

## Briefings

Thought leadership for the independent schooling sector

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### **NON-STATE SCHOOLS ACCREDITATION – A NEW ACT FOR QUEENSLAND**

#### From the Executive Director

Queensland will have new accreditation legislation for non-state schools following the passage of the Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Bill 2017 through State Parliament on Thursday 10 August.

The new accreditation Act, which is expected to take effect from 1 January 2018, replaces the current *Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001*, which has been in operation since 2002.

The 2001 Act, when first introduced, was viewed as a leading and innovative piece of legislation governing the regulation of non-state schools. Through the Act, Queensland was the first jurisdiction to focus accreditation requirements on the suitability of a school's governing body and to legislate for school self-review. The then Minister for Education, the Hon Anna Bligh, described the legislative requirements as enabling for non-state schools and a move towards self-regulation of the sector.

The 2001 Act was introduced following the *Report of the Review of Accreditation and Accountability Arrangements for Queensland Non-State Schools 2000* undertaken by Professor Roy Webb who was Vice-Chancellor of Griffith University at the time. Professor Webb was subsequently appointed as the first chair of the Non-State Schools Accreditation Board (NSSAB) which was established under the new Act.

The review concluded "the regulatory environment should not seek to specify a particular ideal model for a school, but should be supportive of a diversity of schools and types of schooling" and that the regulatory system be "designed to protect the public's interest in the

standard of schooling and the safety of children, and is minimally intrusive in the operational affairs of schools".

Under the updated 2017 version of the accreditation Act, the fundamental features of the Queensland accreditation system will be retained, including key accreditation criteria relating to governance and management, financial viability, educational programs, health and safety of students, school resources and school improvement. Schools will need to demonstrate their compliance with the accreditation criteria through a self-review process every five years (known as the cyclical review).

Non-state schools will continue to have accreditation attributes such as year levels and the educational program on offer, mode of delivery (for example, distance education) and boarding.

NSSAB continues, with increased powers in respect of dealing with schools that might be operating without accreditation.

The significant change in the accreditation system from 2018 relates to eligibility for government funding. The Webb review had recommended a system whereby accreditation and funding were not interdependent. This resulted in a separate and distinct process for determining whether a school was entitled to government funding (the eligibility for government funding process). The process has effectively been a de facto new schools'

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policy given that in determining eligibility for government funding, factors such as the impact on existing schools has been considered.

Under the new Act, the funding eligibility process has been abolished. A school meeting the accreditation requirements (including that they are not-for-profit) will automatically be eligible for government funding. There are currently six independent schools in Queensland that do not receive funding for parts of their schooling provision – these schools will receive funding for their currently unfunded components from the start date of the new Act.

ISQ has long advocated for this change in the accreditation legislation. It confirms the right of every student no matter which school they attend to receive government funding and strengthens government support for choice in schooling.

Other key changes in the legislation to the accreditation regime include the broadening of the prohibitive arrangement provisions to include any dealing with not-for-profit entities (prohibitive arrangements only currently apply to dealing with for-profit entities). This change along with the retention of the definition of a for-profit school clearly signals a strong position of government that the resources of a school should be solely utilised to provide education for the students of the school. Any transfer of resources from a school to another entity and subsequent use for purposes other than the education

of the school's students will be clearly unacceptable.

Whilst the new Queensland legislation is not quite as prescriptive as that applying in New South Wales (where school income and assets must be used for the operation of the school and members of school governing boards are not to be paid<sup>1</sup>), it is a timely reminder that transactions and arrangements between schools and associated entities should be transparent, at arms-length and entered into only after dealing appropriately with any conflicts of interest.

Given most independent schools are closely associated with other supporting entities (commonly a religious organisation), this should be a focus of good governance. The intent of government is not to break relationships between schools and associated bodies (which often, benefit the school), but simply to ensure that any transactions and financial dealings are justifiable and do not disadvantage the school.

