national electrical and communications association

AUSTRALIA'S PRODUCTIVITY

PILLAR 2: Building a skilled and adaptable workforce

JUNE 2025

INTRODUCTION

As Australia transitions to a low-emissions, technology-driven economy, we must ensure that our most critical asset, our people are equipped with the skills and support to meet the future with confidence.

NECA welcomes the Productivity Commission's focus on building a skilled and adaptable workforce. This work is essential to Australia's long-term resilience, economic growth and social prosperity.

Our economy is under increasing pressure from skills shortages, productivity challenges and shifting industry demands. At the same time, rapid advancements in digital technology, energy infrastructure and service delivery are creating new and exciting opportunities for workers across the country. To fully realise these opportunities, we must strengthen our education and training systems, invest in people, and remove the barriers that limit career mobility and workforce participation.

The electrical and communications industry, represented by NECA, will play a central role in delivering Australia's energy and digital future. With more than 56,000 businesses and over 240,000 workers, this industry is not only enabling the national transition to net zero but is also creating skilled, secure and well-paid jobs. However, this future is at risk. According to Jobs and Skills Australia, the sector is projected to face a shortfall of up to 32,000 electricians by 2030, putting critical national infrastructure and energy transition projects in jeopardy.

Meeting these challenges requires immediate reform. We must improve access to high-quality vocational training, increase apprenticeship and traineeship completion, and deliver lifelong learning options that allow Australians to reskill and upskill as industries evolve. In doing so, we can unlock the full potential of every worker—across every community and region.

NECA calls for policies that strengthen training pathways, enhance national licensing consistency, foster collaboration between industry and education providers, and ensure our trades are supported by quality, structured learning. These changes are vital to addressing the growing shortfall in skilled tradespeople and securing the workforce needed to build a modern, resilient Australian economy.

This is a moment to shape the next generation of Australian workers, a workforce that is skilled, adaptable and ready to lead our country into the future.

About NECA

The National Electrical and Communications Association (NECA) is the peak body for Australia's electrical and communications industry, representing over 6,500 businesses that employ nearly 250,000 people. The industry generates more than $80 billion annually and spans a diverse range of sectors, including defence, construction, mining, air conditioning, refrigeration, manufacturing, communications, and renewable energy.

NECA plays a critical role in fostering the next generation of electrical and communications tradespeople, contractors, and subcontractors. As the industry's advocate, NECA represents the interests of its members at all levels of government, in regulatory bodies, legislative arenas, and industry workforce development and training forums.

Our members are integral to Australia's economy, facilitating essential business connections, powering homes, and supporting infrastructure projects. They are also key to driving investment and enhancing the security and reliability of the nation's energy network, which is central to achieving affordable, environmentally sustainable outcomes.

NECA's National Footprint

With a national presence and strong collaboration between industry and government, NECA is the leading voice for the electrotechnology sector in Australia. Through its associated Group Training Organisations (GTOs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), NECA provides valuable employment and training opportunities for apprentices and tradespeople across the country.

New South Wales, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory and Queensland

NECA Electrical Apprenticeships (NECAEA), wholly owned by NECA, is a leading not-for-profit Group Training Organisation. It supports over 800 apprentices across NSW, WA Queensland and the ACT. NECAEA's completion rate is 90%, significantly higher than the industry average, and it also employs over double the industry average of Women and First Nations apprentices. NECA Training, also owned by NECA, offers a range of training programs tailored to the electrical, communications, broader construction, and energy industries.

South Australia and Northern Territory

Electro Careers & Apprenticeships (Electro) is a not-for-profit organisation established by NECA South Australia/Northern Territory. Electro provides employment and training for apprentices in various trades, including Electrical, Refrigeration, Air Conditioning, and Data Communications. It also offers Australia's first dual trade in Electrical/Refrigeration and Air Conditioning. Electro is dedicated to developing skilled tradespeople to meet the demands of today's industries.

