

Developing a Blueprint for the VET Workforce

Investing in our future workforce today.

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Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is the trade association representing electrical contractors recognised by industry, government and the community as the electrical industry's leading business partner, knowledge source and advocate. You can visit our website at www.masterelectricians.com.au

Throughout many State and Federal consultations, MEA has consistently advocated that integrating and streamlining vocational educational training in secondary schools (VETSS) with an equal weighting to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a crucial, long-term, sustainable solution towards addressing the skills shortage crisis. As the representative voice of our electrical contractor members and champions of the electrification transition, MEA recognises the importance of ensuring we have a sustainable electrical workforce to install and maintain consumer energy resources (CER). Acknowledging that the success of VETSS relies on its teachers, trainers and assessors, we wholeheartedly support the VET Workforce Blueprint in tackling this challenge.

We continue to support and advocate the partnership and integration of Registered Training Organisations (RTO), particularly TAFE, in developing the VETSS curriculum. This will ensure seamless and supportive transition from secondary school into the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) tertiary sector. Consequently, our proposals will allow for cohesive blueprint plans that encourage and support improved attraction and retention of teaching staff in not only the secondary school curricula but also within RTOs.

Growing the Workforce

Q1. Do the barriers and challenges identified in this paper reflect your understanding of the issues in your organisation and/or in your experience? If not, what are the barriers and challenges you or your organisation are facing?

Yes.

Q2. Which barriers are most significant in your context?

a. Perceptions of Working in VET

The current secondary school curriculum is heavily weighted towards ATAR with regards to Government funding, resulting in limited options for VET skilled professionals to enter VETSS teaching curriculum. The current secondary school curriculum is therefore objectively an unstable and non-progressive career option for VET careers with the limited emphasis and prioritisation given to VETSS.

A core argument behind our advocacy for VETSS is its potential to alter systemic and societal perceptions regarding the VET industry, fostering sustainable change. This change will likely enhance attraction and retention rates of students pursuing a VET career, which is partly attributable to the anticipated increase in diversity. The STEM workforce is predominantly a male dominated industry, with 85% of the STEM workforce attributable to males as of 2022¹. In contrast, the teaching industry, a stereotypically female industry, merely consists of 38.6% males as of 2022². These gender disparities amongst industries are objectively attributable to societal perception. Our position is that VETSS will challenge these perceptions, making VET careers, especially those in the STEM trades, more inclusive and appealing to individuals of all backgrounds, including females. We anticipate this will help normalise male participation in teaching roles as VET is embedded in the school system. Changes to these perceptions are vital for the immediate future, as we strive to equip and educate the next generation of STEM professionals.

¹ "STEM-qualified occupation Graph 8" Department of Industry, Science and Resources < [STEM-qualified occupations](#) | [STEM Equity Monitor](#) | [Department of Industry Science and Resources](#)>

² "Schools Data on government and non-government students, staff and schools" Australian Bureau of Statistics (February 2024) < [Schools, 2023](#) | [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)>

b. Credential and Teaching Currency

The burden of obtaining and maintaining two professional qualifications coupled with the associated administrative, time and financial obligations, can serve as a significant deterrent for many individuals. The core teaching workforce will likely be older tradespeople who are 'ready to put down the tools' or tradespeople who have had career ending injury, an assertion supported by current statistics where 40% of VET trainers, teachers and assessors are 55 or older³ (we note these statistics are not limited to secondary school teachers). Understandably, the prospect of undergoing additional learning and training to obtain a new teaching qualification presents a barrier to entry. Furthermore, the obligation to maintain both their trade and teaching licences imposes significant costs, consumes valuable time and creates burdensome demands.

At MEA, a significant portion of staff consist of retired electricians who utilise their existing expertise while supported with career development courses to facilitate their transition into office-based roles. We find there to be a large cohort of VET individuals ready and willing to give back to the industry. This demonstrates efforts to attract more VET professionals towards careers, such as teaching, requires qualification barriers to be addressed.

In proposing our VETSS curriculum with an equal weighting to ATAR, it is essential to adapt the associated TAE framework to support a qualified teaching workforce. We propose utilising the existing TAE qualification framework within the VETSS system, requiring certain number of years practical STEM experience coupled with the TAE to support teachers. Currently obtaining a teaching degree takes four years,⁴ but our proposed framework aims to streamline this process by drawing from educators' STEM experience who have completed a TAE to help deliver content in high school settings.

c. Rural and Remote Areas

We anticipate our argument under 1b. 'credential and teaching currency' above will notably enhance attraction and retention of VETSS teachers. The substantial travelling distance often necessary to obtain a teaching qualification is a challenge many rural and remote STEM professionals have already endured for their STEM qualifications. This proves to be both costly and time consuming. By leveraging the TAE qualification and allowing ex-tradespeople deliver VET content as earlier proposed, we can expect this to increase the VETSS teaching workforce.

