

Media Release

With The Nation's Highest Unemployment Cairns Fights Back

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In the face of an unemployment rate of 12.5% and climbing, businesses in Cairns are fighting back and investing in apprenticeships. The catalyst has been the pioneering *50 Apprentices In 15 Days* campaign spearheaded by Tropical North Queensland TAFE and the nation's foremost group training organisation, Skill360 Australia.

With a target of finding employment for fifty apprentices, the campaign was launched last week and so far seven apprentices have secured jobs with local businesses. The apprentices are enrolled in the SchoolTech program, a joint TAFE, Education Queensland and Skill360 initiative which provides Year 11 and 12 students with the opportunity to combine senior studies and vocational training to secure trade qualifications and a Queensland Certificate of Education.

"The support of local businesses has been fantastic and I can't speak highly enough of the businesses that have taken on an apprentice," said Troy Williams, Chief Executive Officer of Skill360 Australia.

Skill360 Australia, a not-for-profit Group Training Organisation, is providing generous subsidies to businesses wanting to take on an apprentice. According to Mr Williams the businesses that are taking advantage of these incentives to employ an apprentice are planning ahead and have looked at what skills will be required in two or three years time.

"When the economic recovery is fully underway these businesses will be well positioned as they had the foresight to make an investment in training," Mr Williams said.

Cairns has the nation's highest unemployment rate, a situation which would normally not be conducive to finding jobs for young people. But TNQT Institute Director Jo Pyne said the school-based apprenticeship training model adopted for SchoolTech was making it easier for businesses to take on an apprentice.

"The program is attractive to employers as the apprentices are with them for two days a week and attend TAFE for the other three days. This allows businesses with a reduced amount of work to take on an apprentice now and look towards a full-time placement when the student finishes Year 12," Ms Pyne said.

"SchoolTech also provides students with a range of options for the future because they finish school with pathways to a trade, employment or further study."

Ms Pyne said the *50 Apprentices in 15 Days* campaign was about businesses and training providers working together to secure the future skills base of the region by supporting local students.

"The SchoolTech students represent the future of business and industry in the far north and we all need to work together to give them a start in their chosen career or we risk losing them to other regions and the metropolitan areas," she said.

"An investment in these young apprentices is a very worthwhile investment in the region's future."

Businesses wanting to take on an apprentice should telephone Skill360 Australia on 1300 933 358.

Ends.

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