

# Blue skies ahead

With current trends suggesting a worldwide shortage of licensed aircraft maintenance engineers, one teenager looks set for a brilliant career.



**D**avid Sinclair, 19, completed high school at the NSW South Coast fishing town of Eden in physics, maths, engineering science and computer studies in 1999.

Now he is an apprentice avionics maintenance engineer with Capital Aircraft Services in Canberra.

When he finishes his apprenticeship in a little over three years, he will be looking at a starting salary of around \$40,000 a year, with prospects of moving quite quickly ahead – even up to \$80,000, depending on the level of licence and further experience.

As a kid he was always interested in electronics, and loved fiddling with electronics sets. It's a classic case of the hobby that is turning into a career.

It was in Year 11 that David decided he would go with either electronics or computing. He looked at a career with Defence, but decided to go private after talking it over with his parents.

When he found out that there are not enough avionics apprentices going through the system to keep up with demand, he didn't need much extra prompting.

He mounted a full-on campaign to get what he wanted.

"I typed in a search of the internet under avionics, and came up with a list of companies doing the work in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne," he said.

Then he contacted each company asking if they had a position for an apprentice. He sent out dozens of letters, and followed them up with phone calls and e-mails. He got a lot of knockbacks, but he was persistent.

And it was David's persistence, according to Jake Jansen, service manager at Capital Aircraft Services, which paid off in the end. Jake says that the company had not really thought about hiring an apprentice until David contacted them. At first they knocked him back because they didn't think they needed an apprentice at that stage.

But David kept in touch with them. Would they think about him if they decided to take on an apprentice sometime in the future?

When Capital Aircraft Services found its work expanding, it was natural for them to contact David and offer him an apprenticeship. He started this year.

The apprenticeship combines formal study with work experience. David travels to Sydney at the company's expense to attend an avionics course at Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE. The course is done in four-week blocks.

David says it's quite demanding, but the class sizes are small – there are only four students – so you get a lot of attention from the teacher.

So what's David's advice on scoring an apprenticeship?

"Write to everyone. Keep making the effort and keep in contact. If an apprenticeship does come up then you've got a good chance."

Even more important, according to David, is to start early. He reckons that means you need to decide in year 11 what you want to do.

With a world-wide shortage of avionics maintenance engineers, an apprenticeship in aircraft avionics looks like a good move. And because there are currently not enough apprentices going through the system to keep up with the demand the prospects look good for some time to come.

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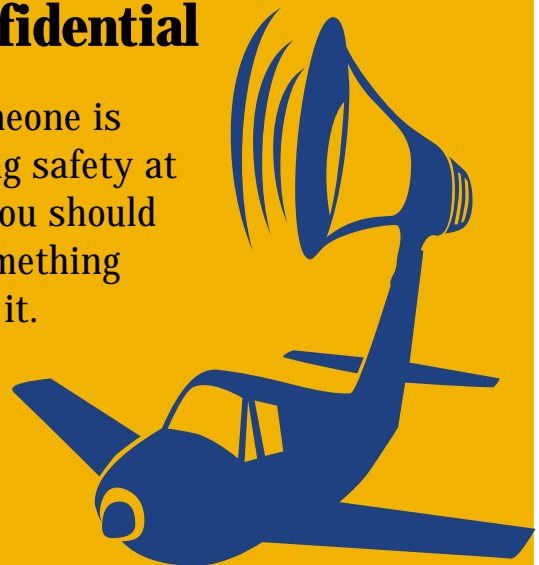
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