

AEN Mid-Year conference

VRQA Update

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VRQA



Victorian **Registration &
Qualifications** Authority

We seek to eliminate or minimise harm, and the risk of harm, to apprentices and trainees.

What harms?

Harms are identified in the November 2022 [Ministerial Statement of Expectations](#) for the VRQA, and through the VRQA's detailed understanding of the sector.

Injury or death

Some apprentices and trainees work in occupations and industries where there is risk of injury or death, such as construction and manufacturing. If they are poorly supervised, this increases the risk. We go to workplaces to make sure that employers are meeting their obligation to provide proper supervision by a suitably qualified or experienced person.

Poor quality workplace experiences

Too many apprentices and trainees 'drop out' – they don't get qualified because of negative experiences in the workplace. This harms their future career prospects. We target those employers who have consistently poor outcomes (such as low levels of completion, high cancellations, dissatisfaction and safety concerns).

Exploitation and mistreatment

The scope of our responsibility is limited to training contract compliance, but we know that other government agencies hold important information about employers that exploit or mistreat apprentices and trainees. For example, when they are not paid properly, forced to work in unsafe conditions, or bullied. All government regulators that come into contact with apprentices and trainees share information. If we receive information from one of our co-regulators that an employer exploits or mistreats their apprentices and trainees, we will cancel their approval to employ apprentices and trainees in Victoria.

Insufficient learning and progress

The career prospects of apprentices and trainees are harmed when they are denied opportunities to learn the skills and competencies set out in their training plan, or to be released from the workplace to attend their registered training organisation. We monitor training plans. We look for training plans that are not maintained to record progress (or where there isn't one at all), to make sure apprentices and trainees are progressing as they should.

Powers of the VRQA

Sanctions

The [VRQA Regulatory Approach Statement 2022](#) explains that our starting point is to seek compliance through education and support. However, where necessary, we will use our full range of regulatory powers and tools to secure compliance.

Our main sanctions are the power to cancel:

- an employer's approval to employ apprentices and trainees in Victoria
- training contracts.

Authorised Officers

We have a team of Authorised Officers that visit workplaces to check compliance. They are deployed

- in response to problems, when apprentices, trainees or other parties notify us of possible non-compliance
- through an annual planned work schedule of visits to workplaces where there is the highest risk of harm.

Any apprentice or trainee with concerns can contact us on:

- vrqa.apprenticeships@education.vic.gov.au
- 1300 722 603

Informing the public

Each year we conduct regulatory campaigns and publish enforcement and compliance priorities centred around minimising the harms to apprentices and trainees identified in this document.

This notifies the public of where we plan to deploy Authorised Officers in the field, including

- industry/industries (for example, automotive, electrical)
- qualifications (for example, Certificate III in Hairdressing).

We will publish the results of our regulatory campaigns.

Our priorities for the regulation of apprenticeships and traineeships in 2024



Women building and construction apprentices

The traditionally male-dominated industry is seeing growth in female participation. We'll check that women apprentices are given skilled work and quality training.



Labour hire organisations (LHOs)

Apprentices and trainees employed by LHOs are at greater risk of exploitation and mistreatment. Our Authorised Officers will visit these workplaces.



Employer training plan compliance

A campaign to ensure apprentices and trainees learn the skills and competencies set out in their training plan and are released from the workplace to attend their registered training organisation.



Ban on engineered stone

From 1 July 2024, the use, manufacturing, supply, processing and installation of engineered stone will be banned in Australia. We'll go into Victorian workplaces to ensure apprentices are not exposed to silica dust from engineered stone.

Completed Campaign - BuildUP

Campaign REPORT



SpeakUP

BuildUP

The women apprentices in construction campaign



Covered all women apprentices and trainees in civil construction in Victoria,

Spoke to 60 women about their experiences. Authorised Officer visits to workplaces, phone interviews, and BuildUP hotline.

KEY FINDINGS

The good news is that we found high levels of employer compliance.

Mostly, we found suitable training plans in place, proper supervision, women provided access to the same tools and equipment as their male colleagues, and trained and assigned work across the depth and breadth of civil construction qualifications (Certificate III or IV in Civil Construction). Many women civil construction apprentices and trainees were very positive about their experience in the workplace.

The bad news is that we found a culture of silence when women apprentices and trainees are mistreated by employers.

Every apprentice and trainee that reported negative experiences did not want the VRQA to take action, due to fear of workplace reprisal or concern of being labelled a 'troublemaker' in the industry.

For the same reasons, callers to the BuildUP hotline who reported serious employer non-compliance chose to remain anonymous.

Other campaign findings include:

- 15% said they are not supervised at all and/or couldn't name their supervisor(s)
- some said they were supervised by other apprentices, which is not safe or compliant
- 3 reported current bullying through homophobic comments, rumours and ridicule.

We are following up with 2 employers regarding allegations of breaches to training contracts.

Supervision guidance

Apprenticeships Victoria has guidance and fact sheets on supervising apprentices and trainees.



