



# Myriad of choices for hands-on training

**S**electing a career is only half the battle these days. Once a decision has been made, choosing where to study can be a headache. The choice for university students is simple with only 16 universities in NSW. For those looking for a trade or vocational course the options available can be overwhelming.

There are 967 TAFE colleges and private registered training organisations (RTOs) in NSW. Another 815 RTOs deliver courses in NSW and are registered in other states. That is 1782 training options to choose from.

To make finding the best courses easier the Institute for Trade Skills Excellence has introduced a star rating scheme.

Since October last year more than 90 training providers have been rated by the scheme and another 50 are being reviewed.

Courses are awarded one, two, or three stars depending what criteria they meet. This week 15 new courses were rated under the scheme. Institute CEO Brian Wexham says it will help students and parents assess the course that is best for them.

"It is essential that students at RTOs go to courses that give them the skills that industry is looking for," Wexham says.

"They can go there confident they are going to a competent course."

Because the scheme was developed with industry, the courses assessed and rated by the program gain links to employer bodies.

The ratings are independent, he says.

"The important thing is to keep raising the bar for the training taking place," he says.

The NSW Department of Education and Training recognises training organisations at its annual Training Awards.

DET state training services general manager David Collins says it pays to do your homework and potential students should be asking questions before they commit.

"The sort of questions people should be asking are: Where will the qualifications lead? Are students getting jobs out of the course? And what are the costs of the course?," Collins says.

With 35 per cent of school leavers completing a vocational course, students should be checking whether they will get recognition for prior learning (RPL), he says.

"If you are going into a similar course you want to make sure you're getting recognition for the work you've done," he says.

Friends and career counsellors can also offer invaluable advice on which courses are better than others.

"If you know someone who has done a course with a provider then that is often the best way to find out what it is like," he says.

Apprentice carpenter Jim Leathbridge says his decision to study at TAFE's Nirimba College, which was this week awarded three stars for its carpentry course, was influenced by a number of factors.

Leathbridge says he studied at the college to earn his construction site green card.

"I was impressed by the set-up," Leathbridge says. "They had a good name for carpentry and engineering as well."

The college is close to home and work, which is an added benefit, he says. And his employer was keen for him to study there.

"He's had people go through the college so he knew what the standard was like."

**HENRY BUDD**

## Trust your future to the stars — of TAFE that is

The Institute of Trade Skills has awarded the following TAFE NSW courses a star rating.

South Western Sydney Institute, Padstow:  
Auto — three gold stars

South Western Sydney Institute, Wetherill Park:  
Heavy Auto — three gold stars

Western Sydney Institute, Nirimba College:  
Bricklaying, Blocklaying, Roof Tiling, Carpentry — three gold stars

Sydney Institute, Randwick College:  
Wall and Floor Tiling, Waterproofing — three gold stars

Western Sydney Institute, Nepean College:  
Bakery — two gold stars

North Coast Institute, Wollonbar and Kingscliffe:  
Hairdressing — two gold stars

North Coast Institute, Coffs Harbour:  
Commercial Cookery — one gold star

Illawarra Institute, Wollongong West:  
Hairdressing — one gold star

Illawarra Institute, Wollongong:  
Bakery — one gold star

Illawarra Institute, Wollongong:  
Cookery — one gold star

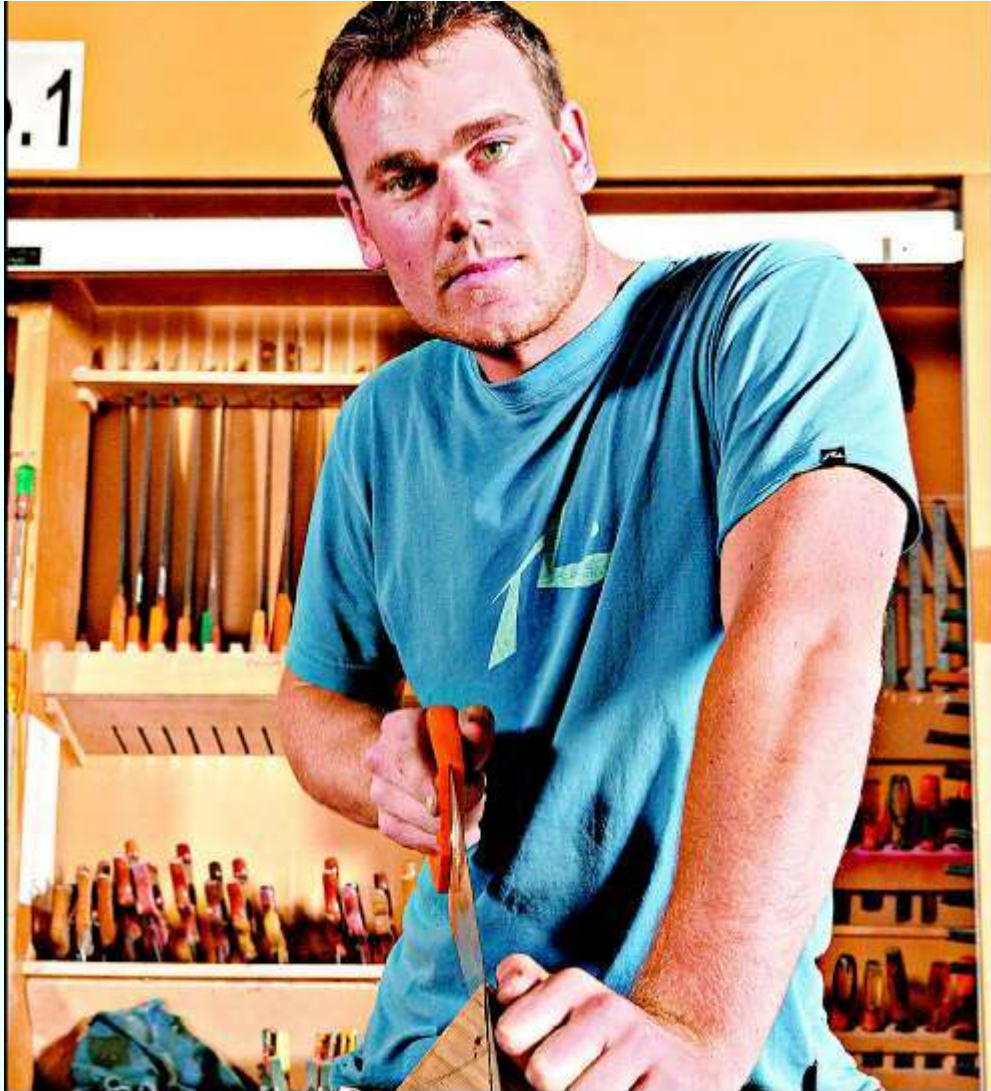
Western Sydney Institute, Mount Druitt:  
Manufacturing — three gold stars

Sydney Institute, Ultimo College:  
Manufacturing — two gold stars

South Western Sydney Institute, Chullora:  
Metals and Engineering — two gold stars

South Western Sydney Institute, Miller:  
Electrical — two gold stars

South Western Sydney Institute, Padstow:  
Horticulture — three gold stars



Trusted . . . Jim Leathbridge says Nirimba TAFE has a good reputation. *Picture: JOHN FOTIADIS*