In some rural and remote areas, Government intervention may be essential to bolster the recruitment of VETSS teaching staff by offering financial incentives such as increased wages and/or assistance with the cost of living.

We have tirelessly advocated that VETSS will likely improve attraction and retention of STEM professionals in rural and remote areas owing to the blanket exposure the curriculum offers to all students, regardless of background. It is vital we address the teaching resource restraints in these areas to realise this goal.

d. Supporting a Diverse Cohort of Students

Throughout many submissions, MEA has strongly advocated that integrating Vocational VETSS an equal weighting to ATAR is one of the key solutions to both diversity and skills shortages issues. The current schooling system moulds students to fit an academic structure, leaving behind those who are unwilling or unable to conform. Providing exposure and targeted

³ "Developing a blueprint for the VET workforce" *Department of Employment and Workplace Relations* (2024) at 3.

⁴ "How to become a teacher" *Deakin University* <[How to become a teacher | Deakin](#)>

training provides all students equal opportunities for future success by providing a supportive and encouraging environment.

The benefits of VETSS curriculum include better equipped personnel entering the workforce, enhanced aptitude and competency screening, heightened attraction and retention and greater diversity in the workplace through early exposure in a supportive environment. MEA sees this as a pivotal tool in supporting societal, structural and systemic change with regards to non-traditional cohorts entering trades. There are well established pathways in VET to attain higher qualifications at Diploma and Advanced Diploma level, satisfying pre-requisites and RPL for Tertiary Degree qualifications.

Q3. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the VET workforce now and into the future?

Too Much Weighting Towards ATAR

MEA believes the low attraction and retention rates of STEM apprentices are predominantly attributed to the secondary school curriculum, which dictates Government funding and school success metrics based on school ATAR results. Granting VETSS an equal weighting to ATAR would expose a greater number of students to STEM careers as schools become more willing to focus on VETSS, likely resulting in a larger cohort of students pursuing STEM. This will consequently bolster our VET workforce, alleviating pressures imposed through the skills shortage crisis.

Ensuring Informed Workforce Planning

Q4. What mechanisms could be suitable for the regular collection of VET workforce data?

MEA believes that first investing in measuring aptitude and competency at school levels and matching these to career opportunities, puts the greatest amount Australians (regardless of their background) on the ladder of success to a rewarding and productive career. Most other initiatives and campaigns will inherently be limited in effectiveness and become a less effective use of precious taxpayer money.

Which mechanisms would work best for your organisation's context?

Utilising the excellent data and reporting of NCVET, and the work of state-based skills funding organisations such as Construction Skills Queensland, and Energy Skills Queensland would be helpful to the JSA.

What existing workforce data do you routinely collect and could even share with JSA?

We collect mostly commercial and pricing data.

How Should the Blueprint Respond to Barriers and Challenges?

Q5. What could be done to attract and retain more VET teachers, trainers and assessors?

Please refer to MEA's response under Q2.

Q6. What could be done to attract and retain other key workforce roles such as complementary education professionals (e.g. educational designers, librarians or counsellors) or support VET professionals to enter leadership positions?

Sub-Heading

Please refer to MEA's response under Q2.

As aforementioned, granting VETSS equal weighting to ATAR will result in more readily available government funding for ATAR curriculums. This will inherently allow for greater

attraction and retention of complementary education professionals as schools will have greater financial resource for VETSS staff recruitment.

We believe that VETSS will help develop prosperous career paths for many individuals, regardless of background, who chose to pursue a STEM trade. Opportunities for leadership roles, horizontal industry career progression, proprietorships and much more will be available. There are many examples of successful business people who have started their career journey in a trade, that has led to further VET qualifications, University qualifications, and either individual business success or a career as an executive working for large multi-national companies.

Q7. In your view, what strategies or actions would have the best impact for building capability and supporting career development and progression?

Please refer to MEA's answers under Q2d and Q3.

Q8. Are there actions that should be specifically taken at the national level, and at the local level? - Are there examples of attraction and retention strategies, actions or initiatives that have worked well?

National and State Government should prioritise granting VETSS with an equal weighting to ATAR. Our comment is supported by our responses to the previous questions.