Victoria and Tasmania

NECA Education and Careers has been supporting apprentices, trainees, and electrical contractors across Victoria and Tasmania for over 25 years. As a Group Training (GTO) and Registered Training Organisation (RTO), it specialises in pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, and post-trade training, and offers a wide range of industry short courses. The organisation adheres to the highest standards, including the National Standards for GTOs, the Australian Qualification Training Framework (AQTF), and the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) RTO Standards. NECA Education and Careers also partners closely with employers to recruit, employ, train, and mentor apprentices, ensuring their ongoing development and success within the industry.

Improve school student outcomes with the best available tools and resources

Pathways to trade careers

Attracting young people to Apprenticeships is an ongoing challenge. Many young women and men think they may be interested in the Electrical trades but do not have the conviction needed to commit to a 4-year Apprenticeship.

Pre-Apprenticeship programs have proven a particularly successful means of addressing this inherent reservation as they provide program participants with a 'taste' of the industry, provide them with basic hand and power tool skills and, in doing so, assist them to decide if a trade career is for them.

Cohort specific initiatives, such as female and indigenous-only pre-apprenticeship programs also assist to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence required for young people from these sections of the community to compete on a level playing field for Electrical Apprenticeship positions.

However, the Pre-Apprenticeship programs implemented must be relevant to the industry for which they are providing pathway to employment.

Pre-Apprenticeship programs must serve as an effective preparatory step for apprenticeships and include content that is matched to the realities of entry-level training and delivery contexts, particularly in Senior Secondary Schools.

If leading to an AQF Level II qualification, pre-apprenticeship programs must function as a foundational platform, equipping learners with practical, industry-relevant knowledge and skills that prepare them for an apprenticeship in the industry (ie, a AQF Level III qualification).

Feedback from NECA members and industry employers has consistently highlighted a range of desirable foundational skills for new entrants. These include:

- Effective communication,
- Basic mathematical skills to support measurements and calculations,
- Competency in using hand and power tools,
- Work health and safety (WHS) compliance, and
- The ability to identify hazards and apply appropriate risk controls.

A Pre-Apprenticeship program should not include AQF Level III units of competency, drawn directly from the apprenticeship qualification. This approach undermines the qualification's accessibility, practicality, and suitability for school-based and early-career delivery contexts.

The inclusion of Certificate III units in a Certificate II pre-apprenticeship program introduces several practical, logistical, and financial challenges:

a. **Delivery Capacity in Secondary Schools**
   Many Certificate II programs are delivered by Senior Secondary School RTOs. Secondary School teachers often have limited to no direct industry experience and restricted access to the equipment and materials required for safe and effective delivery of technical units of competency. Requiring these providers to deliver AQF Level III (trade-level) content risks compromising both learner outcomes and safety.

b. **Disruption to RTO Scheduling**
   Embedding Certificate III units within the Certificate II causes downstream disruptions in RTO scheduling. Apprentices entering with different unit completions necessitate staggered delivery and individualised credit transfer processes—further burdening RTOs already operating at or beyond capacity.

c. **Funding and Financial Viability**
   Most state-based VET funding frameworks rely on unit-based payments. When RTOs are required to issue credit transfers for Certificate III units completed at Certificate II level, they lose access to funding for those units. This undermines the financial sustainability of Certificate III delivery, particularly as shorter, less resource-intensive units are displaced by longer and more expensive components.

d. **No Net Gain in Training Outcomes**
   Completing Certificate III units during Certificate II studies does not reduce the overall duration of an apprenticeship. Instead, students merely reallocate 8–12 days of training to their RTO's first-year schedule, offering no added benefit to the learner while increasing complexity for the provider.

Considering the above, NECA recommends a significant realignment of Certificate II level Pre-Apprenticeship Programs to:

- Remove duplication of Certificate III content,
- Focus on practical, AQF Level II-appropriate units,
- Support the development of transferable, foundational skills.

