NSW Department of Education

Frequently asked questions – for students

Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers Program (TPEW)
Released in October 2025

education.nsw.gov.au

General program overview

What is the Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers program?

Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers (TPEW) is an additional pathway to achieve a trade qualification outside of an apprenticeship. It recognises the skills and experience of experienced but unqualified trade workers through recognition of prior learning (RPL) and gap training.

The main objectives of the program are to:

- provide an additional pathway to achieving trade qualifications outside of an apprenticeship for experienced though unqualified trade workers
- increase the number of trade-qualified and/or licensed workers to support the building and construction sector.

How does TPEW differ from traditional apprenticeship pathways?

The TPEW program is designed specifically for workers with industry experience and knowledge. Students are required to meet certain eligibility criteria to ensure they have the required skills and experience in the industry. This ensures that this pathway is the most suitable, rather than an apprenticeship.

What qualifications are available under TPEW?

A list of TPEW-approved qualifications, and respective training providers that deliver the qualifications, can be found on the webpage: education.nsw.gov.au/trade-pathways-experienced-workers.

Eligibility criteria

Who qualifies for the TPEW program?

At the time of enrolment, students need to meet the Smart and Skilled eligibility criteria and must:

- be aged 21 years or older
- have a minimum 3 years' work experience in the trade they will be undertaking training in, including at least of 12 months' work experience in Australia
- be currently working in the industry associated with the qualification, or have worked in the industry within the last 5 years
- if undertaking an MEM or UEE qualification, be currently working in the industry related to that qualification
- if undertaking an ESI qualification, have already completed the UEE30820, another ESI qualification or an equivalent qualification
- not be a current apprentice or trainee or, if a cancelled apprentice, cancellation must have occurred more than 6 months prior
- not be enrolled in any related Smart and Skilled subsidised training
- be assessed as capable of achieving at least three (3) units of competency (UoC)s as a recognition of prior learning RPL (51) outcome.

What documentation is needed to prove eligibility?

Eligibility is confirmed by an approved TPEW training provider delivering the relevant qualification. As part of the assessment process, you may be asked to provide evidence demonstrating:

- at least 3 years industry experience (with a minimum 12 months' trade experience in Australia) of previous employment in the relevant industry and trade
- current or recent employment in the trade (within the past 5 years). This could include a resume, reference letter or letter of employment
- experience and projects through a Third-Party Report, if self-employed or a sole trader
- previous or prerequisite qualifications (if required).

Skilled migrants

Does the TPEW program support skilled migrants?

While the TPEW program is not specifically designed to support skilled migrants, the department acknowledges the role of skilled migration in addressing workforce shortages. Therefore, participation may be approved on a case-by-case basis for eligible skilled migrants where no other options are available. Examples of these instances could include:

1. Partner or spouse visa holder

- You arrived in Australia on a partner or spouse visa and are in the process of applying for permanent residency
- You gained trade experience overseas and have been working in Australia for at least 12 months in the same or a related trade
- You are seeking to gain an Australian trade qualification to support licensing or career progression.

You may be considered for TPEW if you are not eligible for Smart and Skilled funding and where gaining a qualification supports your continued employment in NSW.

2. Dependent of a Skills in Demand visa holder

- You are a dependent applicant (secondary visa holder) of a Skills in Demand visa holder on a four-year assignment
- You have worked in your home country as a carpenter for more than 10 years and have been employed in Australia as a trade assistant for the past 12 months
- You are seeking formal recognition of skills through an Australian trade qualification.

You may be considered for TPEW where there is clear evidence of trade experience and a link between your qualification attainment and ongoing work in NSW.

3. Bridging visa holder awaiting visa outcome

- You hold a Bridging Visa A or E while waiting for the outcome of a protection or permanent residency application
- You have verified trade experience overseas and are currently working in NSW in a related occupation
- You are seeking to gain an Australian trade qualification to improve your employment options and settlement outcomes.

You may be considered for TPEW where your work rights are current, your trade competency can be demonstrated and your participation supports workforce needs in NSW.

4. Humanitarian entrant on interim visa

- You arrived on a Humanitarian Stay (subclass 449) or similar temporary humanitarian visa and are waiting to transition to a Temporary Humanitarian Concern visa (subclass 786)
- You gained trade experience overseas and are already working in NSW in the same or a related occupation
- You are seeking to gain an Australian trade qualification to support ongoing employment and settlement.

You may be considered for TPEW to assist with skills recognition and qualification attainment during the settlement period, subject to program capacity and confirmation of work rights.

Disclaimer

These examples do not represent an exhaustive list of potential participant circumstances and do not guarantee acceptance into the Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers (TPEW) program.

Eligibility and participation decisions are made at the discretion of the NSW Department of Education, taking into account individual circumstances, program capacity and alignment with NSW workforce priorities.

Is the TPEW program a formal recognition process for overseas trade qualifications?

No, the TPEW program is not designed as a formal recognition process for overseas qualifications. It aims to complement existing national gap training and skills recognition frameworks rather than replace them.

For trade recognition pathways, please refer to Trade Recognition Australia.

What if a skilled migrant applicant does not meet the Smart and Skilled residency requirements?

The department may, at its discretion, approve participation for applicants who do not meet the Smart and Skilled residency requirements but satisfy all other TPEW eligibility criteria.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and gap training

What is RPL and how is it assessed?

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an assessment-only process that allows experienced workers to gain credit towards a qualification by demonstrating skills and knowledge they've already acquired — whether through work, training or life experience. This process ensures that learners are not retrained unnecessarily, while maintaining the integrity and rigour of nationally recognised qualifications.

How many units must be eligible for RPL to participate?

You must be assessed as capable of achieving a minimum of three (3) units of competency (UoCs) as RPL.

What is gap training and how is it delivered?

Gap training refers to the units of competency (UoCs) that a learner must complete to achieve a full trade qualification, after their prior experience has been formally recognised through RPL.

Costs and enrolment

Is the program fully funded?

The TPEW program is fee-free and fully subsidised by the NSW Government.

How do I apply for the TPEW program?

To apply for the program:

- visit the TPEW webpage to explore approved training providers for the relevant qualifications
- identify a provider that offers the trade qualification aligned with your experience
- contact the provider directly to discuss your eligibility, skills and experience, and next steps for enrolment.

Outcomes and certification

When is training expected to be completed by?

The training period will depend on the qualification and training plan for each individual learner.

All students must enrol in the program and commence by August 2026. All training must be completed by 31 May 2027.

Is this qualification nationally recognised?

TPEW provides nationally recognised qualifications through RPL and gap training.

Will this help me obtain a trade licence?

Contact the relevant licensing authority for further information regarding licensing matters.

For further information about licensing go to:

nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/licences-and-credentials/building-and-trade-licences-and-registrations

Contact and support

Where can I find more information about approved providers?

You will find the contact information for providers who can deliver your desired qualification on the TPEW webpage: education.nsw.gov.au/trade-pathways-experienced-workers

Who can I contact for help?

Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers program

Training Services, Department of Education

Email: **TPEW@det.nsw.edu.au**

Acknowledgement of Country
We recognise the Ongoing Custodians of the lands and waterways where we work and live. We pay respect to Elders past and present as ongoing teachers of knowledge, songlines and stories.
We strive to ensure every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learner in NSW achieves their potential through education.
We advise this resource may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.

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