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 **MIGAS**
APPRENTICES & TRAINEES

In this issue



Lachlan Kemble
takes out Regional
WorldSkills Gold

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Editor's note



Australia's future trade capability is being built in workplaces across the country. It grows when apprentices are trusted with meaningful work, tradespeople make time to teach and employers invest beyond the work outputs.

Our cover story follows Ruby Watson, who entered mechanical fitting with little knowledge of the trade and is now a qualified fitter maintaining critical equipment across Shell QGC's Western Downs operations. She took an opportunity, backed herself and found where she belongs.

Harry Steptoe's story looks at what comes next. Ten months after qualifying as a carpenter, he is overseeing his first home build and learning that responsibility on site reaches well beyond the tools. Lachlan Kemble's Regional WorldSkills gold shows the value of setting the standard higher. The medal was won on competition day, but the standard behind it was built over four years of asking to be judged more critically.

What I take from these stories is that apprenticeships matter well beyond the qualification. They build judgement and confidence while keeping practical knowledge moving into the next generation.

Elsewhere, we look at new tools and technology changing how work gets done, share details of this year's MiScholarship program, now open for applications, and begin the lead-in to National Apprenticeship Week 2027. Its theme, Handed Down, Handed On, recognises that trade skills endure because people choose to share them.

David Hoey
Chief Executive Officer
MiGroup Australia

Industry round-up

BUZZ >

INNOVATION ON SHOW

September marked Queensland Manufacturing Month, putting the spotlight on the people, skills and technology behind the state's manufacturing industry.

Through Inside Advanced Manufacturing tours, students got onto factory floors to see what the work actually looks like today, from robotics and automation to high-precision production.

For employers, it was a chance to open the doors to future talent and get apprentices involved in what's happening locally.

Keep an eye on Manufacturing Skills Queensland's channels for news and events. And, if you'd like to get involved head to msq.org.au.



TECH >

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Finding Her Bearings



When Ruby Watson applied for a mechanical fitting apprenticeship with Shell's QGC business through MIGAS, she knew almost nothing about the trade. Four years later, she's maintaining critical equipment across Queensland's Western Downs and discovering that confidence isn't something you arrive with, it's something you build.

When Ruby Watson finished Year 12, she knew university wasn't for her.

The classroom had never really suited her, and after moving to Canberra during high school, she wasn't convinced the traditional path was the right one. A cousin suggested she return to Queensland for a work health and safety traineeship in Chinchilla. She took the opportunity, and for the first time found herself surrounded by an industry she knew very little about.

When she saw a Shell QGC apprenticeship advertised through MIGAS, she decided to give it a go.

"I just thought, 'Why not?' I'm young. I think I have the ability," she said.

It's a characteristically understated way of describing a decision that changed the course of her career.

Today, Ruby is a qualified mechanical fitter based near Chinchilla, servicing the large engines that power Shell QGC's gas compression facilities across the Western Downs.

Her work ranges from scheduled servicing and inspections to overhauls that keep critical equipment operating safely and reliably.

Ask her what changed most during the apprenticeship, though, and the answer has less to do with the technical side.

"Confidence," she said. "Personally, that's still something I sort of struggle with."

It's an honest answer, and one that resurfaces as she reflects on the past four years.

Mechanical fitting is demanding work, and some tasks require as much physical effort as technical skill.

"I'm a relatively strong person," she said. "But I do find some physical aspects of the job challenging."

She was also stepping into a trade that has been more traditionally male dominated.

"My mum was quite worried," Ruby said with a laugh. "She was like, 'Are you sure? It's going to be something different.'"

Ruby understands why but says she quickly found herself surrounded by people who wanted her to succeed.

"The people I've worked with have been really understanding. Any time I need help with anything, they've always been receptive," she said.

She credits those relationships with shaping her apprenticeship as much as any technical training.

"I think networking well within the team has probably made the biggest impact," she said.

For Ruby, returning to Queensland carried another layer of significance. A proud Bigambul woman, she now works across country that holds longstanding connections to her family.

"QGC has given me opportunities. They really focus on building healthy relationships with the Traditional Owners."

One of the defining features of Shell QGC's apprenticeship program is that apprentices rotate through different teams each year, gaining experience with different equipment, different people and different ways of working.

As is the nature of an apprenticeship, just as Ruby found her feet in one team, she'd move to another.

"It's always different equipment, so that can be a challenge in itself," she said. "You're constantly learning."

Looking back, she sees those rotations as one of the most valuable parts of the program.

"I think it's good that they move us around because you're always learning. By the end of your first year you think, 'Yep, I've got this.' Then you move again and learn something new," Ruby said.

She pauses for a moment before adding what might be the apprenticeship's biggest lesson. "When you're younger, you're trying to find out who you are. I think that really shapes you in your own way," she said.

One rotation, in particular, stands out. Working with the commissioning team introduced Ruby to a completely different side of the business as new facilities were brought online and handed over for operation.

"When you're younger, you're trying to find out who you are."

She doesn't describe it as the highlight because it was bigger or more important than anything else.

She simply enjoyed seeing another part of an industry she'd barely known existed a few years earlier.

Not long after qualifying, Ruby found herself working alongside an apprentice of her own.



Ruby on site at Shell's Western Downs operations, where she's built her trade from the ground up.

