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Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace
Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

3 February 2012

To Committee Secretary

Senate inquiry: Shortage of Engineers and related employment skills

The following Terms of Reference will be address in this submission:

- (c) options to address the skill shortage for engineers and related trades, and the effectiveness and efficiency of relevant policies, both past and present
- (e) effective strategies to develop and retain engineering talent in the private and public sectors through industry training and development, at enterprise, project and whole-of sector levels

Overview of Sinclair Knight Merz

Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) is a leading multi-disciplinary company with global capability in strategic consulting, engineering and project delivery. With more than 7,000 people shared across over 40 offices, we're an employee-owned organisation operating across the Asia Pacific, the Americas and EMEA (Europe, Middle East & Africa), serving the mining and metals, energy, power, transport infrastructure, social infrastructure, water, defence, industry and international development assistance markets.

Formed in 1964, our people come from a diverse range of disciplines including engineers, planners, architects, economists, scientists, project managers, technicians and functional staff.

Employment at SKM

70% of our global business is generated in Australia, working specifically with public and private companies and government to deliver engineering design and project delivery.

Due to the shortage of skilled labour in Australia in the maritime engineering, structural engineering, mechanical engineering, project delivery, design, and port and wharf skills in

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particular, SKM has needed to invest considerable effort in sourcing experienced engineers and project delivery personnel outside Australia. We have focused our strategic resourcing efforts in participation in international expos, referrals from our senior people and strategic partnerships with sourcing agents in Europe and the Americas. Given the engagement method for these specialist skills is via 456 visas, this approach has not always provided SKM with the opportunity to develop and retain local talent.

Annually, SKM campaigns universities to engage graduate engineers in Australia, resulting in an average hire of 100 graduates per year. The availability of suitable qualified graduates is diminishing due to demand in the market and the number of graduates undertaking civil engineering.

In order to address the short term and long term requirements, it is recommended that the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees focus on a number of initiatives to assist industry to meet the demands for engineers in the area of training and policy.

Strategies for consideration

- Provide bridging programs to create opportunities for those in trade professions wishing to undertake engineering/project management study, to transition to this under-resourced area. This can take a number of forms such as: full time study support or joint employer and government support in the form of an apprenticeship
- Provide incentives for females to undertake engineering/project management studies, for example, HECS reduction or specific female engineering scholarships
- Provision of a re-skilling grant for engineers/project managers who have taken a parental or career break to provide support to return to engineering/project management
- Incentives for employers to sponsor students through engineering and project delivery university programs eg: tax concessions
- Review of the impact of potential LAHFA changes on Australia's ability to attract highly skilled engineers to meet the demand
- Support for Australian companies wishing to import international skills, for example, tax concessions, sponsorship funding and a more streamlined and fast-track process to enable migrants to gain initial short-term visas, and subsequently permanent residency in Australia if required

Yours sincerely

Steve Dorian
General Manager People