

A word from the CEO

A new federal budget, a new financial year and definitely some new challenges.

The 2016/17 Financial Year was a good 12-month period for NECA. We continued to expand our membership. We hope to hit 5,000 members during F18/19, thereby representing some 100,000 electrical contractors across the country. Our SA Chapter now officially supports contractors in the Northern Territory, meaning we now actively support the industry in all states and territories. Our range of member services is expanding across all chapters, and the demand for our apprentices is on the increase again – and this is usually indicative of the market being fairly stable.

The May budget

This year's budget did bring some good news for our sector. The construction of a new airport in Western Sydney is a once-in-a-generation opportunity in that it is a boost to industry, and will provide significant work opportunities across the building industry, including our own electrical contracting sector. This commitment delivers certainty for the building sector at a time when we need it.

The new airport, to be located on a 1,780 hectare parcel of Commonwealth-owned land at Badgery's Creek, is 56km from the Sydney CBD. Construction will commence next year and the new airport will be ready for operation in 2026. The first stage of the new airport's construction will generate more than 11,000 direct, and indirect, jobs over-and-above those created through the construction of road and rail access projects. So, up to 35,000 jobs could be created.

Not only is this construction specifically related to the airport's development, it also flows through to surrounding access infrastructure such as motorway and arterial road upgrades and construction, as well as attached business and industry space generated by the new airport's location. This investment will create significant opportunities for electrical contracting firms over the next decade and will help to build



employment and apprenticeship growth throughout this time period.

Economic infrastructure is the key to unlocking and removing transport bottlenecks across Australia, and NECA welcomes the decision of the Government to push ahead with the construction of the Western Sydney Airport, the Melbourne to Brisbane Inland Rail project and Perth's Metronet rail project as positive economic examples that will deliver growth across the electrical contracting sector and cities and regional towns across Australia.

Market Monitor

As we go to print we are working on the analysis of the 2017 study. More than 1,000 contractors took part in the study this year – both NECA members and non-members, and we are already seeing some very interesting feedback around:

- Younger electricians are more optimistic about the future;
- NSW was the most optimistic of all states surveyed, WA was the least;
- Electricians see general economic conditions and increased competition as impacting future business;
- EBAs only impacting a small number of businesses - mostly the bigger guys - increasing their cost of business, and because it is not universally applied; impacting on their ability to be competitive on costs;

- Buying products which are compliant to Australian standards is definitely on the radar;
- The industry isn't keeping up with the demand for online ordering and information;
- Solar and energy storage and batteries is predicted as the next emerging technology. So do check it out on our website:

www.neca.asn.au.

The Excellence Awards

Our state events kick off on Friday 4 August in Melbourne and conclude in Sydney on Friday 8 September. If you haven't booked your table yet don't delay. We have had some great projects submitted this year. So there will be some tough competition. This year's national finals will be in Sydney on Thursday 23 November at the new convention centre (ICC). And this year we have combined the apprentice and excellence awards. Again, it will be a great evening.

Integrate

Now entering its ninth year, Integrate is Australia's premiere AV and Integration trade show. The event sees local and global brands showcasing solutions and products to AV technicians and corporate end-users to celebrate the latest industry developments. Given the importance of the electrical contractor in this fast-growing sector, NECA has gradually become more-and-more involved in this event. In 2016 we were very pleased to see a huge increase in the number of electrical contractors at the Sydney show. Consequently we have now committed to being present at both the 2017 and 2018 shows – working in tandem with our wholly-owned cabling registrar ACRS.

The 2017 event is in Melbourne and 2018 is in Sydney – so look out for the NECA and ACRS stand, and do come along to our educational session.

Best regards,
Suresh Manickham



national
electrical and
communications
association



NECA's Electrical Innovative Delivery and Pathways Project for apprentices

NECA has previously reported to industry on the details and progress of the Electrical Innovation Delivery and Pathways Project otherwise known as the Alternative Pathways Project (APP).

