who have had apprentices, the experience is patchy. Quotes like “They’re too much trouble” and “they cost too much” are common among employers.

However, an innovative scheme jointly funded by the Australian Tile Council and the Federal Department of Education Science and Training under their Skilling Australia program, turns trade training on its head. Literally!

“**Up-front Productivity Training**” as the scheme is known, **starts** by teaching mature apprentices to tile a simple bathroom. In 4 weeks straight at TAFE, the sponsored apprentices focus on laying metres of tiles to the standard required in the industry. They will immediately be involved in figuring out where to start, how to cut and shape tiles, using adhesive, laying and grouting tiles. The idea is that they are immediately able to lay enough tiles to cover more than their wages.

Their employers are advised to allow them to do more tile laying and less labouring, so they can become better and faster, early on in their apprenticeship.

The training is based on the educational principles of “Authentic Learning” where, instead of learning all the component parts before attempting the main task, the learners work out what they need to know as they complete a real project. They are expected to complete 3 whole bathrooms in their first 4 weeks at TAFE. They re-cycle the tiles by using a special temporary adhesive.

Another unique aspect of this scheme is that each apprentice will have a “**Sponsor**”. The sponsor partly supports the apprentice during the TAFE training period of their apprenticeship. The sponsor could be the employer, or a tile or adhesive manufacturer, or a retail tile outlet.

Sponsorship is a real change, particularly for tile manufacturers, who ordinarily would only have negative contact with a tiler, (when a job goes wrong). Now

they can mentor, promote and link the apprentice (soon to be a tradesperson) with their company and products, use them in promotion while being better corporate citizens and ensuring the future of their industry.

This new scheme does not replace the current apprenticeship program, it augments it. The first class of mature apprentices will start at Randwick TAFE in August this year, with at least 4 such classes to start around Australia at the beginning of 2007. More classes would start in the second half of 2007 as the new scheme allows for the first year of TAFE to be completed in seven weeks of one semester.

The participants, and women are encouraged to take part, would be paid at mature apprentice rates, so their income would not drop to unsustainable levels while they are becoming qualified. This has been a traditional barrier to the entry of older workers into the industry. The participants, who must be over the age of 25, are expected to be motivated and able to learn more quickly than traditional apprentices. They would be expected to have the productivity of a third year apprentice while in their first year. This productivity, hopefully about 20 square metres a week, offsets their wages and on costs. Employment through a Group Apprenticeship Scheme will be also be available for those employing tilers who like to have their paperwork kept to a minimum.

After being taught a different program in their first year, the mature apprentices are expected to plug into the normal TAFE training in second and third year. A shortened period of apprenticeship is being investigated, but the term would still be at least 3 years.

There is much to be done to ensure “Up-front Productivity Training” becomes a long term viable entry path to the trade of tiling, and industry involvement is critical. But, in the end, if these trainees make money for their employers, there should be plenty of demand to put on a “mature age” apprentice.

If you want more information about the scheme, as an employer, sponsor, prospective apprentice, or as an interested member of the tile industry, drop Colin Cass an email [colin@cass.org](mailto:colin@cass.org) or ring on 0414 539 549.