NECA agrees that the utilisation of school resources more efficiently and innovatively will enable teachers to provide the quality teaching vital to improve student outcomes.

NECA also agrees that Australian teachers have access to a multitude of curriculum and lesson planning resources to enhance student learning experiences. However, where secondary schools are also Registered Training Organisations and, as such, responsible for preparing students for the world-of-work in vocational and trade-based occupations, teachers must work closely with industry to ensure, industry endorsed, relevant and compliant training delivery and assessment is achieved.

This is consistent with the Productivity Commission's aim to explore the most effective ways to ensure all teachers have access to high-quality teaching and learning resources and are supported in using them effectively to improve student outcomes.

Support the workforce through a flexible post-secondary education and training sector

Targeted marketing of Australian apprenticeships

Modelling has shown that after three to four years of university studies, the HECS debt can be around $40,000, excluding cost of study materials and ancillaries, whereas over the same period an apprentice will earn between $110,000 and $240,000, accumulate four years of superannuation and long service entitlements, overtime, and other allowances, while studying one day per week towards a nationally, often internationally, recognised qualification.

Targeted marketing and communication of the benefits of an apprenticeship will encourage more individuals to see apprenticeships as a viable pathway to a qualification and a career with equal or greater earning potential than many tertiary qualification avenues.

NECA further notes that the industry's skills shortages include technical trainers.

NECA would recommend support, including incentives, for 'Trade to Trainer' programs to encourage and support experienced workers seeking less labour-intensive work, or carer or lifestyle changes, to transition into technical training roles. That said, industry-led non-profit RTOs must be adequately supported to deliver the training that is required to upskill from the trade to the classroom.

Exemption of GTO apprentices from additional mentoring under AASN arrangements

GTOs offer comprehensive mentoring and support, surpassing what other entities typically provide. Thus, exempting GTO apprentices from additional mentoring requirements under ASSN arrangements would ensure effective and considerably more streamlined support. There may be a need to re-allocate funding to the GTO commensurate with the cost of providing the mentoring that is currently being provided.

Quality training provision

Across Australia there are currently fewer than 50 Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) delivering the electrical sector's trade qualification (UEE30820) and fewer than 20 RTOs delivering the Electricity Supply sector's trade qualifications (UET30621 & UET30821).

Wait times to commence off-the-job 'tech' training now extend to 18 months and in one jurisdiction wait lists have been suspended.

Not surprisingly, the RTOs who are servicing the industry are at capacity and Industry members across Australia are adamant that "we need more tradespeople, but we need more trade schools as well".

Funding to support the establishment of dedicated industry-led Centres of Excellence, equipped to train apprentices using the latest technology and educational tools are urgently required.

NECA is aware of many public TAFE facilities and other Government-owned buildings, particularly in rural and regional centres, that are considerably under-utilised. Arrangements supporting the use of these facilities by Industry RTOs to deliver qualifications and skill sets in severe skills shortage areas are needed immediately.

Additionally, in response to the considerable lack of available training places, particularly in rural and regional Australia, NECA is currently trialing a 'pop up' RTO campus model, utilising a Community Hall as a trade school facility on the NSW South Coast. Under this model, NECA utilises the Hall three days per week to deliver the Certificate III in Electrotechnology – Electrician qualification.

From this initiative the NECA Training's presence on the South Coast has seen the employment of nearly 40 new electrical apprentices in less than 12 months.

NECA has also implemented a Block Release training model to accommodate Apprentices working for organisations with shift rotation and fly-in-fly out employment models, such as the mines, utilities and other large infrastructure construction works. Under this model, training is delivered over 2 full weeks, full time every 2-3 months. The successes have been substantial for both the Apprentices and their employers.

