

2026 EPP Apprenticeship & Traineeship Head Start program guidelines

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Background

The *Educational Pathways Program (EPP)* is designed to improve education and career outcomes for young people by introducing NSW public high school students to vocational education and training (VET) and employment pathways.

The *Head Start Program*, part of the EPP, supports NSW public high school students in Years 10 to 12 to explore VET and employment pathways. The Head Start program is delivered by Group Training Organisations (GTOs) in partnership with Partner Providers who are Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and schools.

The program aims to strengthen links between schools, industry, and training providers – helping young people make informed career choices, complete school, and successfully enter the workforce.

The department, through *Training Services*, administers and manages the program, providing funding to **GTOs** (via an EOI process) to:

- work with selected schools to raise awareness of VET and employment pathways
- recruit and support students through pre-apprenticeship or pre-traineeship training
- provide at least 3 days of work experience or industry immersion
- assist students to transition into school-based apprenticeships or traineeships (SBATs) or other employment pathways.

Program objectives

For students

- understand vocational choices and workplace requirements
- explore work readiness and employment opportunities
- receive guidance from GTOs and Partner Providers
- undertake pre-apprenticeship or pre-traineeship training
- participate in at least 3 business days of work experience or industry immersion
- access mentoring and support to complete training and transition into an SBAT, apprenticeship, or traineeship

For GTOs

- raise awareness of VET and employment pathways
- support students through the commencement and completion of pre-apprenticeship or pre-traineeship training
- organise and monitor workplace learning opportunities
- facilitate student transitions into longer-term vocational training or employment



Program outcomes

The Head Start program supports students to:

- gain awareness of vocational pathways and industries
- complete pre-apprenticeship or pre-traineeship training
- finish school through to the end of Year 12
- transition where possible into an SBAT, apprenticeship, or traineeship.

Student eligibility

To participate, a student must:

- be at least 15 years of age
- be enrolled in Years 10 to 12 at an EPP-serviced school
- be an Australian citizen, permanent resident, humanitarian visa holder, or New Zealand citizen
- meet [Smart and Skilled student eligibility criteria](#).

Note: Students should undergo a selection process in collaboration with the GTO and participating school prior to commencement.

GTO eligibility

To be eligible to deliver the program, a GTO must:

- be registered as a GTO in NSW under section 30 of the [Apprenticeship and Traineeship Act 2001](#)
- support industries that employ apprentices or trainees in NSW
- be registered for GST
- be a current employer of SBATs, apprentices, or trainees
- not be subject to GTO performance monitoring review under the GTO registration requirements.

Partner Provider (RTO) eligibility

Partner Providers must:

- hold a current [Smart and Skilled contract](#)
- deliver nationally recognised qualifications or Units of Competency (UoCs) relevant to the training
- maintain valid Working with Children Check (WWCC) approvals
- have no active sanctions under [Smart and Skilled](#) or from the [Australian Skills Quality Authority \(ASQA\)](#).



Participating schools and networks

A [list of participating EPP regions](#) and schools can be found on the department's website.

GTO application and assessment

Assessment criteria

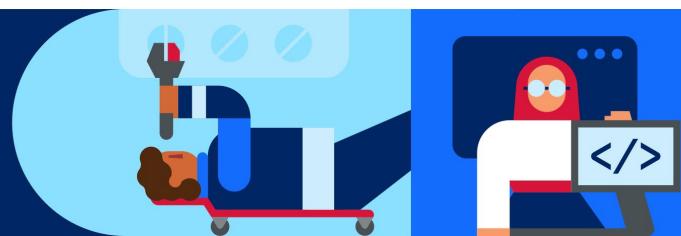
Expressions of Interest from GTOs will be assessed based on:

- capability and if applicable past program performance
- quality of student outcomes and regional alignment
- availability of industry and work experience opportunities
- Partner Provider capacity and accessibility
- employer and community support
- department-identified risk factors.

Maximum place allocations

Reporting period	Minimum allocation utilised
31 March 2026	15%
30 June 2026	30%
30 September 2026	60%
30 November 2026	75%

The department may reallocate allocations from underperforming GTOs to higher-performing GTOs.



Funding and payment structure

Base Funding – up to \$2,000 per student

Payment Type	Description of payment trigger	Amount
Training commencement	Partner Provider submits Training Activity Data	\$800
Training completion	Student completes training and 3 days of work experience or immersion	\$700
Transition	Student moves into an SBAT, apprenticeship, or traineeship	\$500

Conditions:

The Funding Deed sets out the conditions under which GTOs will receive payment of each Payment Type under the Base Funding.

- payments are linked to validated data and Smart and Skilled compliance in accordance with the [Smart and Skilled Contract and Operating Guidelines](#).
- program funds must not duplicate or be used alongside other State or Commonwealth grants.
- all training must comply with the [Targeted Priorities Prevocational and Part Qualifications Policy \(TPPPQ\)](#).

GTO responsibilities

To deliver the program, a GTO must:

Program management

- work with Partner Providers as per the conditions of the funding deed/intent on the EPP Head Start with the [terms and conditions of Smart and Skilled contract](#)
- sign and return the Funding Deed
- ensure all training is completed by **30 November 2026** and data submitted by **15 December 2026**
- participate in department monitoring and reporting

Program delivery



- design programs addressing local skill needs
- enrol students in 3 to 4 vocationally relevant units
- deliver training face-to-face with reasonable adjustments
- provide mentoring and ongoing student support
- organise at least 3 days of work experience or immersion

Collaboration and engagement

- work with schools, employers, and industry to identify local training needs
- pre-screen and select suitable students
- communicate regularly with schools and Partner Providers

Student outcomes

- support students into SBATs, apprenticeships, or traineeships
- notify the department of graduation ceremonies and invite department representatives to attend

Accountability

- GTOs remain fully responsible for all program delivery – no subcontracting is permitted

Partner Provider (RTO) responsibilities

To assist GTOs to deliver the program, Partner Providers must:

- comply with the *Smart and Skilled contract* and *guidelines*
- complete all training by **30 November 2026** and data by **15 December 2026**
- deliver 3 to 4 face-to-face vocational units with hands-on learning
- make reasonable adjustments for individual learning needs
- ensure no student fees are charged
- retain full responsibility for delivering training to Eligible Students – no subcontracting is permitted.

Role of the department

The department manages the program by:

- administering the Funding Deed, these guidelines and the funding
- setting GTOs' Maximum Place Allocations and issuing Provider Activity Schedules
- making payments to GTOs based on validated student data reports
- monitoring student progress and GTOs' performance
- reallocating unused or underutilised places
- providing advice and support as needed.



Other support networks

GTOs may collaborate with other agencies to achieve apprenticeship and traineeship outcomes, including:

- [Workforce Australia Employment Providers](#)
- [Apprentice Employment Network NSW & ACT](#)
- [Apprenticeship Connect Australia Providers](#)

Course graduation

GTOs are encouraged to invite a representative from the department to attend any graduation ceremonies. All costs associated with graduation ceremonies remain the responsibility of the GTO and/or Partner Provider.

Communications

For all program enquiries, email: group.training@det.nsw.edu.au

