



Examining Earn While You Learn Models

Success Rates and Challenges
in the Global Contexts

Summary Paper





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Background and context

The care and support sectors face sustained workforce shortages due to rising demand and high turnover, and the supply of skilled graduates is impacted by low completion rates in key qualifications. Alternative pathways and employment models need to be explored to enable the sector to attract the workforce it needs – now and into the future. Earn While You Learn (EWYL) models have the potential to attract more workers into the sector by integrating formal education with pay and practical industry experience to lift completions. EWYL models allow students to earn income while completing their qualifications, ensuring better outcomes. While these models show promise, and are used in other industries, they have varying levels of uptake across HumanAbility sectors—Aged Care and Disability Services, Children’s Education and Care (CEC), Health, Human (Community) Services, and Sport and Recreation.

Methodology

This summary paper provides an overview of a more in-depth background paper, which is the initial stage of HumanAbility’s Earn While You Learn (EWYL) Research Project.

The background paper uses a systematic approach to the literature, conducting an investigation spanning seven databases with derived findings from the analysis of 121 pieces of grey literature and 16 peer-reviewed articles.

Purpose

Stakeholder feedback for the 2024 HumanAbility Workforce Plan highlights the challenges the sector faces in recruiting, attracting and retaining the skilled workforce needed to meet current and future demand. Stakeholders cite a range of contributing factors, including the scarcity of quality practical work placements, particularly in regional and remote areas and the growing issue of ‘placement poverty’ faced by students as they try to balance study with paid work to cover basic costs of living.¹ As a result, HumanAbility’s 2024 Workforce Plan prioritises “improving the quality of, and access to, contemporary training and qualifications”.² This commitment reflects our dedication to identifying systemic challenges and exploring evidence-informed approaches to enhance training accessibility and outcomes.

This summary paper is part of a preliminary assessment of a four-phase research project. The project aims to consider EWYL models for both entry-level and existing workforce upskilling, thus supporting career development and pathways.

¹ HumanAbility. (2024). Workforce Plan 2024.

<https://humanability.com.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/WFP/Workforce%20Plan%202024.pdf> (accessed March 02, 2025)

² Ibid.

The findings from this phase will inform the subsequent research phases:

Research Phases	
Phase 2	Identify promising practices and features of identified EWYL models implemented or evaluated in Australia in recent years across all HumanAbility sectors and hospitality, retail, business, and construction sectors/occupations that could be applied more broadly.
Phase 3	Identify and examine the barriers and facilitators affecting the uptake and completion of current EWYL models (learners' perspectives), as well as their implementation (employers' perspective), across all HumanAbility sectors.
Phase 4	Co-develop models and resources (such as decision-making trees and journey maps) to help services, systems, employers and training providers assess their suitability and readiness for implementation.

Chapter 1: What are Earn While You Learn (EWYL) Models?

This chapter defines the scope of EWYL, examines its types in the Australian context, and introduces a framework for categorising different models.

Definition and scope

“Earn While You Learn”, which may include ‘Work Integrated Learning (WIL)’^{3,4} Work-based Learning, or Wage-based Learning, is a broad-based term that intends to capture a wide variety of educational strategies that integrate paid work with structured learning experiences.⁵

EWYL models emphasise that knowledge is cultivated through hands-on experiences and thoughtful reflection.⁶ By integrating employment with training, and embedding learning in authentic work environments, these models help address skills gaps and shortages while providing students with accessible educational pathways that lead to formal qualifications and credentials.⁷

Types of EWYL Models: Australian Context

EWYL models are recognised as a priority and strategic focus for education providers in Australia,⁸ and there is increasing interest in governments supporting their use,⁹ yet their interpretation varies significantly across institutions, particularly between Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education.¹⁰ Broadly, these models combine paid work with formal training, often leading to nationally recognised qualifications. EWYL models in Australia include apprenticeships, traineeships, cadetships, paid internships, paid placements, GYO initiatives, co-op programs, paid practicums or paid versions of university work-integrated learning (WIL).

EWYL models, including apprenticeships and traineeships, have been crucial to Australia’s skills development system, providing practical employment-based training that supports the growth of skills

³ Paid placements including scholarships, summer vacation programs, and internships offered by major organisations, can be considered valid forms of Work Integrated Learning (WIL).

⁴ Edith Cowan University. (n.d.). *WIL for students*. <https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/science/employability/work-integrated-learning/students> (accessed May 15, 2025)

⁵ Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. (2016). *A practical guide for work-integrated learning: Effective practices to enhance the educational quality of structured work experiences offered through colleges and universities*. <https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/CCLT/pdfs/heqco-practical-guide-wil.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2025)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Kay, J., Ferns, S., Russell, L., Smith, J., & Winchester-Seeto, T. (2019). *The emerging future: Innovative models of work-integrated learning*. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 20(4), 401-413. https://www.ijwil.org/files/IJWIL_20_4_401_413.pdf (accessed May 25, 2025)

⁹ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2024). *Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System Final Report: Skills for tomorrow: Shaping the future of Australian apprenticeships*. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/16795/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-final-report/39422/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system-final-report/pdf> (accessed June 24, 2025)

¹⁰ Campbell, M., Russell, L., McAllister, L., Smith, L., Tunny, R., Thomson, K., & Barrett, M. (Year). *A framework to support assurance of institution-wide quality in work integrated learning: Final Report*. Queensland University of Technology; RMIT University; The University of Sydney. <https://research.qut.edu.au/wilquality/wp-content/uploads/sites/261/2019/12/Final-Report.pdf> (accessed May 25, 2025)

and knowledge. Apprenticeships have primarily been linked to trade professions (e.g. plumbing, carpentry, or electrical work), while traineeships include service-related roles, providing more career paths beyond traditional apprenticeships (e.g. aged care and disability services, ECEC).¹¹ Apprenticeships and traineeships are commonly categorised as trade and non-trade, and in 2020, represented 17% of all students enrolled in Vocational Education and Training (VET).¹²

