

# NSW Training Awards 2026

Western NSW



## Digital Program

11 June 2026



# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wiradjuri people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which this event is being held. We would like to pay our respect to the Elders both past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People present this evening.



**Title: Ceremonies**

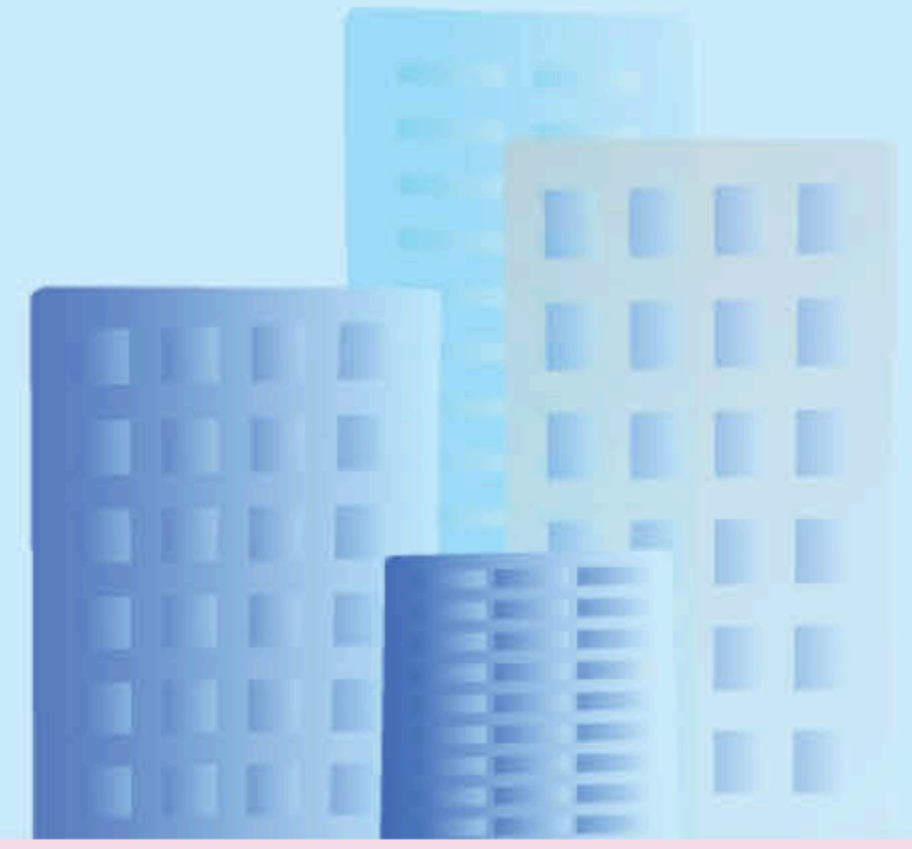
**Artist: WUPA Artist - Craig Layer**

The main circle in the centre represents the Jobs Together Program and like an important meeting place draws others to it. The circles attached to it are other support mechanisms associated with the program such as our communities and Aboriginal mentors.

The three symbols above and below the main circle represent our elders and their cultural knowledge and how important it is that Aboriginal culture be central to the success of the Jobs Together Program.

The three dotted lines going into and coming out from the circles represents both the journey taken by Aboriginal people as they endeavour to find education and employment pathways as well as being a threefold cord that is hard to break and symbolises the strength that comes from having Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal working collaboratively together.

