

Guide to starting an apprenticeship



The Fair Work Ombudsman is committed to providing you with advice that you can rely on.

The information contained in this guide is general in nature. If you are unsure about how it applies to your situation you can call our Infoline on 13 13 94 or speak with a union, industry association or a workplace relations professional.

Why use this guide?

Starting an apprenticeship can be an exciting time. It can also be a little nerve-racking. We think it's important to know your rights and responsibilities before you start work, so you can focus on settling into your apprenticeship.

This guide provides the information you need to know and links to further resources. You can also complete our free Starting a new job online course at fairwork.gov.au/learning

Who is an apprentice?

An apprentice is someone who combines work and study to obtain a trade qualification, for example, as a carpenter, chef or hairdresser. An apprenticeship typically takes between 1 to 4 years to complete.

You need to have a formal training contract with the relevant state or territory training authority and regularly undertake training through a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), for example a TAFE or registered training provider. You can find your relevant state or territory training authority in the [Who to contact?](#) section at the end of this guide.

Who is a trainee?

A trainee is someone who combines work and study to obtain a certificate qualification in a particular industry or occupation, for example, office work, childcare or information technology. It takes approximately 1 to 2 years to complete a traineeship. For more information about trainees visit fairwork.gov.au/apprenticestrainees



Your rights and entitlements

Most employers and employees (including apprentices) in Australia are covered by something called awards and by the National Employment Standards (NES) which set out minimum pay rates, leave entitlements and conditions. Before starting your apprenticeship, it's helpful to know the answers to these important questions.

What are the National Employment Standards?

The NES are minimum standards that have to be provided to all employees:

- **Maximum weekly hours** – 38 hours per week, plus reasonable additional hours.
- **Requests for flexible working arrangements** – certain employees can request a change in their working arrangements.
- **Parental leave** – up to 12 months of unpaid leave per employee, as well as the right to request an additional 12 months leave.
- **Annual leave** – 4 weeks of paid leave per year for full-time employees (pro rata for part-time employees), plus an additional week for some shiftworkers.
- **Sick and carer's leave (also known as personal/carers leave) and compassionate leave** – 10 days per year of paid sick and carer's leave for full-time employees (pro rata for part-time employees), 2 days of unpaid carer's leave and 2 days compassionate leave as required.
- **Family and domestic violence leave** – 10 days of paid leave per year.
- **Community service leave** – unpaid leave for voluntary emergency management activities and leave for jury service.
- **Long service leave** – paid leave for employees who have been with the same employer for a long time.
- **Public holidays** – an entitlement to a day off on a public holiday, unless reasonably requested to work.
- **Superannuation (super)** – employers must make contributions to eligible employees' super funds under super guarantee laws. Super is also a NES entitlement. For more information see our Tax and superannuation page at fairwork.gov.au/super
- **Notice of termination and redundancy pay** – up to 5 weeks notice of termination and up to 16 weeks redundancy pay.
- **Information Statements** – the Fair Work Information Statement must be provided to all new employees before, or as soon as possible after they start a new job. To download a copy, visit fairwork.gov.au/fwis. The Casual Employment Information Statement must also be provided to casual employees at the start of employment, and at set times throughout their employment. For more information and to download a copy, visit fairwork.gov.au/ceis
- **Employee choice about casual conversion** – pathways for a casual employee to become a full-time or part-time employee in some circumstances. Note that generally, state and territory training authorities require apprentices and trainees to be employed full-time or part-time.

For more information about each of the NES entitlements go to fairwork.gov.au/nas

Fixed term employees

Fixed term employees are engaged for a set period of time, or for a season. Apprentices are often employed as a fixed term employee for the duration of their apprenticeship. Employees on new fixed term contracts must be given a Fixed Term Contract Information Statement. You can download a copy at fairwork.gov.au/ftcis. For more information on fixed term employees visit our Fixed term employees page at fairwork.gov.au/fixed-term-employees



What award or agreement covers my employment?

