



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Members present:

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair
Mr JP Lister MP
Mr MA Boothman MP
Mr N Dametto MP
Mr BL O'Rourke MP
Mr JA Sullivan MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary
Ms H Koorockin—Committee Support Officer

PUBLIC BRIEFING—INQUIRY INTO THE DELIVERY OF VET TRAINING IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE QUEENSLAND AND THE CAIRNS TAFE UPGRADE PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Friday, 14 July 2023

Brisbane

FRIDAY, 14 JULY 2023

The committee met at 3.15 pm.

KOCH, Mr Steve, Acting Associate Director-General, Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training

LEVY, Mr Marc, Executive Director, Infrastructure Investment, Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training

LUCAS, Mr David, Executive Director, Service Delivery, Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training

PRITCHARD, Mr Simon, Chief Financial Officer, TAFE Queensland

TUCKER, Mr John, Acting Chief Executive Officer, TAFE Queensland

WINTER, Ms Alexandra, Acting Executive Director, VET Strategy, Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training

CHAIR: I declare open the committee's public briefing. I welcome representatives from the Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training. I note that the transcripts from our public forums in Cairns and Thursday Island are available on the website today, so in due course you might wish to respond to some of the issues raised therein. Would you like to make an opening statement around what you have heard today and provide a response after which the committee will have some questions for you?

Mr Koch: Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon to yourself and the committee members. I would also like to begin today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Turrbal and Yagara people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you to the committee for the invitation to attend today's departmental briefing regarding the two inquiries. Let me explain the role of my departmental colleagues who are attending this afternoon as well. We are joined by Mr Marc Levy, the Executive Director of our Infrastructure Investment branch. He has been heavily involved in the Cairns TAFE upgrade project as well. Mr David Lucas is the Executive Director of our Service Delivery team. He looks after our regional operations and industry engagement framework. Alex Winter is the Acting Executive Director for our VET Strategy team and is also leading the development of a new Queensland VET strategy. I am also pleased to be joined by the interim CEO of TAFE Queensland, John Tucker, and Simon Pritchard, Chief Financial Officer from TAFE Queensland.

As we know, Queensland is a large state, home to many industries and disperse communities. Training and skilling Queenslanders situated in regional, rural and remote parts of the state is of vital importance to our economy, community and lifestyle. The Department of Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training strives to ensure that our VET sector is focused on delivering priority skills in traditional and emerging industries as well as addressing the needs of regional, rural and remote communities to support Queenslanders into good jobs. We are dedicated to continuous improvement in the delivery of vocational education and training in regional and remote areas and continue to work towards enhancements through the implementation of specific actions under the Good People Good Jobs: Queensland Workforce Strategy 2022-2032 as well as the Paving the Way: the First Nations Training Strategy and the development of a new Queensland VET Strategy.

In the 2021-22 financial year there were more than 220,000 students who accessed government subsidised training across the state in more than 300 qualifications and skill sets and nearly 250 apprenticeship and traineeship qualifications. It is worth noting that of that 226,000, around 86,000 or 38 per cent were in regional and remote areas of the state. To complement the annual investment that the government makes in vocational education and training, the Queensland government also continues to invest in world-class, industry relevant and publicly owned training infrastructure. As part of the Advancing Our Training Infrastructure—AOTI—initiative, \$15 million was

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committed to consolidate and revitalise the Cairns TAFE campus into a fit-for-purpose, contemporary facility to meet the needs of industry and the community. As indicated in the departmental briefing paper and as you may have discovered during your inspection earlier this week, the Cairns TAFE campus is the flagship campus for Far North Queensland and services over 8,000 students annually. These upgrades have provided world-class facilities for students in the Far North to study in.