Credit transfer and recognition of prior learning

Through its participation in training, training governance, training package development and licensing processes NECA is concerned about the opportunistic behaviors of numerous RTO's and associated businesses in promoting the award of qualifications in electrotechnology (and other regulated vocations) based largely on Recognised Prior Learning (RPL) processes rather than genuine training, assessment, and verification processes. Students/candidates are charged significant amounts in fees to be awarded the qualification in anticipation of obtaining a license from state-based jurisdictions in regulated work activities. It is also apparent that the relevant regulator (ASQA) is largely ineffective in preventing or addressing the under-performance or conduct of those RTOs.

In the electrotechnology sector, the potential for dangerously under-skilled persons to obtain qualifications enabling highly technical and/or high-risk work is increased by the unrestricted ability of RTOs to utilise Credit Transfers and/or RPL in the award of the qualification.

Balance service availability and quality through fit-for-purpose occupational entry regulations

Occupational entry regulations govern the entry of new workers into certain professions. These regulations are needed for high-risk professions, such as those in the Electrical industry, to protect consumer and worker safety and infrastructure integrity.
The various Australian jurisdictions have recognized that the possession of the qualification itself is an inadequate threshold for the issue of a license and apply additional requirements - such as independent testing (Vic), completion of registered apprenticeship (Qld), certificate of proficiency (NSW), endorsement for specific post-trade competencies (ACT).

NECA acknowledges that previous work conducted by the PC (2023, 2024) estimated that streamlining occupational licensing and registration requirements could result in an increase in productivity of 0.8% for industries with the highest incidence of occupational licensing and an overall 0.34–0.39% boost to GDP.

NECA considers that a national electrical license, with regulated occupational entry requirements reflecting the best jurisdictional practices and ensuing competent practitioners would achieve the results flagged by the PC, reduce the administrative burden in state regulators, and secure greater consumer protections.

Mature-age Apprentice Subsidy Scheme

It is widely recognised that the Australian energy industry is suffering the most severe skills shortages of all industries.

The National Council for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) forecasts electrical trades will be the number one skills shortage vocation over the coming decade, with no less than 35,000 additional electrical industry workers required by 2030.

If the Industry's unprecedented skills shortages are to be addressed, employers recognise that a more diverse technical workforce is needed.

However, priority social cohorts, including women, are more likely to pursue a trade career later in life, when adult wages become a barrier to employment as an Apprentice. Adult apprentices are significantly more expensive to employ and, hence, significantly more difficult to justify, particularly for small businesses.

While people over the age of 21 constitute less than 5% of NECA Apprenticeships' annual intake, they comprise 50% of applicants.

The wage barrier significantly disadvantages women, who are more likely to apply for an apprenticeship when over the age of 21. Funding is required to bridge this gap.

As a practical example, in Western Australia the single biggest change in ECA female apprentice numbers came when the WA Construction Training Fund (CTF) provided 100% of the wage gap allowing Group Training Organisations (GTOs) to provide industry with adult apprentices at the same rate as the junior apprentices for normal time hours.

During the period that the fund was operational, ECA WA doubled the number of female apprentices.

In its most recent pre-budget submission to the federal government, NECA proposed the introduction of a Mature Apprentice Subsidy Scheme (MASS).

NECA believes the introduction of such a scheme, through a pilot program within the energy sector, and particularly electrotechnology, offers an excellent opportunity to address skills shortages in the longer term, this will in our experience increase the level of participation by women, First Nations, and other priority group members in trade-based employment.

Greater utilisation of GTOs

NECA recommends strategies, including financial incentives, be implemented to encourage businesses, particularly SME's and businesses new to the apprenticeship system, to utilise GTOs.

This will substantially raise the recruitment, retention, and completion rates of Apprentices in the trades for the following reasons:

- Businesses, particularly small and micro businesses, often lack the infrastructure and resources for comprehensive apprentice mentoring and support. GTOs provide invaluable assistance to both apprentices and host employers. This support translates to improved completion rates.
- GTO's employ robust recruitment practices, ensuring that apprentices are matched with host employers based on their skills and potential for success.
- GTO's provide job security. If a business faces financial difficulties or ceases operations, the GTO steps in to secure an alternative placement for the business's apprentices, safeguarding their employment and, therefore, their apprenticeship.
- GTOs ensure well rounded training and ensure full compliance with WHS practices.

