



# Outdoors work was lure at Alcoa refinery

FOR Jane Burton, the lure of working outdoors was a major reason for her decision to apply for an operator traineeship at mining giant Alcoa's Pinjarra refinery, 90km south of Perth.

The 22-year-old had taken on a variety of different jobs, from managing a supermarket to working on farms and being a gym instructor.

But nine months ago she made her leap into the booming West Australian resources sector.

Thousands of others like her are being encouraged to undertake vocational education and training to tackle the skills crisis and help capitalise on the nation's minerals wealth.

Labor says the current skills shortage reflects a long-term underinvestment in the training system.

Concerned that the skills crisis is fuelling inflation and wages

pressures, the Government yesterday outlined plans for a significant boost to its skilled migration program as well as an expansion of its traineeship program.

After previously committing to deliver 450,000 training places over four years, the budget last night promised 630,000 over five years, at a cost of \$1.9 billion.

As well as 85,000 new apprenticeships, 391,800 training places will benefit existing workers who want to upgrade their qualification, while 238,200 places will be for new workers.

Ms Burton said she drawn to the resources sector as she was not interested in attending university and preferred physical work outdoors.

Her partner worked at Alcoa in Pinjarra, and she had been thinking about trying to join him. She saw an advertisement for a

trainee operator, applied, and was subsequently one of five people taken on for an 18-month traineeship at the refinery.

The company also took on five operator trainees at each of their Wagerup and Kwinana refineries.

Ms Burton said her traineeship involved full-time shift work — two days, two nights, then four days off — as well as TAFE assignments that had to be completed to obtain her skilled certificate.

Workers such as Ms Burton are attracted by the high wages in Western Australia, and the budget papers confirmed the nation's two-speed economy, with pay growing faster in the resource states of Queensland and Western AUstralia.

But Ms Burton said it was the physical nature of the job, not the pay, that she most liked.

As an operator, she is

responsible for ensuring the refinery is running smoothly, with the majority of her 12-hour shift spent outdoors.

Ms Burton lives with her partner in Mandurah, just minutes away from the Pinjarra mine and refinery.

While she did not attend TAFE every week, her traineeship allowed her and her four colleagues to regularly take time off to attend courses.

At the completion of her 18-month traineeship next year, she hopes to be employed permanently as an operator, which will involve a slight increase to her salary.

"This is quite a different area to go into for me and to learn new things," she said.

"It is a big challenge."

Alana Buckley-Carr

## SKILLS | TAFE TRAINING



**Physical labour:** Jane Burton tried several jobs before becoming an operator at Alcoa's Pinjarra refinery

Picture: Colin Murty