As I mentioned earlier, the Queensland government continues to implement actions from the Queensland Workforce Strategy and is the first jurisdiction in the nation to have a whole-of-government workforce strategy. One of the key actions in that workforce strategy is to develop a new Queensland VET Strategy. Consultation on this strategy is now underway and Queenslanders are invited to have their say to ensure that the VET sector is delivering the best outcomes for individuals, employers and communities. In particular, one of the focus areas highlights that, in our current VET environment, future access considerations is critical and is looking for feedback on access to delivering quality training and skills. The department is encouraging all Queenslanders to be part of this process and have a voice in how the government's investment in quality training, skills and infrastructure will meet Queensland's future workforce demands, especially in regional, rural and remote communities. Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Chair and committee members, to appear today and also thank you for the opportunity to listen to your hearings this week. This really provided the opportunity for a number of industry interests and issues that have been raised to come to life as well.

Mr LISTER: Thank you, Mr Koch, and thank you to the other officers who appear before us today. I have personally got a lot out of the visits that we did and it was good to see representation from both TAFE and the department on our journey. Thank you for that. Mr Koch, we have heard a number of stakeholders say that they would like to see better results from the Skills Assure Suppliers. Can you outline what mechanisms the department employs to hold contractors to account in terms of performance standards and so forth?

Mr Koch: Absolutely. The Skills Assure Suppliers framework is a critical framework that we use to contract registered training organisations, or RTOs, in Queensland. It is over and above the national regulation and national registration process for RTOs which is administered through the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Historically, Queensland has contracted with more Skills Assure Suppliers or RTOs than most other jurisdictions across Australia. We currently have around 350 RTOs we contract with.

In terms of your question around performance management and quality in the provision of government subsidised training, we have a number of compliance and quality measures, including that we have monthly validations and compliance checks. We have a contract management team within the department which is responsible for the management of those contracts with Skills Assure Suppliers. That team undertakes a monthly validation process for data that RTOs provide to the department. We have a number of systems that enable us to undertake those validations. Each Skills Assure Supplier is allocated a contract manager who performs monthly compliance checks on the Skills Assure Supplier, reviews the data, reviews publicly available information on the Skills Assure Supplier and then is also responsible for the handling of any complaints and any issues that are raised with the department or the Queensland Training Ombudsman.

On top of that, we also have a contractual audit and compliance team. That is a separate team within the department. Their role is to undertake a risk-based approach to compliance monitoring and auditing under our contracts with providers and to actually go out, visit the providers, look at student records, look at the quality of the assessment and training that is undertaken and provide compliance reports and audit reports on those providers. We then have a process internally where we consider the findings of those reports. In the most severe cases—and I would emphasise that it is a relatively small number of the providers—it can lead to sanctions such as suspension or termination of Skills Assure Supplier contracts as well.

Mr LISTER: That was very thorough, thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Thank you again to the department for joining us in Thursday Island and Cairns. It was very informative being up there. My question goes on from the member for Southern Downs's question. When we are talking about the auditing and validation of subjects, are employment outcomes considered as part of the auditing process?

Mr Koch: We do have a focus on undertaking surveys of students who have gained a certificate III and we work with the Queensland Government Statistician's Office to get that data over time. It is not strictly part of the audit process. It is a survey that we do up to 12 months after the completion of training so we can find out the destination of the student and whether they have moved

into further training or employment. That gives us more information on the outcomes. We take a similar approach with the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program which targets and provides support to disadvantaged Queenslanders to access training and skills. For example, that program has a 76 per cent outcome in terms of further training or education for participants in Skilling Queenslanders for Work. We look at some of those employment and further training outcomes and that helps us guide our investment, particularly in qualifications, and our priority skills list.

Mr BOOTHMAN: If an individual enrolls in a course and then they find that they have virtually no employment possibilities from that course, what are their options then in terms of the free courses or the certificate III guarantee? Once they use up that certificate III guarantee, have enrolled in a course and feel that they will not get the employment outcomes that they are after, what are their rights then? Will they be able to go into another certificate III course?

