More Territorians are taking on apprenticeships and traineeships leading to skilled jobs, Minister for Employment, Education and Training Syd Stirling said today.

Mr Stirling said recently released figures showed that during the 12 months to March 2003, 2100 Territorians began an apprenticeship or traineeship – a 23% increase from the 12 months to March 2002.

The figures also show that at 31 March 2003, around 2700 apprentices and trainees were in training – a 17% jump from the same time in the previous year. Of these, 920 or 34% were females.

Meanwhile, 1000 Territorians completed an apprenticeship or traineeship in the 12 months to March 2003.

Mr Stirling said the figures showed that more Territorians were taking on vocational education and training in an effort to further their skills and become more employable.

"The Territory Government is helping to meet an anticipated 24% increase in apprenticeships over the next three years, providing an extra $1.5 million a year in funding support for apprentices," he said.

The funds will be used for:

- purchasing on and off-the-job training support;
- providing travel assistance to apprentices having to travel interstate for training; and
- supporting the administration and management of apprenticeship contracts.

"Government sees apprentices as a vital section of the workforce, providing business with skilled workers," Mr Stirling said.

"Priority will be given to training that is responsive to the needs of business by addressing skills shortage areas and developing work-ready employees.

"The Territory will focus on marketing apprenticeships, in both traditional trades as well as in emerging industries, in order to increase participation rates and develop a skilled workforce in the Northern Territory."