"It was really weird," she said. "He asked me questions and I'm like, 'Do I actually know that?'"

Then she catches herself.

"I just took a second to remember I do know what I'm doing," Ruby said.

"As an apprentice, you could always ask someone to check something. Now you've got to teach yourself, reassure yourself and back yourself a bit."

The shift from apprentice to tradesperson isn't just about technical competence, it's about trusting your own judgement.

Although she's only recently qualified, Ruby has already achieved one goal she set herself early on by securing ongoing employment with Shell QGC.

"I was lucky enough to get a job with Shell after completing my MIGAS apprenticeship, and that was one of my goals," she said.

The next goal is less about titles than experience. She wants to keep learning, grow her confidence and become a better technician.

And, for anyone wondering whether an apprenticeship is worth taking on, her advice is refreshingly straightforward.

"Just do it," Ruby said.

"I was unsure myself. I just thought, 'What's the worst that can happen?'"

It's a question Ruby seems quietly pleased she never overthought.

Pictured: The next generation of apprentices commenced with Shell QGC Upstream and MIGAS in early 2026.



From the Ground Up

Ten months ago, Harry Steptoe was finishing his carpentry apprenticeship with MIGAS and host employer, Clarke Constructions.

Today, he's overseeing his first home build from the ground up, a two-storey house that started the year as a blank patch of grass and is now nearing handover.

"They say you learn the most in your first year being qualified," Harry said.

"As an apprentice you learn the hands-on skills of the trade. But not how to manage ten different trades at the same time."

The shift from apprentice to overseeing a full job has meant learning skills well beyond the tools.

"It's taught me better people skills more than anything, along with organisation and management," he said, crediting experienced mentors at Clarke's for helping him through the transition.

Down the track, Harry may find himself teaching those same skills to someone else. For now, first-year MIGAS apprentice Dylan is working alongside him on the build, learning the trade from the ground up in the most literal sense.

Frames are up, the roof's on, and cabinetry is going in, with handover only weeks away. For anyone finishing their own apprenticeship soon, Harry's advice is straightforward.

"Take everything in your stride," he said. "You do not know everything, and every day will be a learning curve. Show the right intent and skill set, and you'll be setting yourself up for a fruitful career."



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Professional Excellence
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Proving His Mettle

Two weeks out from WorldSkills, Lachlan Kemble discovered the competition would hinge on a welding technique he had never used. What followed was a convincing lesson in backing yourself.

There are probably better times to learn that a major welding competition is going to test you on something you have never actually done, but for Lachlan, the news arrived about two weeks before WorldSkills.

The competition would involve fully coded structural welding, assessed to trade-certified standards, with stick welding firmly on the agenda. Lachlan remembers looking at another competitor when they realised what they were walking into.

"Man, we've never done stick welding before," he said.

Talking with some of the other competitors beforehand didn't help settle the nerves either. He was already playing down his chances, telling the others he was "just a fabricator," as he'd recently been spending more time on the tools fabricating than welding.

Then he discovered two of the people he was competing against welded on site for a living, which gave him another reason to wonder how the day might unfold.

The competition was judged across 14 criteria covering penetration, consistency, overfill and underfill, with tolerances tight enough that being a single millimetre out of alignment across 20 millimetres of weld was enough to lose a point. Every competitor was either a fourth-year apprentice or newly qualified, yet they were being asked to work to a Certificate IV coded standard,

beyond what most had been training towards.

Looking good from the outside wasn't enough, either. Once the welding was finished, the judges would break the work apart to inspect what was happening underneath, exposing faults that couldn't be hidden by a tidy finish.

"It just looked like a block of steel. We'd cut it and see what happened," Lachlan said.

For the first batch of welds, the doubts stayed with him, although as the competition wore on he began to realise he was holding his own. That became clearer when a supervising teacher stopped at Lachlan's bay and questioned one of his welds, convinced the position he was using couldn't produce a clean result.

"He came in, watched me do it, and said, 'That's ridiculous. I've never seen something that tidy, in that profile, before.'"

By then, the description Lachlan had offered earlier in the day, "I'm just a fabricator", was beginning to look a little conservative.

He went on to win regional gold, a result that travelled quickly back to his host employer, Shepherd's Transport Equipment, and added some fuel to a nickname that had already been circulating around the workshop: 'Best Best Welder', or BBW for short. The initials are stamped across his tools and what began as a joke has stuck well enough that his bosses now use the name when they want his attention, or simply want to give him a hard time.

For all the attention that comes with the medal, Lachlan traces the result back to something much less dramatic than finding another gear on competition day.



Lachlan Kemble, hard at work on the tools.

In his first year at TAFE, he asked his teachers to hold his work to a higher standard than the rest of the cohort, and he continued making the same request through every training block that followed.

"I've always demanded to be held to a higher standard because I want to grow faster, get better, do more," he said.

That decision meant four years of inviting closer scrutiny of his work than was strictly required. When WorldSkills suddenly presented him with unfamiliar techniques and expectations beyond his formal training, he had already spent most of his apprenticeship getting used to the feeling of being stretched.

"You can still get better, you can chase perfection. You'll never get it, but you can keep chasing it like a dog chasing a bone," he said.

For a bloke whose tools already declare him the 'Best Best Welder', Lachlan doesn't appear particularly interested in whether the nickname is deserved just yet. In his mind, there is still better work to be done.



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