EWYL models are typically integrated into educational programs aligned to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), which includes levels 1-10. These models also recognise the skills and competencies acquired through practical engagement.¹³

¹¹ National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). (2001). *Australian apprenticeships: Research at a glance*. Research summary. ISBN 0 87397 695 9. https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/file/0024/10887/australian-apprenticeships-research-at-a-glance-543.pdf (accessed March 02, 2025)

¹² Stanwick, J., Ackehurst, M., & Frazer, K. (2021). *Issues in apprenticeships and traineeships – a research synthesis*. Research summary. National Centre for Vocational Education Research. ISBN 978-1-925717-82-2. https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0051/9669669/Issues-in-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-a-research-synthesis.pdf (accessed March 02, 2025)

¹³ Atkinson, G. (2016). *A framework to support work-based learning and work-integrated learning: Fostering engagement with employers*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research. https://www.ncver.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/60281/Work-based-learning.pdf

Table 1: Types of EWYL models in Australia, and their attributes

Model	Entry Requirements	Duration	Qualification	Funding/Support	Employment/Qualification Outcome
Apprenticeship	Usually, minimum age of 16 years; ¹⁴ may require trade prerequisites (e.g. school certificate not essential)	3–4 years (full-time)	Trade or para-professional certificate/diploma	Employer pays wages; government subsidies/incentives often apply; training subsidised through Commonwealth/State funding	Completion often yields a trade qualification but can also lead to a non-trade qualification; On completion an apprentice may or may not continue to be employed by the company
Traineeship	Minimum age of 15 years; ¹⁵ no formal education needed	6 months – 2 years (full- or part-time)	Vocational Certificate or Diploma (e.g. Cert II)	Employer wages plus state/federal training subsidies (e.g. Smart & Skilled, Free TAFE)	Completion leads to entry-level qualification; often employed by same employer
School-Based Traineeships (SBATs)	Year 10-12, school and employer agreement	1–2 years alongside school	Partial Cert II/III	Paid part-time work, subsidised training	Can transition to complete traineeship, apprenticeship or employment
Cadetship	Often current university student or soon-to-be; selection by employer/university	Up to 3–4 years (aligned with degree)	University degree or advanced diploma	Funded by employer (salary to cadet), may include scholarship; course fees sometimes employer-paid	Completion usually leads to guaranteed interview or job offer (especially in public/private sector)

¹⁴ The general minimum age for starting an apprenticeship is 16 years old, however for certain apprenticeship programs, especially those fields like construction, automotive and engineering the age requirements may be 18 years old if the nature of the work involves certain health and safety risks.

¹⁵ The minimum age is 15 years in all states/territories, though some allow earlier starts under special arrangements with school. Students as young as Year 10 can begin school-based traineeships, where part time is spent working while still enrolled in VET in Schools programs. After completing the equivalent of Year 10 young people can transition into full-time traineeships.

Paid Placements ¹⁶	Enrolled in required course; placement arranged by university/VET institution providing the course	Short-term (weeks to months, part of study requirements)	N/A (mandatory part of some Vocational Education and Training (VET) or university courses – set out in work placement hours)	Employer pays student (awarded wages) during placement; may be subsidised by scholarships	Student gains practicum experience without debt; may improve job prospects. Required for course completion.
Paid Practicums ¹⁷	Enrolled in required program	60–100+ days across higher education degree	Mandatory for certain courses e.g. teaching, nursing	Commonwealth programs (e.g. Commonwealth Prac Payment); Wage subsidies and payments; Grants and institutional support	Required for professional registration and to obtain qualification associated with the course
Grow Your Own (GYO) Initiatives	Varies – often seeks local community members and/or specific cohorts e.g. regional/remote, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander or CALD	Varies (project-based; often multi-year planning); employer or local area initiative	May include vocational/diploma qualifications or on-the-job accreditation	Grants or partnerships funded by government or NGOs (e.g. workforce planning grants); sometimes self-funded or through donations and philanthropy	Builds local workforce capacity; many participants progress to local jobs or remain with the employer with which initial training was undertaken

¹⁶ Differs from paid practicums in that they are often broader, structured work periods that may span weeks or months and often resembles regular employment within a training framework.

¹⁷ Differs from paid placements in that they are often short-term, supervised work experiences embedded in academic programs where any payment is usually a modest stipend or reimbursement rather than wage.

Co-op Programs	University students with high academic results, employer interviews	3–5 years including work periods	Undergraduate degree	Paid placements, scholarship funding	Industry experience, graduate employment pathways
Internships	Final-year university student or recent graduate	4–24 weeks	No formal qualifications, may count toward credit	Often unpaid or stipended; via providers	Industry experience, potential job pathway
University Work-integrated learning (WIL)	Enrolled in university program	Varies (100-600 hrs. typical)	Degree credit (no standalone qualification)	University-administered, often unpaid however, can include paid placements including scholarships, summer vacation programs, and internships, offered by large organisations.	Enhanced employability, often leads to job offers
TAFE-Integrated Employment Programs	TAFE course enrolment in addition to employer partnership	3–12 months	Certificate or Diploma	Skills First/Job Trainer and employer support	Often job offers post-placement
Project-based Work-integrated learning	Final year or mid-program enrolment, academic approval	Varies (semester or intensive block)	Degree or VET credit	Institutional support, occasionally industry co-funding	Real-world experience, industry connections, portfolio building
Industry-Based Learning (IBL)	Selected via academic performance	6–12 months	Degree credit	Paid by host organisation	Strong employment links post-graduation

EWYL Models: Types and Uses

The literature and stakeholder experience have shown that these models differ significantly in terms of name, structure, purpose, and delivery; however, they all share a core objective of integrating paid or structured work experience with formal learning to enhance job readiness and credential attainment. To better understand the typology of EWYL models in Australia, a categorisation framework has been developed (see Table 2 below). This framework groups EWYL models into several overarching categories based on shared structural attributes, including the nature of the employment relationship, the level of integration between earning and learning, the role of industry partners, funding mechanisms, and the type of qualification outcomes.