Mr Koch: In terms of second-chance training or other options, we have a number of avenues for students to seek access to second-chance training. One of the key ones now and one of the key focus programs that we have had throughout 2023 is Fee-Free TAFE which provides second-chance training to individuals. There is no eligibility requirement around previous qualifications for that program. Skilling Queenslanders for Work, that I mentioned earlier, also provides that option. Additionally, we have a process through our regional teams in particular where they can approach the department and where public providers such as TAFE Queensland can work with the department to seek approval for second-chance training or to gain enrolment into another qualification. In terms of your query around avenues to support students as well, I highlight the regional offices that we have across the state and their role in supporting apprentices and trainees in particular as well as the Queensland Training Ombudsman that provides a free service for VET students regardless of whether it is fee-for-service or government subsidised training.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you very much, Steve and team. We appreciated having some of you on our tour over the last couple of days. It was important not only in Cairns but also up at Thursday Island. I know the committee appreciated that. I think it gave everyone a clear insight, even for some people who had not been to Thursday Island before. It was very interesting.

One thing that has been mentioned throughout today's hearing is the difference between regional and metropolitan regional areas. From my own experience and other tours we have done as a committee there is a stark difference between metropolitan regional TAFEs and more remote and regional TAFE facilities. Moving forward, what is the department's strategy to ensure we bring up the standard of TAFE across the sector?

Mr Koch: In terms of lifting the standard of TAFE, both facilities and infrastructure and our investment more broadly, one of our key strategies will be the Queensland Vocational Education and Training Strategy, the VET Strategy, which is a key action, and the Workforce Strategy. The consultation process is open for that now. In terms of your specific question, the member may be aware the government has invested over \$280 million over the last five years into training infrastructure and TAFE facilities. That has provided significant opportunities for students to access world-class training facilities. A number of those facilities are in regional Queensland, and further investment is currently being made into areas such as Thursday Island. I know the committee toured the Tagai campus earlier in the week. I would also highlight a number of our regional strategies, and I will ask the CEO of TAFE for any comment shortly.

It was mentioned in the earlier session the regional loadings for the subsidies the government provides for VET in Queensland. Those loadings are really important in terms of encouraging face-to-face training in those locations. That is for training that occurs in rural, remote or Cape York and Torres Strait locations and they are tiered according to those levels. That provides an RTO with more funding towards the cost of training and supports training in regional locations. As part of the Vocational Education and Training Strategy we will consider our investment framework around that approach into the future as well as other important mechanisms such as regional jobs committees and our industry engagement approach where we work with industry skill providers across the state to get industry advice. I will ask the interim CEO of TAFE Queensland for any commentary on that as well.

Mr Tucker: From our perspective—this does not necessarily go directly to the question about infrastructure and assets, which are the department's remit—there are some 68 locations across the state where TAFE Queensland is active. Outside the metropolitan area those range from some of the campuses the committee saw earlier this week. As we all know, this beautiful big state that we live in presents challenges because of its size, and TAFE Queensland is not immune to that. We do have challenges in regional and remote areas around attraction. The same issues that communities deal with in terms of trying to attract people to those communities apply to us as well. Trying to get trainers

on the ground in those locations is very difficult. It is for all of us. TAFE Queensland has been doing this for 140 years so it is something we are very experienced at. We maintain a high level of employer satisfaction across the state. Our last employer survey put us at a 92.1 per cent employer satisfaction rate across the state, so we are very proud of that. It is not done easily, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Mr DAMETTO: Mr Tucker, just a quick follow-up question. Private RTOs seem to do a lot of fly-in fly-out when it comes to getting their trainers into remote Indigenous communities or remote mine sites and communities. Does TAFE have a strategy to ensure we are getting trainers to where people need to be trained rather than creating the scenario where people are travelling a lot for their training?

