Vocational Education and Training in New South Wales

For Refugees and Asylum Seekers
This guide is an introduction to the vocational education and training (VET) system in New South Wales (NSW). It will help you to understand the training opportunities available to you.

The guide looks at:

- the Australian education system
- the definition of VET
- apprenticeships and traineeships
- other useful information concerning VET, such as Foundation Skills, Adult and Community Education and Recognition of Prior Learning
- the features of the NSW Government’s Smart and Skilled VET program

It also contains answers to some frequently asked questions.

**Please note:** This guide contains links to English language websites which explain the information given here in more detail.
The Australian education system has three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary education. Vocational education and training (VET) is one form of tertiary education.

**Primary and secondary education**

In NSW, school education is divided into primary and secondary education and all children must be at school by the age of 6.

Primary school runs for seven years through to Year 6, usually between the ages of 5 and 11.

Secondary education, or high school, runs from Year 7 to Year 12, usually from the age of 12 onwards. Students must complete Year 10 and must be in education or training until the age of 17.

**Tertiary education**

After high school, you may go on to tertiary education. This is optional and depends on the job or career you choose.

Tertiary education includes both higher education (university) and vocational education and training (VET).

Study at university level enables you to earn a degree or gain further (postgraduate) qualifications after your degree such as a masters degree. Some professions, for example, medicine and law, require university-level qualifications.

Other jobs may require the skills covered by a vocational education and training (VET) qualification. VET is offered by a variety of training providers and, by giving you the skills that employers are looking for, can lead to employment. Some VET courses may also lead to university study.
What is Vocational Education and Training?

Vocational education and training (VET) is training in job related and technical skills. It covers a large number of careers and industries from trades, such as carpentry and plumbing, to office work, retail, hospitality and technology, as well as aged care and child care.

VET includes apprenticeships and traineeships. (These are explained later in this guide.)

Full qualifications range in level from Certificate I, Certificate II, Certificate III to Certificate IV, then Diploma and Advanced Diploma. (These levels are explained later in this guide). These full qualifications are nationally recognised and take up to 1 – 4 years to complete, depending on the level and whether it is an apprenticeship.

Part qualifications are short courses where formal training may be required to meet specific skills needs but a full qualification is not necessary. Part qualifications can lead to a job or further study. If you later decide to undertake a related full qualification, you do not have to repeat the units of competency or modules which you have already successfully completed. These will be recorded on an official document called a statement of attainment.

In NSW, VET can be government-subsidised, so most or all of the cost of your training is paid for by the NSW Government. In this case, the government sets the student fee which your training provider charges you. VET can also be offered at a commercial fee-for-service rate which is set by your training provider. In this case, you are responsible for paying the full cost of training according to what your training provider charges.

Smart and Skilled is a program which offers nationally recognised, government-subsidised VET in NSW, including fee-free training for refugees and asylum seekers for qualifications up to and including Certificate IV level. (See What is Smart and Skilled? for more information).
## Vocational education and training qualification levels explained

The levels of vocational education and training qualifications are progressive and build on each other. Certificate I is the lowest level and Advanced Diploma the highest.

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<td>gives you basic functional knowledge and skills to undertake work, further learning and community involvement. Some Foundation Skills, which are explained later in this guide, are offered at the Certificate I level.</td>
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<td>qualifies you to undertake mainly routine work and is a pathway to further learning. Some Foundation Skills, which are explained later in this guide, are offered at the Certificate II level. Certificate II level qualifications are entry-level requirements for some jobs or industries.</td>
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<td>qualifies you to undertake skilled work and is a pathway for further learning. Certificate III level qualifications are entry-level requirements for many jobs or industries. Many apprenticeship qualifications are at Certificate III level.</td>
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<td>qualifies you to undertake specialised skilled work and is a pathway for further learning. Some apprenticeship qualifications are offered at the Certificate IV level.</td>
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<td>qualifies you to undertake advanced skilled work or help a professional and is a pathway for further learning. Diplomas are advanced-level qualifications.</td>
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<th>Advanced Diploma</th>
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<td>qualifies you to undertake specialised skilled work or help a professional and is a pathway for further learning. Advanced Diplomas are the highest level of VET qualification.</td>
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Foundation Skills

Foundation Skills are basic skills that help you to find a job or prepare to enter vocational training.

They are made up of five core skills (learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy), plus employability and computer skills. Foundation Skills courses help you with the ability to speak, listen, read and write in English, and to use mathematical concepts.

Smart and Skilled offers Foundation Skills qualifications at Certificate I and Certificate II levels to provide extra support to students who have learnt English but may not yet be ready to undertake a VET qualification or enter the workforce.

For more information, go to https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/for-students/students-with-additional-needs/students-needing-extra-learning.

Adult and Community Education

If you need extra support to access training offered under Smart and Skilled, an approved Adult and Community Education (ACE) provider may be able to assist you.