To briefly recap, NECA believes that for our industry to continue to be successful and relevant, we must continue to innovate and be more efficient. To this end, NECA sought support from the Federal Government's Australian Apprenticeship Program – Alternative Delivery Pilots and was successful.

The Project is well underway developing and evaluating alternative training approaches designed from industry experiences that will provide greater skills development, choice and industry acceptance. Nine specific program models are being rolled out, after consultation, with the five partner providers, including the three NECA Providers (WA, Victoria and NSW), PEER (SA) and TAFE Queensland.

NECA is a prime supporter of the apprenticeship system and will strongly oppose any proposals that will undermine the completion of "electrical work" by other than employees with Certificate III qualifications and the relevant workers licence. Also, NECA:

- supports theory training taught as part of the Certificate III and that training must be taught by an RTO
- supports blended learning, facilitated by an RTO
- does not support a two-year apprenticeship
- does not support fully institutionalised training

The Project Overview

The nine Programs that encapsulate the project are:

- Pre-apprenticeships and focussed on-the-job and off-the-job skills training
- Expanding customised training for employers with partner providers
- Examining current practices and developing resources for better targeted simulated training for partner providers
- Developing training pathways, resources and trialling training under energy efficient technologies
- Operationalising a nationally industry endorsed and available Readiness Assessment tool which assists recruitment and identifies literacy and numeracy needs and trails a related course

- Trial innovative approaches to increase the number and outcomes for women into the industry
- Developing more streamlined resources and pathways for adult apprenticeship Pathways, particularly for those with some relevant experience
- Developing and implementing a nationally consistent and effective Capstone assessment arrangements
- Developing and trialling a course for apprentice mentor/supervisors

Specific Program Updates

While each of the programs are important the following will update some of the programs that are more advanced and that have already had trials established or soon will.

Program 1 – Pre-apprenticeships and focussed on-the-job and off-the-job skills training

A survey instrument was prepared and administrated by partner providers to gather additional employer and apprentice feedback on the use of pre-apprenticeship programs and to inform the implementation of the trials. The survey response was excellent with well over 100 from employers and over 300 from apprentices and importantly from all jurisdictions.

Chart 1: Percentage of employer responses to "Do you think completing a pre-apprenticeship provides an individual with some basic electrical trade skills and knowledge?"

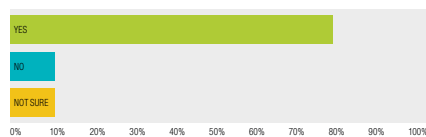
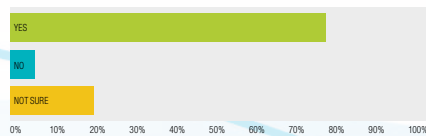


Chart 2: Percentage of apprentice responses to "Do you think completing a pre-apprenticeship provides an individual with some basic electrical trade skills and knowledge?"

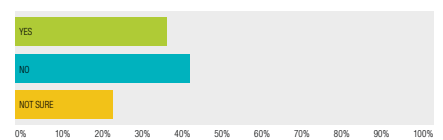


It is clear that both employers and apprentices have strong support for pre-apprenticeship programs. This was demonstrated by comments indicating that and 'hands-on' practical skills and knowledge were considered critical in pre-

apprenticeships to provide students with a real 'taste' of the industry and employers confidence in completing students' capability and readiness to enter an apprenticeship.

Interestingly apprentices did not see a pre-apprenticeship as being a fast track through an apprenticeship as indicated in Chart 3.

Chart 3: Percentage of apprentice responses to "Do you think completing a pre-apprenticeship helps to complete an apprenticeship faster?"



Broadly, employers and apprentices viewed work safety, math skills, student maturity, exposure to different electrical sectors and workplace based experience as important areas to improve for pre-apprenticeships.

Additionally, employers saw government funding for pre-apprenticeships as important, particularly for youth engagement. However, supply/demand balance and co-commitment considerations were important factors to ensure value for money.

Some trials have already begun.