Table 2: Earn While You Learn Models—Categorisation Framework

Formal Apprenticeship/Traineeship Models		
Apprenticeships	School-Based Traineeships (SBATS)	Traineeships
Cadetships	Grow Your Own (GYO) Initiatives	
VET and University Education Integrated WIL		
Paid Practicums	Internships	Project-Based WIL
Clinical Placements	Paid Placements	Industry-Based Learning (IBL)
Co-operative Programs	Higher Education WIL Programs	TAFE-Integrated Employment Programs

Chapter 2: EWYL models in the care and support sectors

This chapter explores how EWYL models are being applied across the care and support sector and discusses cross-sector challenges that impact their implementation.

Within Australia's care and support sectors, the Children's Education and Care (CEC) sector has an exceptionally high uptake of traineeships in ECEC. This is in part due to the sector's regulatory environment, which requires services to meet staffing ratios of a specified number of qualified educators per child. This differs across different states and territories and is as follows:

Table 3: ECEC Centre-based ratio requirements

Age of children	Educator to child ratio	Applies
Birth to 24 months	1:4	All states and territories
Over 24 months and less than 36 months	1:5	All states and territories excluding VIC
	1:4	VIC
36 months up to and including preschool age	1:11	ACT, NT, QLD, SA, VIC
	1:10	NSW
	1:10 2:25 for children attending a preschool program	TAS
	1:10	WA
Over preschool age	1:15	NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, NSW
	1:11	ACT
	If no Kindergarten children present 1:10 for first 12 children then 1:13 (e.g. If 11 or 12 children present, 2 staff members still required) Refer to table in Reg 369 for full breakdown	WA

Source: The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA). Educator to child ratios¹⁸

¹⁸ Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (n.d.). *Educator to child ratios*. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/educator-to-child-ratios> (accessed June 26, 2025)

This also means that trainees undertaking Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care are also counted in staffing ratios.¹⁹ This surge in the sector is driven by acute workforce shortages in childcare, necessitating the rapid skill development of new educators.²⁰ Government policies have been effective in encouraging increased use of traineeships. For example, in Western Australia, state government investment in free or low-fee training, and new eligibility criteria, nearly doubled ECEC traineeship uptake in one year.²¹ The Australian Government's Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System provides substantial financial support to employers and trainees in priority occupations, including ECEC.²² Employers can receive up to \$5,000 in training support payments over two years.²³ Additionally, the Fee-Free TAFE initiative, a collaboration between the Australian Government and state and territory governments, offers fee-free training in priority areas such as ECEC. This includes TAFE students having the opportunity to enrol in a Certificate III or Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Care without incurring any tuition costs.²⁴ This reduces financial barriers for students and supports the development of a skilled workforce in high demand including in ECEC. Other programs include:

- **Early Childhood Practicum Placement Grant:** Students pursuing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in ECEC can receive up to \$5,000 in support if they complete their final practicum in a service that offers an approved kindergarten program.²⁵
- **Rural and remote residential program:** Provides support to educators from regional, rural, and remote areas to complete their early childhood education qualifications.²⁶

Sport and Recreation have embraced traineeships as a workforce pipeline. Entry-level roles in sports coaching, fitness, and community recreation are often filled through traineeship programs, which often provide dedicated group training support. AFL SportsReady, a national not-for-profit organisation, is a notable example. Since 1995, they have provided employment traineeships and training for over 4,000 school leavers across various organisations, such as governing bodies, AFL clubs, golf courses, and secondary schools.²⁷ Currently, they employ more than 500 trainees and apprentices nationwide, spanning a wide range of industries.²⁸ This longstanding EWYL culture in sports means clubs, gyms, and recreation centres can train young staff on the job while they earn a certificate qualification. Many sport and recreation courses, such as coaching and outdoor recreation, are offered through

¹⁹ NSW Government. (2024). *Compliance focus – educator ratios and adequate supervision*. NSW Department of Education. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/leadership/news/compliance-focus-educator-ratios-and-adequate-supervision#tabs0> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²⁰ Pickering, C. (2025). *Tools down: Australia's apprenticeship boom is over*. Hiring Lab. <https://www.hiringlab.org.au/blog/2025/04/23/australias-apprenticeship-boom-is-over/> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²¹ Government of Western Australia. (2023, July). *Traineeship boost for WA's early childhood education workforce*. <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook-Labor-Government/Traineeship-boost-for-WA%27s-early-childhood-education-workforce-20230629> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²² Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2025). *Australian Apprenticeships Priority List – 1 January 2025*. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/16762/australian-apprenticeships-priority-list-1-january-2025/39275/australian-apprenticeships-priority-list-1-january-2025/pdf> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²³ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. (2022). *Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System: Frequently Asked Questions*. <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/13749/australian-apprenticeships-incentive-system-frequently-asked-questions/30140/australian-apprenticeships-incentive-system-frequently-asked-questions/pdf> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²⁴ Queensland Government. (n.d.). *Early childhood education and care: Incentives and subsidies*. <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/careers/incentives-and-subsidies> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Sports People. (n.d.). *Welcome to the AFL SportsReady Job Board*. <https://www.sportpeople.com.au/pages/19087-welcome-to-the-afl-sportsready-job-board> (accessed June 26, 2025)

²⁸ Ibid.

apprenticeship/traineeship pathways and benefit from government training subsidies similar to those in other priority sectors. These arrangements help meet the strong demand in the sector and provide clear pathways for youth leaving school, making traineeships popular in the sector.

