



Australian Government

# A U S T R A L I A N A P P R E N T I C E S H I P S

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## High energy apprentices

### Ergon Energy Vocational Programs

South Queensland region



Ergon Energy has a 98 per cent completion rate for their Australian Apprentices thanks to a dedicated training team and an in-depth recruitment process.

Vocational Programs Manager Bruce McMahon says the company has operated a dedicated program for Australian Apprentices for six years.

‘The apprenticeship program is around 10 per cent of our field-base workforce and the majority are in regional Queensland in places where it can be difficult to retain or attract staff,’ Bruce says.

Ergon Energy serves around 650 000 customers from Thursday Island to Stanthorpe and across regional Queensland. Of the more than 4000 employees, 319 are Australian Apprentices.

Australian Apprentices undertake a variety of qualifications including as distribution linesperson, system electrician, mechanical fitter, boilermaker, sheet metal worker and fitter.

The company started an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program last year and makes sure 10 per cent of the annual Australian Apprenticeships intake is Indigenous.

‘We were always trying to attract Indigenous applicants, particularly for Thursday Island or in other locations like Murgon. We try to help Indigenous applicants,’ Bruce says.

The company has developed its pre-vocational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program in partnership with the Australian Technical College of North Queensland.

‘It’s a 12-week training package, delivered half on site and half as external studies. The advantage is they don’t have to be away from home for too long,’ Bruce says.

The recruitment process helps the company retain most of their Australian Apprentices. Another advantage is that they can offer around 85 per cent of their graduating Australian Apprentices full-time work.

‘Attracting local apprentices in remote locations is really important for our workforce as the chances they will stay are higher,’ Bruce says.

‘The program has five dedicated field officers in each of our regions who visit depots and make sure the apprentices training program is on track.’

Stephen Vines, General Manager of Queensland Apprenticeship Services, says Ergon Energy’s Australian Apprenticeships program is really impressive.

‘I think you can see the personal commitment the staff have to the apprentices and trainees,’ Stephen says.

‘Some employers have a sole focus on the front end and recruiting. Ergon do that, but they also provide all the support they need to successfully complete their apprenticeship.’

Training is a priority and even an optional program, like Ergon's Trade Professional Program, has 85 per cent take up.

'We expect a lot from our tradesmen now. Customer service and managing skills are just as important as the trade itself. So the apprentices really see the value of broadening their skills,' Bruce says.

High performing second-year Australian Apprentices are encouraged to do tertiary studies. They get study time, a wage increase, reduce their training time by two years, and when they qualify they are guaranteed a job with the company.

Ergon Energy also runs the Sponsored Apprentice Program where current employees are nominated to add a trade qualification to their skills. In 2010 they will have 77 nation wide positions with 12 as sponsored positions.

'Our apprentices give us a lot of innovation, they come up with solutions and can really see things differently,' Bruce says.

'Being a regional winner for the Minister's Award for Excellence is valued recognition for our apprentice program. Ergon Energy is dedicated to training apprentices for our industry and selection for such a prestigious award indicates we are getting it right. We are proud of our program and apprentices. This award allows us to highlight the achievements of many individuals who make the program successful.'

