

## **Submission to the Education Health Standing Committee: Inquiry into the delivery of the VETiS program**

### **BACKGROUND:**

*Founded in 2008 the Ertech Construction Academy is an innovative training institution which aims to provide young people with a pathway into the civil construction industry. Funded by Ertech Holdings, over \$3.5m has been invested in training and development programs for projects located across Western Australia.*

The Ertech Construction Academy (ECA) is a company-funded, formal youth training initiative providing Year 11 and 12 students with the opportunity to achieve a nationally recognised Certificate II in Civil Construction through on-site training while still attending high school.

In partnership with specific RTO's the ECA invites students to participate in a formally-structured onsite training program two days per week at a purpose-built training facilities. These are currently located in West Swan and at a very suitable site at Tamala Park under the auspices of the Mindarie Regional Council.

The Academy's workplace training covers a broad range of knowledge, including; occupational safety and health basics, duty of care responsibilities, installation of underground services and the operation of large mobile earthmoving equipment.

The majority of graduates commence full-time employment either with our company or other major industry players upon completion of their studies. Other students have furthered their knowledge by undertaking apprenticeship training within the construction industry and associated fields.

The Academy program has trained in excess of 130 students from more than 20 schools - with 110 graduates to 2016.

The success of the ECA's training model has led to the development of customised project-specific programs in Broome and Kununurra for company projects with an indigenous component.

The Academy has been formally recognised with the following awards:

2013 - Polytechnic West – Employer Partnership of the Year

2012 - Skills DMC Chairman's Award for VET in Schools Training

2011 - NAB School First in partnership with Clontarf Aboriginal College

2010 - Indigenous Trainer of the Year – Civil Contractors Federation (WA)

### **Our Success:**

In the past five years, over 93% of our graduates have found employment within six (6) months of graduation from the program. Some have been employed within the company whilst others have found work in other civil construction aligned industries. Those employed by the company have progressed to Certificate III level and beyond.

### **Key Issues :**

Since its foundation, the ECA program has utilised the RTO of services of South Metro TAFE ( *formerly Swan TAFE and Polytechnic West*). The RTO was the recipient of VETiS funding and used this to pay for trainer and classroom resources. The high expense of conducting the program which includes provision of plant, significant equipment resources (surveying, pipes, concrete materials, PPE, support staff) has required the company to underwrite program up to \$250,000 annually.

Over the period since 2008, approaches have been made to former state ministers for Education – Training (Peter Collier MLC and Liza Harvey MLA ) seeking to access to part VETiS funding to assist the program. During 2015-2016 several formal discussions were held with Polytechnic West relating to the company's ability to continue the underwriting the resources required for the program. This has resulted in the company severing its relationship with South Metro TAFE at the end of 2017. From 2017, the company has engaged a private RTO to provide the training for the Academy program, but as they are unable under the current structure, to access the VETiS funding, students are now required to pay fees (\$2500) for the course.

Our initial investigation was with key personnel within the Education Department responsible for coordination of VETiS (North and South) and we were encouraged to learn that schools did have some funding enabling students to undertake courses requiring fees. This has not been confirmed in reality so there has been a significant drop in numbers (50%) resulting in only those who can afford the fees are able to participate. This makes it very difficult for many who would benefit from the course and the qualification.

In the past decade, whilst the TAFE - RTO accessed the VETiS funding we had significant applications (30+) for the 16 places and many who were chosen had challenging learning issues. However, with the requirements of regular attendance, no less than 80%, regular drug and alcohol testing and the practical nature of the program, the employment take up at the end of the program has been over 90%.

### **Considerations:**

*How well the program is meeting the needs of schools, students and industry.*

Our experience has been that the program has the potential to make a real difference, but is limited to the RTO's that are able to access the funding. In the civil construction industry there are other elements and programs that could be undertaken but without suitable expansion of funding to other RTO's this is not possible as the TAFE sector is not always willing to add courses to their scope.

Parental, school and student responses to our program over many years has confirmed for us that the quality of the Certificate II in Civil Construction and the results of this training ending up in employment is very successful. The capacity of South Metro TAFE to offer the Certificate II in Civil Construction without access to suitable sites and plant would be significantly hampered without industry engagement. It is impossible to teach "pie-laying" or "plant operation" in a classroom.

### *Challenges for regional and remote areas*

One challenge facing students and schools in regional areas is the capacity of the school to be able to offer relevant and appropriate VET courses for their students. The sourcing of training for relevant qualifications is often limited to what the local TAFE have on scope.

In certain regional locations a qualification that would be appropriate and relevant to needs of students are hampered by what can be sought through local industry and capacity to have the qualification scoped. The many country and regional visitors to the Ertech Construction Academy over the years has demonstrated the desire to have the program replicated elsewhere.

### *Registration and on-going monitoring of training organisations.*

This is a key issue for consideration. It is our strong contention that if the RTO that we have partnered with for the Certificate II in Civil had access to VETiS funding we would have a significant number of trainees in our program for 2017-18. To make it even more accessible, the company has subsidised some families with part scholarships to enable the students to get the qualification.

The on-going monitoring is also a critical issue. In our experience, it took quite some time to get extra resources for the program from Polytechnic West (South Metropolitan TAFE) and only on an ad-hoc basis; it was never on-going. The only times our company was asked for feedback was when the RTO was providing submissions for State Training Awards.

On-going feedback and evaluation of any registered RTO receiving funding should be a requirement as part of the funding agreement. This evaluation should be completed by the recipients, and industry partners. The Certificate II in Civil construction offered at the Ertech Construction Academy has been modified and adapted as a result of the feedback from our operations divisions who identified specific requirements and skills of the trainees. Further suggested modification to the instructional process has not been as successful.

### *Resourcing of the program*

The funding of VETiS is a limited and any potential to increase this will be a question for the government of the day. However, in certain qualifications the funding based on SCH ( Student Contact Hours) is not always equitable and when the specific type of course requires smaller groups or increased supervision (e.g. when operating large plant) the potential for resourcing the program appropriately comes into question.

## **SUMMARY:**

The VETiS program has the potential to make a significant impact on the VET opportunities for young people. The current model does require change; in some situations overhaul, and in some cases expansion. The benefits of any changes and expansion will be greater than the current program provides.



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