Your apprenticeship is likely to be covered by an award or registered agreement. These are legal documents that provide entitlements such as rates of pay and breaks.



Awards

An award is a document that sets out the minimum wages and conditions for an industry or occupation. Awards cover things like apprentice pay, hours of work, rosters, breaks, allowances, penalty rates and overtime.

To find the award that applies to your job go to fairwork.gov.au/findmyaward



Registered agreements

An agreement is a document that sets out the minimum wages and conditions for a workplace. When an agreement is in place, it will usually apply instead of the award.

For more information on agreements go to fairwork.gov.au/agreements



Award/agreement free employees

Some jobs will not be covered by an award or agreement. Employees in these types of jobs are award/agreement free and are entitled to the National Minimum Wage and the NES.

The National Minimum Wage doesn't include special rates for apprentices. Apprentices who are award/agreement free must be paid at least the minimum rates provided for apprentices in the Miscellaneous Award.



What should I be paid?

To be paid apprentice pay rates, you must have a formal training contract with your employer that is registered and recognised by a state or territory training authority. You must be paid at least the minimum wage in your award or agreement. If your award or agreement doesn't have apprentice pay rates, you should be paid the minimum rates for the job you do. You should also be paid any penalty rates or allowances that apply under your award or agreement.

If you are award/agreement free you must be paid at least the minimum rates provided for apprentices in the Miscellaneous Award. You should get a pay slip from your employer no later than one working day after pay day. Your employer should also be keeping records about your employment including details about your pay, hours of work and leave entitlements.

For help with pay rates and entitlements go to fairwork.gov.au/pact or call our Fair Work Infoline on **13 13 94**.

Adult apprentices

Some awards and agreements provide for adult apprentices. Generally, an adult apprentice is 21 years of age or older when they start their apprenticeship. This means that if an apprentice begins their apprenticeship at 20 years of age, they are not eligible to receive adult apprentice wage rates, even if they will turn 21 during their apprenticeship.

Adult apprentices will usually have their own pay rate in an award. If there are no adult apprentice rates in the award, you get paid the regular apprentice pay rates.



What hours will I be working?

As an apprentice you can combine time at work with training, and can be full-time, part-time or school-based. Your type of employment affects the hours you work, your pay rate and your entitlements:

- **full-time apprentices** usually work, on average, 38 hours per week, plus reasonable additional hours.
- **part-time apprentices** work, on average, less than 38 hours per week. These apprentices work a regular pattern of hours which are usually recorded in writing. Part-time apprentices get entitlements such as annual leave and sick and carer's leave.

If you're not sure how you're being employed, you should check with your employer before you start.

For more information on the different types of employment go to fairwork.gov.au/employee-types

School-based apprentices

School-based apprenticeships allow senior high school students to commence an apprenticeship while at school. School-based apprentices work part-time and undertake the first stage of their formal on- or off-the-job apprenticeship training. School-based apprentices work part-time and receive the same entitlements as other part-time employees.

It's a good idea to keep a diary of the hours you work. Important information can include: the dates you work, the time you start and finish, your breaks, the name of your supervisor on your shift and any leave you take. Our free Record My Hours app makes it quick and easy for you to record and store the hours you work, plus other information about your employment.

For more information about the Record My Hours app including how to download it go to fairwork.gov.au/app



When do I get pay increases?

As an apprentice, you get paid a percentage of the full tradesperson's wages as set out in your award or agreement. This percentage is usually based on the stage of your apprenticeship.

Minimum pay rates will usually increase on 1 July each year and also when you move through your apprenticeship. The type of progression that applies depends on your award or agreement and is usually:

- **time-based** – you progress to the next pay level after you've worked a certain amount of time (for example, 12 months) or
- **competency-based** – you move to the next pay level when you've met certain requirements of the apprenticeship (which might be earlier than 12 months). Once your apprenticeship is completed and signed off by both your RTO and your employer, you get paid the tradesperson's pay rate.



Do I get paid for the time I spend at training?

