

Are construction industry cadetships effective? Do current work-integrated learning systems lead to positive social outcomes?

Construction cadetships are the predominant form of industry-based learning for construction project management, civil engineering and quantity surveying students. Yet data shows burnout, wage theft, sexism, racism, exploitation, and safety issues unduly impact students engaged in these systems. So what other options are there?

Why the study:

- Skill shortages are occurring across all levels of the construction industry. Apprenticeships, cadetships construction degrees and other vocational education are the most established pathways to address the problem.
- Educational pathways where learning is structured and complimented by industry have had little historical review. The current experiences of young people engaged in these systems shows that they are not often benign.

What we did:

- A comprehensive methodology was conducted through thematic analysis of existing literature, relevant documents, policies, and Australian university curriculum and enrolment data.
- Next, Surveys, Interviews, and Observations were conducted with construction cadets and those who employ cadets. Attride-Stirling thematic analysis was employed in this data to investigate the labour and educational impacts of completing a cadetship in Sydney.

What we found:

- There is lack of structure, consistency and regulation in these training and education systems. WIL and specifically cadetships in their current unstructured format are not the most effective option for delivering skilled, critical and emotionally resilient construction workers.
- Improving educational outcomes and social outcomes for young construction workers requires making their education more holistic, supported and critical. This process must be collaborative and democratic for all stakeholders like universities, industry, professional bodies, unions and especially students.
- A significant finding is the limitation of International students from the study. These students are ineligible to complete most industry-based WIL due to visa requirements that clash with employer expectations.

What this means:

- The research highlights practical solutions for addressing gaps in the educational literature around construction-based WIL and cadetships. Policy suggestions as well as deeper structural recommendations are made for universities, governments and professional bodies.
- By reviewing and improving our education systems in collaborative ways, the construction industry can continue to address cultural and economic problems and alleviate the injustices that students and apprentices face on construction sites.

