Building a tradie army

Apprentices key for $100b infrastructure boom

TAXPAYERS will help bankroll much-needed apprentices in jobs heavily filled by overseas workers as the Morrison Government moves to build a local workforce for its $100 billion infrastructure investment.

Jobs Minister Michaelia Cash will today reveal the first review of the National Skills Needs List in seven years, signalling an overhaul to subsidised apprenticeships and transitioning away from skilled, foreign labour.

The Courier-Mail can reveal that of the 65 occupations on the skills needs list, only 22 meet the guidelines. The list has not been updated since 2011, meaning it has not kept up with changes to the economy and the labour market.

The review will almost certainly be slammed by some Australian industry groups, which face losing financial incentives, including helping to pay for apprenticeship wages.

The Government will focus on financially supporting trades needed for its 10-year plan to build more roads, trains, dams and big-ticket infrastructure. It is also sending a strong signal to the Australian labour market that the Government wants fewer skilled migrants.

Those currently on the skills needs list include carpenters, motor mechanics, hairdressers, sheet metal trades workers, cooks, plumbers, refrigeration mechanics and cabinet-makers.

The review will determine which of the 65 professionals will continue to be on the needs list.

An occupation is considered to be needed on the skills list when bosses are unable to fill, or have trouble filling, positions.

The new list will be determined by July next year to coincide with a streamlined new apprenticeship program.

Senator Cash told The Courier-Mail the overhaul was needed.

"The National Skills Needs List is one of the most effective levers we have as a Government in determining our tradie workforce, so it is vital that we get the review right," Senator Cash said.

New award for Atwood

LITERARY agent Lynn Nesbit and Margaret Atwood and some of the forces behind the Hulu adaptation of her novel The Handmaid’s Tale will be this year’s honorees at the Center for Fiction’s benefit and awards dinner.

The Center announced Nesbit would receive the Maxwell E. Perkins Award, given to literary publishers, in recognition of her "outstanding and sustained contributions to the literary world".

The New York Times bestselling author Atwood will receive the Center’s Fiction Award of Merit, given to "an author whose body of work is distinguished and worthy of national acclaim for more than one decade of publishing."