

STATE-OF-THE-ART FORESTRY TRAINING

Course: Certificate III in Harvesting and Haulage

Training provider: TAFE Gippsland

Training location: Forestec Campus,
East Gippsland

Industry supporters: Hancock Plantations
Victoria, VicForests, TMCO Pty Ltd., Reynolds
Logging, Mountain Logging, Waratah
Forestry Equipment

A RAPIDLY EVOLVING INDUSTRY – THE CONTEXT

Technology is revolutionising the forestry industry, with sophisticated machinery and monitoring tools leading to major gains in efficiency and sustainability.

"The way technology has gone, it's all about optimisation," says Kevin Nunn, forestry manager at TAFE Gippsland. "There's a world stewardship standard that basically stops illegal logging. A log that ends up in Asia can be tracked back to its origin in East Gippsland. You need technology to be compliant with these standards, or the world won't buy your logs."

It's a time of growth as well as change – demand for timber is rising worldwide and the federal government has backed the industry's aspiration to plant a billion trees across Australia in the next 10 years. The industry is also part of the Food and Fibre sector – one of the state government's high priority sectors for economic growth.

INVESTING IN TECHNOLOGY – THE SOLUTION

TAFE Gippsland's forestry contacts indicated demand for workers was high, but it had a problem in trying to meet that need - key equipment at its Forestec Campus in East Gippsland was no longer in line with industry standards.



"We were an old-school logging training provider," Mr Nunn says. "Our machinery was 15 years old, with a basic computer – it was out of date."

A successful application to the Regional and Specialist Training Fund has changed that. TAFE Gippsland received \$1.1 million, with more than \$995,000 invested in new equipment and the remainder used to subsidise teaching costs to ensure the course was well resourced.

The new gear includes an excavator base and a tracked harvester training simulator. The simulator uses virtual reality technology and offers a true-to-life experience of operating forestry machines.

"The simulator is state-of-the-art," Mr Nunn says. "Students spend a couple of days on it before moving on to the real thing."

"It's vital for students to get that experience in a safe environment before they start operating expensive 30-tonne machines with fellow workers around," he says.

"I spoke to a contractor who was very surprised at one of our young blokes who was able to use a machine well on his first go, and that's because of the simulator."

Two units that teach students about optimisation were added to the course to dovetail with industry expectations and the use of the new equipment.



JOBS FOR ALL – THE OUTCOMES

Eight students from the inaugural group completed the course – and all of them are now working in forestry. This result backs up TAFE Gippsland's conviction that graduates can expect to find work as logging plant operators, log truck drivers, front-end load operators, bulldozer operators or harvesting technicians.

GREEN SHOOTS – WHAT'S NEXT

Kevin Nunn says the course has already been timetabled for next year and sees no reason why the excellent results for the first cohort can't be repeated.

He says the ideal scenario is that contractors refer people to TAFE Gippsland to get the training they need for a job.

"The machinery has opened up a lot more avenues for us and our students," he says.

"THE TRAINERS WERE SO KNOWLEDGEABLE, THEY ALL HAD INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE"

Student case study: Shane Jackson

Shane, 18, from Montrose, has been working in forestry for three years, mostly in tree removal. He says the certificate will help him move on to more skilled work.

"This qualification can lead to a lot more work and job opportunities," he says. "I'm all ticketed up now so I'll just keep working on my skills."

He says flexibility – he could fit training around work commitments – and the quality of the instructors were two of the course's trump cards.

"The trainers were so knowledgeable, they all had industry experience," he says. "They were able to teach you without being too full on."

Shane, who completed an intermediate felling course as well as the Certificate III, says the training has helped him tackle demanding work in his job with Sherbrooke Tree Services.

"I learnt a huge variety of things (on the course). The simulator was very helpful, because when you go on the real thing, there's situations you've seen before."

The skills he honed on the new equipment at the Forestec Campus are now being put to use.

"When you're working on the machines, it's more mentally demanding than physically demanding. You're thinking a lot of things, like how to make the most out of your timber, and you have to be concentrating, because it's very expensive machinery and there's people around."

The Regional and Specialist Training Fund is a targeted *Skills First* funding stream that supports training for specific skills in regional and specialist areas that are not being met by the current training market. Training providers who hold a current *Skills First* VET funding contract are eligible to apply for higher subsidies and one-off grant payments for selected courses in specific regions to meet local industry demand or specialised occupations. Funding will be considered where there is a strong connection between industry, training and job outcomes.

To find out more visit: www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/funding/Pages/rst.aspx or email the RSTF team at: rstf@edumail.vic.gov.au