Mr Tucker: Whilst I cannot really speak for private RTOs and their business models, I can make this observation. Across the spectrum of providers in the state there are a range of business models. I can certainly talk about the TAFE Queensland business model. We do have a physical presence. In fact, we are in some regional towns in Queensland. As you would well know, we are one of the major employers in that town. By and large, as my colleagues from the department know, supporting those facilities regionally by TAFE Queensland staff members who are resident in those communities is very important to us. One of the facilities the committee saw earlier this week was on Thursday Island. The four staff members who helped us and the committee were born and bred on that island. It is very important to us to maintain relevance in that community. It is an example, I suppose, of what happens in regional TAFE campuses across the board.

To come more directly to the question, it is very important to us, and our strategy is to maintain that presence locally in towns. There are challenges in that, as the nature of delivery moves to much more of an online distance mode, facilities are perhaps utilised differently. That affects the south-east corner in the metropolitan area, but TAFE Queensland is certainly committed to retaining those regional places of employment, work and training.

CHAIR: Mr Koch, how many loading tiers exist at the moment?

Mr Koch: There are currently three tiers: country, remote and Cape York and Torres Strait.

CHAIR: Are they going to be under that review process as well as part of the strategy?

Mr Koch: Yes.

CHAIR: In terms of the Skills Assure Supplier system, we heard from the Water Directorate that they have challenges with TAFE having exited the market in that space and two private RTOs, one in Queensland and one in Victoria. What is the opportunity for other RTOs to look at applying for SAS approval?

Mr Koch: In terms of answering that question, I might take a broader approach around a few of the issues that have come up this afternoon around access to Skills Assure Supplier status and the process we go through as part of that. We are constantly looking at the data we receive in terms of students accessing VET in Queensland, particularly with regard to qualifications in industry areas. Our process around considering the need for additional Skills Assure Suppliers is based on the data we receive as well as feedback from industry, primarily through the Industry Skills Advisors network that the department contracts to receive industry advice, as well as feedback from students and any issues that are raised directly with the department such as the water training issue. We consider all of that information and then we determine whether there is a need for additional suppliers in the market. Then we look at the national register of RTOs. On some occasions—and we have done this throughout the last financial year—we may approach some RTOs to apply to become a Skills Assure Supplier in certain areas, largely in thin markets such as water or irrigation training. It is another one we have done this year.

We continue to work with RTOs. Part of our challenge in some of that space is there may not be a lot of RTOs that are registered with the national regulator in some of those industry areas. We work with public providers such as TAFE Queensland or Central Queensland University and existing providers. The process we have undertaken in relation to water qualifications is that we work with qldwater as the industry skills advisor. We are currently working with Jobs Queensland around a final workforce plan, looking at workforce planning in that space and encouraging the existing two Skills Assure Suppliers that were discussed in the last session to take on additional students and working directly with them. I understand there is a forum being planned to consider those issues in the coming months. I also understand that one of those Skills Assure Suppliers also employed an additional trainer to try and service more students as well.

CHAIR: Understanding the demand as a result of the data you receive and not allowing RTOs to cannibalise one another is part of that process in terms of opening an invitation.

Mr Koch: Absolutely.

CHAIR: We have heard throughout the course of this week about the connection between RTOs and the public provider and industry and businesses that support those industries and what that connection looks like. Is that also forming part of the review process the department commits to undertaking?

Mr Koch: Absolutely. As part of our review of those areas when they do arise, whether it is on an industry or regional basis, we would engage with the industry skills adviser. A key part of the water example is to work with qldwater as our industry skill provider in that space to look to ensure that that market is being serviced.

CHAIR: We heard—it has been a consistent theme, I would imagine, and Thursday Island was a very good example—that there may be some missed opportunities because there is not a coordination between whoever is providing the training and the existing businesses and industries within those localised regions, including government. I think that would be a very good thing to keep on the radar.

Mr SULLIVAN: I have a specific question. I want to address something that was said in an earlier session in relation to Skills Assure Suppliers. I do not want to misquote her, but she said, 'Why can someone in Moggill get health training for free and someone in Chinchilla has to pay \$4,000?' That might be a slight misquote, but I think that was pretty—

CHAIR: That was rural health.