As an apprentice, the time you spend at trade school is paid time and is included in your ordinary hours of work. You'll discuss with your RTO and employer when and how often you will undertake training. If you don't undertake your trade schooling when you're supposed to, you don't get paid for that time (unless you're on sick leave or another type of approved leave).

For full-time students who are also school-based apprentices, you are not paid for each hour you spend at trade school. Instead, for training you are paid an additional 25% of the hours you work for your employer each week. This can be averaged over a semester or the year.

Example: Payment for training for school-based apprentices

Sean is a full-time school student doing a school-based apprenticeship. He works 8 hours per week with his employer. Sean gets paid a total of 10 hours per week which is made up of:

- 8 hours he works with his employer
- 2 hours for his off-the-job training (being 25% of the 8 hours he works for his employer).



Do I have to pay for training fees and prescribed textbooks?

The money you spend on training fees and prescribed textbooks must be reimbursed by your employer within the timeframe set out in the relevant award. Usually your employer does not have to reimburse you if:

- your progress in the course is unsatisfactory
- your employer pays the costs and fees directly to the RTO
- you aren't working for them at the time that the costs have to be reimbursed.

For more information go to our Pay Calculator at fairwork.gov.au/pact



What about tax and super?

In most cases, your employer should deduct tax from your wages. Paying 'cash in hand' without deducting tax is illegal. You should not be asked to get an ABN because, as an apprentice, you can't be engaged as a contractor.

In most cases your employer is also required to pay superannuation (super) contributions for you. Super is paid in addition to your minimum wage; your employer can't deduct it from your wages.

Find out more about tax and super, including payment for employees under 18, from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) website at ato.gov.au or our Tax and Superannuation page at fairwork.gov.au/super



What paperwork should I get?

You need to get a formal training contract from your employer. It outlines your employer's obligations to provide training and the qualification you are working towards achieving. Training contracts are registered with your state or territory training authority.

You will also need a negotiated training plan endorsed by your RTO and your employer that specifies the training required to achieve the appropriate nationally recognised qualification. The training plan should specify:

- the qualification to be issued on completion of the training plan
- the training/tasks to be delivered by the employer
- the training to be delivered by the RTO and where and when that training will occur
- the end date of your apprenticeship
- units of competency that you must achieve together with the expected completion date for each
- any relevant units of competency that you have already completed (recognition of prior learning)
- training materials, resources, facilities and supervision arrangements that will support the training
- any additional support you may require if there are identified barriers of learning (for example, poor literacy and numeracy skills)
- how and when the RTO plans to monitor and assess your progress
- an addendum, used to capture additional information required for school-based apprenticeships.

You might also get a contract of employment or employment offer which sets out things like your pay and entitlements, which can't be lower than your minimum entitlements under your award or agreement.

Apprentices on new fixed term contracts must also be given a copy of the Fixed Term Contract Information Statement. You can download a copy at fairwork.gov.au/ftcis. An employee is on a fixed term contract if they enter a contract with an employer that has a set end date (for example, the contract ends after a set period of time or a season).

For more information on fixed term employment including new rules that limit the use of fixed term contracts visit our Fixed term employees page at fairwork.gov.au/fixed-term-employees



How long is my probation period?

Probationary periods apply to all apprenticeships and are included in the apprenticeship duration (they usually range from 30 to 90 days) as determined through the approved training scheme. This is separate to any other workplace trial or probationary period. Apprentices on probation should still be paid the correct minimum wage and get their NES entitlements, including notice of termination if the employer decides to end their employment.

While on probation, the apprentice or employer can withdraw from the training contract simply by giving the appropriate period of notice (which comes from the NES or applicable award/agreement). As soon as the probationary period has elapsed, the training contract becomes binding on both parties. It can only be cancelled or transferred by mutual consent or, where there is no agreement, by application to the relevant government department.



Is there anything else I should be aware of?