In contrast, other HumanAbility sectors, such as Aged Care and Disability Services, historically have had less use of traineeships. The HumanAbility 2024 Workforce Plan highlights a lack of EWYL models in these sectors, partly due to funding constraints and highly casualised workforces that make structured traineeships challenging to implement.²⁹

Compared to other HumanAbility sectors, CEC and Sport and Recreation have a blend of acute skills demand and supportive policy settings. This includes wage subsidies and fee-free courses, which enable a significantly greater use of traineeships across these sectors.

However, to note, when viable, EWYL models in these sectors are very effective at rapidly upskilling and qualifying its existing workers. For example, BlueCare in the Aged Care and Disability Services sector has achieved considerable success with its traineeship program, launching more than 433 traineeships since February 2022 and maintaining a retention rate of 71%.³⁰ Nevertheless, while traineeships help alleviate staffing shortages, they do come with challenges. Recent workforce surveys reveal high turnover of trainees and experienced educators in the ECEC sector, reflecting low satisfaction amongst both groups.³¹ Industry feedback in the sector suggests that a heavy reliance on trainees can overwhelm experienced staff, who must balance mentoring responsibilities with their own workloads, which can drive job dissatisfaction and increase attrition.³²

Table 4 below provides a breakdown of the most commonly used EWYL models across HumanAbility sectors.

Table 4: EWYL models in use across HumanAbility sectors

²⁹ HumanAbility. (2024). *Workforce Plan 2024*. <https://humanability.com.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/WFP/Workforce%20Plan%202024.pdf> (accessed March 02, 2025)

³⁰ CHECKUP. (2025). *Building a stronger workforce: BlueCare’s approach to training and placement*. <https://checkup.org.au/news-publications/latest-news/building-a-stronger-workforce-bluecares-approach-to-training-and-placement/> (accessed June 10, 2025)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jobs and Skills Australia. (2024). *The Future of Early Childhood Education Profession. Early childhood education and care workforce capacity study*. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/19636/future-early-childhood-education-profession/2658/future-early-childhood-education-profession-extended-report/pdf> (accessed May 05, 2025)

Sector	Most common EWYL model	Notes
Aged Care, Disability Services	Traineeships. Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing and/or Disability) while in employment, around 1 - 2 years. ³³	On completion, graduates have strong prospects of ongoing employment (often with the same employer). ³⁴ The availability of traineeships remains limited, posing challenges to meeting the growing demand for skilled workers.
Health	A mix, with a preference for traineeships. Traineeships support roles, including Assistant in Nursing (AIN), hospital orderly/ward assistant, patient services assistant, and food services assistant roles, typically include a minimum of 100 days in paid employment and training. ³⁵	Cadetships are less common in this sector, although some niche programs exist, particularly within hospitals and specialist health organisations. Means-tested practicum payments are also available for VET and higher education students in nursing and midwifery.
Children's Education and Care (CEC)	Traineeships and school-based traineeships. School-based traineeships being a notable development, creating a pathway from high school into the CEC sector.	ECEC has seen a notable rise in traineeships in response to growing workforce demand, relative to other sectors. Government policies have been effective in encouraging increased use of traineeships.
Human Services (Mental Health, Community Services, AOD)	Traineeships. Most traineeships result in a Certificate III or IV in Community Services, and roles such as case worker, youth worker or family support officer. ³⁶ GYO Initiatives. For example, some Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) run local training programs leading to formal qualifications First Nations social services staff. ³⁷	Government funding (often subsidises the training cost (some states fully fund community services diplomas under "Free TAFE" or similar initiatives). ³⁸ Means-tested practicum payments are also available for higher education students in social work.

³³ Curran, S. (2023, November 20). *Skilled Care Aged Care Traineeship FAQs: Your questions asked*. <https://skilledcare.edu.au/aged-care-traineeship-faqs/#:~:text=The%20qualification%20comprises%2013%20modules%20and%20can%20be,months%20with%20part-time%20study%20%2815%20hours%20per%20week%29>. (accessed June 10, 2025)

³⁴ Aspire to Succeed. (2025). *Rising demand for aged care workers in Australia*. <https://aspiretosucceed.com.au/demand-for-aged-care-workers-in-australia/> (accessed June 10, 2025)

³⁵ NSW Government. (2024). *Health Services (Health Services Assistance) – Certificate III*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/students/career-and-study-pathways/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships/traineeships/certificate-iii-health-services-health-services-assistance> (accessed June 10, 2025)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ AbSec Learning and Development Centre (LDC). (n.d.). *Leadership through learning*. <https://absec.org.au/absec-learning-and-development-centre/> (accessed June 12, 2025)

³⁸ NSW Government Education. (n.d.). *Health care and social assistance*. <https://skills.education.nsw.gov.au/nsw-fee-free/health-care-social-assistance> (accessed June 12, 2025)

Sport and Recreation	<p>Traineeships and school-based traineeships, with a small number of internships.</p> <p>Particularly at the Certificate II-IV levels, most commonly with the Certificate III or IV in Sport and Recreation. School-based traineeships are effective, supporting students towards careers in lifeguarding, aquatics and coaching.³⁹</p>	<p>A very limited number of qualifications can technically be delivered as apprenticeships. Paid placements in sports are generally limited to internships, such as sports management internships, which may be unpaid or supported by stipends. Cadetships are uncommon outside of special programs.</p>
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Cross-sector challenges and bottlenecks

