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Parliament of Victoria  
Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
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## **Re: Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries**

Dear Parliament of Victoria

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission regarding the Inquiry into student pathways to in-demand industries.

### **National Trust of Australia (Victoria)**

We are the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, with over 60,000 members and supporters across Victoria.

We are an independent, non-government and not-for-profit organisation. While independent of government, we work collaboratively with the State Government, local councils, businesses, local communities and individuals to strengthen heritage protection, increase community involvement and understanding of cultural heritage management and the need for heritage conservation.

The NTAV strives to be a leader in developing and promoting conservation excellence. As the custodian of 39 heritage properties the Trust has a key role to play in building the capacity of the heritage conservation industry and ensuring that conservation skills are valued and sustained into the future. In recent years we have undertaken a number of initiatives in this area including the [Como Approach](#) and building networks of traditional trade practitioners to work together to build capacity in the industry through workshops and [industry forums](#).

### **Summary**

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) believes traditional trade skills and knowledge is an in-demand industry due to its critical role in meeting Victoria's demand for quality new construction and the repair and maintenance of our existing building stock.

These vocations are fundamental not only for the care and retention of our built heritage, but to enable adaptive reuse of existing buildings that support circular economy principles, and to create a sustainable built environment for the future.

As a result the following should be undertaken to improve student pathways into this industry:

- Traditional trades as well as trades more broadly should be recognised and showcased as viable and rewarding careers, with career guidance for this industry provided in schools and pathways developed for existing trades practitioners to gain heritage building credentials.
- Traditional Trade skills and knowledge should be integrated into TAFE curricula by inclusion of conservation principles and approaches, re-introduction of depth of skill trades training and creation of dedicated traditional building skills courses.
- The value of tradespeople working to conserve and maintain Victoria's cultural heritage should be promoted and support provided for heritage building businesses to take apprentices and trainees.

## Introduction

As cities grapple with growing environmental, economic, and social challenges, the knowledge and skills required to work with our existing building stock, preserve our significant heritage and apply sustainable practices to how we build, more in-demand than ever. Yet Victoria is facing a critical shortage of trades practitioners with these skills and knowledge. Without these skills, we risk losing irreplaceable heritage buildings and missing opportunities for sustainable adaptive reuse and retrofitting that could contribute significantly to housing supply and climate goals.

Current vocational education pathways fail to adequately support or even acknowledge these traditional trades skills. TAFE curricula focus predominantly on standard new build and replacement construction techniques, leaving a critical skills gap in heritage and traditional building practices as well as the skills necessary to repair rather than replace existing buildings and building components. Addressing this oversight represents both an economic opportunity and a sustainability imperative that demands immediate attention.

## Maintenance and Repair as Economic Necessity

Victoria's built heritage represents billions of dollars in community assets that contribute to our vibrant and rich streetscapes and neighbourhoods. These assets require ongoing maintenance and repair by trade practitioners who understand traditional materials and techniques. Lime mortars, traditional carpentry and joinery, slate, metal, tile work and stone conservation are not merely historical curiosities—they are essential skills for maintaining functional, occupied buildings that house communities and businesses across the state.

The absence of these skills and knowledge means that these buildings fall into disrepair, are damaged or deteriorate due to inappropriate repairs and materials, in turn leading to demolition or neglect rather than restoration or conservation. The demolition of these buildings, often incorporating quality materials and detailing no longer available, represents a massive loss of embodied energy and cultural value. When we lose traditional building skills, we lose the ability to maintain much of our existing built environment.

Investment in education and training in traditional trades is needed at this critical time to ensure we build capacity in the industry to continue to maintain our iconic architecture and the cultural landscape that attracts visitors and contributes to our wellbeing through living in vibrant and distinctive neighbourhoods.

### **Sustainability and Circular Economy**

Traditional building skills are fundamentally aligned with sustainability objectives and circular economy principles:

- **Adaptive Reuse:** Skilled trade practitioners enable the conversion of existing buildings for new uses, reducing demand for new construction and associated environmental impacts.
- **Waste Reduction:** Traditional repair and restoration techniques prioritise maintaining existing materials and components rather than wholesale replacement
- **Embodied Energy:** Preserving existing buildings retains the embodied energy invested in their original construction.
- **Local and Quality Materials:** Traditional techniques often utilise locally sourced, natural materials with lower environmental footprints.
- **Longevity:** Buildings maintained with appropriate traditional techniques and quality materials have proven durability spanning centuries.

