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Minister for Education, Training and Skills

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Women leading the way in SA Training Awards

A civil construction worker who swapped the pharmacy for heavy machinery and a gardening guru turning her passion into a career are among the women in trades taking out top honours in this year's South Australian Training Awards.

Now in its 30th year and presented by the South Australian Skills Commission, the Awards are the pinnacle recognition for vocational education and training (VET).

This year's program attracted a record number of nominations in 14 categories, showcasing the depth and diversity of talent within the sector across the state.

Women dominated the list of individual honours, with last night's recipients helping inspire greater female participation and retention in the industry.

Aya Pulle was named South Australia's 2026 Apprentice of the Year, excelling in a traditionally male-dominated trade.

Aya completed her Certificate III in Civil Construction and her apprenticeship ahead of schedule, while also attaining additional certifications.

The SADB employee was recognised for her technical skills, her contribution to Civil Contractors Federation SA's Women in Civil Committee and her upcoming volunteer work in Nepal for a humanitarian housing project.

Women were also awarded the school-based Apprentice or Trainee of the Year, Trainee of the Year, VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year, Vocational Student of the Year, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year.

Marking the Awards' 30-year milestone, the Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to the Hon Paul Caica, recognising more than three decades of service to South Australia's VET sector and supporting training opportunities.

Winners will represent South Australia at the 2026 Australian Training Awards in Sydney in November.

For information about all the award winners and finalists, visit trainingawards.sa.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Lucy Hood

A high-performing skills sector is central to building the workforce our industries and major projects will rely on for decades to come.

These awards recognise the apprentices, trainees, students, training organisations and employers making that happen, now and in the future.

Topping the list this year is a diverse group of female apprentices and tradeswomen helping build our state and keep it moving.

We want to keep breaking barriers through fee-free TAFE, growing our technical colleges and continuing to invest in non-government training providers and industry partnerships.

Quotes attributable to SA Skills Commissioner Cameron Baker

For 30 years, the South Australian Training Awards have recognised people and organisations whose skills, commitment and dedication have helped shape our industries, strengthen our communities and build the skilled workforce our state needs.

These Awards recognise not only individual achievement, but also the employers, trainers, mentors, families and colleagues who help people succeed.

This year's winners and finalists demonstrate the quality, innovation and commitment that continue to strengthen vocational education and training in South Australia and create meaningful opportunities for people to build rewarding careers.

I congratulate every winner and finalist, and I look forward to seeing our winners in eligible categories represent South Australia on the national stage at the 2026 Australian Training Awards.

2026 Individual Award winners

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year – Elkira Simmons
- Apprentice of the Year – Aya Pulle
- School-based Apprentice or Trainee of the Year – Keeley O'Shaughnessy
- Trainee of the Year – Polly Marks
- VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year – Maisa Lacasandile
- Vocational Student of the Year – Emily Stone
- Lifetime Achievement Award – the Hon Paul Caica

2026 Organisational Award winners

- Adult Community Education Provider of the Year – SkillUp SA
- Industry Collaboration – Heavy Industry Multi Skills Program
- Large Employer of the Year – BAE Systems Australia
- Large Training Provider of the Year – Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (SA Branch)

- Small Employer of the Year – Longko Salon
- Small Training Provider of the Year – ELC Training Australia
- VET Innovation for Schools – Western Technical College