While EWYL models have demonstrated considerable promise in expanding and diversifying the workforce across HumanAbility sectors, they also face persistent and interconnected challenges that can undermine their impact and scalability. The cross-sector challenges and bottlenecks are rooted in both systemic policy and structural workforce issues that cut across all of HumanAbility's sectors. Common themes that were identified in the literature include:

- **Employer engagement:** Some employers hesitate to take trainees, fearing lost productivity or high supervision costs. This is particularly the case for small businesses that face significant time and budget constraints, which often prevent them from having dedicated staff to focus on apprenticeships, traineeships, or even human resources.⁴⁰
- **Funding structures:** Training and trainee wage subsidies often come from multiple sources (federal/state VET funding, specific grants).⁴¹ Inconsistencies between states or uncertainty around incentives (e.g. changes to subsidies) can cause boom-bust cycles. For example, traineeship numbers in the ECEC sector were found to be highly sensitive to incentive payments.⁴² Similarly, in Sport and Recreation, traineeships attract participants primarily due to available subsidies, such as those offered through AFL SportsReady.⁴³ Removing incentives leads to a significant drop in enrolment.
- **Regulatory constraints:** EWYL models are frequently funded through apprenticeship or traineeship systems that require workers to be supervised and engaged on an ongoing basis. When combined with pre-existing workforce pressures, qualification requirements and prescribed ratios e.g. the National Quality Framework in children's education and care that enforces strict educator-child ratios and minimum qualification requirements⁴⁴ – little funding or staffing may be left to support

³⁹ Australian Government. (2022). *SIS30122 Certificate III in Sport, Aquatics and Recreation, Release 1*. Training.gov.au. <https://training.gov.au/Training/Details/SIS30122/qualdetails> (accessed June 12, 2025)

⁴⁰ Behavioural Insights Team. (2020). *Perceptions of apprenticeships: Behavioural insights evidence review*. Behavioural Insights Team. <https://www.education.gov.au/recurrent-funding-schools/resources/perceptions-apprenticeships-behavioural-insights-evidence-review-february-2020> (accessed June 16, 2025)

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Jobs and Skills Australia. (2024). *The Future of Early Childhood Education Profession. Early childhood education and care workforce capacity study*. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/19636/future-early-childhood-education-profession/2658/future-early-childhood-education-profession-extended-report/pdf> (accessed May 05, 2025)

⁴³ Australian Institute of Sport. (2024). *Apprenticeships and traineeships: A guide to vocational pathways and careers for elite athletes*. https://www.ais.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1143298/Elite-Athlete-Apprenticeships-Guide-2024.pdf (accessed June 17, 2025)

⁴⁴ ACECQA. (2024). *Qualifications for centre-based services with children preschool age or under. Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority*. <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications-0/qualification-requirements/qualifications-centre-based-services-children->

workers through EWYL pathways. Rather than changing these quality standards to accommodate trainees, employers may need additional support and resourcing to free up experienced staff to be able to adequately supervise and mentor trainees within these regulated environments.

- **Mentoring and supervision constraints:** A pervasive bottleneck is the need for experienced staff to train and mentor EWYL participants. In the ECEC sector, this was also identified as a critical constraint. Similarly, research in the Aged Care and Disability Services sector stressed the necessity of training mentors alongside trainees.⁴⁵

Sector fragmentation and geographical disparity: Community services often function with minimal staffing, meaning they lack capacity and training structures to support trainees. The Victorian Department of Social Services (DSS) community sector framework, developed after extensive consultations, highlights that small providers “lack capacity” to navigate complex grant and training processes, which are a significant barrier to their participation in EWYL models.⁴⁶ Regional, rural and remote areas often lack RTOs or structured vocational supports, which limits access to EWYL models beyond metropolitan centres. The JSA report on Vocational education and training in regional, rural, and remote Australia reveals a concerning decline in the number of RTOs.⁴⁷ These barriers include travel distance, infrastructure limitations, and insufficient enrolment numbers, known as “thin markets,” which can lead to trainees needing to relocate to access training.⁴⁸

[preschool-age-or-under#:~:text=Under%20regulation%20126%20of%20the%20Education%20and%20Care,diploma%20level%20education%20and%20care%20qualification%20%28or%20higher%29. \(accessed June 17, 2025\)](#)

⁴⁵ Alexander, J., Gendera, S., Robinson, S., Fisher, K. R., & Howe, K. (2023). *On-the-job training supports for people with intellectual disability employed in aged care*. DOI: 10.3109/13668250.2023.2256075. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3109/13668250.2023.2256075?rfr_dat=cr_pub++0pubmed&url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrsref.org#abstract (accessed June 18, 2025)

⁴⁶ Victorian Department of Social Services. (2025). *Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework*. <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/documents/2025-02/community-sector-grants-engagement-final.pdf>

⁴⁷ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2023). *Vocational education and training in regional, rural and remote Australia*. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/690/vocational-education-and-training-regional-rural-and-remote-australia/983/vet-regional-rural-and-remote-australia/pdf> (accessed June 18, 2025)

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Chapter 3: EWYL models in the hospitality, retail, business, and construction sectors

This chapter examines EWYL models in hospitality, retail, business and construction, comparing apprenticeship and traineeship commencements and completions with those in HumanAbility sectors. By identifying differences in commencements and completions, the analysis provides a foundation for future research into how lessons from these industries may inform the application of EWYL in the HumanAbility context.

In sectors such as hospitality, retail, business and construction, EWYL models have consistently delivered strong outcomes in training completions, job readiness, and workforce supply. Examination of the usage and success of these models in other sectors could offer valuable insights for strengthening their application in the care and support sector. This is not to say that these industries are not also facing workforce demands.