Productivity in the electrotechnology and construction sectors depends on workforce stability, continuity, and the efficient use of human capital. Greater utilisation of Group Training Organisations increases productivity across the industry by addressing the fundamental barriers to apprentice recruitment, retention, and development. Robust Australian research, including data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, confirms that apprentices placed through reputable, industry led, not for profit Group Training Organisations have substantially higher completion rates and better long-term outcomes.

Small and medium sized enterprises often do not have the internal resources to manage the considerable administrative and regulatory responsibilities involved in apprentice employment. By engaging Group Training Organisations, businesses can transfer the complexity of recruitment, onboarding, payroll, training coordination, work health and safety compliance, and performance management to dedicated professionals. This enables business owners to focus on project delivery and client service, resulting in increased productive output.

Group Training Organisations employ rigorous screening and job matching to ensure apprentices are placed with suitable host employers. This targeted approach reduces mismatched placements, minimises early dropouts, and avoids unnecessary skills gaps. Proper matching sets apprentices up for success from the outset, reducing the churn and productivity losses that follow failed placements.

High attrition rates among apprentices directly employed represent a direct loss to productivity in the sector. Every time an apprentice leaves before completion, the employer loses the invested training time, suffers interruptions to workflow, and must begin the

recruitment and induction process again. This churn results in significant downtime and additional recruitment costs. Industry led, not for profit Group Training Organisations consistently deliver retention and completion rates above ninety per cent, compared with much lower rates elsewhere in the sector. Higher completion rates provide a more stable pipeline of skilled workers, with fewer disruptions to workflow and a lower overall cost of recruitment per qualified apprentice.

When an apprentice leaves the industry before completion, the negative consequences are not limited to the business. In the electrotechnology sector, the skills developed during an incomplete apprenticeship are often not transferable to other trades or industries. This leaves young workers without a recognised qualification, reduces their future employment prospects, and erodes their confidence in vocational pathways. From a national perspective, the cost of vocational training is heavily supported by government. When an apprentice drops out, the public investment is wasted, with no return to the economy or community. This is not simply an academic concern. Australia is already facing severe skills shortages in electrotechnology, and every lost apprentice increases the burden on future training and workforce planning efforts.

If a small business faces financial pressure or reduced workloads, apprentices are often the first to be dismissed. This results in wasted training investment, lost productivity, and a skills gap for the business. Group Training Organisations protect against this by finding new placements for apprentices who may otherwise fall through the cracks. By keeping apprentices employed and progressing toward their qualifications, Group Training Organisations maintain the workforce pipeline and minimise project delays caused by skills shortages. Group Training Organisations are also held to the highest standards of work health and safety and employment law compliance. This reduces the risk of legal disputes, penalties, or project shutdowns. By providing consistent, quality training and mentoring, Group Training Organisations produce apprentices who are more job ready, reducing the need for constant supervision or remedial training, and allowing businesses to operate more efficiently.

Not for profit, industry led Group Training Organisations are closely aligned with industry trends and requirements. This ensures apprentices are trained in the skills that are currently in demand, improving their contribution to business productivity from day one. This is often not the case in less specialised training environments.

By reducing the barriers to employing apprentices, Group Training Organisations enable more small and new businesses to participate in workforce development. This expands the available pool of skilled workers and encourages innovation and growth across the industry.

Directing businesses, particularly small to medium enterprises and those new to apprenticeships, to reputable, not for profit, industry-led Group Training Organisations is a proven method for increasing productivity. This approach lowers costs, streamlines training, prevents the waste of public funds, reduces lost opportunity for young people, and creates a stable, high-quality workforce for the sector. These outcomes advance both NECA’s objectives and national economic interest.