Funded ACE training covers short courses, including language, literacy, numeracy and employability skills, as well as some full qualifications up to and including Certificate III qualifications.

To find out more about available ACE programs contact your local approved ACE provider. A list of these providers is available at www.training.nsw.gov.au/ace/about_ace.html.
Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment of the skills and knowledge you have gained through:

- work experience
- previous training in your country of origin
- voluntary work
- school experience
- life experience
- sporting achievements.

Your training provider will assess your skills and knowledge and determine whether you are granted RPL against particular units of competency in your chosen qualification.

Where you are granted RPL, your student fee is adjusted (if you are paying a fee) and you do not have to complete the units of competency where you have been granted RPL.

For further information about RPL, please speak with your training provider.
Apprenticeships and traineeships combine full time or part time work with formal training. They involve getting a nationally recognised qualification while you earn money and learn your job.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are established under training contracts between the employer and the apprentice or trainee. The NSW Government’s Department of Industry approves and administers apprenticeships and traineeships in NSW.

Apprenticeships and traineeships can be full-time, part-time or school-based and are available to anyone of working age.

An apprenticeship is a contract with an employer which allows you to learn on the job (while you work and get paid) and includes training with a training provider. Apprenticeships last three to four years and cover skilled trades like building and construction, cooking, engineering and manufacturing etc. An apprenticeship leads to a job as a qualified tradesperson. Plumbers, electricians, mechanics and hairdressers are all examples of qualified tradespeople.

Like an apprenticeship, a traineeship is a contract which combines paid work with training by a training provider. Traineeships cover a wide range of jobs in areas such as agriculture, hospitality, business, office administration and information technology. Traineeships can last between one to three years, depending on the industry and the qualification.

**Please note:** Visa holders MUST be able to legally work AND study in Australia for the length of time required to complete the apprenticeship or traineeship to be eligible. More information can be found at [https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/apprenticeships_traineeships/policy/policy_procedures/citizenship_residency.html](https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/apprenticeships_traineeships/policy/policy_procedures/citizenship_residency.html).

**Before you start an apprenticeship or traineeship you’ll need to know:**

- what apprenticeships and traineeships are available
- how you can get an apprenticeship or traineeship
- who can help and what assistance is available to you
To start, you need to find an employer for your apprenticeship or traineeship and then choose the right qualification for your training with your employer and training provider. Information on starting an apprenticeship or traineeship, including a search tool to help you find a course, is available at https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/apprenticeships_traineeships/students/getting_started.html.

You can also search for apprenticeship and traineeship courses offered under Smart and Skilled in the Course Finder at https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/sands/find-a-course. All NSW apprenticeship and many traineeship qualifications are eligible for a government subsidy under Smart and Skilled. (See What is Smart and Skilled? for more information).

Pre-apprenticeships and pre-traineeships are introductory units which allow you to try out a trade or industry. They are fee-free, meaning you won’t have to pay any student fees. If you then decide to do a full apprenticeship or traineeship, your pre-apprenticeship or pre-traineeship training may count towards your qualification, so you don’t have to repeat the units of competency you have already successfully completed. More information on pre-apprenticeships and pre-traineeships is available at https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/apprenticeships_traineeships/students/pre_training.html.
**What is Smart and Skilled?**

*Smart and Skilled* [https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/](https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/) is government-subsidised training in NSW, which means that the NSW Government pays most or all of your student fees.

Even though your fees may be paid for by the NSW Government, you can still choose your course and training provider.

**Which courses can I study under Smart and Skilled?**

The courses which are subsidised under Smart and Skilled are on the NSW Skills List. The Skills List includes a wide range of nationally recognised qualifications to support the skills needs of NSW employers.

With over 700 qualifications, it covers all industries in NSW and includes qualifications up to Advanced Diploma.

All NSW apprenticeship and many traineeship qualifications are on the Skills List.

See *How do I find a Smart and Skilled course and training provider?* in this document for instructions on finding a course on the NSW Skills List.

Please note: If a full qualification is not on the NSW Skills List, it is not government-subsidised. You can still study the course but you will pay a commercial fee-for-service rate which is set by your training provider.
Where can I train under Smart and Skilled?

Training providers must be registered training organisations and approved by the NSW Government to deliver training under Smart and Skilled. They must meet strict quality standards and performance requirements.

Under Smart and Skilled, you have a choice of approved training providers – public (TAFE NSW), private and adult and community education (ACE) providers. See how to find a training provider below.

See How do I find a Smart and Skilled course and training provider? in this document for instructions on finding an approved Smart and Skilled training provider.

Please note: You can study with training providers which do not offer Smart and Skilled but you will pay a commercial fee-for-service rate which is set by your training provider.

Am I eligible for Smart and Skilled?