Program 8 – Developing and implementing a nationally consistent and effective Capstone assessment arrangements

Significant variations in the electrical licensing jurisdictions around Australia have been a problem for many decades. The mutual recognition arrangements that the state regulators now have in place work effectively but it does not solve the basic problem of the fundamental differences in assessment. Integrally linked to this issue is the use and application of the Capstone assessment arrangements.

The Capstone test requirements also differ markedly across Australia but are pivotal to regulator standards and employer confidence in quality outcomes. The models vary from a fully government regulated test undertaken under the auspices of government, to a prescribed government option, through to a reliance of RTOs using what is contained in the actual training package alone. There has been a significantly high failure rate across all models when apprentices undertake these tests.

Research has been undertaken including interviews with most licensing authorities around Australia and in some cases training authorities where the responsibility is split. An initial research summary report outlining the linkages between the completion of the qualification and eligibility for licences within each jurisdiction, the pre-test support arrangements available and the role of RTOs in delivering Capstone programs has been prepared.

A range of models will be examined to determine which is the most effective from an employer's point of view, or at least which are the critical aspects or features for an efficient and effective arrangement. Project partner providers will also provide input into a proposed national course for pre-test support arrangements and their potential role in improving Capstone outcomes including contributions to decisions around what a

future industry standard might look like.

Program 9 – Developing and trialling a course for apprentice mentor/supervisors

Whilst the selection of potential apprentices through pre-apprenticeships, literacy and numeracy assessments and other measures is critical it too often does not lead to a positive outcome for the apprentice or the employer by resulting in the completion of the apprenticeship.

Also critical is the ability of the apprentice to be mentored in the workplace by the apprentice's supervisor or other employees. The mentoring of a supervising electrician, be it a sole trader electrical contractor or any one of many electricians in a business, cannot be taken for granted. Some people have a natural ability to do this, others can learn the skill or some will simply not want to mentor a young apprentice.

This program aims to provide a course that will target employees who assume the role of workplace mentors of apprentices to enhance their coaching and mentoring role. This will include their efforts to motivate apprentices, teach them about the work, develop their skills, provide them with feedback and recognise their achievement.

Feedback has been received from employers around Australia through partner providers which assisting with the development of the course which is envisaged as a half-day face-to-face session in conjunction with a 20 to 30 hour online component.

NECA's Electrical Innovative Delivery and Pathways Project for Apprentices is now in full flight and trials will be progressing across all the component programs. NECA expects to report to the Federal government in mid-2018.

Attracting more women into the industry

A key strand of the Alternative Pathways Project (APP) is listening to female apprentices – past and present, to hear how they feel we could increase their numbers and their contribution to the industry.

Over the next three months we will be talking to as many women as we can reach across the industry to hear more about their experiences as apprentices – and what they think could be done to make more women aware of the opportunities a career in our industry can offer.

From our initial interviews it's clear that it's not always easy for women to work in the male-dominated construction industry. But that said it does attract some pretty feisty characters. And they have some great ideas for how we can make things even better.

Here is a just a few of their ideas:

- Start talking to girls much earlier in their schooling (Year 9 or 10 perhaps);
- Run educational sessions at schools just for girls (and their teachers!);
- Use the media: print, radio & TV, to make parents more aware of the opportunities this career path could offer their daughters;

- Sponsor women's sports clubs to get in front of those girls, and women, who enjoy outdoor and/or highly-competitive sports;
- Proactively support the fledging woman's groups that are sprouting up across the industry to offer women support and mentoring around their challenges and career options.

- If you are a current or past female apprentice, please contact us at marketing@neca.asn.au to give us your thoughts around four broad questions:
 1. What made you choose this career path and who influenced your decision – at home and/or at school?
 2. Have you encountered any barriers, or blocks, which seemed gender-based?
 3. What advice you would give those young women potentially following in your footsteps by choosing this career path?
 4. What suggestions do you have for the Government, and NECA, in terms of making this career path a more attractive option for women leaving school?