Easing cost-of-living pressures

In the current economic landscape, the impact of cost-of-living pressures on apprenticeship participation within the electrical contracting industry is substantial. The current housing market, particularly the rental market, significantly impacts an individual's capacity to seek roles outside their local area or in circumstances where family or other support mechanisms aren't available.

Similarly, early start times conflict with childcare availability and childcare fees are rising, rendering many Apprentices unable to place their children into care five days/week. As a result, many are forced to leave the apprenticeship.

Programs such as the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System could offer financial support to ease the economic burden on apprentices and make a career in the electrical industry more accessible.

NECA recommends the consideration of increased rental assistance and childcare subsidies for apprentices.

Fee Free VET - not just TAFE

The electrotechnology sector plays a critical role in Australia's transition to a net zero, technology-enabled economy. With over 241,600 workers across more than 56,000 businesses (Powering Skills Organisation, 2024), this industry underpins vital national capabilities in renewable energy, smart infrastructure, and the rollout of electric vehicle systems.

Yet, the sector is facing a projected shortage of up to 32,000 electricians by 2030 (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2024). This shortfall presents a significant risk to the pace and success of Australia's energy transition and broader industrial competitiveness. Closing this gap requires a vocational education and training (VET) system that is responsive, scalable, and aligned with real-world employer needs.

Recent reforms—including the introduction of the Fee Free TAFE Bill 2024—are welcome in their intention to increase access to training. However, NECA is concerned that the current structure of the policy may unintentionally exclude high-performing, industry-led registered training organisations (RTOs), despite their proven success in delivering skills outcomes. Unless addressed, this exclusion risks undermining the policy's effectiveness and exacerbating skills mismatches in critical trades. Fee Free TAFE is not Fee Free VET; therefore, all RTOs must be government funded.

NECA and other stakeholders in the electrotechnology sector have demonstrated strong training outcomes through non-government RTOs. Apprenticeship completion rates in NECA-operated RTOs consistently exceed 90 percent, compared to 55 percent across the public TAFE network (NCVER, 2024). This performance reflects a closer alignment

between training content and current workplace requirements, as well as better support mechanisms, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises that form most of the industry.

In its current form, the Fee Free TAFE scheme provides funding exclusively to public providers. While this may support institutional investment, it also distorts the training market and limits student choice—both of which are likely to suppress quality and reduce system agility. Moreover, it fails to recognise the role of industry-led providers in scaling up capacity at pace.

The impact of this policy misalignment is already being felt. NECA members report that public providers are often unable to adapt training models to match emerging technologies, resulting in graduates who are underprepared for the demands of contemporary electrical workplaces. In contrast, industry-led RTOs provide specialised, workplace-integrated training with demonstrated relevance and effectiveness.

Further compounding the issue is the growing need for a more inclusive workforce. In traditionally male-dominated sectors such as electrotechnology, Group Training Organisations (GTOs) have played a pivotal role in improving retention, especially for women. GTOs offer structured mentorship, targeted pastoral care, and flexible arrangements that enable women to manage employment and caregiving responsibilities. Research from NECA (2023) indicates that women with access to mentorship are 50 percent more likely to complete their apprenticeships than those without.

As Australia seeks to lift labour force participation and drive gender equity in high-growth industries, these models of training delivery and support must be embedded within the national VET framework—not sidelined by narrowly framed policy instruments.

While Fee Free TAFE seeks to remove financial barriers, cost is not the primary factor limiting apprentice completions. Quality, relevance, and provider capability are the key variables. If all providers—public and non-government—achieved completion rates approaching 90 percent, the current rate of apprenticeship commencements would be sufficient to meet forecast workforce needs. The policy challenge is not only to increase access, but to ensure the system supports high-quality outcomes.

