

ACT LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, TRAINING
AND YOUTH AFFAIRS

Inquiry into Vocational Education and Youth Training in the ACT

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28th August 2015

Mr Andrew Snedden
Secretary
Standing Committee on Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
196 London Circuit
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Re: Inquiry into Vocational Education and Youth Training in the ACT

Dear Committee members

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on vocational education and youth training in the ACT.

Our submission to this inquiry is in relation to the training of apprentice electricians in the ACT.

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak industry body for Australia's electrical and communications contracting industry, which employs more than 145,000 workers and delivers an annual turnover in excess of \$23 billion. We represent approximately 4,000 electrical contracting businesses across Australia.

NECA represents the electrical and communications contracting industry across all states and territories. 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 principle industry bodies such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and Standards Australia.

Additionally, NECA maintains responsibility for the employment, training and skilling of more than 4,000 current and future electricians and contractors through our Group Training and Registered Training Organisations.

Our members have expressed concerns for some time in relation to the training provided to apprentices by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). These problems have been exacerbated by the closure of ElectroSkills, which until 2013 also provided training for apprentice electricians in the ACT.

The education provided by CIT to apprentice electricians has been the subject of significant complaints by NECA members for some years.

These include a lack of effective communication with employers, specifically:

- The lack of notification provided to employers of changes to the subject timetable;
- The lack of notification provided to employers of when individual apprentices are required to attend class;
- Not providing information to employers as to whether apprentices have subjects outstanding prior to apprentices applying to sit their Capstone exam. Employers are paying for the subjects studied by apprentices; and
- In some cases employers have been advised by CIT that apprentices have not attended classes on certain days, when in fact they are not enrolled in those subjects at all.

Additional problems experienced in relation to CIT include:

- The lowering of standards, presumably in order to push more apprentices through the system and thus gain funding;
- Frequent changes to the curriculum without explanation;
- The transitioning of all students to a new academic package, including students who were part-way through their studies. These students have suffered from a lack of continuity to their studies, including in some cases having to go over certain areas they have already covered previously; and
- An academic as opposed to industry-focussed approach.

While the performance of CIT has improved in some respects, there are still fundamental issues which need to be addressed.

The closure of ElectroSkills in 2013 worsened these problems.

After the closure of ElectroSkills, approximately 250 to 300 electrical apprentices transferred to CIT. However, the transition between the two was not a smooth one, nor handled well.

Firstly, some records of student achievement were not passed on from ElectroSkills to CIT. Other records were incomplete and did not indicate whether or not apprentices had successfully completed the subjects they attempted.

This resulted in the absurd situation whereby apprentices had to repeat subjects they had already satisfactorily completed, as they could not prove they had done so.

ElectroSkills and CIT had different approaches to training, which did not dovetail and made the transition harder still for apprentices.

Anecdotally, we believe that a significant number of apprentices have dropped out due to these issues, and the stress, lost time, financial cost and frustration involved.

Moreover, CIT has struggled to cater for the extra number of apprentices it must educate in the wake of the closure of ElectroSkills.

Many apprentice electricians are not being provided with important basic skills by CIT. For example, some are coming through the training system unable to properly conduct tests – obviously this has significant safety implications when dealing with electricity!

These issues with CIT have resulted in many businesses taking on fewer apprentices, or not taking on any altogether, due to the significant costs in financial terms as well as time.

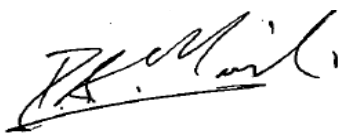
This, combined with apprentices dropping out in frustration due to the issues involved in transitioning from ElectroSkills to CIT as previously mentioned, will unfortunately impact on the availability of skills in the industry in the future.

NECA therefore believes the ACT should support and incentivise the establishment of a new RTO for the training of electrical apprentices in the ACT.

This would reduce the strain evident on CIT, as well as allow the introduction of a more industry-focussed approach for the training of electrical apprentices in the ACT.

I would be happy to provide further evidence to the inquiry in relation to these matters and can be contacted on telephone: 02 9439 8523 or email: suresh.manickam@neca.asn.au

Yours faithfully



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