# Thank you to our 2026 State Sponsors



## Diamond Sponsor

---



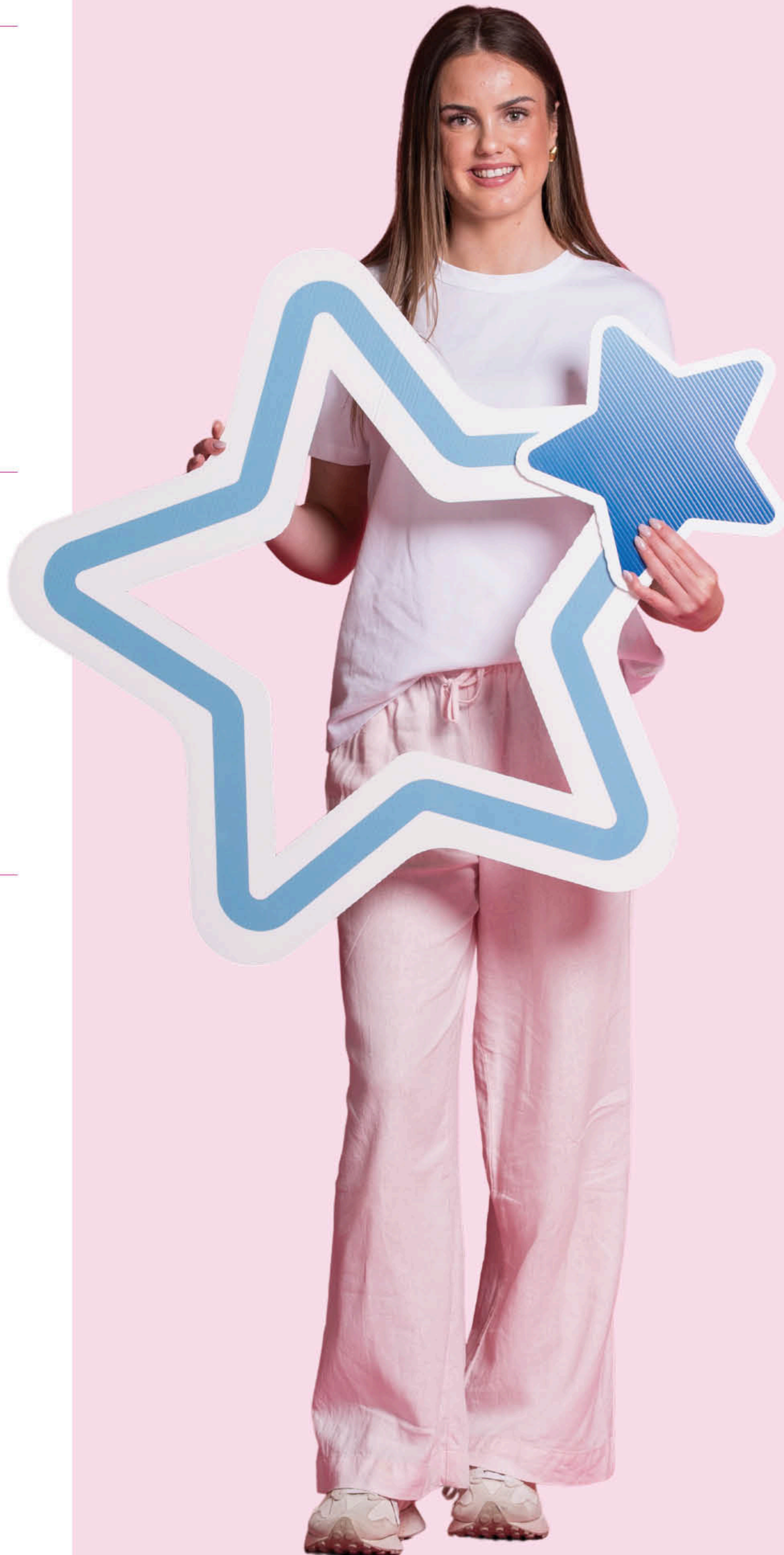
## Platinum Sponsor

---

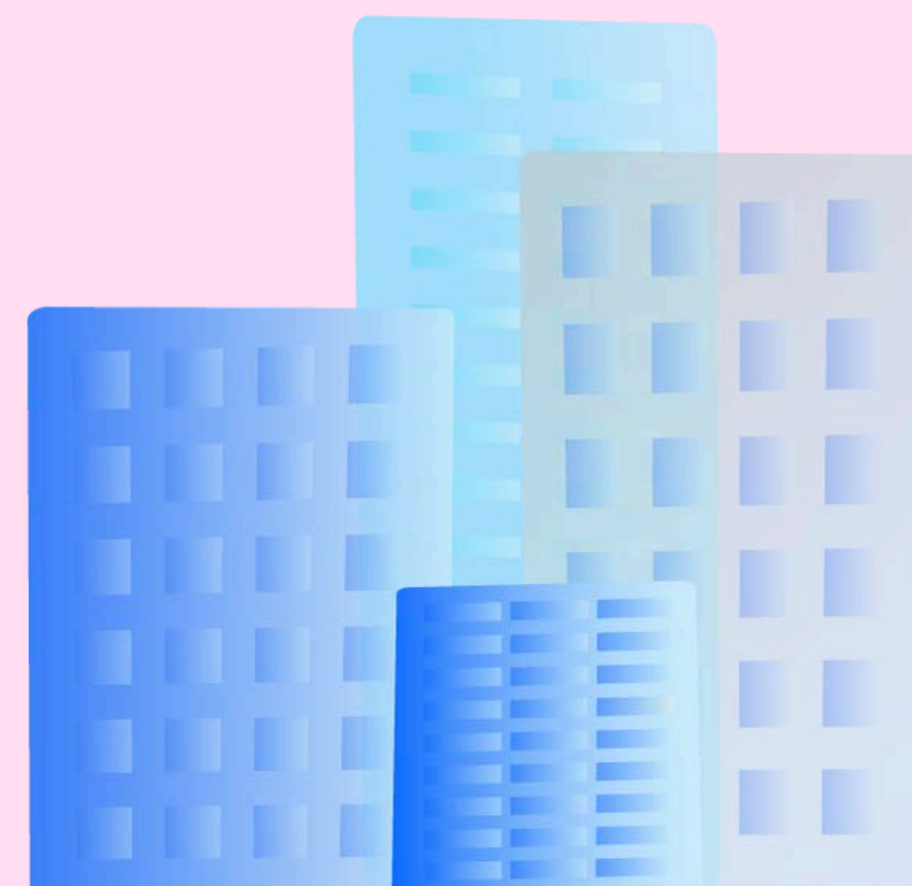


## Gold Sponsors

---



# Thank you to our 2026 Regional Sponsors



## Gold Sponsor

---

# GLENCORE



# OCTEC LIMITED

## Silver Sponsor

---

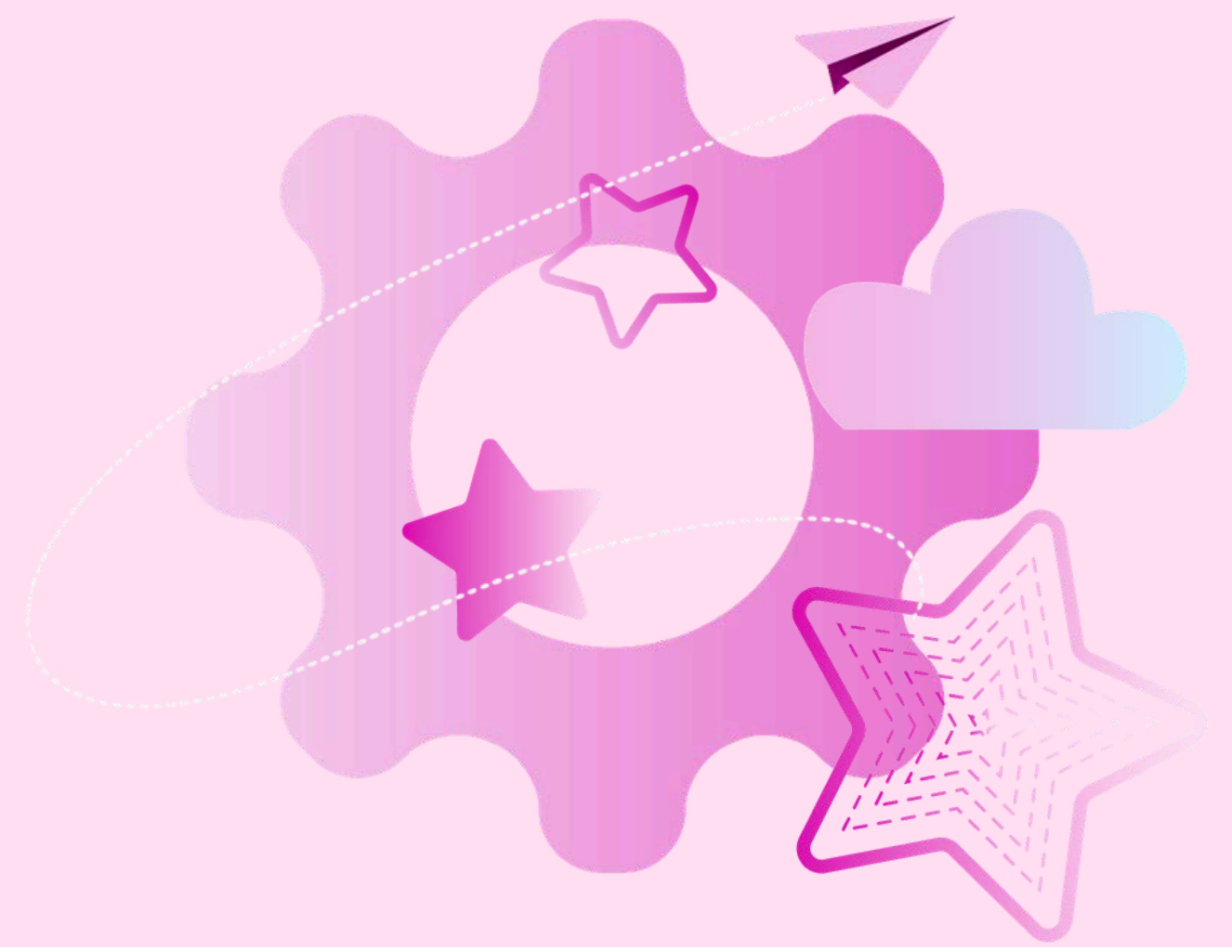


## Bronze Sponsors

---



# Order Of Proceedings



## Acknowledgement of Country

**Casey Naiden**

## Master of Ceremonies Introduction

**Rebecca Hambrook**

2025 NSW Vocational Student of the Year

**Breanna Pilon**

2025 Western NSW Aboriginal & Torres Strait  
Islander Student of the Year & State Finalist

## Welcome Address

**Glenda Buckley**

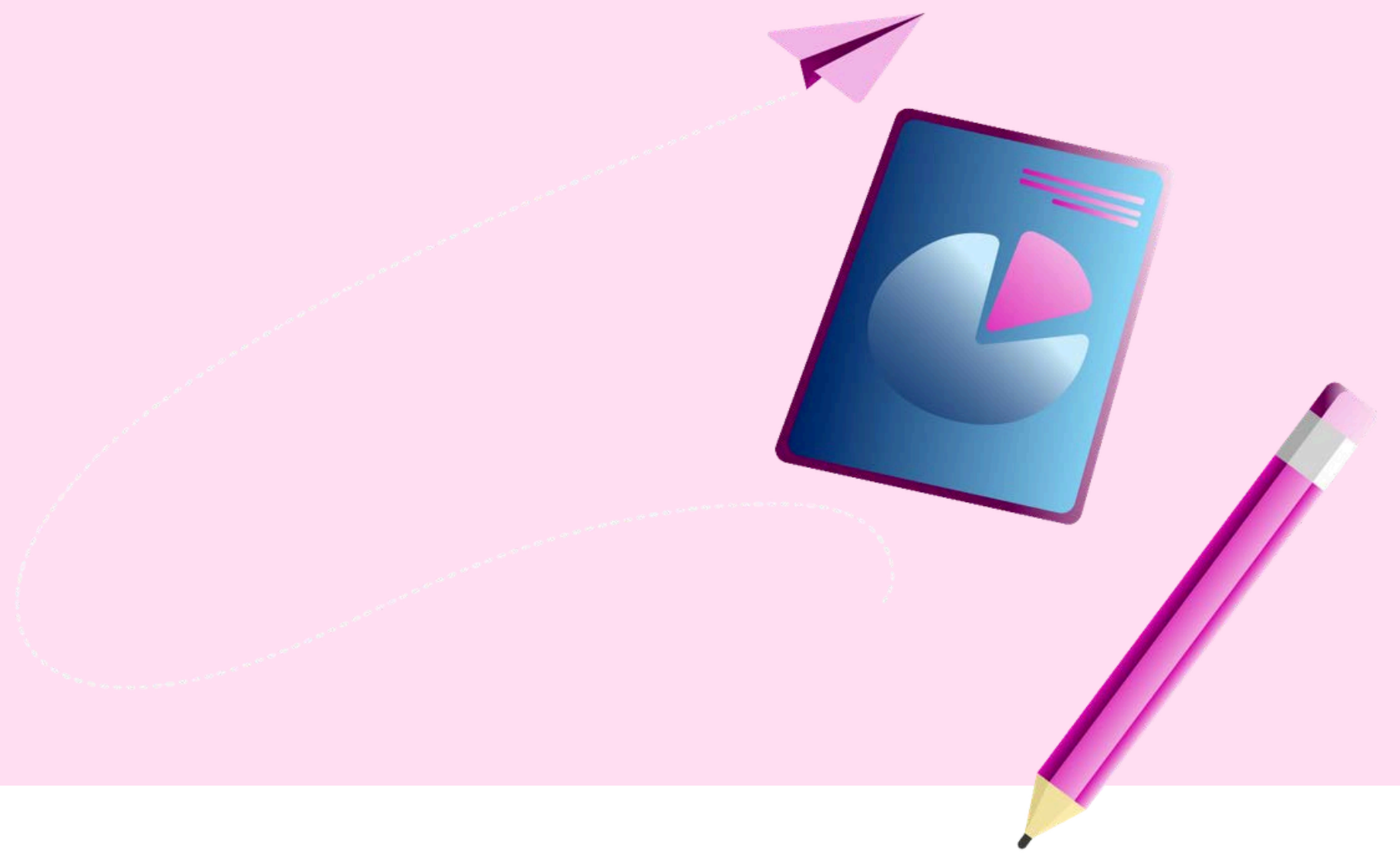
Director, Regional Training Services

## Award Categories

- Vocational Student of the Year
- VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year
- VET in Schools Student of the Year
- School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year
- Trainee of the Year
- Apprentice of the Year



# Message from the Regional Manager



## Western NSW

---

Welcome to the 2026 Western NSW Training Awards. I am proud to support an event that recognises the success, hard work, and dedication of trainees, apprentices, trainers, and employers throughout our region.