BuildUP



Next Campaign – (Non-GTO) labour hire employers of A&Ts

Statement of Expectations

- *The VRQA to 'review its practice related to labour hire arrangements, and publish a policy on its future approach' (SOE 7f).*

Rationale

- The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* provides insufficient powers for the VRQA to have oversight of host employers. Apprentices and trainees employed through labour hire arrangements are at greater risk of exploitation and poor training progress because a) host employers are not subject to the VRQA employer approval process, training contract or the training plan, which means b) these apprentices and trainees are largely 'invisible' to the VRQA.

Joint campaign with the Labour Hire Authority

Will get underway in August to September

Summary of key findings

Non-GTO labour hire

- There were **2,003*** Apprentices and Trainees (A/T) with Active/Active Recommended training contracts employed by non-GTO labour hire (LH) employers:
 - 1,020 apprentices
 - 983 trainees.
- Analysis of the qualifications/employers/workplaces of these A/T is in the following slides, including that:
 - Most Apprentices in this cohort are training to qualify as electrotechnology electricians (31% | n=315)
 - Most Trainees in this cohort are pursuing qualifications in supply chain operations (32% | n=319).

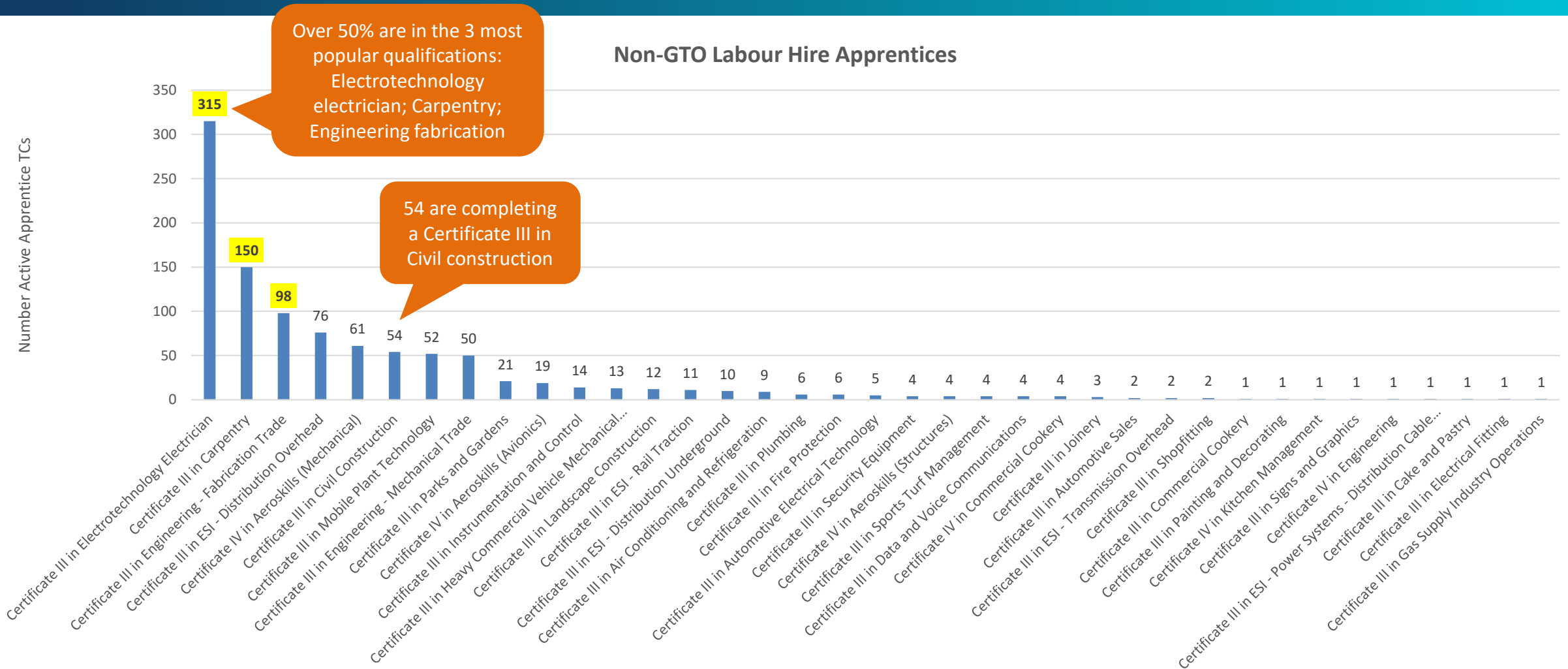
2024 Labour Hire campaign

VRQA will undertake a joint campaign with the Labour Hire Authority, focused on a selection of building and construction qualifications. This will target those working with the highest risk of breaches of workplace health and safety obligations. Specific parameters of the campaign are to be confirmed.

NOTE: There were **4,978** A/T with Active/Active Recommended training contracts employed by GTOs. They will **not be** included in the current labour hire campaign/s.