It is a timely reminder for schools to check the arrangements they have with associated bodies to ensure they are covered by written agreements wherever possible, are in the best interests of the school and are defensible not only to governments, but also to the schools' community. These might, for example, include rent paid for the use of land and facilities owned by an associated body or the provision of services by another entity. It could be particularly important

where several staff work across the school and another organisation.

For most independent schools the benefits from supporting, but separate organisations, are normally totally in favour of the school. For example, a school might pay a peppercorn rent for the use of facilities owned by a sponsoring church. However, there have unfortunately been in recent years some examples where funds and resources have been transferred from schools to affiliated bodies and then used for other purposes.

Other key changes to the accreditation Act include the streamlining of approval processes for amalgamating and dividing schools, removal of the concept of provisional accreditation and new provisions which allow NSSAB to take show-cause and cancellation action against a school in respect of a school attribute (rather than the whole school). Appeals against decisions of NSSAB will now be made to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal rather than the Minister for Education.

The new Act will also require governing bodies of schools to notify NSSAB within 28 days of any change in their membership.

The Minister for Education, the Hon Kate Jones, during the second reading speech on the new legislation acknowledged the contribution of the non-state sector for its valuable input into the development of the reforms to the regulation of non-state schools. She particularly acknowledged the input of Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) and the Queensland Catholic Education Commission.

The Minister also said "this Bill makes important improvements to the legislative scheme for regulating non-state schools by reducing red tape and streamlining the accreditation and funding eligibility processes". The Minister, like the many members

1 Section 83C New South Wales Education Act

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of Parliament who spoke during the debate, acknowledged the work of non-state schools and the contribution they have made, and continue to make, to Queensland education and the community.

The Bill was passed without a division. The Hansard of the debate on the Bill can be found at [http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2017/2017\\_08\\_10\\_DAILY.pdf#page54](http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2017/2017_08_10_DAILY.pdf#page54).

Details of the Bill, Explanatory Notes and amendments passed during the third reading can be found at <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/bills-and-legislation/current-bills-register>.

ISQ will be updating its Handbooks on Accreditation of Non-State Schools and New Schools to incorporate the legislative changes. This will take place after the subsequent Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Regulation has been finalised later this year.

The previous accreditation legislation served Queensland's non-state schooling sector well for 15 years. With the new Act, non-state schools can look forward to another long period of certainty in the regulatory environment at the state level which supports school choice and allows schools to focus on school improvement and high standards through a self-review mechanism.



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## SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION INTO SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING



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*“Social media is a community effort, everyone is an asset”*  
Susan Cooper

Social media has changed the way people communicate en masse. Microblogging site Twitter allows for real-time updates as events and emergencies are actually happening. Its value lies in its short (140 characters or less), portable (you can tweet from your mobile phone) and immediate messaging to individuals, groups or the entire world. It includes the ability to send messages, pictures, audio, video and attach files. Social sharing site Facebook’s status update allows for longer messages, and up-to-the-minute news and social sharing.

In addition to widespread adoption for its purely social use, social media has proven to be a fast and effective communications tool during natural disasters and in recovery efforts when infrastructure must be rebuilt and people cared for.

Australia is a leader in use of social media for crisis communication within emergency management organisations. This paper examines critical instances where Facebook and Twitter have been used successfully

and suggests ways schools can integrate social media into their emergency management plans.

David Cowling (2017) of SocialMediaNews.com.au cited unique website data and the Australian Bureau of Statistics in his latest Social Media Statistics Australia report which shows approximately 70 percent of the total Australian population (or 7 in 10 Australians) are active Facebook users. Approximately 12 million Australians (1 in 2) use Facebook on a daily basis. The latest monthly social media statistics has Facebook use at number one (refer Table 1).

Many independent schools in Queensland have Facebook accounts which they use to stay in contact with their communities. With fifty percent of the population logging in to Facebook daily, it makes sense for schools to include this social media tool into emergency management planning.

