**Career Pathways in the Furnishing Sector:**

*(Cabinetmaking, Upholstery, Glass & Glazing, Furniture Finishing, Installation, Designer CAD/CAM and more)*

The furnishing industry offers a world of opportunity. From cabinetmaking and upholstery to digital design and manufacturing, every pathway begins with hands-on learning and can grow into a lifelong, rewarding career.

Celebrating these pathways is important - not only for the next generation of tradespeople but for the strength and sustainability of the industry itself. When employers take the time to show apprentices what’s possible, they help build confidence, motivation, and pride in the trade.

Apprentices who can see where their skills can take them are more likely to stay engaged, complete their qualification, and continue to grow within the business. Clear career pathways are one of the most powerful retention tools an employer can provide.

***Employer Tip: Start the conversation early on where their apprenticeship could take them - within your business and beyond. When apprentices can see their future, they’re more likely to stay committed and strive for excellence.***

**Why Show Career Pathways?**

Apprenticeships are more than just training - they’re the foundation for a career.

When apprentices understand how their skills build over time and what roles those skills can lead to, they’re more motivated to learn, stay safe, and progress. Pathway information also helps parents and school leavers see that an apprenticeship is a genuine “earn-while-you-learn” alternative to university, offering financial independence from day one.

Many tradespeople go on to become supervisors, designers, trainers, or business owners - all starting with the same first step: an apprenticeship.

**Career Pathways at a Glance:**

Most careers in the furnishing sector begin with a Certificate III Apprenticeship (such as MSF30322 Certificate III in Cabinet Making and Timber Technology) and can branch into a variety of directions.

A diagram of a company's career path

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

***Supervisor Tip: During reviews, ask your apprentice which pathway interests them most, then line up training and mentoring opportunities that move them in that direction.***

**Promoting Apprenticeships as a Smart Career Choice:**

When speaking with potential apprentices - or their parents and teachers - it’s important to highlight that apprenticeships are not just a job, they’re a paid pathway to a nationally recognised qualification and a lifelong career in a hands-on trade.

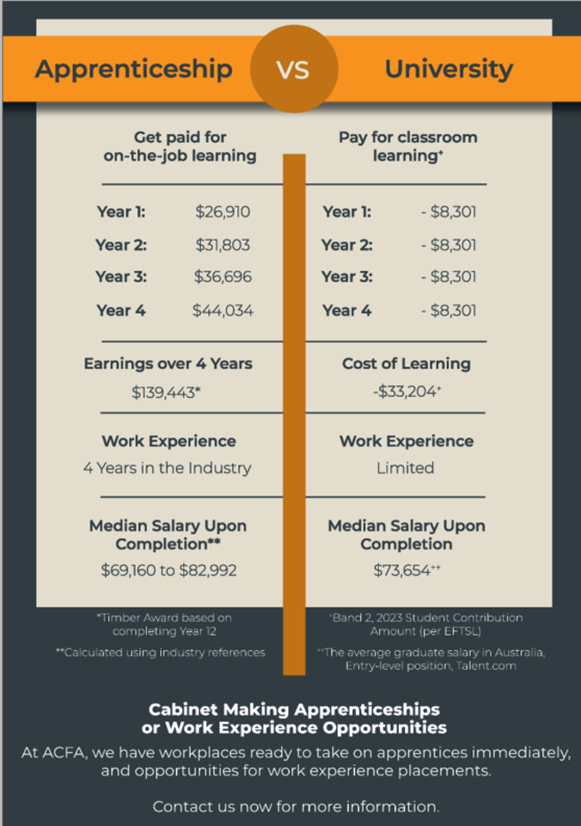
Unlike university study, where students often pay for years of learning before entering the workforce, apprentices start earning immediately while gaining real skills, work experience, and industry connections. By the time a university graduate is looking for their first full-time role, an apprentice can already have four years of paid experience, a qualification, and no student debt.

**How to Position It as an Employer**

* “Earn while you learn.” Apprentices get paid from day one, gaining skills that lead directly to full-time employment.
* “Real skills, real jobs.” Apprentices graduate with work-ready experience, not just theory - making them valuable to employers across the industry.
* “Debt-free qualification.” Apprentices finish their training with savings and experience, while university students often finish with large student loans.
* “Faster career progression.” By the time university students graduate, apprentices are often already qualified tradespeople earning competitive wages.
* “Hands-on learning.” Apprenticeships suit practical, creative, and problem-solving individuals who prefer learning by doing.

**Example Pitch:**  
“An apprenticeship lets you build your career while getting paid to learn.  
By the time a university student finishes studying, you’ll already be qualified, experienced, and earning a full trade wage - without the debt.”

