

Submission

INQUIRY INTO THE DELIVERY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE QUEENSLAND



19 January 2023

About Queensland Independent Schools

Community confidence in the independent schooling sector remains strong with more than 140,000 students enrolled in 236 independent schools across Queensland. These schools educate more than 15 percent of the state's total school-age population and about 20 percent of all secondary students.

Independent schools are valued institutions and a pivotal part of Queensland's education system. They are valued schooling choices for families, hubs of human and community connection, places of intellectual, civic and social development, employers and employment generators, education innovators and change-makers.

Independent schools are as unique as the communities they serve and offer parents a choice in the education of their children. Common to all independent schools is their commitment to strong student outcomes, high standards of behaviour, and the welfare and wellbeing of students.

Many independent schools educate international students or specialise in the education of students with disability. There has also been strong growth in the number of Special Assistance Schools for students who have disengaged from mainstream schools, and trade training schools that combine senior year studies with practical vocational education and training.

Over the past five years, enrolments at Queensland independent schools have increased by more than 11 percent. This growth is a clear indication that parents value an independent education and are prepared to invest their after-tax incomes in their child's schooling.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) is the peak body representing Queensland's independent schooling sector. Independent Schools Queensland represents the interests of its member schools, fosters choice in education and protects the autonomy of independent schools. ISQ is a not-for-profit organisation and membership to ISQ is voluntary.

Introduction

The following submission has been derived from feedback provided by independent schools located in the far north of Queensland, central Queensland, and the Darling Downs southwest region of Queensland. Contributions have also been provided by the Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) Parents Network and the collective experience and exposure of the ISQ Education Services Advisor (VET) and the ISQ Manager (School Improvement) to a range of regional, remote, and rural independent schools.

1. The role of public providers in VET delivering in rural, remote and regional Queensland including:

- **VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes**
 - There are very few RTOs that service rural, remote and regional Queensland apart from TAFE therefore the options for schools and their prospective vocational students are very limited and impact on the rate of participation that these areas could see.
 - Currently external providers seek mostly to offer courses that they can financially accommodate through funding.
 - Schools who could become or continue to maintain their status as an RTO are choosing to engage the services of external providers as the support for school RTOs across Queensland has diminished rapidly in recent years.
 - To engage a school student on a school-based apprenticeship and/or traineeship, employers are an essential key. Students need to leave their local areas to engage in the work-based component of the apprenticeship which is dependent on their ability to travel.
- **VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including enablers and barriers to VET**
 - Public transport or transport in general is an issue for Aboriginal peoples, to get to the established centres to receive their training. Travelling is also a massive hurdle for them in that culturally, they are more inclined to feel 'safe and supported' within their local environment.
 - Online programs do not work for the most part for Aboriginal students as their preferred mode of delivery, mostly due to the lack of community connection (a big part of their culture) and the reliance on digital skills and reliable internet services.
 - It has also been positively reported that several Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students have completed VET certificates at level 2 through traditional face-to-face modes of delivery and accessing VET in Schools (VETiS) funding and have also had no trouble securing apprenticeship placements.

2. The major barriers to the provision of localized and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland.

- **Dependence on locally based training providers**

Many senior secondary school students are becoming much more responsive to the combined theory and hands-on learning approach provided by vocational education and training irrespective of whether the subject-area is trade or professional based. As there is a high level of **dependence on locally based training providers** to deliver vocational programs that meet a given localised industry and / or community need, senior secondary school students in regional, rural and remote areas are:

- restricted with regards to the choice of training programs and the quality of training being provided (RTOs will often run classes based on a minimum number of learners).
- often reliant on parents to enable their travel to and from the location of the training provider, which not all parents have the capacity to do.
- also reliant on parents to pay for their non-funding courses and, again, not all parents have the capacity to do this.

- **Access to Industry**

- Training and assessment across vocational programs must be informed by industry and supported by industry to enable:
- the practical application of skills and knowledge across a range of different industry relevant contexts and within an industry relevant environment.
- structured work placements for students on vocational programs where work hours are mandated as part of their course.
- work experience opportunities within localised organisations to enable student pathway choice and awareness of local industry skills and knowledge expectations.
- professional learning opportunities that enable the ongoing industry currency compliance requirements for local VET teachers.

Independent schools in regional, remote and rural areas have reported that they have limited access to industry to enable the provision of placements, opportunities for practical application for learners and professional learning for teaching practitioners.

This impacts a school's choice to incorporate nationally recognised programs within their study offerings that enable the acquisition of skills for senior students emerging into work or further study in Queensland – a point which is highly contributory to the current skills shortages being experienced both at a state and national levels.

- **Online Delivery**

The provision of **online delivery** has worked in recent years to 'band aid' the teaching of knowledge-based learning through a pandemic. It has, however, also returned some issues for students wishing to engage in nationally recognised training in that:

- online delivery hinders the natural pedagogy of vocational learning which seeks to 'engage' these first-time learners in schools and requires the directly observed practical application of skills and knowledge.
- as first-time learners, students are more engaged through the direct support of an industry qualified trainer and assessor who is in attendance and directly observing the application of skills and knowledge.

