**Supporting Female Apprentices: A Quick Reference Guide**

Women are an important and growing part of the furnishing and cabinet-making industry. Encouraging and supporting female apprentices strengthens your business by bringing fresh ideas, problem-solving styles, and leadership potential to the workplace. Making a conscious commitment to welcome women opens your business to 50% more of the population, helping to fill skill shortages and build a stronger, more sustainable team.

While the trade has traditionally been male-dominated, employers who create inclusive, respectful, and well-supported environments not only help apprentices thrive they also strengthen the entire team and industry.

**The Benefits of Women in Trades**

Hiring a female apprentice offers significant advantages for businesses. It enhances workplace diversity, introduces fresh perspectives and valuable skills, and helps alleviate the broader industry skills shortage. A diverse team contributes to a more inclusive and positive workplace culture, and female apprentices often demonstrate strong commitment and loyalty once employed.

By supporting the recruitment of women, companies also promote gender equality and play an active role in challenging outdated industry stereotypes

Women bring valuable perspectives and skills that strengthen teamwork, quality, and problem-solving across all areas of the business.

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| **Skill/Contribution** | **Business Value** |
| **Attention to Detail** | Strong focus on quality finishes and precision work, crucial for cabinet-making. |
| **Communication Skills** | Clear, respectful communication that builds positive team dynamics and client relationships. |
| **Safety Awareness** | Often more conscious of procedure, contributing to safer workplaces. |
| **Creative Thinking** | Innovative approaches to design, layout, and problem-solving. |
| **Reliability and Organisation** | Strong time management and consistency in completing tasks. |
| **Customer Focus** | Natural strength in client communication and presentation, especially in design and install environments. |
| **Improved Team Performance** | Diverse teams are shown to be more creative and effective problem solvers. |
| **Fresh Ideas and Perspectives** | Women entering traditionally male-dominated trades often challenge “the way things have always been done,” leading to new ideas and innovation. |
| **Soft Skills Strength** | Female apprentices often excel in communication, teamwork, and customer service, complementing technical skills in the workplace |

***Employer Tip:*** *A balanced team creates better results. Diversity in thinking and approach improves quality, teamwork, and workplace culture. The presence of women can positively shift workplace culture, encouraging professionalism, respect, and cooperation.*

**Creating an Inclusive Workplace**

**1. Create a Safe and Inclusive Workplace**

A safe and respectful environment is the foundation of success. Female apprentices need to know they will be treated fairly and protected from any form of bullying, discrimination or harassment.

* Set Clear Expectations: Enforce zero tolerance for harassment, intimidation, or inappropriate "banter" at induction and consistently. (this will include ensuring that your business has implemented the appropriate Workplace Policies, i.e. Bullying & Harassment, EEO & Anti-Discrimination and Sexual Harassment)
* Use Gender-Neutral Language when addressing the team (e.g., "team" or "crew" instead of "guys").
* Encourage Open Reporting and deal with issues promptly and confidentially.

**2. Provide the Right Facilities and Equipment**

Simple changes ensure female apprentices feel welcome and safe at work.

* **Amenities:** Provide clean, private amenities and ensure sanitary bins are available.
* **Correct PPE:** Offer correctly fitted **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**, including gloves, uniforms, and safety gear designed for women.
* **Access:** Ensure adequate lighting and safe access to all work areas.

**3. Pair with a Mentor or Supportive Role Model**

Mentorship is one of the biggest factors in apprentice retention.

* **Internal Support:** Pair new female apprentices with a supportive tradesperson or supervisor who communicates clearly and fairly.
* **External Mentorship:** If you don't have women in your team, your ACAP Provider can often help connect your apprentice with an external female mentor or industry network.
* **Check-ins:** Schedule regular check-ins (e.g., fortnightly) to discuss progress, challenges, and wellbeing.

**4. Promote Equal Access to Learning and Opportunities**

All apprentices must have equal access to training, tools, and progression opportunities.

* **Rotate Tasks Regularly:** Ensure all apprentices gain experience with machinery, assembly, installation, and finishing.
* **Ensure Inclusivity and Fairness:** Ensure fair and equitable task distribution among all apprentices. Make sure all apprentices receive a balanced variety of assignments to ensure full skill development.
* **Plan Ahead:** Discuss career goals and map out future opportunities early.

**5. Address Isolation and Build Team Connection**

Being the only woman in a male-dominated workplace can feel isolating.

* **Integration:** Introduce new apprentices properly to all team members on day one.
* **Teamwork:** Encourage shared problem-solving and collaboration—not competition or exclusion.
* **Belonging:** Include female apprentices in social and team-building activities.

**6. Support Work-Life Balance and Flexibility**

Offering reasonable flexibility supports retention, as women often balance multiple commitments.

* **Flexibility:** Offer flexible start or finish times where possible.
* **Communication:** Provide clear notice for overtime or schedule changes and encourage open communication about personal commitments without judgement.

**7. Celebrate Achievement and Build Confidence**

Recognition builds confidence and helps apprentices see their value.

* **Acknowledge Progress:** Celebrate achievements publicly—even small wins.
* **Nominate:** Nominate female apprentices for industry awards, programs, or leadership opportunities.
* **Inspire:** Encourage female apprentices to represent your business at expos or events to inspire the next generation.

**8. External and Industry Support Networks**

Encourage your apprentice to leverage these networks for peer support, mentorship, and career advice. These services are often free and confidential.