**Table 1: Social Media Statistics Australia – July 2017**

1	Facebook	17,000,000 active Australian users (includes messenger services)
2	YouTube	15,500,000
3	WordPress	5,500,000
4	Instagram	5,000,000 active Australian users (FB/ Instagram data)
5	WhatsApp	4,500,000 active Australian users
6	LinkedIn	4,200,000 active Australian users
7	Snapchat	4,000,000 active Australian users
8	Tumblr	3,800,000
9	Twitter	3,000,000 active Australian users

All figures represent the number of unique Australian visitors per month, unless otherwise stated. Source: Vivid Social (as cited in Cowling, 2017)

Figure 1: QPS Facebook page Likes, May 2010 – Jan 2011

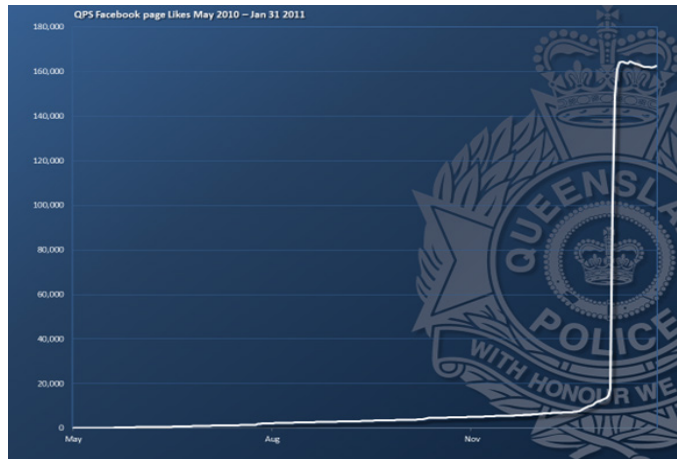
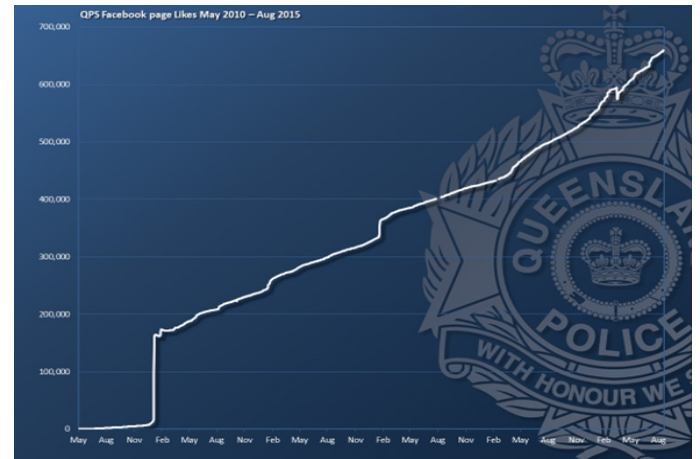


Figure 2: QPS Facebook page Likes, May 2010 – Aug 2015



Source: James Kliemt, QPS Presentation at 2016 ISQ Schools Marketing and Communications Forum.

## Queensland Police Service 2011 Floods and Tropical Cyclone Yasi

Queensland Police Service (QPS) social media use during the 2010-2011 Floods and Tropical Cyclone (TC) Yasi has been the subject of a number of research papers and has often been used as a case study. Some researchers say use of social media as an effective method of disseminating information in Australia emerged during the 2011 Queensland floods (Bird, Ling, & Haynes, 2012).

Ehns & Bunker analysis of the fast rising number of “likes” on the QPS Facebook page during the 2011 Floods and TC Yasi (see Figure 1) showed that reliable information is sought in times of disaster. The authors drew the conclusion that “QPS satisfied the needs of the community by posting detailed and extensive information from a trusted source i.e. the police” (2012, p. 9).

The QPS Facebook page became a key source of information and its popularity rapidly grew as the wet season continued to impact the state.