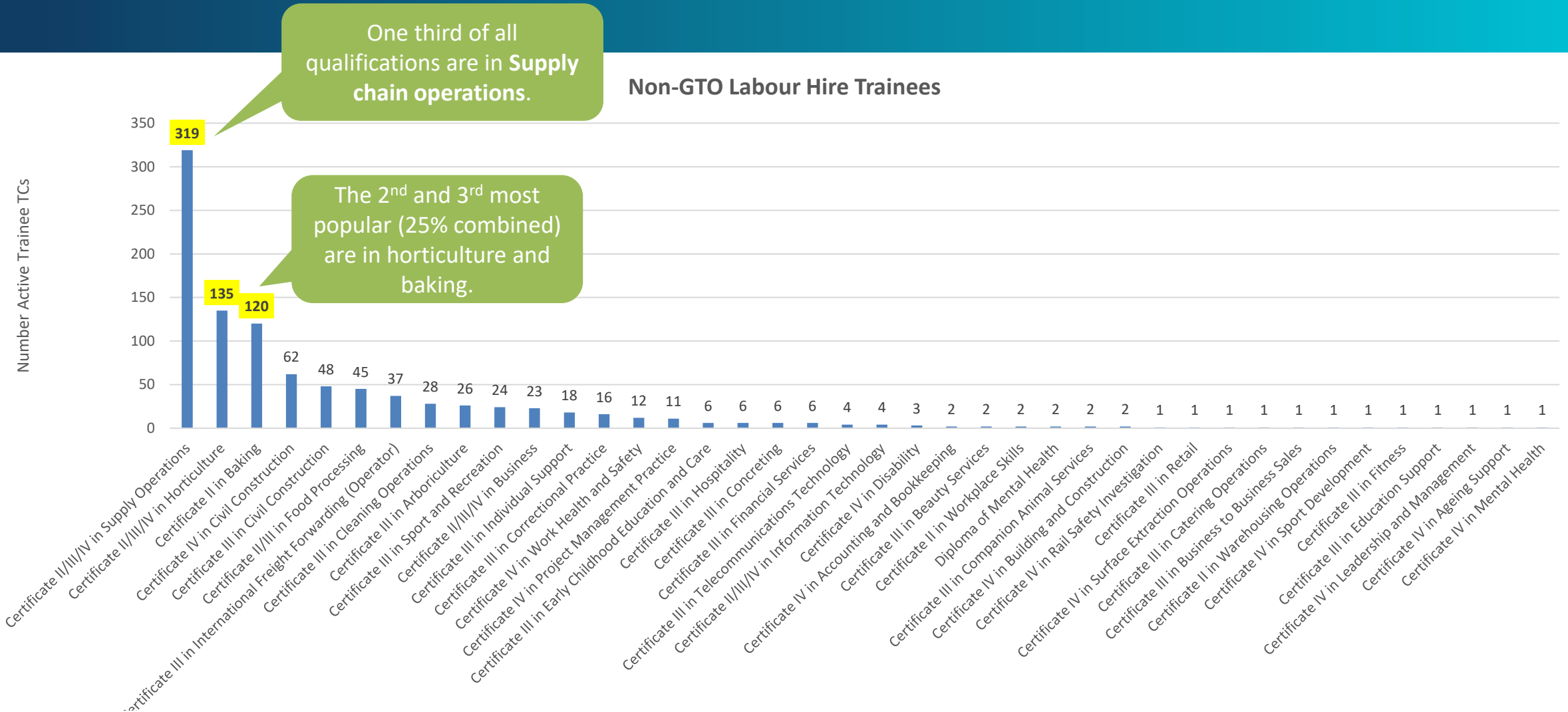
Number of Apprentice training contracts/qualification*

Non-GTO Labour Hire Apprentices



*some grouped together (e.g. Cert II/III)

Number of Trainee training contracts per qualification



*some grouped together (e.g. Cert II/III)

GTO audits

- VRQA conducts GTO audits once every 5 years - the audit against the National Standards comprises a financial capability (FCA) and a quality audit (QA)
- previously GTOs were audited at some point during the 5 year recognition period and the FCA and the QA were not conducted in the same year. This means that some GTOs have up to 3 years in between the FCA and the QA.
- VRQA are working towards aligning the FCA and QA , so these are conducted in the same timeframe and taking the Expiry date to the end of the month. VRQA will aim to conduct GTO audits within 12 months of recognition expiry, but in some cases up to 2 years before expiry.
- this will make it simpler for GTOs to have the one audit period.
- the majority of GTOs (24) expire December 30 2027. 5 others expire in other months of 2027

*some grouped together (e.g. Cert II/III)

Expiry year	GTOs Expiring	Approximate audit year
2025	4	2024
2026	2	2025
2027	29	2026-(8 to be audited in 2025 due to either the last FCA or QA conducted before 2020)
2028	5	2027