

Award finalist links school with trade

Patrick plugs gap

John Morcombe

COLLAROY apprentice Patrick Nicol is one of three finalists in the NSW school-based apprentice of the year category of the NSW Training Awards.

The apprentice plumber is the first student from St Augustine's College at Brookvale to take advantage of a scheme that allows him to combine his secondary school studies with an apprenticeship.

Now in year 12, Patrick studies three days a week at school, one day on the job with employer Andrew Cross Plumbing and one day at TAFE.

It means he will finish school and go straight into the second year of his apprenticeship and third year of TAFE.

Patrick triumphed in the region finals against nine other school-based apprentices from the northern Sydney region.

Now he is one of the three finalists for the state award.

He said he had considered leaving school at the end of year 10.

"I wasn't sure what I wanted to do at the end of year 10 and I thought about leaving school and doing an apprenticeship, but when I heard about this I decided to do it so that I could stay at school, hang out with my mates and finish year



Apprentice plumber Patrick Nicol is one of three finalists.

12, but at the same time start my apprenticeship career," he said.

"It's great because next year I go straight into third year at TAFE and the second year of practical."

Patrick's apprenticeship is administered by the Australian Business Limited Apprenticeships Centre, which is seeing a swing back to apprenticeships by young people.

"The number of school-based apprenticeships we've administered in NSW has risen by 64 per cent in the 2010 financial year, and with students like Patrick, I'm certain this will continue," ABLAC general manager Andrew Williams said.



Jonathan King, left, and Jack Thompson will be tracing the journey of Burke and Wills in a documentary.

Tracking legends

Peter Bodkin

NEARLY 150 years after Burke and Wills began their fateful journey north, Avalon historian and politician Jonathan King will retrace the explorer's steps across the desert.

Veteran actor and environmentalist Jack Thompson will join Mr King for the re-enactment, which begins on Sunday after more than a year of planning.

A film crew will accompany the pair to produce a documentary that will both chronicle the expedition and catalogue the ecological impact of 150 years of

white settlement as the environmental campaigners make their trek.

Mr King, the Greens candidate for the federal seat of Mackellar, said Australia's delicate soil was not able to cope with the impact of millions of hard-hoofed animals like cattle, sheep and pigs. "As the continent dries, as the extremes of weather intensify on this warming planet, (severe dust storms) will become more frequent and more intense," he said.

In 1860, Burke and Wills led an expedition from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, but died on the return journey.