



10 March 2022

Dr Michele Bruniges AM
Secretary of the Department
Department of Education, Skills and Employment
GPO Box 9880
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Dr Michele,

LETTER OF SUPPORT: ENERGY, RENEWABLES AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES SKILLS CLUSTER

The Board of Directors of the NSW Utilities & Electrotechnology Industry Training Advisory Body (NSW UE ITAB) strongly supports the establishment of Energy, Renewables and Emerging Technologies Skills Cluster to meet the specific needs of the constantly evolving Utilities/Energy and Electrotechnology industry. The NSW UE ITAB has been in existence for over 30 years in NSW and has a long-standing relationship with the NSW government in relation to workforce development and Vocational Education and Training (VET) as an independent training advisory body. It is the Board's opinion from this historical perspective, and expertise, in understanding the interrelationship between skills development and occupational classification arrangements, as enunciated in ANZSCO, that where synergistic overlaps of skills exist efforts should be made to facilitate their codification by appropriate bodies with technical expertise. This is true of the Utilities and Electrotechnology sector and is evinced by qualifications under coverage which have some of the highest apprenticeship numbers or unique arrangements that require workers in high-risk occupations to hold said qualifications in order to work.

The NSW UE ITAB has been party to many of the VET systems changes over the past 30 years, including Training Package development. A consistent theme is that ANZSCO classifications work well for some industry sectors, where occupations transcend industry sectors and ANZSIC classification where occupations and career paths are unique to an industry. Both are appropriate and must coexist in a skills and VET framework. Both must be duly serviced. There is no one size fits all approach. To believe otherwise is not to accept the realities of the world of work nor understand how work is organised to meet economic and technological change or skills development in the labour market. Creating single focused ANZSIC based organisations that do not have the same construct as ANZSCO focused organisations will result in a deconstruction of skills that overlap synergistically. It will bring about a multiapproach to the same occupational outcomes, where many are high risk and involve dangerous mediums of work and in some cases occupational licenses or particular agency authorisations. This approach without doubt, will result in more cost, duplication of effort and resources, less coherence and increased skill shortages in these occupational areas. There is enough historical knowledge in the Utilities and Electrotechnology kindred state/territory Network ITABs, the industry, RTOs and industry practitioners to evince this resultant outcome.

The NSW UE ITAB Board supports the notion that to be successful moving forward, it is vital that we have a highly skilled, adaptable and productive workforce who own consistent and portable skills, which are recognised through national qualifications and training products.

Member stakeholders of the NSW UE ITAB cover the skills and qualifications developed under the coverage of the Electrotechnology (UEE), Transmission, Distribution and Rail (UET), Generation (UEP) and Gas (UEG) Training Packages, recognising that they have significant overlap with each other. Often this commonality is reflected in our stakeholders' workforce where it underpins flexible career pathways.

The Board believes it is essential that these interrelated Training Packages remain together in the new VET model, as they have done since the inauguration of Training Packages in 1998. They have served the respective employers, employees and regulators well, for skill and employment purposes, notwithstanding any comments to the contrary, the evidence of qualifications completed is there.

The NSW UE ITAB recognises that technology advancements and work organisation in terms of disaggregation of organisational structures and employee arrangements within the Utilities and Electrotechnology industry have and continue to move at a rapid pace and invariably because of the high degree of qualification and skill sets used to be employed in the industry, impact on qualifications and skill set design. Historical large publicly owned utilities network organisations have been changing ownership and structures and in turn have created workforce challenges. This has seen modified employment practices including increased use of contracted services. Technological innovations and carbon emission government policy enhancements too, have seen growth in an array of renewable energy systems and regulations, the introduction of new technologies that encompass high-end automation, digitization in terms of programmable equipment all interconnected to the internet of things. The industry has and continues to undergo significant changes.

All of the above, coupled with the fact that many workers that work in many of the energy industry sub-sectors inherently involve working with dangerous medium. This requires, in addition to the above, a deep understanding of the ever changing and evolving regulatory framework these sectors work in. There is a compelling need to ensure that those who are given the keys to help the industry facilitate, build and codify its skills pool, must at the very least be close and have strong knowledge of and ties with the industry. They must be technically competent, highly focused and understand the culture of the industry and be the heart of any organisation that purports to become an Industry Skills Cluster. Creating this context provides a best fit-for-purpose environment to facilitate information gathering on workforce, work organisation and skills issues. In turn greater outcomes.

The initial nine clusters proposed do not reflect or present a sound basis from which occupations that transcend industry sectors can be appropriately identified, facilitated and serviced. The proposed cluster arrangements represent a significant risk to our industry sectors as the skills and qualifications our industry stakeholders rely for employment or employing qualified personnel would be dissected across four clusters. This will result from our long-term experience in fragmentation and potentially lead to industrial disharmony, licencing complications, conflict, parallel skills paths and most likely a host of same qualifications for same occupational outcomes, skewed to an industry context all with different units of competency, different training and different assessments. Such an arrangement poses an unacceptable risk to our stakeholders' staff, business, work organisation strategies and the community, particularly if it resulted in inconsistent paths to electrical licenses, or a myriad of unwanted qualifications proffering employment in the electricity or gas networks.

It is for these reasons the NSW UE ITAB supports the proposed establishment of an Energy, Renewables and Emerging Technologies Skills Cluster. The NSW UE ITAB would be more than happy to elaborate further on the support and advantages for giving effect to a singular proposed cluster to cover the Utilities and Electrotechnology industry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hughes', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

David Hughes
Chairman

Cc.

- NSW UE ITAB Board of Directors
- State/Territory Utilities and Electrotechnology Network ITABs