“During the 24-hour period following the flash flooding in Toowoomba and the Lockyer Valley on 10 January 2011, the number of likes increased from

17,000 to 100,000 with an average of 450 post views per second. The media also relied on information posted through the Queensland Police Service social media sites, with radio and television anchors reading reports within moments of them being published. This resulted in the dissemination of information at an unprecedented rate to large numbers of people” (Bird, Ling, & Haynes, 2012, p. 1).

Interestingly, following the 2011 floods QPS’s Facebook page has continued to climb year after year (see Figure 2). Of course, this cannot be attributed solely to the 2011 floods and TC Yasi. However, the initial significant spike during that time was capitalised on by QPS Media and Public Affairs Branch to help them hone their skills, shape their social media planning and practice, and teach other organisations how to follow their lead.

Ehns & Bunker’s analysis highlighted that the use of Facebook and Twitter cannot be seen as totally distinct social media channels since they have high interaction during disasters. In their 2011 Queensland floods data set, it was observed that a significant number of Twitter tweets had a redirection link to the QPS Facebook page.

“QPS used Twitter as a range amplifier and Facebook as a more detailed information platform” (2012, p. 9).

There are three million monthly active users of Twitter and the microblogging platform is rated ninth in the Social Media Statistics Australia list (see Table 1). Schools that have a Twitter account should not ignore this most popular platform in times of emergency.

Lon Safko in *The Social Media Bible* (2012) says Twitter has become the communications tool of choice by many emergency services around the world, often doing a better job of getting information out during emergencies than traditional news media or government agencies. The reason: family members including anxious parents can get real-time updates through Twitter, as in the case of the Virginia Tech shootings in April 2007 in the United States of America. Twitter can also play a vital role in keeping people safe during disasters.

“During the August 2011 hurricane, Irene, Twitter users started flooding the web with images and stories. The microblogging site was also used by the government and FEMA to inform people of the path of Irene and safety precautions. Nonprofits were able to raise money on Twitter as well” (p. 300).

## SOCIAL MEDIA INTEGRATION INTO SCHOOL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING

**Figure 3: School Closure Information to supply to DET**

During an emergency event, please provide the following information in an email to: [det-emergency@id.ngcomms.net](mailto:det-emergency@id.ngcomms.net)

1. School Name
2. School Address
3. Date Closed
4. Reason for Closure
5. Date Reopened
6. Authorised Officer

**KEY DET requirements**

All school closures will be displayed on the DET School Closures Website: <http://closures.det.qld.gov.au/>

**Figure 4: Queensland Department of Education and Training Facebook Post, 27 March, 2017**

## 2017 Tropical Cyclone Debbie and DET

Tropical Cyclone (TC) Debbie and the severe rain and flooding it caused prompted the Queensland Government to make a 7:30am announcement on Thursday 30 March 2017 that all schools in Queensland between Agnes Waters and the New South Wales border would be closed. This massive area stretches more than 600km down the state’s coast and the announcement affected more than 2,000 schools and childcare facilities.

The Department of Education and Training (DET) Community Engagement and Partnerships (CEP) branch used both Twitter and Facebook to push information out. CEP worked with the Emergency Services Management Unit and DET’s media team to ensure consistent messaging. Minimum responses were given via DET’s Twitter account, its main role was to update schools and the media, and to encourage the community to check the Department’s schools closure website. Twitter was used to amplify the message and drive people back to the site via a link in the tweet. CEP referred to the school closures website as the “single point of truth” throughout significant weather events in Queensland. DET staff updated the website as information came in.

Independent schools are encouraged to advise the Department of Education and Training’s Emergency & School Security Unit in writing via email on [det-emergency@id.ngcomms.net](mailto:det-emergency@id.ngcomms.net) if your school will be closed during a weather/emergency event. It is equally important to advise when the school has reopened (see Figure 3).