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| **Organisation** | **Support Provided** | **Links** |
| **Tradeswomen Australia (TWA)** | Advocacy, mentoring, inclusion training, and a job board for women in trades. | [tradeswomenaus.com](https://tradeswomenaus.com/) |
| **Supporting and Linking Tradeswomen (SALT)** | A non-profit providing a national support network and practical workshops. | [saltaustralia.org.au](https://saltaustralia.org.au/) |
| **National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)** | Networking events, professional development, and advocacy for women in construction and related industries (like cabinet-making). | [nawic.com.au](https://nawic.com.au/) |
| **Apprentice Connect Australia Provider (ACAP)** | Your free, first point of contact for mentoring, mediation, and specialist support for women in trades. | (Contact your local provider e.g., MEGT, BUSY at Work etc.) |
| **Mental Health Support** | Confidential crisis support and mental health resources. | [Beyond Blue](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/) / [Headspace](https://headspace.org.au/) |

**9. Building a Respectful Team Culture**

True inclusion is when respect is part of everyday work.

**Training: Make Inclusion Part of the Job**

Include gender awareness and respectful workplace behaviour in your regular team discussions.

* **Toolbox Talks:** Start a weekly or monthly **session focused on Respect and Inclusivity.** Topics can include:
  + Reviewing the company’s zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment.
  + Defining what constitutes a disrespectful workplace (e.g., inappropriate language, isolating behaviours, sexist jokes).
  + Discussing the importance of using gender-neutral language and how it makes the team more welcoming.
  + Reviewing the need for correct fitting PPE for all team members (referencing Step 2).
* **Induction:** Clearly state your expectations for respectful conduct from day one. Have all employees, including existing staff and apprentices, sign off on the company's code of conduct.
* **External Training:** Consider providing refresher training for supervisors and senior tradespeople on unconscious bias and how to effectively manage a diverse team.

**Intervene: Recognise and Address Bias Immediately**

A culture of respect is built on quick, consistent intervention. Do not allow discriminatory behaviour to be dismissed as "just a joke" or "banter."

* **Act Fast:** When you hear a comment or witness a behaviour that crosses the line, intervene immediately and privately. A delayed response implies acceptance.
* **Be Clear and Direct:** State that the comment or behaviour is not acceptable in your workplace and explain *why* it violates your policy. Focus on the behaviour, not the person (e.g., "That language is inappropriate," not "You are a problem").
* **Follow Up and Document:** Conduct a confidential follow-up with the apprentice and the individual involved. Maintain clear documentation of the incident and the action taken.
* **Use the Chain of Support:** If the issue involves the apprentice's direct supervisor, or if you need external mediation, immediately refer the matter to your AASN Provider for support.

**Reward Inclusivity: Make Respect a Performance Measure**

Recognition and reward systems should reinforce the positive culture you are trying to build.

* **Recognise Teamwork:** Reward employees who actively demonstrate teamwork and support, particularly those who step in to help an apprentice learn a new, complex skill or who demonstrate strong mentoring.
* **Integrate into Reviews:** Include **"**Demonstration of Inclusive and Respectful Behaviour**"** as a key metric in your annual or quarterly performance reviews for all staff.
* **Celebrate Mentors:** Publicly acknowledge and reward tradespeople who successfully mentor and retain female apprentices, highlighting their contribution to the business's success and future skill capacity.
* **Share Success Stories:** Use internal communications (or social media, with permission) to share stories of female apprentices thriving, which breaks down stereotypes and encourages others.

**CASE STUDY: ACFA Apprentice of the Year – Female apprentice success story**

**Key Message:** Supporting female apprentices strengthens your business and the industry. By creating safe, inclusive workplaces, providing mentorship, and recognising achievement, you build a stronger, more diverse, and more sustainable workforce for the future of cabinet making and furnishing.

**PLACEHOLDER one page Infographic**

**Workplace awareness checklist for women in trades**

This checklist supports employers in creating safe, respectful and inclusive workplaces for women in trades, particularly in male–dominated factory environments.

**Facilities and Physical Environment**

* Separate, clean toilet facilities are provided.
* Women’s toilets include sanitary disposal bins
* Appropriate change rooms or private spaces area available.
* PPE and uniforms are supplied in suitable sizes and fits (not just men’s sizes).

**Workplace Culture and Behaviour**

* Workplace code of conduct includes zero tolerance for harassment or biased behaviour
* Acceptable workplace language is communicated and reinforced
* Supervisors encourage inclusion and participation in team activities and discussions

**Training and Awareness**

* Staff receive training in respectful workplace behaviour and unconscious bias
* Supervisors are trained to support and mentor women apprentices
* Bystander intervention training is provided so all staff know how to act if issues arise

**Safety and Support Systems**

* WHS risk assessments consider the specific needs of women (including psychosocial hazards)
* Clear reporting processes are in place for inappropriate behaviour or safety concerns
* Reports are treated confidentially with no risk of reprisal
* A mentoring or buddy program is available, ideally

## **Women in Trades**

Support is available for women who start an apprenticeship in eligible trade occupations on the [Australian Apprenticeships Priority List](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.au/support-and-resources/financial-support-apprentices-priority-occupations#financial-support-for-apprentices-working-in-priority-occupations-2). Eligible occupations are those that have had historically low rates of participation from women.

### **What support will I get?**

* Personalised advice and information on career options and industry mentoring
* Access to professional networks
* Additional well-being care and support
* Entrepreneurship training
* Access to [additional financial support](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.au/support-and-resources/financial-support-apprentices)