Hospitality

The hospitality sector, including restaurants, chefs and hotels, utilises several EWYL pathways. For example, the 3-year Australian Apprenticeship for chefs (cooking), which leads to a Certificate III/IV in Commercial Cookery or Patisserie.⁴⁹ Another common pathway is hospitality traineeships, for example Certificate II in Hospitality⁵⁰ for roles such as food and beverage attendants, hospitality all-rounders, or hotel receptionists. School-based apprenticeships and traineeships (SBATs) are also popular in hospitality. For example, high school students may enter into a training agreement that typically lasts around five years, starting with two years of part-time study, followed by three years of full-time study after completing the Higher School Certificate (HSC).⁵¹

Retail

The retail sector, for example, supermarkets, stores and customer service outlets, has widely adopted traineeships as a primary EWYL model. Retail Traineeships at Certificate II/III level generally involve a commitment to undertake at least 100 days of paid employment and training, covering skills in sales, merchandising, customer service, and retail operations.⁵² Most trainee enrolments in the sector are concentrated in major cities, reflecting Australia's population distribution.⁵³

⁴⁹ Holmesglen. *Certificate III in Commercial Cookery (Course Code SIT30821): Apprenticeship*. <https://www.holmesglen.edu.au/explore-courses/hospitality-tourism-and-events/cookery/vocational-education/certificate-iii-in-commercial-cookery-apprenticeship> (accessed July 07, 2025)

⁵⁰ NSW Government. (2023). *Hospitality – Certificate II*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/students/career-and-study-pathways/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships/traineeships/certificate-ii-hospitality> (accessed July 07, 2025)

⁵¹ Evolution. (n.d.). *Smart and Skilled – School-Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships SBATs*. <https://evolution.edu.au/courses/smart-and-skilled-school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships-sbats/> (accessed July 07, 2025)

⁵² NSW Government. (2023). *Career and study pathways: Retail Certificate III*. <https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/students/career-and-study-pathways/school-based-apprenticeships-and-traineeships/traineeships/certificate-iii-retail#Commitment2> (accessed July 08, 2025)

⁵³ Service and Creative Skills Australia. (2024). *Shaping Tomorrow: Workforce Planning Report, Retail*. https://sacsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Retail_Full_Report_2024_Compressed.pdf

Business

The business sector here is broad, covering office-based roles, administration, finance and professional services. EWYL models in this sector range from entry-level traineeships to high-level cadetships and internships. For example, Business Administration Traineeships (Certificate III in Business) are common in organisations. The Certificate III in Business (BSB30120) encompasses a variety of skills pertinent to business functions, such as data entry.⁵⁴ Moving up the skill ladder, Cadetships and Sponsored Programs play a major role in professional fields. For example, the Pitcher Partners 2026 Cadetship Program provides accounting cadets with an opportunity to blend part-time coursework with hands-on, relevant work experience.⁵⁵ Internships and graduate programs are also prolific in business fields. University students in business, finance, IT, or similar often undertake paid internships during summer or as part of their course requirements, working in companies as interns. For example, NAB Australia's Summer Intern Program 2025 – 2026 is an 8-week paid program designed to give students insights into the banking and finance industry.⁵⁶

Construction

The construction industry is often held up as the classic example of the apprenticeship model's success. Trade apprenticeships in construction trades, such as carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and bricklaying, provide a foundational training route. These are typically 3-4 year programs leading to a Certificate III qualification and a skilled tradesperson status.⁵⁷ In addition to trade apprenticeships, construction also employs traineeships in specific sub-trades or related roles. For instance, civil construction traineeships are available for plant operators or road pavers, typically lasting approximately 1-2 years.⁵⁸ Trainees completing these traineeships are usually qualified with a Certificate II in Civil Construction.⁵⁹

Higher-level cadetships also exist in the sector, especially for roles that require tertiary education.⁶⁰ A construction cadet might work as a cadet site manager or health safety and environment cadet part-time while studying, gradually taking on more responsibility as they progress in their degree.⁶¹ Upon graduation, they transition into roles like site engineer or project manager.

Figures 1 and 2 below illustrate apprenticeship and traineeship commencement and completion data across hospitality, retail, business and construction in comparison to traineeships in HumanAbility sectors. Commencement data shows that between 2020 and 2021, apprenticeship and traineeship

⁵⁴ Queensland Academy of Technology. (2024). *BSB30120 Certificate III in Business Administration Course*.

<https://qat.qld.edu.au/domestic/business/bsb30120-domestic-certificate-iii-in-business/> (accessed July 09, 2025)

⁵⁵ Pitcher Partners. (n.d.). *2026 Cadetship Program. Pitcher's Partner*. <https://www.pitcher.com.au/job-offer/pitcher-partners-2026-cadetship-program/> (accessed July 09, 2025)

⁵⁶ NAB Australia. (n.d.). *NAB Summer Intern Program 2025-2026*. <https://careers.nab.com.au/jobs/f645d243-9e24-49bd-aac7-32e4e7ffde95> (accessed July 14, 2025)

⁵⁷ Fair Work Ombudsman. (n.d.). *Apprentices in the building and construction industry*. <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/building-and-construction-industry/apprentices-in-the-building-and-construction-industry#:~:text=Find%20out%20about%20entitlements%20for%20apprentices%20working%20in,can%20take%203%20to%204%20years%20to%20complete> (accessed July 14, 2025)

⁵⁸ Directions. (2022). *Workforce Development Apprenticeships Training Careers: Civil Construction Traineeships*. <https://www.directionswa.com.au/traineeships-perth-wa/civil-construction-traineeships> (accessed July 15, 2025)

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Construction Pathways. (n.d.). *Cadetships & Graduate Programs: Learn on the job while you study*. <https://constructionpathways.com.au/entry-pathways/cadetships-graduate-programs/> (accessed July 15, 2025)

⁶¹ MIRVAC. (n.d.). *Mirvac's 2025 Cadetship Program*. <https://www.mirvac.com/careers/Cadetship> (accessed July 15, 2025)

commencements in the Retail, Hospitality, Business and Construction sectors outpaced those in HumanAbility sectors. However, by 2021 and continuing into 2023, a notable shift occurred, wherein the Children's Education and Care sector experienced a significant surge in commencements, recording more new trainees than Retail in 2022 and then significantly higher numbers of trainees than, Retail, Hospitality and Business, in 2023 and 2024, reflecting growing demand for early childhood educators and targeted policy interventions such as Fee-Free TAFE and funded Cert III and Diploma pathways.