Q9. How can industry assist with building the teacher, trainer and assessor workforce?

a. Industry Trade Associations

Industry leaders, such as MEA, are shedding light on the detrimental effects the current schooling curriculum is having on STEM careers. It remains crucial for industry stakeholders to continue addressing this disparity and continue advocating for pathways that facilitate seamless and incentivising transition for STEM professionals into the VETSS workforce.

b. VETSS Facilities

MEA regularly visits both public and independent high schools, designed to cultivate skills for VET trades. Initiatives like these will enhance the attractiveness of VET teaching as opportunities expand. The scarcity of such facilities creates uncertainty regarding career stability and advancement. By granting ATAR and VETSS equal importance, we anticipate career progression in VET teaching to mirror that of traditional teaching.

Q10. What collaborative mechanisms could be implemented to assist transition between industry and the VET workforce? Where the employer is the RTO, what would assist in transitioning staff into teacher, trainer and assessor roles?

Please refer to MEA's answer under Q2.

Q11. If there was one immediate goal that could be worked towards to relieve the current pressures on the VET workforce, what would that be?

VETSS an Equal Weighting to ATAR.

Improving attraction and retention rates of STEM apprentices which we strongly believe will be achieved through enhanced VETSS programs and support for mentoring programs for both trainees and employers. Also, improvements in support for the Group Training Organisation (GTO) model of apprenticeships has been shown through numerous studies, that the recruitment practices and enhanced mentoring inherent in the GTO system, dramatically lifts completions. Apprentice Employment Network Australia reported –

“Australia’s network of [GTOs] are achieving “substantially higher” completion rates of apprentices and trainees than direct employers in small and medium sized businesses”⁵.

If these initiatives were to commence in 2025, we anticipate witnessing the onset of improvements by 2026 as these students enter tertiary education. However, we acknowledge that systemic and cultural change will require a few more years to be meaningfully realised.

Q12. What does success look like in practice for the actions you have proposed?

Refer to Q11.

⁵ Bob Bowden, “NEW STUDY SHOWS GROUP TRAINING ORGANISATIONS ACHIEVING SUPERIOR COMPLETION RATES FOR APPRENTICES AND TRAINEES” *Apprentice Employment Network Western Australia* <[New study shows group training organisations achieving superior completion rates for apprentices and trainees - Apprentice Employment Network WA \(aenwa.com.au\)](https://www.aenwa.com.au)>

Conclusion

MEA strongly advocate for government to prioritise its funding into VETSS to provide a sustainable and meaningful solution to the skills shortage crisis and lack of diversity in STEM trades. By streamlining and integrating VETSS curriculum, with an equal weighting to ATAR, we can expect to see a steady systemic and societal change to the perception of STEM trade careers and the diversity within its skilled pool of labour. Integrated and equal VETSS will expose all students, regardless of diversity and personal circumstance, to pursue STEM trade opportunities, so desperately needed to fuel the productivity of the nation. It will allow those who do not wish to pursue ATAR subjects the same opportunities as those developing an academic/office career to begin pursuing the trade jobs at an earlier school age. It is time to change the narrative and begin emphasising the benefits and inclusiveness of STEM trades. Without cultivating this change at a younger impressionable age, we cannot expect to see the skills shortage and diversity issues resolved, and in many respects worsen.

For successful and sustainable implementation of VETSS, a skilled teaching workforce is vital. We have highlighted several key barriers preventing enhanced attraction and retention of a VETSS educators which includes:

- Perceptions
- Currency of STEM and teaching qualifications
- Rural and remote areas
- Disproportionate emphasis on ATAR curriculum which is undermining the perceived career security and progression offered by VETSS teaching.

MEA's proposal to introduce VETSS is designed to not only expose a greater number of students to STEM careers, but also foster a more supportive educational environment for those who are unwilling or unable to conform to the traditional ATAR framework. It therefore follows that the teaching framework requirements for VETSS differs from those of the ATAR framework. To overcome the barriers outlined above, MEA suggests allowing career transitioning tradespeople who have attained a TAE qualification to facilitate the transition of individuals into supporting the teaching workforce. This change should help alleviate teaching resource capacity constraints in rural and remote areas for VET. In cases where it does not, MEA suggests allocating part of the Government's \$70 million investment towards higher wages and/or cost-of-living assistance for teachers in rural and remote areas to incentivise recruitment.

In conclusion, we anticipate VETSS will foster systemic and cultural change of traditional perceptions, benefitting both those entering the STEM trades workforce and those contributing to the industry by teaching at schools. The urgency of the skills shortage crisis demands immediate, sustainable, and meaningful solutions. We firmly believe that integrated and streamlined VETSS, coupled with a revamped teaching framework requirement, offers a pathway to achieving this goal.