Mr SULLIVAN: Yes, rural health. Does the department have a view in relation to that?

Mr Koch: We are aware of that issue. We have undertaken investigations into accessibility to health training in rural and regional locations. I would highlight that TAFE Queensland, for example, delivers training in over 20 health qualifications in locations across the state. A number of those qualifications are fee free at the moment under Fee-Free TAFE. Health industry and community service industries have a number of RTOs we contract with. As part of our process we always look at the number of existing Skills Assure Suppliers we have. We have investigated that issue. We are always very mindful of ensuring there is accessibility to training right across the state and that that is available through our existing network, and we will continue to do that.

Mr SULLIVAN: This is a bit of a high-level question. How does the department, with all of the levers that it has, provide connectivity between the various elements the department funds, whether it is private RTOs or group training organisations, partnerships with TAFE and Central Queensland University and, one of my favourites, Skilling Queenslanders for Work? There is a whole array on that spectrum. How does the department make sure they are all working together?

Mr Koch: I think that is a key role for the department—to ensure that through our engagement with both industry RTOs, including Skills Assure Suppliers and public providers, and their students. We heard earlier about career advice and career pathways, as well as a lot about VET in Schools, so working with the Department of Education and schooling sectors more broadly. We have a really strong focus not just on maintaining our investment of funding frameworks and our programs and our commitment to quality but also largely through our regional network on playing a key role in engagement with industry and regions and making it really clear what is available. To your point member, there are a lot of programs and a lot of support available from the government through the sector. As a department we are really passionate about making that as accessible and as clear to the community as we can as well. I might ask Mr Lucas if he has any additional comments.

Mr Lucas: We are fortunate we have a network of about 180 regional offices. One of their main roles is doing what Steven is saying: they are on the ground trying to connect everything, connecting the programs but also connecting people to those programs and connecting employers to the programs. Another example—and Steve did touch on it—is that things like Skilling Queenslanders for Work are developed locally. They are not developed in Brisbane for a Cairns project. Things are done locally for that local need. We have strength in our regional network to be able to do that on the ground.

Mr O'ROURKE: You two just pinched my questions by the way. I will just put that on the record. We are all thinking the same things. From a department point of view, at TAFE in Cairns we saw how great the marine studies are going and the work that has happened with private industry and all those involved. How do we make sure that the department knows we are working with local government and industry employers to make sure that we are hitting the mark on the training that is being provided?

Mr Koch: That is a critical part of the system: industry engagement—I know it was raised in the Cairns hearing on Monday evening—and that link with employers, schools and RTOs. It is absolutely critical to work together in that partnership. We do that across the state through our industry skills via the network that we have that provides advice directly to the department. It may be in relation to skills that are needed, the qualifications that are needed and the national training package and qualification development process. That is really important. We also get advice from that network on the quality of RTOs.

We also have a network of nine regional jobs committees across the state. Those regional jobs committees bring employers, employee groups, universities and RTOs together locally to look at place-based responses to workforce issues. It is critical to have that industry-wide lens to spread the regional aspect across the solutions that we develop as well. Our regional teams and the Jobs Queensland team are really important parts of both that industry engagement and the regional jobs committee approach as well.

CHAIR: We heard from a number of principals over the last few days as well in terms of VET delivery in school. Could you articulate the connection between the Priority Skills List and how schools decide what they are going to deliver in the VET space?

Mr Koch: VET in Schools is a really important part of the system. Queensland has been a leader across Australia in terms of VET in Schools for many years. We have over 50 per cent of all school-based apprentices and trainees in Queensland. Almost 40 per cent of all VET in Schools students across Australia are in Queensland. Our numbers continue to be very strong in that space. We are very proud of our approach to VET in Schools. In terms of explaining how VET in Schools works—

CHAIR: It was interesting to hear from the principal of Tagai State College. They are about to start a partnership with Caloundra State High School. I think it was in personal fitness and financial literacy. I am wondering how schools determine and work with that priority list to think about what is local demand and what is driving forward. There has certainly been some consideration raised about how obtaining a cert might assist an ATAR versus is it actually delivering VET to meet the local demand or skills that are needed.