Facebook was used by the Department as the key platform during the emergency with DET posts reaching almost 1.5 million people. See Figure 4 for Facebook post promoting the closures website. Some posts were shared more than 14,000 times with up to 1,000 comments on any one post, 80 percent of these required a response. Thousands of responses were provided to the public via Facebook, often dispelling rumours such as incorrect

information about schools being closed and staff safety. Social media is a 24 hour a day, seven days a week medium and needs to be monitored after hours, on weekends and on holidays. This was especially the case during TC Debbie and two CEP staff were rostered to monitor DET social media during the emergency.

**DET refers non-state school emergency enquiries back to the schools themselves. This alone is a compelling reason for schools to update their own social media accounts with relevant information such as: *the school is closed today and tomorrow due to extreme weather.***

It is also a good idea to post a prominent message on your website for you school staff, students, parents and carers regarding school closure, varied hours or other changes due to an emergency.

Emergency management planning should include communication before, during and after the severe weather event or emergency. Figure 5 is a simple social media communications guide to prompt schools when undertaking more detailed planning.

Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ) represents the sector and has established a close working partnership with the Department to find workable solutions for independent schools regarding the DET school closures website. ISQ is also advocating for more collaboration across school sectors, especially in local communities, to help independent school principals decide if and when to close their school. ISQ will keep schools informed as this work continues.

**Both the DET and QPS case studies used social media communications in conjunction with traditional media. ABC radio is Australia's official emergency broadcaster. Schools should also include ABC radio in their emergency planning. Your local ABC radio station is a useful source of information and can also help you to disseminate information to your community.**

These Queensland Government agencies also sent out media releases and made sure to update their website copy. However, in times of crisis they

## Figure 5: Simple Social Media Emergency Communications Guide

### Before:

When a severe weather event has been forecast this is a good time to help prepare your school community by referring parents, carers, students and staff to official, trusted sources such as the ABC and DET school closures website and your own website for updates. This could be done by embedding links to these other source sites, retweets or shares of useful information they provide.

Content may include reminders to parents/carers to:

- make their own emergency management plans. Do parents/carers have a backup to take care of their children in the event of a school closure or to pick them up from school if it is closed in the middle of the day?
- check local public transport schedules for changes.
- check Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) warnings. These can also be retweeted to share.

### During:

Updates regarding your school situation should be timely and as specific as possible. If you are closing the school this should be clear and prominent and if you are aware that the school will be closed for multiple days provide this information so parents/carers and staff can make other plans. Again, you may retweet other trusted sources such as BoM and ABC radio to share warnings, flood maps and lists of bridge or road closures in your area. The location of the nearest shelter is also helpful to post and share.

### After:

Advice about support the school is offering such as counsellors and employee assistance programs is particularly important if people have been injured or the school has been damaged. Rebuilding and/or co-ordinated clean-up efforts and thanks to emergency services are also good posts after the weather event.

are well-aware that people are seeking information quickly and social media is an invaluable tool for this.

Research (Merchant, Elmer, & Lurie, 2011) published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* found the extensive reach of social networks allows people who are recovering from disasters to rapidly connect with needed resources. Tweets and photographs linked to timelines and interactive maps can tell a cohesive story about a recovering community's capabilities and vulnerabilities in real time. Social media has been used in new ways to connect responders and people directly affected by such disasters with medical and mental health services. The flash floods in Australia and the earthquake in New Zealand were mentioned in the research. The researchers were at pains to point out that "social media cannot and should not supersede current approaches to disaster-management communication or replace our public health infrastructure, but if leveraged strategically, they can be used to bolster current systems" (p. 291).

Social media is a valuable channel of communication that is proven to increase our ability to prepare

for, respond to, and recover from emergencies. Schools should seriously consider adding social media in to the mix when emergency management planning.

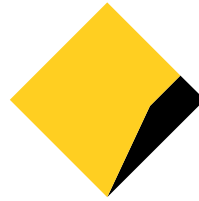
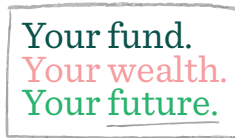
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