- **Sham training arrangements:** your employer should not pay you as an apprentice unless you have a registered and recognised training contract with a state training authority (within the timeframe required).
- **Goods or services instead of pay:** you should be paid at least your minimum wage for all hours that you work. You shouldn't get things like food or clothes instead of your wages.
- **Deductions:** your employer can only take money out of your pay in limited circumstances. Unless your industrial instrument says otherwise, generally your employer can't take money out of your pay for breakages/accidents, till shortages or customers who don't pay.
- **Adverse action and discrimination:** your employer shouldn't take adverse action against you for exercising your workplace rights (for example, taking leave under the NES) or for a discriminatory reason such as gender identity, sexual orientation, age or religion. Adverse action can include things like your employer ending your employment or cutting your hours of work. Find out more at fairwork.gov.au/discrimination
- **Pay secrecy:** Employees have the right to talk about (or not talk about) their current or past pay, and the terms and conditions of employment that would be needed to work out their pay (such as hours of work). They can also ask other employees the same thing (about their pay and terms and conditions of employment) but employees can't be forced to share this information if they don't want to. For more information about these rights, including when these rights started applying and who they apply to, see our Pay secrecy page at fairwork.gov.au/pay-secrecy

For more information on your workplace rights check out the fact sheets available at fairwork.gov.au/factsheets

Tailored advice from your union

Unions represent workers in the workplace. Unions can provide their members with information, advice and support. For information about union membership and advice and assistance on workplace issues please visit the Australian Council of Trade Unions at actu.org.au

Your Responsibilities

As an apprentice you'll have responsibilities to your employer. The work that you do will be helping your employer to run their business so you should make sure that you're working to the best of your ability. You should perform all the duties of your job and comply with any lawful and reasonable directions that your employer gives you. You should also let your employer know if there is anything in the workplace that concerns you.

Make sure that you know about and follow the workplace's policies and procedures, including those that relate to a safe and healthy workplace. Part of contributing to a safe and healthy workplace is ensuring that you do not discriminate, bully, harass or sexually harass other employees or anyone else you interact with in your role. You should also make sure that you don't reveal any confidential information about the business.

It's important to your employer that you are punctual and reliable. You should let your employer know as soon as possible if you can't make it to work. For example, if you're sick or have to care for someone who is sick. We recommend you find out your employer's preferred way of notifying them. For example, do you have to call them if you're sick or can you send a text message?

As an apprentice you have a further responsibility to participate in and successfully complete your training as required by your training contract with your current employer. Training is part of your job and you need to give notice if you will be unable to make your training. Find out if you need to contact your employer and let them know if you can't attend training, or whether you need to speak to the RTO directly as well as informing your employer.

Your first day

You'll need to remember a lot of things on your first day. Don't be afraid to ask questions to find out what to do.

- **Work location** – where you were interviewed might not be where you'll be working, so check where you need to go on your first day.
- **Supervisor** – make sure you know who you need to talk to when you arrive on your first day.
- **Hours of work** – know when you need to arrive on the first day and what hours you'll work.
- **Travel arrangements** – in some industries your employer will provide you with transport to work; otherwise make sure you know how you'll get to work and how long it will take.
- **Dress code** – find out what you should wear. If the business has a uniform you should make arrangements to collect this.
- **Facilities** – find out if the business has a kitchen or meals area and what facilities are available for you to prepare or buy your meals.
- **Your duties** – find out what type of tasks you'll be doing.
- **Paperwork** – you'll generally need to fill in forms about taxation and superannuation, provide your employer with your bank details and you might also need to sign a contract, a confidentiality agreement or other documents.
- **Registered Training Organisation** – find out when and how your training will be delivered by your RTO. Whether it will be at TAFE or another location, and what days/hours you will be expected to attend training.
- **Workplace policies** – find out what the policies and procedures are in your workplace. These can cover things like social media use, public holidays and sick leave procedures.

Be MoneySmart

Now that you're earning money you want to be smart about what you do with it. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) MoneySmart website can help you to learn how to manage your money. Visit moneysmart.gov.au



Resolving workplace issues

Even in the best workplaces there may be times when issues arise. Sometimes they will be minor and will be easily resolved, but sometimes the situation will be more complex. Although it can be difficult, it's important that you try to deal with any issues straight away, otherwise they can get worse.

