

# Mentored Apprenticeship Program

Esso Australia Pty Ltd (EAPL) case study



## Executive summary

In 2017, Esso Australia Pty Ltd (EAPL) collaborated with WPC Group to initiate an apprenticeship program at two of its major production sites, Longford and Long Island Point. Since inception, the program has achieved remarkable results, boasting a **100% completion rate (15% female against a 2% industry average), substantive cost savings and a future-proofed workforce.**

The initiative was motivated by EAPL's desire to diversify and renew its workforce, correct misunderstandings about industry roles, and uplift the local community.

The WPC Group-EAPL Mentored Apprenticeship Program began in 2018, admitting 26 apprentices. A standout feature was its tri-level mentoring system: apprentices received guidance from a WPC mentor, an EAPL mentor, and their immediate supervisor. This hands-on approach was complemented by rotational experience with local businesses and extensive training, from foundational skills to safety certifications.

The success of the program was underpinned the innovative collaboration between WPC Group and EAPL, who started from scratch by mapping out a detailed, site-specific training plan. The program's positive outcomes have extended far beyond the business itself, having enriched the regional community, and boosted the reputation and prestige of the apprenticeship program among locals.

*The apprentice program has been a huge success. The workforce is fully engaged in the program and actively committed to developing each of our apprentices into skilled tradespeople.*



WPC Group partnered with EAPL (in Australia and Thailand) and their selected Registered Training Organisation, TAFE Gippsland, to lead the development of the WPC Group-EAPL Mentored Apprenticeship Program, which launched in 2018.

## About EAPL

In 2017, Esso Australia Pty Ltd (EAPL) approached WPC Group, a leading national Group Training Organisation (GTO), about starting an apprenticeship program at two of its major production sites: Longford and Long Island Point in Victoria. Nationally significant industrial facilities, these sites produce crude oil, gas and as and liquefied petroleum gas for the Australian market.

## What prompted action?

In addition to increased awareness of the need to diversify, the need to renew its workforce and expand the skills base of the local area were key drivers of EAPL's motivation to establish a new apprenticeship and traineeship program. Neither the Longford nor Long Island Point sites had operated a structured program such as this for several years.

Additionally, there was a lack of understanding by students and careers advisors in local TAFEs and schools of the Fitter & Turner apprentice and Process Plant Operations trainee roles, or the career and financial prospects in these industries. A change to the delivery of training delivered by TAFE in regional areas – from day release to block release – also presented an opportunity for a structured apprenticeship program.

Finally, EAPL leadership purposefully felt that, given the relative socioeconomic disadvantage experienced in the region, providing direct employment and career opportunities to its residents was 'the right thing to do', as it would build local community resilience, boost skills profiles, and create positive flow-on effects.

"The apprentice program has been a huge success. The workforce is fully engaged in the program and actively committed to developing each of our apprentices into skilled tradespeople," said EAPL in a statement.

## What was done?

WPC Group partnered with EAPL (in Australia and Thailand) and their selected Registered Training Organisation, TAFE Gippsland, to lead the development of the WPC Group-EAPL Mentored Apprenticeship Program, which launched in 2018. Creating the program required extensive internal EAPL and community stakeholder engagement including working with other TAFEs, schools, local businesses and education providers.

The first intake provided opportunities for 26 young people to commence an apprenticeship or traineeship across EAPL's Longford and Hastings sites in Victoria's Gippsland and Mornington regions respectively.

These apprentices and trainees did not need to relocate to start their employment. Instead, they could stay at their regional homes with their families and undertake a skills-based apprenticeship or traineeship under the guidance of the many highly skilled and knowledgeable tradespeople across EAPL worksites.



A standout feature of the program was its tri-level mentoring system: apprentices received guidance from a WPC mentor, an EAPL mentor, and their immediate supervisor.

# What resources were needed?

A strategic business and community imperative, significant resources and investment were allocated to get this program off the ground and also run it in a best practice, sustainable way. This included:

## **Tri-level mentoring support**

An innovative feature of the program was the depth and frequency of mentoring provided to each apprentice. In addition to a WPC Group mentor, each apprentice had a EAPL mentor as well as their supervisor.

Program-specific quarterly review processes were developed to monitor performance, professional development, and growth, and proactively resolve any emerging issues. EAPL mentors were employee volunteers who undertook a comprehensive 3-day training program before being matched to an apprentice.

## **Safety training**

Apprentices underwent an extensive induction foundational skills and safety training (6-16 weeks, dependent on occupation) to obtain necessary safety cards before setting foot on an EAPL worksite, enabling apprentices to hit the ground running from day one.

## **Advanced training and certifications**

To complement their structured TAFE training, apprentices were given access to fully-funded training and certification courses including dangerous goods awareness, forklift, fire training, and first aid.

## **Relations with local business**

Partnerships were established with local companies to supplement the apprentice's breadth of professional experience across different industry environments through a 4-week rotation.

Rotafab was one of those businesses and supported the development of machining skills. Electrical commercial and residential skills were supported by Marathon Electrical.