These principles directly support Victoria's climate change objectives and waste reduction targets while providing meaningful and rewarding employment opportunities.

### **Valued Vocations and Craftsmanship**

Traditional building trades represent highly skilled vocations that combine technical expertise, practical skills and creative problem-solving. Traditional trade practitioners work on unique projects, develop specialised knowledge, and contribute to preserving community identity and sense of place. These are not declining industries—they are essential services experiencing acute skills shortages due to inadequate training pathways.

International examples demonstrate strong career prospects in traditional trades, with specialised craftspeople commanding premium rates and enjoying diverse, rewarding and work valued by communities. The perception that traditional trades are somehow less modern or relevant fundamentally misunderstands the important role that conservation and repair methodologies play in the contemporary construction industry.

### **TAFE Curriculum Limitations**

Current TAFE building and construction programs focus almost exclusively on modern materials and new construction techniques. Students learn to work with contemporary materials—steel frame construction, modern concrete practices, and synthetic materials—but receive minimal exposure to traditional techniques and sustainable approaches essential for working on and repairing existing buildings – a substantial component of the design and construction industry.

Key missing elements include:

- Understanding of conservation principles and approaches.
- First principle understanding of materials and construction methods.
- Relationships between trades.
- Lime mortar mixing and application.
- Traditional timber joinery techniques.
- Stone carving and conservation.
- Lime plaster mixing and application.
- Traditional roofing materials and techniques.
- Traditional plumbing including lead detailing.

Inclusion of traditional skills and knowledge within TAFE building and construction programs will enrich learning, equip students with a greater depth of knowledge for problem solving, and provide more diverse pathways into future employment.

### **Industry Disconnect**

The construction industry increasingly recognises the decline in traditional trade skills, but educational pathways have not addressed this issue and have contributed towards it by removing previously included training with traditional materials and tools. Building contractors struggle to find qualified trade practitioners, while students remain unaware of opportunities in this specialised field.

Career guidance systems provide virtually no information about traditional trades as career options, perpetuating the skills shortage and limiting student awareness of these rewarding vocational pathways.

### **Recommendations**

#### **1. Develop Pathways**

- Include information about traditional trades as well as trades more broadly as viable and rewarding careers for all in career guidance materials and programs in schools.
- Showcase the career progression opportunities and earning potential in specialised heritage work.
- Develop recognition pathways and progression routes for existing trades practitioners to gain heritage building credentials.
- Support international skills exchange to learn from traditional trades practices in other regions.

#### **2. Integrate Traditional Skills into TAFE Curricula**

- Include teaching of conservation principles and approaches as part of core/general building units.
- Include traditional building techniques within existing trade qualifications. For some trade qualifications this simply means re-introducing previously removed units, restoring the depth of skill previously offered.
- Create dedicated traditional building skills courses teaching conservation theory and practice.

- Encourage Industry placement between TAFE institutions and heritage building contractors.

### 3. Provide Industry Development and Skills Recognition

- Provide targeted support for heritage building businesses to take apprentices and trainees.
- Develop networks connecting heritage tradespeople to enable knowledge sharing and professional development.
- Support research and documentation of traditional building techniques relevant to Victorian contexts.
- Provide recognition programs for tradespeople working in traditional trades.
- Promote the value of tradespeople working to conserve and maintain Victoria's cultural heritage.

### Conclusion

Traditional construction practitioners represent an essential in-demand industry critical for maintaining Victoria's built heritage, supporting adaptive reuse initiatives, and advancing sustainability objectives in new construction. These skilled vocations offer meaningful career opportunities while addressing urgent community needs.

The current absence of these skills from vocational education pathways represents a significant gap that undermines both heritage conservation objectives and sustainable development goals. Integrating traditional building skills into TAFE curricula and career guidance systems in schools will create valuable employment opportunities while ensuring Victoria retains the expertise necessary to utilise and maintain its existing building stock.

We urge the Committee to recognise traditional building trades and knowledge as priority vocations requiring immediate attention in vocational education planning and delivery.

For any enquiries regarding this submission, please get in touch with this office on 03 9656 9818

Yours Sincerely,



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