As soon as you can, you should speak with your employer about the issue. If you're unsure about how to start this conversation you should complete our free Difficult conversations in the workplace – employee online course at fairwork.gov.au/learning

You need to be prepared to work with your employer to resolve an issue. If you take a flexible and practical approach to resolving the issue, you and your employer should be able to find the solution that best suits everyone.

Who can give me support during my apprenticeship?

If you have an issue you have been unable to resolve with your employer or need support during your apprenticeship you can contact your Australian Apprenticeship Support Network provider or your state or territory training authority for support.

The Australian Apprenticeship Support Network provides free support services for Australian Apprenticeships. This includes providing information and assistance to employers, apprentices and other interested people. They also administer government incentive payments to employers and allowances for Australian Apprentices. You can find your local provider at apprenticeships.gov.au

State training authorities are government departments in each state or territory responsible for the operation of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system (including Australian Apprenticeships) within that jurisdiction. You can find your relevant state or territory training authority in the [Who to contact?](#) section at the end of this guide.

Getting the most out of your apprenticeship

Being flexible and positive will help you make the most of this opportunity. It's best practice to work with your employer to see how you're performing and how you can improve your work. It helps to make sure you're using your skills and knowledge to the best of your ability and being a good employee. For example, you can use your initiative, organise and prioritise your work and look for ways you can incorporate what you've learnt in training. Keep learning and remember there might also be further formal training opportunities.

Everyone wants to work in a happy and productive workplace. Part of being a successful apprentice is contributing to a positive workplace culture. You can do this by assisting other employees where appropriate, learning from others and working cooperatively with your team.

You should also think about the way that you work with your employer. If you show your employer that you are a trustworthy employee and build a good working relationship, it will be easier to talk to them about work and any issues that arise.

There are a number of skills that will help you to succeed in your job. These include:

- being a clear communicator
- working well in a team
- problem solving
- planning and organising your work
- working independently
- learning and developing new skills
- using relevant technology
- showing initiative and contributing.

You can improve some of these skills by completing our free Starting a new job online course at fairwork.gov.au/learning



Your apprenticeship checklist

You can work through this checklist to help make sure you have all the information you need to start your apprenticeship. If you're unsure of something, speak to your boss or contact the Fair Work Infoline on **13 13 94**.



First day

Where do I need to go?

What time do I start?

Who do I report to?



Paperwork

Have I completed and signed relevant paperwork?

- ☐ Letter of offer/employment contract
- ☐ Tax File Number declaration form
- ☐ Superannuation choice form
- ☐ Formal training contract
- ☐ Other (for example, deductions, policies):

What info do I need to take on my first day?

- ☐ Bank account details
- ☐ Tax file number
- ☐ Licences (for example, drivers licence, Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA))
- ☐ Passport and visa (if visiting and working in Australia)
- ☐ Proof of age (if under 21)
- ☐ Qualifications and/or school records
- ☐ Apprenticeship papers
- ☐ Emergency contact details
- ☐ Other:



Uniform

Do I have to wear a uniform for work?

- ☐ Yes, my employer has already provided it/will provide it on first day
- ☐ Yes, I need to buy the uniform
- ☐ No, but I understand the dress code



Tools

Do I need tools for work?

- ☐ Yes, my employer has already provided them/will give them to me on first day
- ☐ Yes, I need to bring/buy my own tools
- ☐ No, I don't need tools



Award/registered agreement

What's my award/agreement?

- ☐ My award/agreement is:

- ☐ I am award/agreement free



Employment type

Am I full-time or part-time?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time

Am I ongoing (permanent) or employed for a fixed term (a set time/task)?

- ☐ Ongoing (permanent)
- ☐ Fixed term

Am I a school-based or adult apprentice?

- ☐ Yes – school-based
- ☐ Yes – adult (over 21)
- ☐ No



Probation

Do I know when my probation period ends?