Tonight, we celebrate the exciting achievements of individuals and teams who have built skills and taken on new challenges. Your commitment to learning, growth, and supporting each other is what makes the Western Region strong and vibrant. Whether you are receiving an award, nominated, or cheering on someone, your efforts help shape the future of our community.

These awards also highlight the important role that businesses, training organisations, and educators play in helping our people succeed. Without your guidance and encouragement, these achievements would not be possible.

To all nominees and winners — congratulations. Your stories and successes inspire those around you. Thank you for your dedication to developing your skills and working hard every day.

On behalf of the Department of Education, I wish everyone a wonderful evening. Let's continue working together to create opportunities and build a skilled, confident, and successful Western Region.

Best wishes,

**Daniel Bennett**

Western NSW Regional Manager

Regional Training Services

# Meet Our Masters of Ceremonies

Helping us celebrate tonight are our fantastic Master of Ceremonies — passionate ambassadors for Vocational Education and Training. Having undertaken their own VET journey, they embody the transformative power of vocational education and are proud representatives of its impact.



## Rebecca Hambrook

Rebecca Hambrook believes in the importance of recovery and lived-experience support for First Nations and rural communities. Her career journey has been heavily influenced by her personal experiences, and she's used VET to support others on their own pathways to success. In choosing to undertake a Certificate IV in Community Services, Rebecca took a crucial step in her personal and professional life; becoming a support worker. Having overcome trauma, addiction and incarceration,

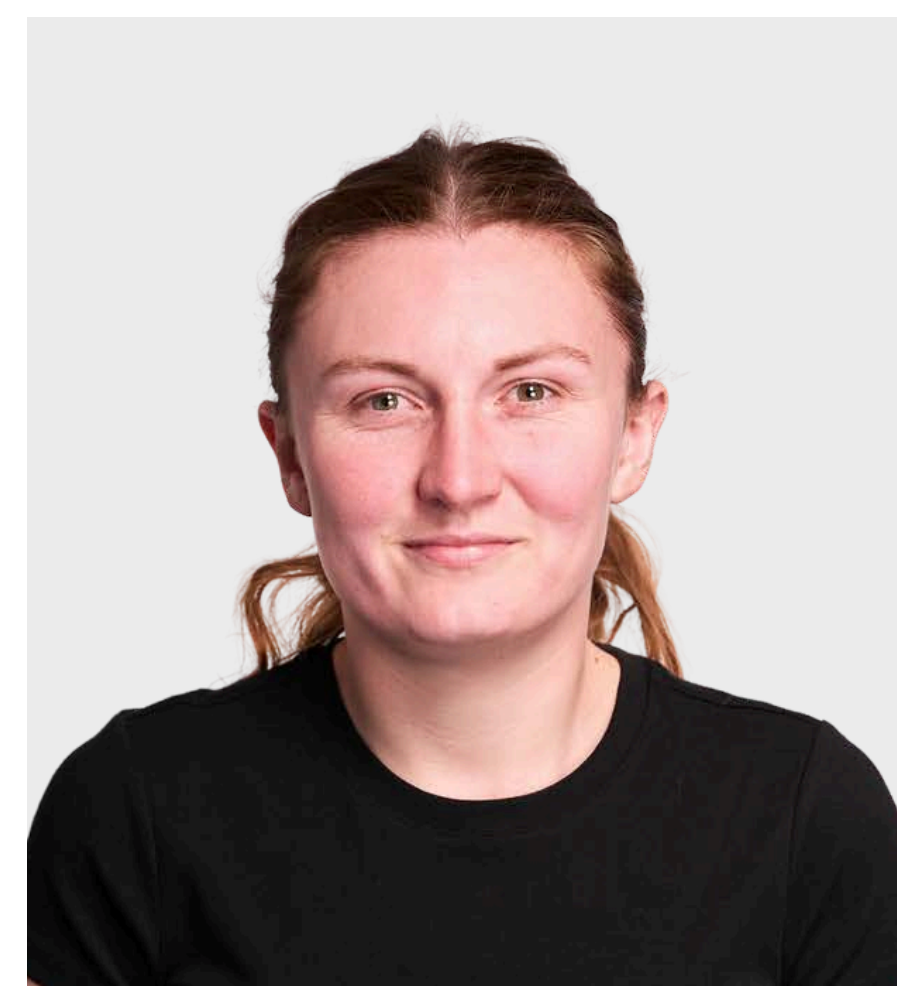
Rebecca chose the community services industry to use experiences to help others facing similar challenges.

The flexibility of online learning allowed her to balance her studies while rebuilding her life. Midway through her course, she secured a role as a support worker at a residential rehabilitation centre, where she was able to apply her knowledge of mental health, trauma, and community services daily.

Now pursuing a Diploma of Alcohol and Other Drugs, Rebecca has her sights set on case work or outreach roles. Her commitment to education and helping others has meant that Rebecca has found her calling and is thriving

## Breanna Pilon

Breanna Pilon is an early childhood educator with a profound passion for working with children and embedding cultural awareness in all she does. Her journey began as a high school student volunteering in primary schools and earning her Certificates I & II in Active Volunteering through the Mulgabirra Program. Breanna then participated in the COVID Indigenous Learning Support Program in Dubbo, where she engaged students in learning about Indigenous history and culture.



After securing a position as Early Childhood Trainee with Skillset and the Rainbow Cottage, Breanna thrived. Her positive attitude and respect for others quickly made her a valued team member. Upon completing her traineeship, Breanna transitioned to a full-time assistant role, a reflection on her growth and the impact she has had on the learning environment.

Passionate about fostering a culturally safe space for young learners, she looks forward to supporting their developmental journeys while sharing her love for Indigenous culture.



## Advancing careers. **Advancing everyday life.**

Find out more at [glencore.com.au/careers](https://www.glencore.com.au/careers)

**GLENCORE**

In Australia, Glencore produces coal, zinc, nickel, cobalt, copper, lead and silver from 20 active mining operations. We also operate metals processing assets in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, including concentrators, smelters and refineries.

We are among Australia's largest producers and marketers of natural resources, connecting Australian resources with industrial customers around the world. Through our diverse portfolio, we responsibly supply the resources that advance everyday life.

We employ 17,420 people in Australia and in 2024 contributed almost \$19.6 billion to the regional, state and national economies. This included spend of \$13.5 billion with 6,810 businesses, as well as \$3.6 billion in government tax and royalty payments.

Learn more about [Glencore Australia](#)



# Empower Your Future

OCTEC Limited (RTO ID 90142) offer vocational education and training in a range of industry sectors. With a focus on practical skills and industry relevance, we empower our students to excel in their chosen fields. Our experienced trainers and commitment to student success make us the ideal choice for students seeking a path to career advancement and personal growth.



**EMPLOYMENT | TRAINING | ADVOCACY**

**[www.octec.org.au](http://www.octec.org.au)**

**OCTEC Limited** is a not-for-profit community organisation providing support and advocacy services for disadvantaged Australians. Their mission is to provide individuals with training and employment opportunities, assist industry recruit and develop skilled workforces, and contribute to communities becoming more sustainable.

Commencing in 1976 as a two-person youth service in Orange, Central Western NSW, OCTEC has grown to become an award-winning provider of services from more than 40 locations across eastern Australia. Today, their services include government-funded employment and pre-employment programs for disadvantaged Australians (long-term unemployed and disconnected youth) as well as services under the NDIS. OCTEC is also a Registered Training Organisation (RTO 90142) offering a range of accredited courses and qualifications, including skills currently in demand by employers.

OCTEC's services are accredited against national and international quality standards, and in 2024/25 they assisted more than 20,000 Australians, including more than 7,300 placements into education or work.



# *Congratulations*

TO ALL 2026 REGIONAL FINALISTS

WE WISH YOU THE BEST OF  
LUCK





# Vocational Student of the Year Finalist

**Kayla Grover-O'Connor**

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate IV in Leadership and Management

## **Training Provider**

Sureway Skills Training

## **Employer**

Bathurst RSL Club



Kayla Grover-O'Connor holds a Certificate IV in Leadership and Management; a qualification she pursued to expand her skills and knowledge within the hospitality industry.

Inspired by the opportunity to participate in a Supervisor Development Program, Kayla completed her certificate, paving the way for a full-time Supervisor position. The course boosted her confidence and leadership abilities, allowing her to provide stability and quality service within her team. She enjoys creating a welcoming atmosphere for customers, with music in the background and regulars arriving for their caffeine fix.

Kayla is passionate about working with a team that shares common goals, which helps ensure smooth, productive days. She values open communication, often seeking feedback from staff to improve workplace practices and training. Kayla supports community events and participates in multi-sport activities with colleagues. She recommends flexible, online learning to others for its positive impact on teamwork, communication, and career progression.