To be eligible for government-subsidised training under Smart and Skilled, you must:

- be aged 15 years or older, and
- have left school or its equivalent, and
- live or work in New South Wales

If you’re an asylum seeker or refugee, you must also hold:

- a Bridging Visa A (BVA), B (BVB), C (BVC), D (BVD) or E (BVE), or a Temporary Humanitarian Stay visa (Subclass 449) or Temporary Humanitarian Concern visa (Subclass 786).

You should tell your training provider about your visa status, including your visa expiry date if applicable. You will be asked to provide relevant visa documentation, or an ImmiCard where appropriate. If you hold a Bridging Visa, you must also provide a document from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection showing that you have applied for a humanitarian visa.

Student fees

Fee-free training for refugees and asylum seekers

If you are eligible and hold one of the above visas, you do not have to pay student fees under Smart and Skilled for any qualification on the NSW Skills List from Certificate I to Certificate IV level.

Training providers may still charge fees for expenses other than the student fee, such as for essential tools or for field trips. Training providers must let you know of any additional fees for these expenses prior to enrolment.

Please note: You may pay a student fee for higher level qualifications such as Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas under Smart and Skilled. These are still government-subsidised qualifications: the NSW Government will pay for most of your fee and you pay the rest. Student loans which help you pay your fee may be available for Diploma or Advanced Diploma courses if you hold a permanent humanitarian visa and usually reside in Australia. For more information about student loans, including eligibility, go to http://education.gov.au/vet-student-loans or ask your training provider.

If you have a disability

If you meet the Smart and Skilled disability criteria or are the dependant of a Disability Support Pension recipient, you do not pay student fees for any Smart and Skilled training you undertake, including higher level qualifications such as Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas.

How do I find a Smart and Skilled course and training provider?

The Smart and Skilled website at https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/ has a Course Finder function which can be found on the right hand side of the Smart and Skilled website home page or at https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/sands/find-a-course.

The Course Finder lets you look for courses and the approved Smart and Skilled training providers that offer them.
To find a Smart and Skilled course and training provider in order to enrol in training, please follow these steps:

1. Select “Courses” from the drop down field in the Course Finder to search for all courses. (You can also limit your search to apprenticeship and traineeship courses, or search by training provider to see the full range of courses offered by that provider).

2. To look for all courses in a chosen field, enter a keyword from the course name or the name of the occupation in the search text box. For example, if you are looking for construction courses, you might enter “Construction” or “Builder”.

3. Use the “Location” drop down field to enter your city/suburb or postcode and limit the search to those approved training providers who offer the course in your region. There is a tick box which lets you expand this search to surrounding regions.

4. The results screen will show you a list of matching qualifications. Click on the qualification or qualifications that best match your search.

5. The results screen will now show you a brief description of the course. It will list the training providers approved to teach the course under Smart and Skilled in your selected region by training location. Click on training provider entries in the list to bring up their details.

6. Contact the training providers that offer the course by phone, email or in person to ask questions – this helps you decide which training provider is best for you. You should ask about the course details (e.g. where and how is it taught), the enrolment process, your eligibility, your fees and any additional support the training provider offers.


8. Choose your preferred training provider.

9. Contact them to enrol.
The Course Finder also allows you to search directly for approved Smart and Skilled training providers. Select “Training Providers” from the drop down field in the Course Finder and then enter your search parameters.

**Please note:** If you cannot find the course you want in the Course Finder, you can enrol in a course outside of Smart and Skilled. This means you will not receive government-subsidised training, but will have to pay the full student fee yourself. In this case, contact your preferred training provider to find out more or use the course search at [https://www.myskills.gov.au/](https://www.myskills.gov.au/) to help you find a training provider who delivers your chosen course.

### Unique Student Identifier (USI)

A Unique Student Identifier (USI) is like an account number and enables you to access your training records and results in one place. Everyone undertaking nationally recognised vocational training in Australia needs a USI.

Under Smart and Skilled, you will need to have a USI before you enrol in your Smart and Skilled course. Your training provider may be able to help you get a USI.

Can I train in languages other than English?

No. You must be able to read, write and speak in English to undertake vocational education and training in NSW.

If you do not have English language skills, the Adult Migrant English Program (https://www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program-0) may provide you with up to 510 hours of free English lessons and offers Certificates I, II, and III in Spoken and Written English.

What is the difference between public, private and adult and community education providers?

The public training provider in NSW is TAFE NSW, which is a government-funded training organisation. Private training providers can be commercial organisations which are run for the profit of their owners or they may be not-for-profit. Adult and Community Education providers are community owned and do not operate for profit.

All three provider types offer nationally recognised vocational education and training. If you decide to train under Smart and Skilled, you are able to choose your preferred approved provider from these three groups.

What can I study?

