

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council

PathwaysReview@education.gov.au

Dear Secretariat

The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into work, further education and training

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak industry body for Australia's electrical and communications contracting industry, which employs more than 165,000 workers and delivers an annual turnover in excess of \$23 billion. We represent the interests of over 5,200 electrical contracting businesses across all Australian States and Territories.

NECA has been advocating for, and on behalf of, the electrotechnology industry for over 100 years. We aim to help our members and the wider industry to operate and manage their business more effectively and efficiently whilst representing their interests to Federal and State Governments, regulators and principal industry bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Standards Australia.

We view the safety and reputation of the electrotechnology industry, and the building and construction sector more broadly, as paramount to all tradespeople, consumers and the general population.

In the context of apprenticeships, NECA proudly boasts a 90% completion rate, and approximately one in three electrical apprentices in Australia is a NECA apprentice.

In 2019, NECA successfully opened a new state-of-the-art training facility in Chullora, New South Wales – we look forward to expanding our training and education footprint with a further new facility opening in Fyshwick, Australian Capital Territory. These successes add to our current training capacity in Melbourne, Perth and GTO operations in Adelaide and Brisbane.

Our approach to attracting and supporting entrants to our industry is through a holistic, progressive and high-quality range of industry relevant programs and initiatives including our long-standing scholarship program, NECA Foundation and the Women in Electrical Trades Roadmap.

NATIONAL OFFICE

Level 4,
30 Atchison Street,
St Leonards NSW 2065
Locked Bag 1818,
St Leonards NSW 1590

T +61 2 9439 8523
F +61 2 9439 8525
E necanat@neca.asn.au
W www.neca.asn.au
ABN 78 319 016 742



In addition to these initiatives, we also manage and promote industry wide Annual Excellence and Apprentice Awards designed to acknowledge and celebrate achievements and highly distinguished electrotechnology projects, which includes recognition of apprentices and future leaders in our industry.

NECA strongly supports the Council of Australian Government (COAG) Education Council's review of the senior secondary pathways into work. This submission has been prepared in response to 'The review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training'.

NECA supports the recommendations as outlined in the submission prepared by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Our submission as attached seeks to contribute to improving the understanding, knowledge and initiatives to assist secondary students to better understand the options available, and by doing so, better inform their career decisions and pathways.

Should you wish to discuss this submission or matters concerning our industry, I can be contacted on 02 9439 8523 or by email suresh.manickam@neca.asn.au

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Manickam", is written over a horizontal blue line.

Suresh Manickam

Chief Executive Officer



Introduction

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the cornerstone to trade training; it is integral to Australia's economic competitiveness, productivity and sustainability, as well as the overall well-being of the community.

Our VET system has prepared and qualified generations of tradespeople with lifelong, practical and hands-on skills, and technical expertise. With shifting demographics, technological advancements, labour market competition and vast cultural change across workplace practices and our lifestyles, the time has come to review, reconcile and modernise the VET system¹. It is fundamental that young people are given the knowledge, tools and options to make informed choices, and that career pathways beyond school are diverse, dynamic and flexible to meet the needs, interests and challenges faced by the next generation of our workforce.

Supporting the VET sector is critical for both the Australian economy and the Electrical Contracting sector. NECA supports the operation of a national competitive training market comprised of public and private RTOs, as overseen by one national regulator. NECA recognises that the future viability and success of Australia's VET system is a shared responsibility, one that should be strongly influenced and informed by industry and supported by Government. Any proposed arrangements must be flexible, streamlined and responsive to the local needs of private industry, as well as offer a clear, affordable and simple pathway for future entrants.

NECA notes its support for the Australian Government's commitment in the 2019-20 Federal Budget to allocate \$525 million to the 'Skills Package – delivering skills for today and tomorrow' (Skills Package), comprised of a new National Skills Commission (NSC), National Careers Institute (NCI) and pilot Skills Organisations. There are significant opportunities under these new arrangements to support the objectives and priorities of the Education Council. Government must ensure that the reforms are consistent, clear and streamlined.

Finally, NECA advocates that a trade career path is as equally attractive and rewarding as a university degree. We call upon all levels of government to actively promote trades career pathways. NECA appreciates this opportunity to engage and contribute to the review and welcomes ongoing reform.

¹ 'Strengthening Skills – Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System' – Steven Joyce <https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets.pdf>



Electrotechnology industry and Vocational Education and Training in Australia

A key challenge for the electrotechnology industry is the ongoing shortage and declining supply of skilled electrical workers. This is evidenced through a reduction in the completion of electrical apprenticeships across Australia, and the retirement of long term and highly skilled workers, leading to a loss of suitably qualified electricians at both ends of the industry and across the broader building and construction sector.

Within the broader context, the electrotechnology industry is undergoing significant change. In the next decade, we are forecasting a strong emergence of new technologies including smart buildings, batteries, solar infrastructure and electric vehicles. These technologies will change the behaviour, culture and attitudes across industry and the community, as well as how we do business. There are potential significant broader sectoral impacts arising from not supporting electrotechnology, including the delay and impediment of significant urban renewal and infrastructure projects, our national competitiveness and the overall wellbeing and sustainability of small business and family owned enterprises which form the backbone of our nation.

NECA strongly believes young people should have visibility, access and support to inform their choices and decision-making to the range of pathways available beyond secondary school. Given the fast-paced changing nature of our global economies, the way we interact and do business, our education and training framework must be robust and agile.

The key issues for consideration by Government in attracting and retaining secondary students into the electrical trade:

- the foundational skills and essential knowledge that young people should be attaining at school to assist them in their careers and lives – for the electrical trade industry, core competencies around practical literacy and mathematics are required;
- a holistic approach to education and career preparedness, this includes incorporating training and practical life-skills, self-care and self-belief. It is important to recognise that many people entering the electrical trade are young people who need some additional support, the empirical research indicates that mentoring and targeted resourcing directed to young apprentices vastly improves retention and completion rates;
- cultural change, communication and education initiatives that mitigate the negative stigma and attitudes about the trade career pathways. Principally, the



outdated perceived views that university is more prestigious, or that a career in trades has a gender bias; and

- funding models and arrangements that support RTOs, GTOs and apprentices.

Government support is critical to ensure the ongoing viability of the industry and to meet the growing needs of our community. This includes strategies, initiatives and funding streams to facilitate a diverse and sustainable workforce and ensure our next generation of our workforce has the best skills, training and education to reinforce our national reputation, position and economic competitiveness. NECA is eager to work in partnership with Government to address these issues.

Recommendations

The key recommendations as advocated by NECA in this submission for consideration by Government:

- a trade career path is as equally attractive and rewarding as a university degree. We call upon all levels of government to actively promote trades career pathways;
- there is a need to develop nationally consistent, practical mathematics lessons in schools for trade-training aspirants, ensuring the involvement of relevant partners in the education system (including the Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers); and
- funding be made available to support the roll-out of the Women in Electrical Trade Roadmap, developed in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and NECA.