# Vocational Student of the Year Finalist

Leanne Kennewell

---



## Qualification

Certificate IV in Housing

## Training Provider

CHIA NSW

## Employer

Housing Plus

Leanne Kennewell has completed a Certificate IV in Housing through CHIA NSW. She is driven by her passion for community housing and supporting individuals facing homelessness, domestic violence, and housing instability.

Through a transformative cadetship at a community housing provider, Leanne gained hands-on experience in tenancy management, wrap-around support services, and building community partnerships. This practical learning deepened her understanding of trauma-informed practice and the importance of empathy, active listening, and respect in supporting vulnerable clients. Leanne's own experiences have helped her connect authentically with clients, especially when navigating challenges like anxiety and addiction.

She values teamwork, adaptability, and open communication, mentoring new cadets and fostering a supportive work environment. Outside work, Leanne is active in her community as a hockey player and coach, inspiring others through sport. She believes flexible, local VET training is critical for career growth.



# VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year Finalist

Emily Bell

---

## Field of Study

Live Production and Technical Services

## Employer

Catholic Education Diocese of Bathurst



Emily Bell is a dedicated Live Production and Technical Services VET trainer, specialising in Performing Arts (Entertainment) with a strong commitment to innovative delivery and student engagement.

She developed tailored Learning and Assessment Schedules now used across multiple schools, demonstrating her leadership in curriculum design. Emily creatively overcame staffing and timetable challenges to provide full Certificate III access for her students, achieving a 94% completion rate. A long-time member and performer with the Orange Theatre Company, Emily integrates real-world industry experience into her teaching. She leads students in managing youth productions and technical roles, fostering leadership and teamwork.

Emily's learner-centred approach includes a comprehensive Google Site with resources that accommodate diverse learning styles, further enhancing engagement. She actively collaborates with industry partners to offer meaningful work placements, resulting in strong employment outcomes for students. Her inclusive, practical program cultivates confidence, creativity, and career readiness in her students.

# VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year Finalist

Michael Pora

---



## Field Of Study

Wool Classing, Shearing and Handling

## Employer

Australian Agricultural Training

Michael Pora is a highly experienced wool classing, shearing, and handling trainer with over 18 years in the industry.

Passionate about shearing, Michael began his career in Western Australia after leaving school early and has since trained over 1,500 students worldwide, including in Chile, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Spain, and Mongolia. Recognising the importance of footwork in shearing, Michael created an innovative training video focusing on this technique, now regarded as a leading resource for remote learners. He tailors his training to individual needs, breaking down complex skills into manageable steps and incorporating games to maintain engagement during intensive 5–10 day courses.

Michael's dedication has helped produce some of Australia's best shearers and contributed to Dubbo hosting the 2029 World Shearing Championships. Also, a working shearer, Michael leads by example, inspiring students to overcome challenges and succeed. He is currently authoring a book titled Just A Bum about his life and shearing career.



# VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year Finalist

Susanne Witt

---

## Field Of Study

Business

## Employer

OCTEC



Susanne Witt is a highly experienced and passionate VET trainer specialising in business with over 15 years in the sector. Known for her commitment to quality outcomes, Susanne has been nominated twice as OCTEC Trainer of the Year. She is the author of the nationally delivered Job Vibes program, designed to boost jobseekers' confidence, employability skills, and work readiness.

Susanne excels at supporting diverse learners, including refugees and Aboriginal communities, using inclusive, trauma-informed approaches tailored to individual needs. Her engaging teaching style, combined with strong communication skills developed from her journalism career, fosters a supportive, motivating environment that encourages learner success. Susanne effectively adapts training for online delivery and integrates learner feedback to continuously improve programs.

Dedicated to real-world impact, she builds strong industry partnerships and champions practical training that leads to meaningful employment. Recognised for high completion rates and learner confidence gains, Susanne inspires students to follow their passions and build sustainable careers through VET.

# VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist

**Marisa Dial**

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Live Production and Technical Services

## **Training Provider**

Catholic Education Diocese of Bathurst

## **Employer**

Orange City Council

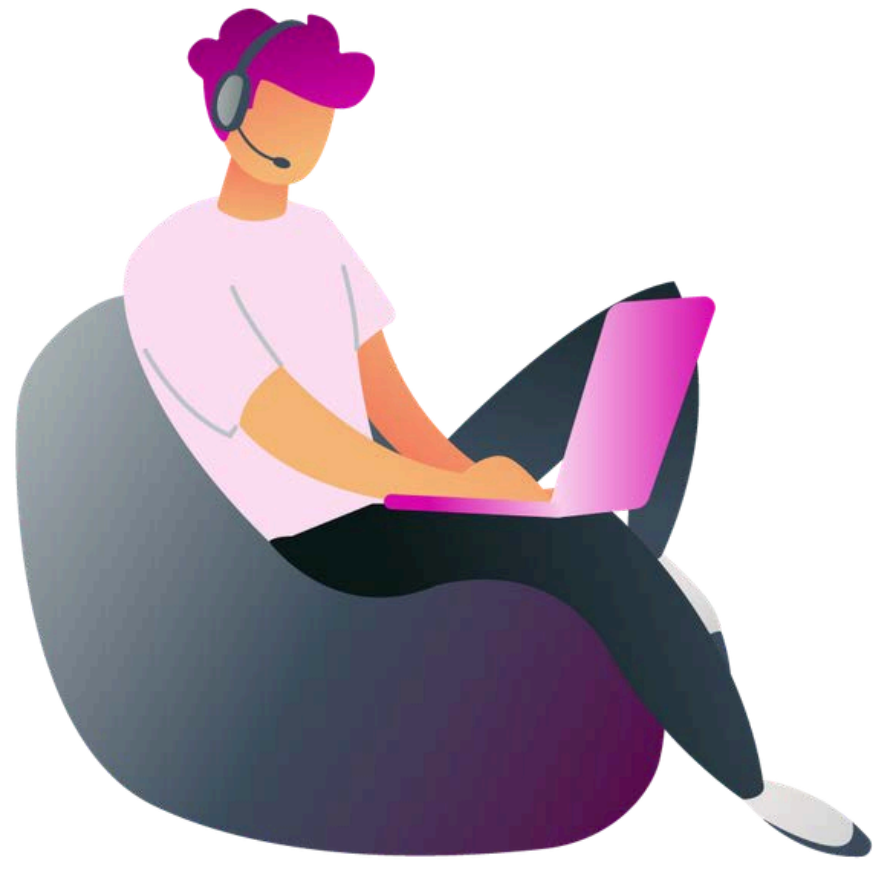
## **School**

James Sheahan Catholic High School

Marisa Dial is completing a Certificate III in Live Production and Technical Services, inspired by her passion for theatre and live performance. After work experience with a local theatre company, she realised her enjoyment of backstage production and wanted to learn more about how theatre operates. Her training enables Marisa to gain a nationally recognised qualification, build her technical skills, and prepare for a future in the performing arts industry.

Through extensive work placements, she learned to rig lights, run soundchecks, and operate advanced equipment, earning mentorship and trust from industry professionals. Her achievements, including an Academic Excellence Award, highlight her commitment to learning and practical experience.

Marisa thrives in team environments, effectively managing time and coordinating events such as school pep rallies. She values clear communication, mutual respect, and collaboration, which she uses to lead backstage teams. Passionate and self-aware, Marisa is dedicated to inspiring others and progressing within live event production.



# VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist

**Thomas Rogers**

---

## **Qualification**

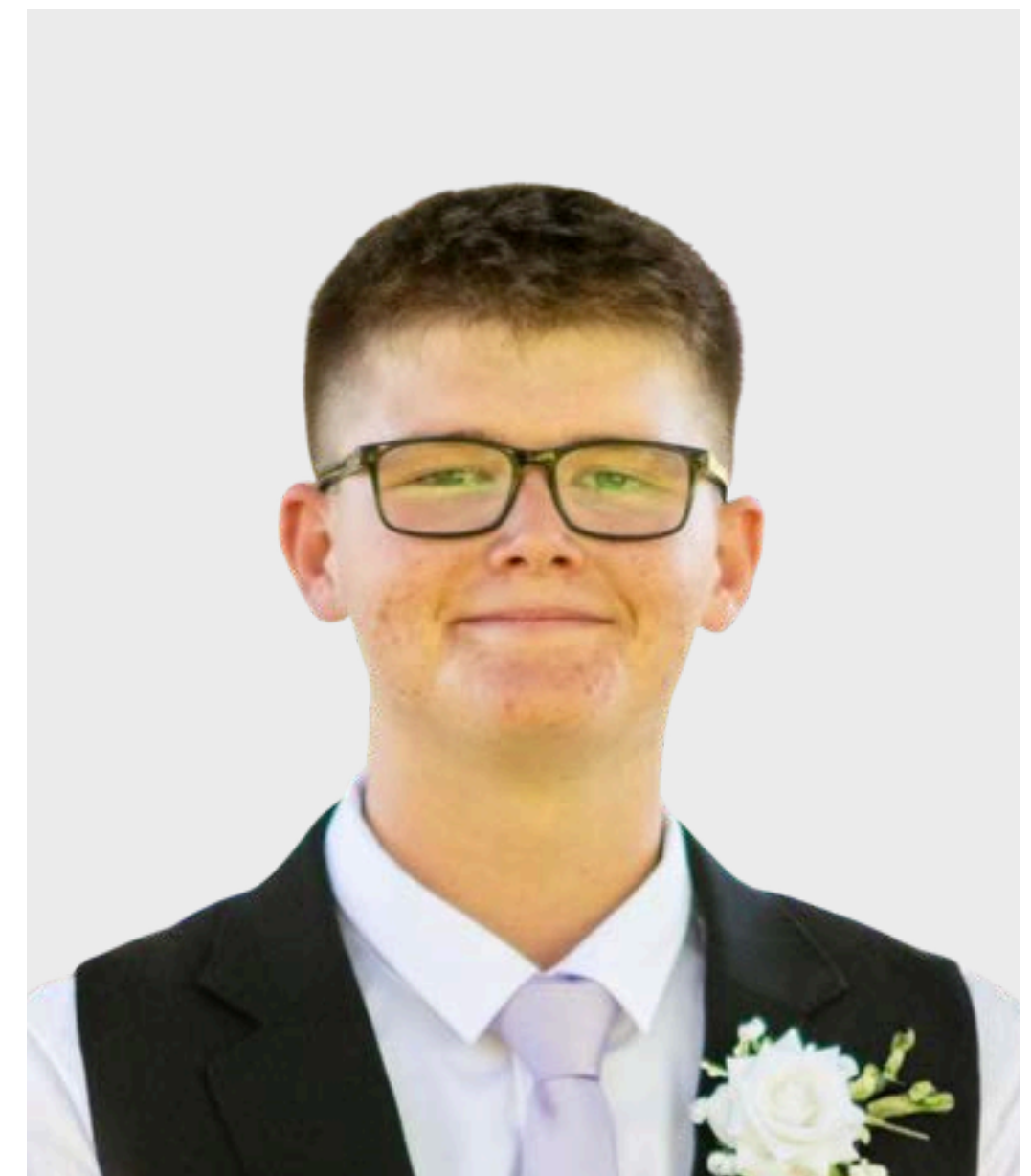
Certificate III in Live Production and Technical  
Services

## **Training Provider**

Catholic Education Diocese of Bathurst

## **School**

St Matthews Catholic School Mudgee



Thomas Rogers is undertaking a Certificate III in Live Production and Technical Services, reflecting his passion for technology, hands-on learning, and live event production.

His interest began in primary school, coordinating lighting and sound for school performances, and has since grown through practical experience in school productions.

Thomas is also committed to community service, volunteering actively with the Rural Fire Service, where he has honed his communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. He is skilled at managing his time and balancing multiple commitments, including participating in school musicals and coordinating production elements for events like "Matilda."

Thomas frequently shares his experiences with classmates, encouraging them to explore VET pathways for their practical benefits and opportunities. He embraces new challenges, remains positive and collaborative, and enjoys helping prepare big events and support his community.

Thomas looks forward to further developing his skills and making a lasting impact in live production and community engagement.

# VET in Schools Student of the Year Finalist

**Joaquin Vicente**

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate II in Cookery

## **Training Provider**

Independent Schools NSW

## **Employer**

The Terrace Thai Cuisine

## **School**

Orange Christian School

Driven by his passion for food and desire to serve others through the culinary arts, Joaquin Vicente pursued a Certificate II in Cookery. This qualification provided an authentic pathway to develop both technical skills and workforce readiness.

Joaquin refined his expertise in food safety, kitchen workflow, stock management, and time efficiency, while embracing leadership opportunities as Head Chef during service periods. His commitment to excellence earned him accolades, including academic recognition in Food Technology and the prestigious Best Chef award at the Le Cordon Bleu Careers Residential.

Working in hospitality has allowed Joaquin to strengthen his understanding of kitchen operations and service coordination, balancing professionalism with genuine enthusiasm. He thrives in high-pressure environments, using clear communication and teamwork to support peers and ensure quality outcomes. Joaquin's VET training has deepened his confidence, helped him develop a professional identity, and provided real-world connections that underpin his ambition to build a successful career in hospitality and culinary arts.



# School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year Finalist

Paige Campbell

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance

## **Training Provider**

TAFE NSW

## **Employer**

Western NSW Local Health District

## **School**

Dunedoo Central School



Paige Campbell is completing a Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance and is passionate about making a difference in her community.

Inspired by the support she received from health professionals, Paige pursued a school-based traineeship, gaining valuable hands-on experience alongside physiotherapists and building strong practical and communication skills. As Vice-Captain of Dunedoo Central School, she leads by example – mentoring younger students, fostering open communication, and actively engaging with teachers and peers. Paige demonstrates dedication by balancing her studies, work, and community involvement, strengthening her time management and teamwork abilities. She recognises the vital role allied health plays in rural areas and advocates for improved access to care and more qualified staff.

Paige encourages others to explore vocational education as a pathway to rewarding careers. With empathy, commitment, and leadership, she aims to continue making a positive impact in healthcare and inspiring others in her community.

# School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year Finalist

Anabelle Hampton

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Real Estate Practice

## **Training Provider**

Real Estate Institute of New South Wales

## **Employer**

HR Realtors and Lifestyle Property

Specialists

## **School**

Lithgow High School

Anabelle Hampton is undertaking a Certificate III in Real Estate Practice and has developed a deep passion for the unique stories behind every property.

Starting her traineeship while still at school, she embraced the opportunity to gain real-world experience alongside nationally recognised training.

Annabelle's combined learning has strengthened her work ethic, discipline, and professional skills.

Progressing from basic administrative tasks to client communication and inspections, she values the balance of theoretical knowledge and practical application that has accelerated her growth. Annabelle is passionate about encouraging others to explore vocational education pathways, highlighting their benefits as a practical, confidence-building alternative to traditional academic routes. She enjoys working in teams, where open communication, respect, and varied perspectives lead to better outcomes and shared success.

Committed to kindness, confidence, and positive influence, Annabelle actively mentors her peers, helping them navigate work and study balance while inspiring them to pursue rewarding real estate careers.



# School-based Apprentice/Trainee of the Year Finalist

**Bronte Toole**

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Motorcycle Mechanical  
Technology

## **Training Provider**

TAFE NSW

## **Employer**

Beard Bros Motorcycles

## **School**

Mackillop College - Bathurst



Bronte Toole is a passionate and accomplished motorcycle mechanic completing a Certificate III in Motorcycle Mechanical Technology through TAFE NSW while attending Mackillop College - Bathurst.

With a genuine love for motorcycles, she has developed impressive hands-on skills, including tyre changes, brake inspections, and chain replacements. Through extensive workshop experience and guidance from seasoned professionals, Bronte has refined her problem-solving abilities, attention to detail, and communication skills. Balancing school, training, and practical work has strengthened her independence, time management, and work ethic.

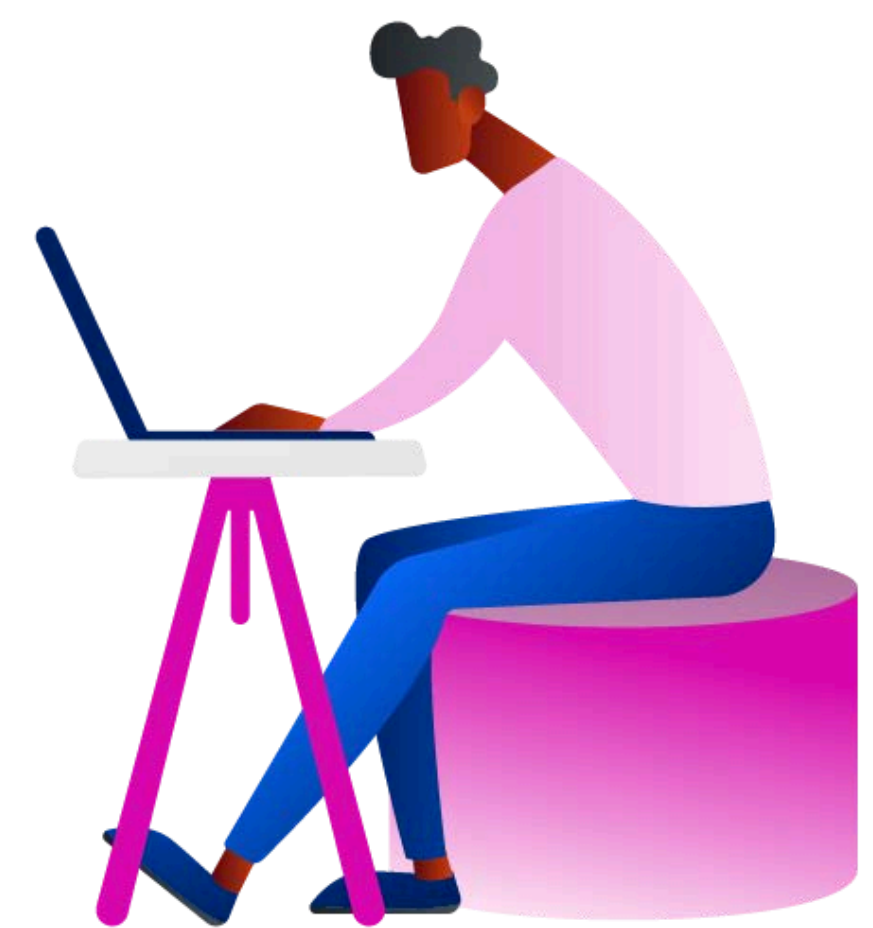
Bronte is proud to succeed in a male-dominated industry and actively encourages more young women to pursue careers in mechanics. She values teamwork, clear communication, and initiative, sharing her journey and supporting others interested in vocational education.