In 2020, apprenticeship and traineeship completions in the Retail, Hospitality, Business and Construction sectors were generally higher than those recorded across HumanAbility sectors. The sole exception was Children's Education and Care, which surpassed Retail by 165 completions, highlighting early momentum in workforce development within that sector.

Throughout 2021 and 2022, completions remain stronger in Retail, Hospitality, Business and Construction overall. However, Children's Education and Care now outperformed Retail and Hospitality, reflecting sustained investment in ECEC training pipelines and the impact of supportive funding.

In 2023, Construction led completions across all sectors. Children's Education and Care further consolidated its position as a high-performing HumanAbility sector in terms of traineeship completions, however, fell behind Business, Hospitality, and Retail.

By 2024, Construction remained dominant in completions, but Children's Education and Care returned to significantly exceeding completions in Retail and Hospitality.

Figure 1: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Commencements Data across Hospitality, Retail, Business and Construction in Comparison to Traineeships in HumanAbility sectors

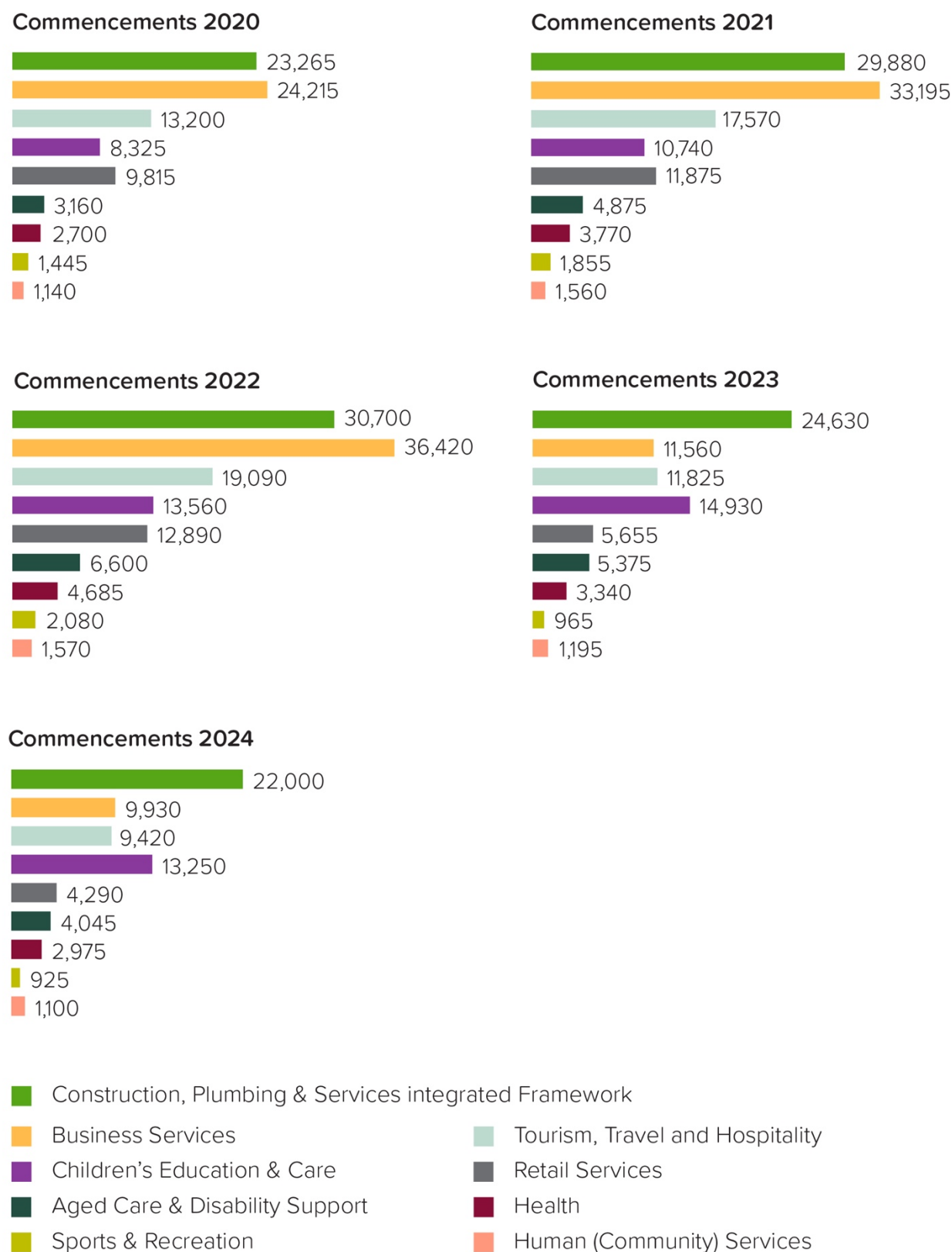
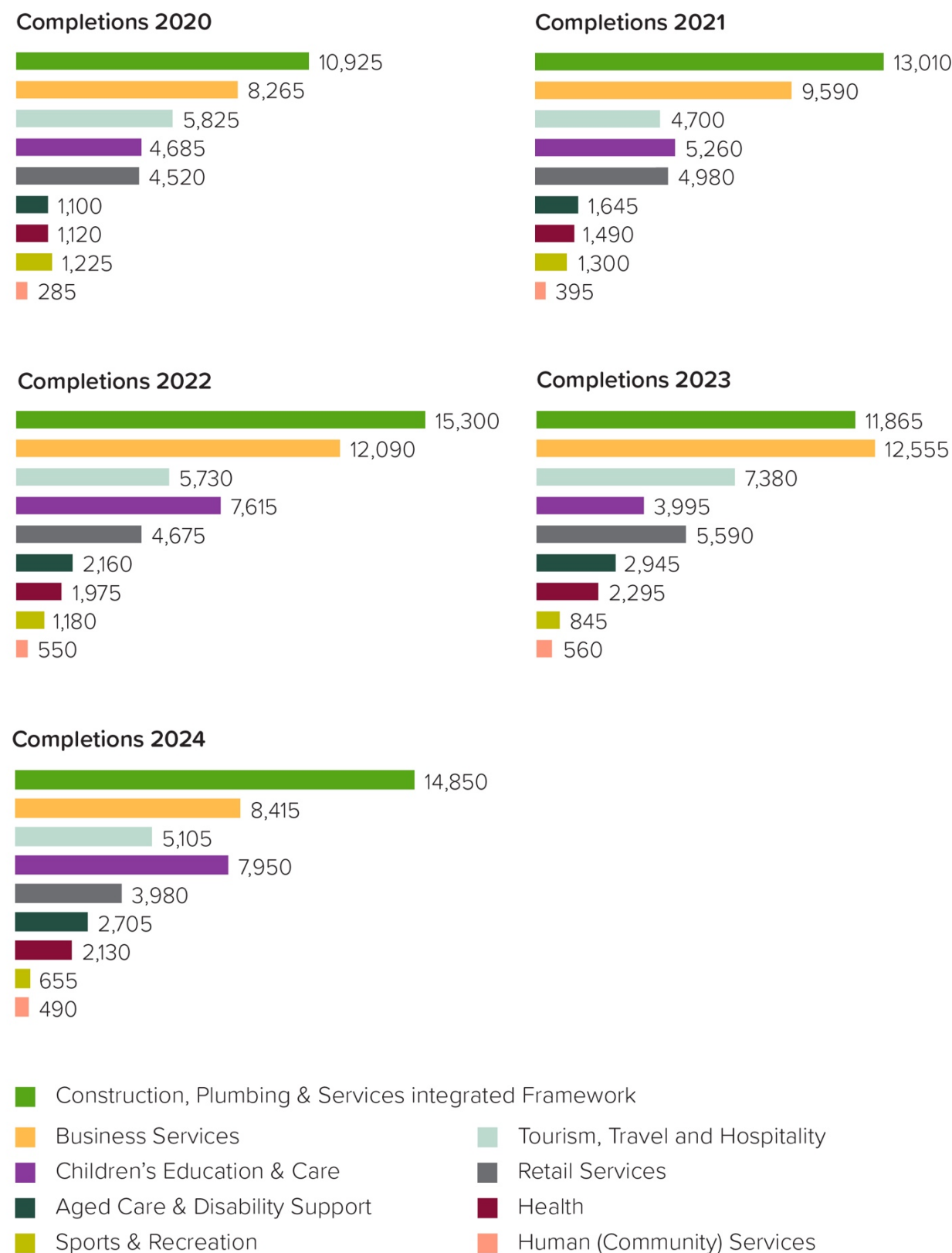