You can study everything from Certificate I Foundation Skills to an Advanced Diploma, a full or part qualification or, if you meet the citizenship/residency status requirements (https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/apprenticeships_traineeships/policy/policy_procedures/citizenship_residency.html), an apprenticeship or traineeship under Smart and Skilled. The section VET qualification levels explained in this guide outlines the different qualification levels from Certificate I and up. There are also sections on Foundation Skills and apprenticeships and traineeships in this guide.
A full qualification is nationally recognised training which leads to a Certificate I – Certificate IV or Diploma or Advanced Diploma, including apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications. Full qualifications may be offered on a full time or part time basis. Most industries require a Certificate II or Certificate III as an entry-level qualification, depending on the job. Certificate IV level qualifications, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas are higher-level qualifications. Some higher level qualifications provide an alternative entry into University.

Part qualifications are short courses offered by training providers which consist of nationally recognised training, including entry-level qualifications. They are designed to help you get a job or go on to further learning. If you continue in a related full qualification you do not need to repeat those units of competency which you have already successfully completed. Part qualifications are fee-free under Smart and Skilled. These are offered by training providers where there is an industry or employer need. Contact your approved Smart and Skilled training provider to find out about part qualification training they may offer.

What training do I need to get the job I want?

If you are interested in a job which is covered by a vocational education and training (VET) qualification that is government-subsidised under Smart and Skilled, our job guides can give you an understanding of the qualifications required, what the job involves, the industries you could work in, job prospects and pay. Go to https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/for-students/job-guides.

What should I do next?

Think about your past qualifications, skills and experience to decide what sort of job you want and whether training is right for you. Our job guides (https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/for-students/job-guides) can help you to find out more about the qualifications required for certain jobs.

If you do not have English skills, we recommend you get English language training through the Adult Migrant English Program (www.education.gov.au/adult-migrant-english-program-0) as you will be required to do your training in English.
If you have completed an overseas qualification, there is an Australian Government service which can help you work out the educational level of your qualification in an Australian context at https://internationaleducation.gov.au/services-and-resources/services-for-individuals/qualifications-assessments/pages/qualification-assessment.aspx. These assessments cover higher education qualifications and tertiary technical and vocational education qualifications. There is a fee for these assessments and they can take up to 3 months.

Note that there may also be registration, licensing, professional membership or other industry requirements to work in your previous occupation in Australia. For example, NSW Fair Trading (http://www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au/ftw/Tradespeople.page) oversees the licensing requirements for a number of trades in New South Wales.

If you have documentary evidence of trade skills and experience or a trade qualification not gained in Australia, you can apply for assessment of a trade qualification if you live in NSW. To find out more, go to https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/skills_recognition/trade/index.html. Other skills assessment services include Trades Recognition Australia, an Australian Government service, which specialises in assessments for people with trade skills gained overseas or in Australia, for the purpose of migration and skills recognition (www.tradesrecognitionaustralia.gov.au). Some training providers are also able to assist you with trade recognition.

If you want to do training, you can use the Course Finder on the Smart and Skilled website at https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/sands/find-a-course to find out whether your chosen qualification is being offered in your area. Contact the approved Smart and Skilled training providers who deliver the course to find out more about it, such as how and when it is being offered. A useful list of questions to ask is available at https://smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au/for-students/how-to-enrol/what-to-ask-when-you-enquire. You can then decide whether you are ready to enrol.

If you are eligible and decide to enrol in a Smart and Skilled course, contact your chosen Smart and Skilled training provider. You will need a Unique Student Identifier (USI) in order to enrol. You should tell your training provider about your visa status, including your visa expiry date if applicable. You will be asked to provide relevant visa documentation, or an ImmiCard where appropriate.

If you hold a Bridging Visa, you must also provide a document from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection showing that you have applied for a humanitarian visa.
Nationally recognised training

This is consistent training across Australia, which leads to nationally recognised vocational qualifications and credentials (see Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification levels explained). Only training providers that meet government quality standards can provide nationally recognised training.

Unit of Competency

When you undertake a nationally recognised vocational education and training (VET) qualification, your training is broken down into units of competency, which define the skills and knowledge you need in a specific area and how these are used in the workplace. You are assessed against these units of competency and the results determine whether you successfully complete the qualification.

Modules

These are similar to units of competency, but apply to accredited courses. Accredited courses also lead to nationally recognised vocational qualifications and credentials.

Training provider

This is where your vocational education and training takes place, for example, a college, school or institute. Training providers include public or government-funded technical and further education (TAFE) institutes, Adult and Community Education colleges as well as private or commercial providers. Training providers who meet government quality standards are known as registered training organisations (RTOs). (See What is Vocational Education and Training (VET)? for an explanation of VET).
For more information

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- training.nsw.gov.au
- facebook.com/TrainingServicesNSW
- NSW Department of Industry
- vet.nsw.gov.au