Ambitious for the future, Bronte aims to advance her expertise further, explore specialisation in motorcycle racing, and inspire the next generation of skilled mechanics.

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist

**Brodie Gibson**

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Surveying and Spatial Information Services

## **Training Provider**

TAFE NSW

## **Employer**

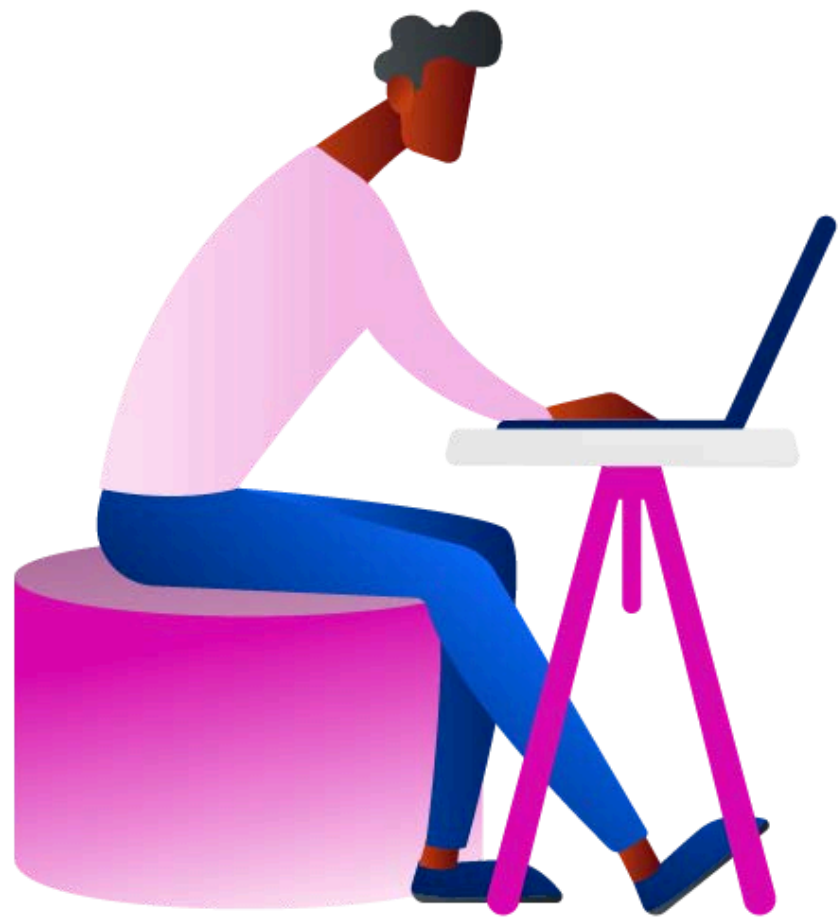
Parkes Shire Council

Brodie Gibson completed a Certificate III in Surveying and Spatial Information Services through TAFE NSW.

Overcoming significant personal challenges, including the loss of a loved one, Brodie transformed his life through dedication to study and work. Initially unsure about his career path, he discovered a passion for maths and surveying, which has helped him achieve key life goals such as buying a home and getting engaged.

Now employed at Parkes Regional Council as one of two surveyors covering a large shire area, Brodie brings reliability, teamwork, and positivity to a demanding role. He embraces new ideas, supports colleagues, and actively contributes to his community through work and volunteering.

Brodie advocates for better industry collaboration, improved technology, and a positive workplace culture. His journey from hardship to accomplishment is an inspiring example for others pursuing traineeships, showing that determination and effort can lead to success.



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist

**Scott Higgins**

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate III in ESI - Distribution Overhead

## **Training Provider**

Essential Energy

## **Employer**

Essential Energy



Scott Higgins holds a Certificate III in ESI – Distribution Overhead and is dedicated to maintaining electricity services and supporting his local community. His day-to-day work involves changing poles, working at clients' homes, and handling crucial electrical tasks to keep homes and towns powered.

Scott completed in-house training through Essential Energy, learning from experienced tradespeople, and appreciated working alongside knowledgeable colleagues.

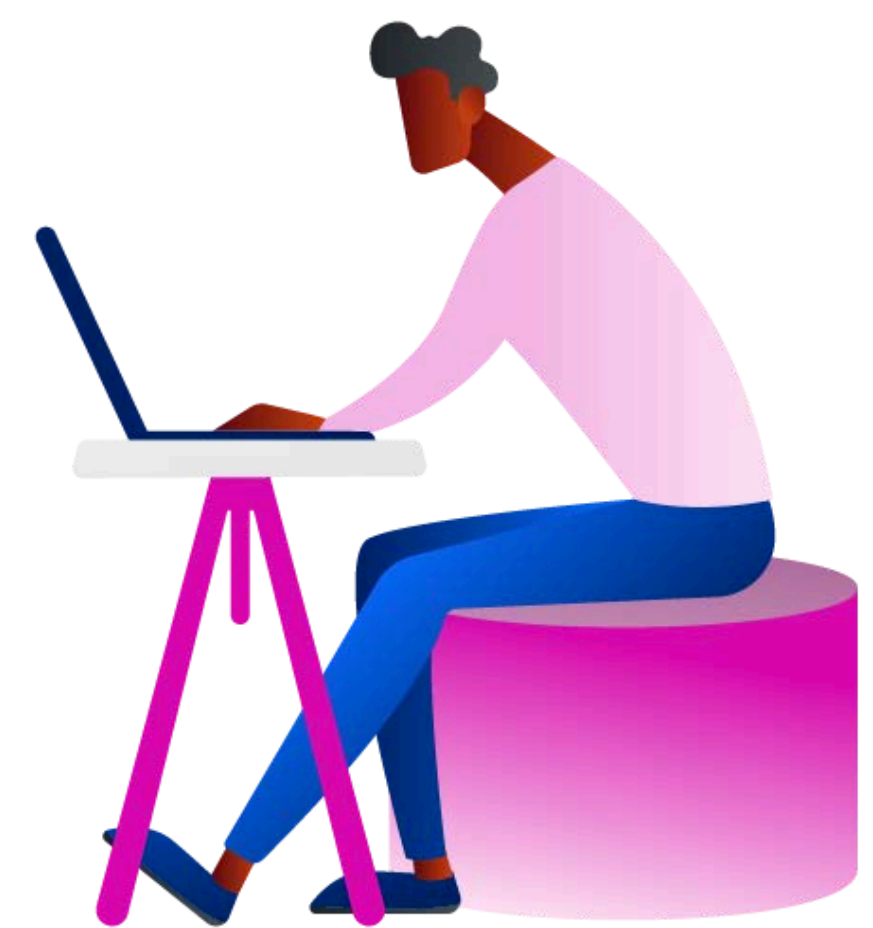
Deeply connected to his community, Scott volunteers at events, plays football, and supports his daughter's sports teams. He believes education about electricity should be more widespread and advocates for future innovations, including renewable energy, battery storage, and improved network reliability.

Scott sees the industry moving toward underground networks and improved backup systems. He encourages anyone considering vocational education and training to pursue it, highlighting the benefits of mentorship, practical experience, and lifelong qualifications. Scott's strong community ties and commitment to excellence make him a valued professional in his field.