NECA urges the Productivity Commission to recommend that all future VET funding, including through fee-free initiatives, be made available on a provider-neutral basis. Jurisdictions must be required to include both public and qualified, high-performing industry-led RTOs as eligible training partners. This will ensure competition, drive innovation in training delivery, and better align the VET system with Australia’s evolving economic needs.

The solution to the national skills shortage will not be found in a single provider type or policy lever. It will come from a coordinated, high-quality VET system that draws on the strengths of both public institutions and responsive, industry-led partners to deliver a workforce that is skilled, adaptable, and future-read.

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Australian Standards are Fundamental to Safety, Compliance and Quality

Australian Standards support safety, compliance and quality across the electrotechnology sector. It is widely recognised throughout the industry that apprentices and tradespeople must have access to these standards not only during their training but also throughout their professional careers. Apprentices in particular need regular access to standards during vocational training and study. These standards are essential for building core skills, supporting safe work practices and meeting the expectations of employers, clients and regulators.

Many important standards are directly referenced in contracts, regulatory frameworks and licensing conditions. For example, the Wiring Rules are often cited in project specifications and legislation. When apprentices and trainees are expected to apply standards that are necessary for lawful and safe work, access to these documents should not be a barrier. At present, Standards Australia operates under a government endorsed monopoly. As the only authority responsible for developing and maintaining the technical standards that support Australian industry, this position carries a clear public responsibility. That responsibility is to ensure the workforce, especially those in training, are not excluded because of cost or limited access options.

The current arrangements, which provide digital only access and prevent printing, create real challenges for apprentices, trainers and TAFE instructors. These restrictions do not reflect long standing industry practice in Australia, where it is common for tradespeople and apprentices to carry a printed, often marked up, copy of the relevant standard for easy reference on site. The ability to refer to and annotate these documents is not a convenience but a basic requirement for quality and compliant work. Many tradespeople use these printed copies daily to resolve technical questions and ensure best practice.

Making key standards available at no cost, both digitally and in print, through TAFE and registered training providers would lead to safer and more consistent outcomes for apprentices and the wider industry. This approach would remove unnecessary obstacles, encourage fair and safe work and better align training with workplace requirements. Providing free access to standards that are commonly required by law, by contract or through licensing obligations is not just sensible. It is a responsibility that fits with the public role given to Standards Australia.

NECA urges the Government to instruct Standards Australia, together with government and industry, to ensure every apprentice and trainee can access the standards they need, in the format they require, at no personal cost. This change is essential to support the next generation of skilled workers and to maintain safety, compliance and technical excellence across the Australian electrotechnology sector.

Balance service availability and quality through fit-for-purpose occupational entry regulations

Occupational entry regulations (licensing) are an essential component of consumer safety, worker safety, and worker portability in the electrical trades. For general electrical work (on commercial and residential premises) it secures a clear understanding of the quality of any work undertaken and WHS expectations relating to the way the work is performed.

Many positions in businesses that perform electrical work, or perform tasks associated with electrical apparatus, or require competencies associated with this trade specify the license as an essential criterion and are largely able to verify the credential easily with the appropriate regulator.

The frustration experienced in the electrical (and associated trades) is the degree to which each state regulator applies different entry criteria to the acquisition of an electrical license and have not come to a consensus on criteria that would permit Automatic Mutual Recognition. In fact, the jurisdictions often appear to be diverging rather than standardising their approach to electrical licensing regulation.

There is no doubt that licensing and regulation is justified for electrical work as the risks to consumers, occupants of the built environment, and workers of electric hazards is real and substantial when non-compliant work occurs.

With respect to electrical work in the broadest sense - that being inclusive of general electrical work, restricted (equipment associated) electrical work, supply authority work, and specialised (eg hazardous area) work – some jurisdictions have licensing frameworks, entry requirements, and enforcement frameworks that could be considered appropriate and effective with respect to managing risks to workers and consumers. Some other jurisdictions have regulatory or policy settings that have frustrated better outcomes.

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