- ☐ Yes, my probation ends on:

- ☐ No, I need to follow this up with my employer



Training

Who is my Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and where will training be held?

- ☐ My RTO is:

- ☐ Training will be held at:



Duties

Do I know what my main duties are?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, I need to follow this up with my employer



Pay

What is your base pay rate?

- ☐ My pay rate is \$ _____

How will I be paid?

- ☐ Direct deposit/EFT
- ☐ Cheque
- ☐ Cash

How often will I be paid?

- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Fortnightly
- ☐ Monthly

How will I be given pay slips?

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Mail
- ☐ Other:



Hours and shifts

What are the minimum hours I work each week?

- ☐ _____ hours per week

Do I know how I'll receive my roster?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, I need to follow this up with my employer



Meal and rest breaks

What meal and rest breaks am I entitled to?



Information statements

Have I received the Fair Work Information Statement?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, I need to follow this up with my employer

If I'm on a fixed term contract, have I received the Fixed Term Contract Information Statement?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, I need to follow this up with my employer
- ☐ I'm not on a fixed term contract so this doesn't apply to me



Leave

Do I know what leave I'm entitled to? Select those that apply to you:

- ☐ Annual leave
- ☐ Sick and carer's leave
- ☐ Compassionate leave
- ☐ Family and domestic violence leave
- ☐ Community service leave



Things to find out on my first day

- ☐ Anything I haven't been able to answer above!
- ☐ Where I store my personal items
- ☐ What I do if there is an emergency
- ☐ The rules about making personal calls, using social media and having visitors at work
- ☐ Who to contact if I'm sick or running late
- ☐ Who I should see if I have questions about my job

Who to contact?

For more information about apprenticeships you can contact Australian Apprenticeships by visiting their website at [apprenticeships.gov.au](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.au) or by calling them on 13 38 73.

State and territory training authorities:

- **ACT** – Skills Canberra at act.gov.au/skills or call (02) 6205 8555
- **NSW** – Skills NSW at skills.education.nsw.gov.au or call 13 28 11 (local) or 1300 772 104 (interstate)
- **NT** – Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade – Northern Territory at nt.gov.au/employ/apprenticeships-and-traineeships or call (08) 8935 7707
- **QLD** – Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training – Queensland at desbt.qld.gov.au/training/apprentices or call 1800 210 210
- **SA** – Skills SA at skills.sa.gov.au or call 1800 673 097
- **TAS** – Skills Tasmania at skills.tas.gov.au/learners or call 1800 655 846
- **VIC** – Apprenticeships Victoria at apprenticeships.vic.gov.au or call 13 18 23 (local) or (03) 9651 4701 (outside of Victoria)
- **VIC** – Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority at vrqa.vic.gov.au/apprenticeships or call 1300 722 603 (for apprenticeship regulatory matters)
- **WA** – Apprenticeship Office WA at wa.gov.au/organisation/apprenticeship-office or call 13 19 54 (local) or (08) 6551 5499 (interstate).

State and territory workplace health and safety bodies:

- **ACT** – WorkSafe ACT at worksafe.act.gov.au
- **NSW** – SafeWork NSW at safework.nsw.gov.au
- **NT** – NT WorkSafe at worksafe.nt.gov.au
- **QLD** – WorkSafe QLD at worksafe.qld.gov.au
- **SA** – SafeWork SA at safework.sa.gov.au
- **TAS** – WorkSafe Tasmania at worksafe.tas.gov.au
- **VIC** – WorkSafe Victoria at worksafe.vic.gov.au
- **WA** – WorkSafe WA at worksafe.wa.gov.au
- **Commonwealth** – Comcare at comcare.gov.au

CONTACT US

Fair Work online: fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: **13 13 94**

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on **13 14 50**

Help for people who are deaf or have hearing or speech difficulties

You can contact us through the National Relay Service (NRS).

Select your [preferred access option](#) and give our phone number: **13 13 94**

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