- this type of delivery and assessment requires a high level of micro-managing to ensure the value of training content provided, the authenticity of work submitted by learners and the assessment judgements made by VET practitioners irrespective of whether they are school-based or employed by an external training provider.
- face-to-face learning has returned a much higher rate of success than those restricted to online delivery which has seen a high number of ‘drop-outs’ across some regional, remote and rural schools. It is important to recognise that online learning has its place in supporting delivery of vocational courses, however, its place in the school system must be established and not become a platform of dependent learning especially within regional, remote and rural schools.

3. Existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET.

- Schools feel that the removal of financial incentives along with a reduction in funding provided through federal government for school-based traineeships across many of the key industry fields, e.g., business, hospitality, screen and media and live production, are now considerably reducing opportunities for students wishing to study through this pathway. As a result, employers are discouraged from taking on trainees in these areas.
- The now superseded FSK20113 Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways was, in previous years, a QCAA recognized qualification with respect to their acceptable minimum literacy and numeracy requirements for exiting students. The transition period for this program has now expired with the replacement qualification, the FSK20119 Certificate II in Skills for Work and Vocational Pathways now in place. Whilst still a popular course for students in the regional, remote and rural areas, this new program has not been accepted by the QCAA as meeting their minimum literacy and numeracy requirements. This has therefore impacted upon many learners in these areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, who find it difficult to achieve the required literacy and numeracy levels through an academic approach.

4. Examples of successful localised VET models and how learnings might be applied in other locations.

- Students benefit from organisations offering school-based trainee programs, for example, St Andrews Private Hospital providing training and work opportunities in health care.
- Having students attend TAFE one day a week or via a school-based Apprenticeship/ Traineeship seems to be a very successful way to deliver VET on this type of pathway.
- Independent school RTOs have in-house RTO Managers who, given that students are their primary agenda, are wonderful at coordinating and managing programs and communicating pathway and funding options to students and their families.
- Providers sending VET trainers and assessors into schools to deliver to groups of student cohorts is a great model that should be replicated across regional areas.
- Students who do not opt for 5 x General subjects enable themselves with more opportunities to incorporate VET programs into their schedule of study. This has proved highly beneficial for many students in these more remote areas.

- Parents of students are funding enrolment in VET programs where they can, as they see the value in keeping their children ‘engaged’ across their senior schooling years and completing with skills and knowledge that will set them on their learning and/or working journey post school.

5. Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) to facilitate improvements in these areas.

Independent schools would benefit from the following facilitated improvements where possible:

- access to programs that enable working collaborations with industry whilst creating the best pathways of learning that support student engagement.
- the coordination of small school student groups across local regions to be facilitated by a central body e.g., local DESBT area office, to enable increased opportunities for full class student participation in VET courses.
- the efficient utilisation of local trade training centres and similar locations to enable vocational training and assessment to take place within industry relevant environments that are more accessible to them.
- support provided to locally based RTOs with nationally recognised programs that serve local areas of need.
- more recognition and support for local school RTOs whose primary agenda and focus is the student.
- sufficient funding to enable the provision of desired courses e.g., Certificate III’s, that match both industry / community needs as well as a student’s choice of study.
- increased engagement and participation of local employers to provide structured work placements for learners as well as professional learning opportunities for VET teachers in schools.
- efficient utilization of locally established trade training centres and industry relevant school-based workshop environments as hubs of learning for schools in regional areas.
- increased training and recognition opportunities of schoolteachers as VET trainers.
- vastly increased awareness and training of VET trainers coming into schools from external RTOs and TAFE on:
 - the difference between adult training and adult-based learning for school students including those based in regional, remote and rural areas.
 - identified behavioural issues of learners within regional, remote and rural schools such as those resulting from trauma and experience of abuse as well as criminal activity.
- encouragement of schools to incorporate study schedules in years 11 and 12 to reflect the provision of programs offered to students rather than fitting in programs to an established structure designed only to support non-VET pathways.
- review and efficient regulation of the amount of training being delivered by all providers of VET in schools in line with legislated requirements.
- alignment of financial incentives to outcomes achieved and destination data and not just on increasing participation.

- support to enable a more balanced level of careers guidance and advice that reflects all pathway choices available to students and that would benefit the local area and not simply what has been the easiest set of study options for the school.

Summary

It is timely that, as extreme skills shortages are being released within several industries across Queensland and the nation, many students are becoming much more responsive to the blended learning approach of theory and hands-on practical application irrespective of whether their chosen subject-area is trade based or professional based. Parents are also notably preferring their children to enrol on these programs to enhance their levels of engagement through senior school and continuing studies.

Having noted a high level of dependence on locally based training providers to deliver vocational programs that meet a given localised industry and / or community need and the issues this presents, it is imperative that a heightened spotlight be focused on the provision of these external services within our regional, remote and rural schools.

Whilst this is a long-term issue, substantial steps could be taken now to focus on bringing schools, training facilities and employers together within each region to increase the engagement of learners and quality achievement of skills and knowledge in line with industry sectors of need.