Mr Koch: In terms of our department and the VET investment budget that we administer, we fund a certificate I or a certificate II in VET in Schools. We have a select list under our Priority Skills List that are qualifications that are for VET in Schools. They are qualifications where we have undertaken industry engagement through our industry skills provider network. The advice is that they are appropriate qualifications for VET in Schools delivery and are likely to lead to employment outcomes for students down the track and provide a pathway.

As the department we do not fund school RTOs. We provide VET in Schools funding for the Skills Assure Suppliers or public providers. However, the schools themselves or the school RTOs can determine to deliver any accredited qualification that they would like to deliver.

CHAIR: There is no requirement for them to consider the local priorities. Is there a relationship between what priority skills look like at a localised level and what a school in that region might—

Mr Koch: Not under the arrangements with our department. Those school RTOs are regulated by the national regulator—the Australian Skills Quality Authority—and through the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority. They have the flexibility to determine their funding and what qualifications best suit them. Our regional teams often engage with schools. The Gateway to Industry Schools program is a key example of what we offer through the department. It is really important to promote those employment pathways. Our regional teams do engage with schools and would encourage schools to ensure that they are undertaking engagement with employers and looking for the local industry links as well.

Mr BOOTHMAN: What mechanisms or strategies does the department have in place when it comes to emerging technologies and emerging industries and how is that dealt with? Is it dealt with statewide or is it dealt with in the local region? For instance, if there is a certain type of mining going on in North Queensland—say, in Mount Isa—is it done locally or is it a statewide strategy?

Mr Koch: Just to clarify, your question is in relation to emerging—

Mr BOOTHMAN: New industries coming on board and new technologies.

Mr Koch: And training in that space. We currently have an initiative that is being implemented called the VET Emerging Industries initiative. That is where the government has allocated \$15 million towards emerging industries across five industry areas. We work closely with industry bodies and employee groups to set up steering committees and to enable a much more flexible and innovative way to support emerging training and emerging skills needs.

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A number of the key strategies have been rolled out there are in areas such as hydrogen, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. Many of them are regional based—for example, working with the Toowoomba and Surat Basin development association around hydrogen a skills need assessment. That is funded through that program.

Others are statewide. For example, with electric vehicles, we are looking at renewable energy and looking at strategies such as micro-credentials. They can then be accessed by employees statewide to promote emerging skills in those industries as well. That is on top of our Skills Assure and VET investment framework and our Priority Skills List, which review regularly to make sure that we have new skills and new qualifications that industry provide advice to us on.

Mr BOOTHMAN: So the strategy would focus then on those local regions to give them first go at participating in those courses.

Mr Koch: It has largely been industry led and determined by working groups and steering committees that have come together. Industry representatives, Jobs Queensland, as well as employee groups have come together and looked at future skill needs in emerging technologies and emerging industry areas and the training needs there. Those projects have been developed by that group. We have had some fantastic feedback on that approach. It has really enabled industry employee groups to come together and help determine where that emerging need is and for the department to enable that approach as well.

Mr DAMETTO: I received some feedback in Cairns offline after we closed the committee hearing from an apprentice networking business that specialised in auto mechanic apprenticeships. It pains me to say this but one of the people who talked to me said, 'If there's another provider other than TAFE, we are happy to go with them.' That is because of the inability for TAFE to be flexible when it comes to providing training but also some of the inefficiencies when it comes to signing up apprentices. Sometimes apprentices have been going up to 12 months without having their paperwork signed. Is there a strategy from the department or TAFE to better service some of the clientele out there in Queensland?

