

Skills for Education & Employment (SEE) Program – Stream 2

An Initiative with Limited Exposure

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11 March 2024

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

Given our position as an electrical industry advocate, our response is focused primarily on improving participation in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) industries. MEA have been strong advocates throughout multiple State and Federal consultations that Vocational Education Training in Secondary Schools (VETSS) is a likely key to improving not only First Nation Community's language, literacy, numeracy and digital (LLND) skills, but also their prosperous participation in STEM trades.

Government is committing a substantial \$46 million (GST excl.) over a three-year period to the Skills for Education & Employment (SEE) Program – Stream 2. MEA acknowledges Federal Government's commendable initiatives aimed at enhancing LLND skills. Nevertheless, we argue the SEE program is limited in efficacy as it fails to address the fundamental obstacle impeding successful LLND development which is arguably rooted at the secondary school level. SEE is limited to individuals and groups who have already completed secondary school, thus missing out on reaching an entire community. Conversely, VETSS would be exposed and accessible to all secondary school students, providing every individual with an opportunity to enhance their LLND skills in pursuit of a STEM trade. We believe Government's expenditure of taxpayer's money to improve first nations LLND skills would be better funded into streamlining and integrating vocational education training into secondary schools (VETSS) with an equal weighting to Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) thereby widening the scope of LLND teaching curriculum. The current schooling system is too focused on ATAR results, essentially excluding those who are unwilling or unable to conform. The implementation of VETSS broadens students' exposure to career opportunities, potentially fostering increased motivation and participation among students in the development of their LLND skills.

In turn, MEA argues that improved VETSS curriculum will not only improve LLND skills, but also support the necessary systemic and societal changes to significantly increase the number of First Nations career participants in STEM trades, better positioning their communities across the country to be at the forefront of successful Australian businesses. Government needs to address the cultural diversity issue within our skills shortage crisis which we believe largely stems from the Schooling curriculum and can only be significantly addressed at the school age. Focusing on post-secondary school individuals is arguably too late for meaningful systemic and sustainable improvement in LLND skills. Furthermore, VETSS is likely to be a long-term sustainable solution to improving LLND skills and reducing the skills shortages amongst First Nations communities in rural and remote areas as all students will be exposed to the curricular through secondary school.

The consultation highlighted aspects that the SEE program is expected to enhance – areas which MEA contends VETSS is likely to generate substantial development. The key distinction lies in the fact that VETSS exposes all students to these benefits during their school years, rather than focusing solely on targeted groups through community and training organisations. The areas likely to be improved are:

- Participation in work or further studies.
- Improved cultural, social and emotional well-being.
- Higher levels of empowerment and self-actualisation.
- Improving the capacity and economic development of First Nations communities.

It is time to change the narrative and begin emphasising the benefits and inclusiveness of expanded and integrated VETSS. Without cultivating this change at a young impressionable age where VET participation is normalised, we cannot expect LLND levels and the low rates of First Nation diversity within STEM trades to be resolved. Over, time we can expect to see less necessity for Government funding into initiatives such as the SEE program as some existing taxpayer education budget money has been directed into VETSS initiatives which benefit all students regardless of diverse background.