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year Finalist

**Tylah Mapperson**

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Business

## **Training Provider**

Zeal Futures Learning

## **Employer**

Zeal Futures

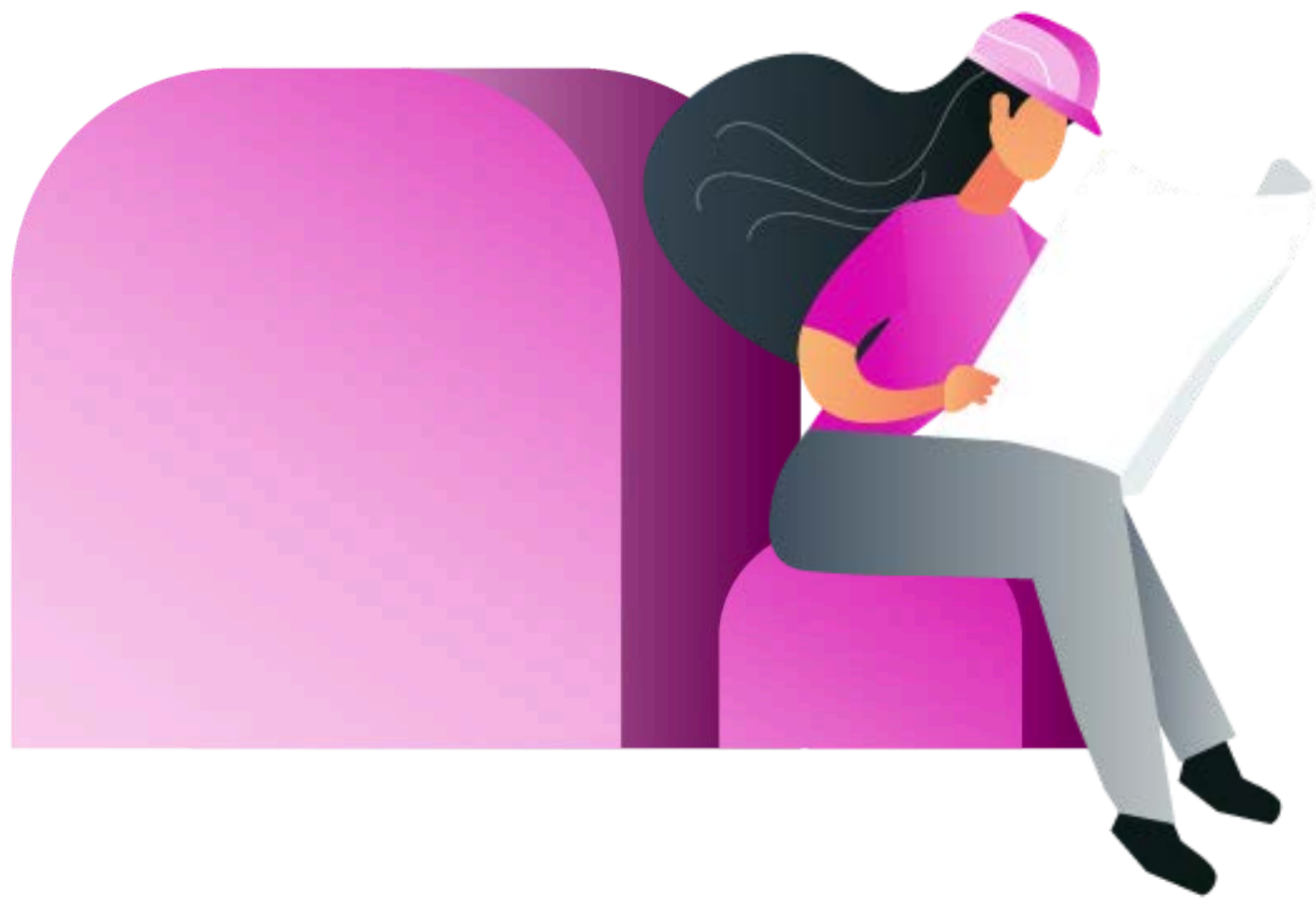
## **Host Employer**

Service NSW

Tylah Mapperson is a dedicated trainee with a Certificate III in Business, currently employed by Zeal Futures. She values her traineeship highly, noting that it provides practical skills through hands-on experience in a real work environment. Tylah appreciates the support for staff and individual growth within her workplace and recognises the importance of pitching ideas to ensure her voice is heard.

Adjusting to the fast-paced environment and managing urgent tasks have been challenging, yet she has developed strong organisational and time-management skills to balance work and study commitments. Passionate about community service, Tylah actively participates in charity work, fundraises for sick children and breast cancer awareness, and engages in NAIDOC and ANZAC events.

She advocates for increased accessibility for the elderly, people with disabilities, and disadvantaged groups, particularly in remote areas. For Tylah, vocational education and training is a crucial stepping stone for building practical, real-world skills and creating future career success.



# Trainee of the Year Finalist

**Macy Everingham**

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate IV in Real Estate Practice

## **Training Provider**

Real Estate Institute of New South Wales

## **Employer**

Bob Berry Real Estate



Macy Everingham holds a Certificate IV in Real Estate Practice and has developed a deep passion for property that began with childhood memories of discussing homes with her mother. Drawn to the idea that a house is more than a structure, Macy pursued a real estate traineeship, balancing her studies with practical work experience. This hands-on approach helped Macy build confidence, resilience, and a strong sense of purpose.

She progressed from a school-based trainee to a full-time employee, now managing a leasing role with dedication and care. Macy values teamwork and communication, striving to ensure clients and tenants feel heard and supported. She embraces leadership through collaboration and brings kindness, integrity, and reliability to every interaction.

Tech-savvy and results-focused, Macy continually advances her skills to enhance customer experiences. Proud of her VET journey, she actively promotes these pathways and celebrates the impact real estate professionals make in people's lives and communities.

# Trainee of the Year Finalist

Trinity Preston

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Business

## **Training Provider**

Australian College of Commerce & Management

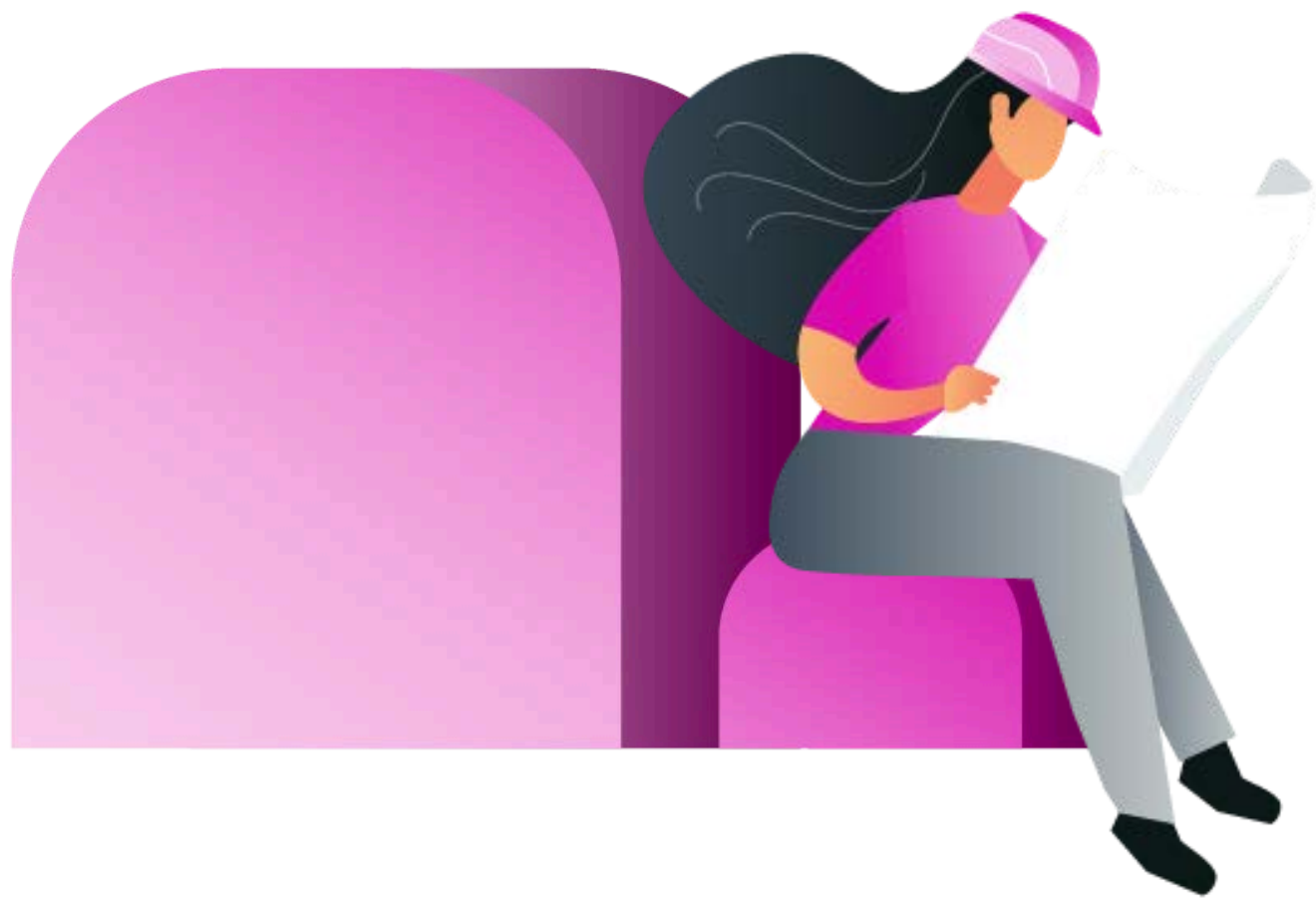
## **Employer**

Orange City Council

Trinity Preston holds a Certificate III in Business and credits her traineeship as the most effective career decision she has made after discovering her practical learning style. Seeking a meaningful career, Trinity quickly developed skills in digital literacy, record-keeping, policy writing, and complex administration.