# Lessons and insights for employers

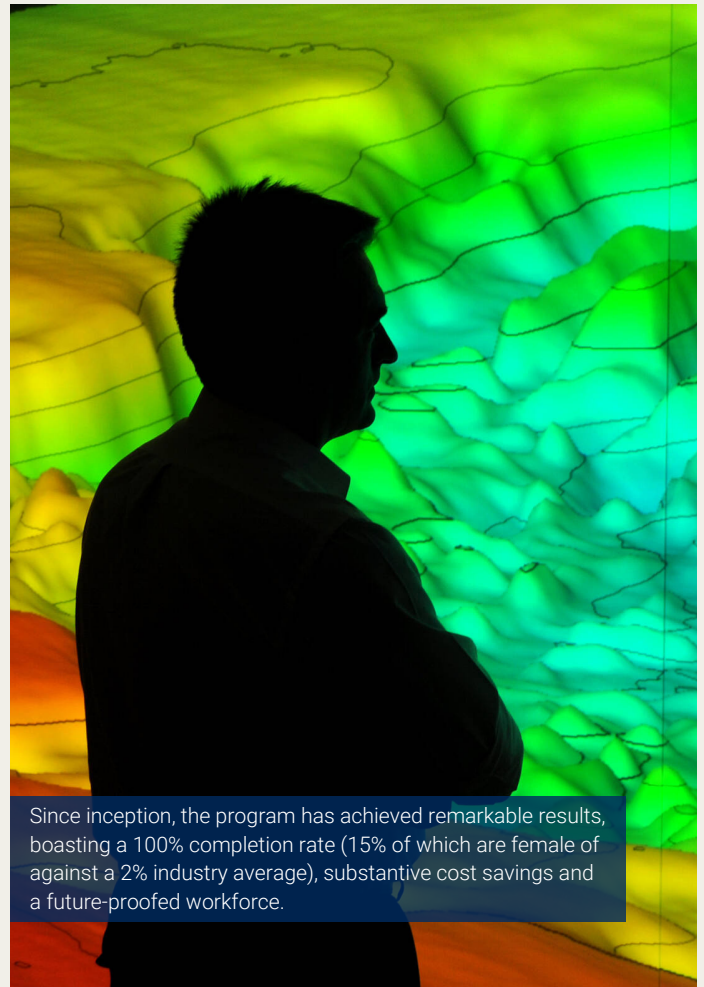
The design and delivery of the WPC Group–EAPL Mentored Apprenticeship Program presented both parties with a rare opportunity to design a cutting-edge apprentice training program from scratch. It incorporated a number of 'ideal world' elements to align the program to the future training needs of EAPL and position it for sustainable success without the constraints of pre-existing processes or attitudes.

Because EAPL had not operated a large-scale apprenticeship program across its worksites for many years, the company had little corporate memory for how to successfully engage and integrate apprentices into a complex industrial workplace. EAPL realised this would require extensive communication and consulting with internal stakeholders to build strategic alignment across the organisation.

To achieve this, at the beginning of the process, WPC Group and EAPL facilitated comprehensive planning with all relevant internal stakeholders to map out a plant-specific sequential training plan for each trade discipline. This ensured each function of EAPL operations contributed to the design of the program, and that the final program did not minimise or omit key local site-specific skills. This generated important organisation-wide awareness, belief and capability, giving stakeholders a sense of ownership of and responsibility for the success of the resulting program.

Another significant innovative feature of the WPC Group–EAPL program was the depth and frequency of the mentoring provided to each apprentice. In addition to ongoing support from a WPC Group mentor, each apprentice was provided with a dedicated EAPL workplace mentor as well as support from their supervisor. WPC and EAPL developed program-specific quarterly review processes to capture and review the multiple dimensions of each apprentice’s workplace performance and professional development, and identify growth opportunities and proactively resolve any emerging issues. This element of the program was an industry first, and has been highly successful.

EAPL’s investment in training has been critical to the program’s success. During its establishment, particular attention was given to identifying potential impediments to complete workplace participation, and designing a number of training activities that apprentices could undertake before formally commencing - including certifications and licences.



Since inception, the program has achieved remarkable results, boasting a 100% completion rate (15% of which are female of against a 2% industry average), substantive cost savings and a future-proofed workforce.

## What were the outcomes and impact?

The focus on widespread promotion and education of the program enabled EAPL to improve workplace diversity outcomes and workforce profiles within in the male-dominated industry. As of March 2023, since its commencement in 2018, the program has generated fantastic engagement and employment outcomes among participants:

- 73 apprentices and trainees to date, 11 have been female (15%), much higher than the industry average of less than 2%.
- 100% apprentice and trainee retention rate on the program.
- 5 apprentices and trainees have qualified with 43 continuing to work at EAPL sites or at external companies across the Gippsland and Mornington Peninsula regions.

This success has generated operating cost savings across a range of areas including recruitment, contractors, (lower-than industry-average) absenteeism levels and excellent quality and safety records. Additionally, EAPL reports the program has helped further their inclusive culture on site, alleviate potential skills shortages, improve access to workplace flexibility and, by pairing enthusiastic apprentices with experienced professionals, promote workforce dynamism.

The quality and prestige of the program continues to build amongst the Gippsland and Hastings communities. Several apprentices have spoken at local careers events and forums, driving continued interest and applications to be part of new intakes. Additionally EAPL have increased the regions’ skilled labour profile and aligned with their goal of keeping families together in the local area.

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