**Place holder for Apprenticeship vs Uni image similar to below with updated figures (no ACFA branding)**



**2025 figures – (present in infographic like above)**

**Apprenticeship vs University**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Get Paid for on-the-job Training** | **Pay for Classroom Learning\*** |
| Year 1: $30,555 | Year 1 = $9,314 |
| Year 2: $36,111 | Year 2 = $9,314 |
| Year 3: $41,668 | Year 3 = $9,314 |
| Year 4: $50,001 | Year 4 = $9,314 |
| Total Earnt: $158,335\* | Total Cost: $37,256\* |
|  |  |
| **Work Experience** | **Work Experience** |
| 4 Years in the Industry | Limited |
|  |  |
| **Median Salary Upon Completion** | **Median Salary Upon Completion** |
| $53,622 to $69,160\*\* | $66,000 to $77,000 |

Apprenticeship:

\*Based on 2025 Timber Award for Apprentice Completing Year 12

\*\*Based on Level 4A of the 2025 Timber Award 2020 through to amounts calculated using industry references

University:

\* 2025 Band 2 student contribution amount for a Commonwealth Supported Place, per EFTSL (Equivalent Full-Time Study Load).

\*\*Average Graduate Salary in Australia, Entry Level Business, <https://au.gradconnection.com/>

**Case Study: From Apprentice to CEO**

**A true example of where an apprenticeship can lead.**

ACFA Chief Executive Officer, Dean Brakell leading Australia’s peak industry association for the furnishing sector began his career the same way many tradespeople do - as a cabinetmaking apprentice.

After completing his apprenticeship, he was promoted to Factory Foreman. In his fifth year, he was supervising 28 staff directly and 56 indirectly within a large commercial furniture business. His leadership skills and commitment to quality quickly led to further promotion as the Operations Manager within the same company.

Seeking new challenges, he then moved into the training sector as a Trainer and Assessor for an industry association’s Registered Training Organisation (RTO). Within a short time, he had advanced to the position of Training Manager, leading a team of trainers and assessors and overseeing national training delivery.

Dean’s next opportunity took him back into industry, leading a national franchise group as National Production Manager. In this role, he introduced new production systems, trained franchisees, negotiated national supplier agreements, and established production facilities across Australia.

Following several senior Operations Management positions in both small and large manufacturing plants, Dean returned to the association - first as a General Manager of Membership Services, and ultimately, as the Chief Executive Officer of the organisation.

**Key Takeaway:** Every role built on the skills and experience gained in the one before. This journey shows how a trade qualification can open doors to leadership, management, and executive positions - not only within the workshop but across the broader industry.

Placeholder - ADD another case study for apprentice – to successful business owner.

**How Employers Can Use Career Pathways**

* Show the ladder early: Add your own pathway map to your induction materials.
* Link work to growth: Explain how everyday tasks build toward future roles.
* Create small milestones: Recognise each achievement or competency reached. Some apprentice struggle to plan years in advance - give them small milestones - 6 weeks - 3 months - 6 months - 1 year.
* Rotate for learning: Expose apprentices to various areas machining, assembly, design, or installation.
* Pair with mentors: Connect apprentices with staff who share their career interests.
* Encourage education: Support apprentices to pursue Certificate IV, diploma, or assessor qualifications.

***Tip: Career conversations don’t have to be formal. Even a quick “Where do you want to go next?” can inspire motivation and long-term loyalty.***

**Supervisor Conversation Guide**

Use this guide in your check-ins or performance reviews.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Conversation Topic** | **Example Question** | **Purpose** |
| Career direction | “What part of the trade do you enjoy most?” | Identify interests and future pathways. |
| Skill development | “Which task would you like more practice in?” | Show commitment to skill-building. |
| Future goals | “Where do you see yourself in three years?” | Discuss progression and opportunity. |
| Next steps | “What skills can we focus on next to move you closer to that goal?” | Create a development plan. |
| Training connection | “This task links to your Training Plan unit - do you feel confident with it?” | Reinforce purpose and qualification progress. |

**In Summary**

* The furnishing industry offers diverse and rewarding career paths - from hands-on trades to business leadership.
* Showing these pathways helps apprentices stay motivated and connected to their goals.
* Use pathway maps, regular mentoring, and training discussions to make the journey visible.
* Keep learning at the heart of your business - skills in technology, leadership, and communication drive the industry forward.

***Bottom Line: Every apprentice is the start of a success story. When you celebrate their progress and show what’s possible, you build not just skilled tradespeople - but the future of the furnishing industry.***

**References and Sources**

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