She earned multiple nominations for assessment excellence and was recognised internally with a Staff Excellence Award for her commitment and positive influence. Trinity actively improves workplace efficiency, bringing a proactive mindset and collaborating with colleagues to update procedures and solve problems. She values clear communication and adaptability, thriving in team environments while approaching her work with ownership and integrity.

Trinity advocates for the benefits of Vocational Education and Training, emphasising real-world relevance, flexible learning, and direct application of skills. Ambitious and hardworking, she aspires to expand her responsibilities, progress to leadership roles, and continue setting a strong example for others, leaving a lasting impact in her field.



# Trainee of the Year Finalist

**Elliette Timmins**

---

## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Business

## **Training Provider**

Australian College of Commerce &  
Management

## **Employer**

Advanced Hearing Solutions



Elliette Timmins, who holds a Certificate III in Business, has blossomed into a versatile and valued team member at Advanced Hearing Solutions.

Her course has enriched her confidence and skills, helping her advance as a Customer Service Officer and explore new opportunities as an Audiology Technician. Elliette excels in workplace communication, offering insightful guidance on email structure, tone, and professional etiquette, and positively influences work health and safety practices. She successfully balances study with work commitments, thriving in both independent tasks and collaborative team environments.

With experience across multiple clinics and states, Elliette tailors her communication style to diverse audiences, fostering strong connections with community members, especially seniors. She highly values the flexibility and lifelong learning benefits of VET training, praising its role in developing critical thinking and transferable skills. Now in a full-time position, Elliette eagerly looks forward to furthering her education and continuing her professional journey.

# Apprentice of the Year Finalist

**Corey Armstrong-Lane**

---



## **Qualification**

Certificate III in Mobile Plant Technology

## **Training Provider**

TAFE NSW

## **Employer**

Skillset

## **Host Employer**

Yancoal Moolarben Coal Operations

Corey Armstrong-Lane holds a Certificate III in Mobile Plant Technology and has developed outstanding technical skills through four years of block-release training and hands-on experience at Yancoal Moolarben Coal Operations.

Starting with limited mechanical knowledge, Corey mastered fault diagnosis, major component change-outs, shutdown planning, and safe work systems, working independently on large-scale machinery including haul trucks, dozers, graders, and excavators. He values the integration of TAFE NSW theory with practical workplace learning, and credits mentorship and teamwork for his professional and personal growth.

Corey actively contributes to workplace communication, supports younger apprentices through mentoring, and helps foster a culture of safety and care. Beyond work, Corey plays rugby, volunteers at Vinnies, and participates in local community events. He is passionate about the mining industry, encourages young people to explore trades, and appreciates the sense of security and fulfilment that his apprenticeship and trade qualification provide.



# Apprentice of the Year Finalist

Jack De Freitas

---

## Qualification

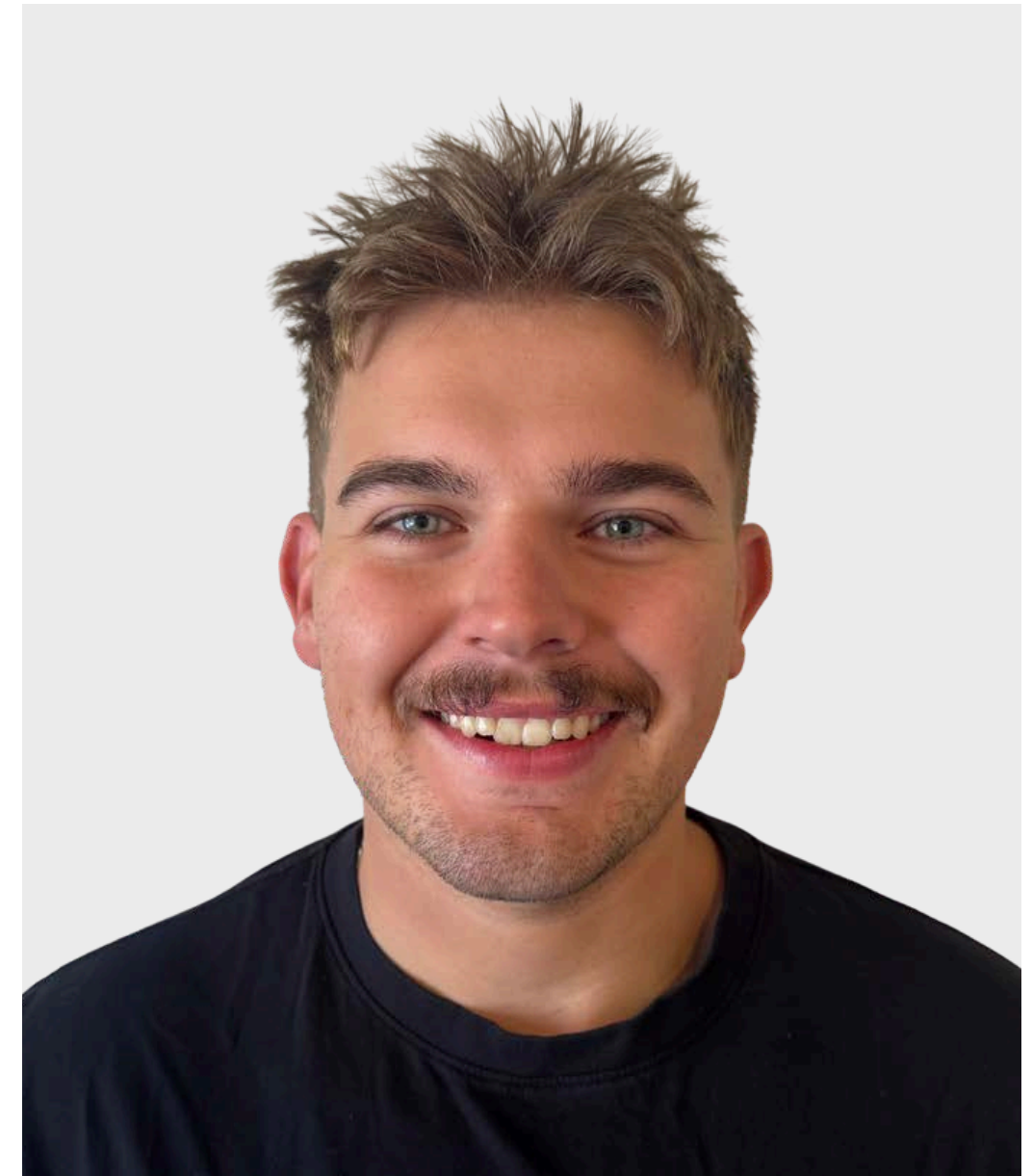
Certificate III in ESI - Distribution Overhead

## Training Provider

Essential Energy

## Employer

Essential Energy



Jack De Freitas holds a Certificate III in ESI – Distribution Overhead and began his apprenticeship at Essential Energy fresh out of school.

He chose this career path because it fits his personality and interests – working outdoors, problem-solving, teamwork, and prioritising safety to ensure everyone goes home safely.

Jack has gained invaluable practical skills, from using heavy machinery and power tools to managing complex electrical work, completing his apprenticeship early despite challenges like floods and COVID. He values the supportive workplace culture and camaraderie with colleagues, often participating in community events like local school trade days and social golf tournaments to boost team morale and inspire others.

Jack believes the future of the industry lies in green energy, including solar and wind farms, and takes pride in helping to keep electricity flowing reliably. His hands-on learning and commitment to safety have set him up for a successful and rewarding career in the electrical sector.

# Apprentice of the Year Finalist

Izaak Johnston

---



## Qualification

Certificate III in Barbering

## Training Provider

TAFE NSW

## Employer

Mane Man's Barbershop

Izaak Johnston holds a Certificate III in Barbering and discovered his passion for the trade after experiencing the welcoming atmosphere at Mane Man's Barbershop.

Inspired by how barbering boosts confidence and builds community, Izaak pursued his apprenticeship and quickly developed strong technical, communication, and customer service skills through hands-on training in a real shop environment. He enjoys working as part of a supportive team, helping clients feel comfortable and confident, and values reliability, a positive attitude, and continuous learning.

Izaak believes barbering is more than just a haircut — it's about connecting with people and making a positive impact. He encourages greater awareness of barbering as a professional career and looks forward to expanding his skills further. Looking ahead, Izaak hopes to own his own barber shop, mentor apprentices, and keep advancing his expertise. He brings dedication, enthusiasm, and a friendly approach to every client and workplace interaction.

# Thank You



On behalf of the Western NSW Regional Training Awards team, we extend our heartfelt thanks for your generous support and involvement in this year's program and event. Your contribution played a vital role in celebrating the achievements of our region's outstanding VET learners, trainees, apprentices, employers, and training providers.

Your commitment to fostering excellence in vocational education and training inspires future generations and strengthens our local workforce. We are truly grateful for your support and look forward to continuing this important work together.

Thank you once again for helping make the Western NSW Training Awards a success.