Figure 2: Apprenticeship and Traineeship Completions Data across Hospitality, Retail, Business and Construction in Comparison to Traineeships in HumanAbility sector



Note 1: NCVER does not split training packages by sector. For example, the Human Services training package includes qualifications for Human (Community) Services, Children's Education and Care, and Aged Care and Disability Services sectors.

Note 2: The HumanAbility sectors have been separated from the training packages using a reference table, while the comparison training packages have not been split due to a lack of a similar reference.

Note 3: HumanAbility sectors do not utilise apprenticeships, only traineeships.

Source: NCVER DataBuilder, Apprentices and Trainees, 2020-2024

Given the sustained performance of the in Retail, Hospitality, Business and Construction sectors in traineeship commencements and completions across multiple years, it is both timely and strategic to examine these industries for transferable best practices that could strengthen EWYL models in HumanAbility sectors.

Chapter 4: Key findings

This chapter highlights the main findings that emerged from the background paper, including the key challenges, opportunities and lessons learned to date.

Key Findings:

- EWYL models vary across sectors and jurisdictions, but all share a common goal: integrating work and learning to develop skills and improve employment outcomes.
- There is increasing use of traineeships in ECEC and care sectors, with emerging cadetship and co-op models in Health and Sport and Recreation.
- Internationally, models such as degree apprenticeships (United Kingdom), co-ops (Canada), and dual VET systems (European Union) offer additional insights.
- Persistent challenges to the quality of EWYL models affect the quantity of EWYL opportunities, including structural funding issues.
- There is room to improve the quality of EWYL models to encourage greater uptake and outcomes by addressing low ‘training’ wages, high non-completion rates, and the wrap-around support for learners.

Gaps and Opportunities:

- There is a need for more precise definitions and consistent terminology when referring to EWYL models, and data that spans all EWYL models.
- There is limited evidence on the long-term outcomes and progression pathways for those undertaking EWYL models
- Funding solutions that make EWYL models viable for each context of service delivery remain under-researched. Investment in employer support, mentoring, and the right regulatory settings is critical.

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