

THE HON JULIA GILLARD MP
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
Minister for Education
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Minister for Social Inclusion

SENATOR THE HON MARK ARBIB
Minister for Employment Participation
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Government Service Delivery

MEDIA RELEASE

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Apprentice Kickstart project to exceed 21,000 target

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard today praised Australian businesses for taking advantage of the Government's Apprentice Kickstart bonus, with the program likely to exceed its target of signing up 21,000 apprentices in three months.

To date, more than 19,600 young people have been given a job in trades hit by skills shortages, as of the closing date at the end of February.

But with more Kickstart contracts still coming from the states and territories for the last part of the program, it is expected the final figure will surge beyond 21,000.

Speaking at the launch of *Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy* in Sydney this morning, Ms Gillard said the Government would go beyond its original commitment to pay the bonus for up to 21,000 apprentices and instead pay employers for every kickstart apprentice taken on over summer.

"Apprentice Kickstart was a practical measure to generate jobs for school leavers. It has helped to tackle youth unemployment and has laid a positive foundation for the vital skills Australia needs for the future," Ms Gillard said.

"Kickstart has been very well received by both employers and training bodies around Australia and I congratulate all those employers who capitalised on the program and gave a young person a go.

"Through the support of the Rudd Government, businesses and motivated school leavers, Apprentice Kickstart has achieved its desired result of boosting apprenticeships around Australia."

Minister for Employment Participation Mark Arbib said under Kickstart, the Rudd Government more than tripled the commencement bonus for employers in the first year, from \$1500 to \$4850.

"Apprentice Kickstart was designed to boost apprenticeship commencements after a drop off during the global recession," Senator Arbib said.

"The project helped us eclipse commencements for the same period 12 months ago, when 17,500 apprentices began work."

Funding for Apprentice Kickstart came from the Government's \$650 million Jobs Fund which was negotiated with the support of the Australian Greens and Senator Stephen Fielding.

Senator Arbib said State and Territory Governments were in the process of submitting proposals for the \$20 million pre-apprenticeship measures under Kickstart.

Media inquiries: (DPM) Russell Mahoney 0407 930 687: (Arbib) Alison Hill 0407 570 640
DEEWR Media: media@deewr.gov.au **Non-media queries:** 1300 363 079