Mr Koch: I will ask the interim CEO of TAFE Queensland for any comments on that, as well as Mr Lucas regarding the apprenticeship registration process.

Mr Tucker: On the parts of that question that I can comment on, the apprenticeship sign-up process is largely done prior to those apprentices selecting a training provider. TAFE Queensland or any provider is downstream of the sign-up process. Perhaps others on the panel may be able to offer some more around the sign-up process. Where those delays occur I absolutely accept and my observation, even from a training provider's point of view, is that we try to get started on training as quickly as we can. Sometimes that happens more quickly than the sign-up process can occur. There may be some things there that can be sped up. Distance and remoteness again will play a feature in getting people out to sign them up.

'Flexibility' is always a question, if you like, or a word that we hear a lot. TAFE Queensland is attempting and responding to the request for flexibility all around the state, using technology to enable learning across the state. I would be interested to perhaps catch up on the specific nature of that in particular—

Mr DAMETTO: I would be more than happy to.

Mr Tucker:—and see what we can do. We have all heard around the state and in my many years in TAFE Queensland that often employers have difficulty. We obviously cannot run every single qualification in every part of the state. From some of the presentations earlier, particularly from GTOs and employer groups, my understanding is absolute around that difficulty of sending apprentices across the state, across distances, to have to seek accommodation et cetera. It is something that we try to minimise.

In the apprenticeship program, TAFE Queensland in the last few years has created a foundation program, which is the first interaction that a student would have in their first year, to have that engagement available fully online but managed, accepting some of the comments that we hear about online being a set and forget. That is not the approach we take with that, but it is available so that first-year apprentices do not have to travel, accepting though in some trades—and it may be a specialised area of automotive or mechanical—that once those units become very specialised then they may have to travel. The constant challenge that we deal with in a big provider like TAFE Queensland is that the big centres of excellence can concentrate resources and be very impressive facilities for students to experience. That comes sometimes at the cost of having small amounts of training in regional areas. That is a balance that we have been dealing with as long as I have been with TAFE.

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CHAIR: It certainly happens reciprocally though. We are very water based in my electorate. I have islands and ferries. All sorts of people are in the maritime industry. Conversely, to get the qualifications they need, they need to head up to Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef International Marine College to pick up some of those tickets.

Mr Tucker: Absolutely.

CHAIR: When you get down to that specialised level, you are absolutely right: you cannot provide that in every jurisdiction across what is an extraordinarily geographically diverse and decentralised state.

Mr Tucker: That is an exceptionally good point, because it does happen in the reverse.

CHAIR: It does.

Mr Tucker: Previous to the marine facility being created in Cairns—

CHAIR: It was Tassie.

Mr Tucker:—students would have to go to Tasmania.

Mr DAMETTO: I just wanted to ask that question from this point of view: as a tradesperson my certificate says 'TAFE' at the top and I hear people talking down TAFE to me in my capacity on this committee. I try to think about ways to try and fix that. Thank you.

CHAIR: Thanks, member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr Tucker: I certainly thank the member for that.

Mr O'ROURKE: Mr Koch, with regard to reducing the barriers around digital technology for regional and remote communities, is the department doing any work in that area to help address those issues?

Mr Koch: As part of our training and infrastructure upgrades and the projects that we are currently undertaking and some of our planning towards the future, we are absolutely looking at the digital technology requirements for the future in training. As the committee has heard this afternoon, having accessibility to both face-to-face training and online training in a mixed mode, whether that also be with an employer, is really critical and important. We are looking at that particularly in the infrastructure components and with those upgrade projects that are underway and potentially some of our future projects as well.

Mr O'ROURKE: Thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: You were talking about strategies for emerging industries. Going back a bit to current industries, for instance on the Gold Coast in the Coomera precinct we have a lot of boat building. I am just curious to hear your thoughts about the process of building boats, specifically the trade skills. For instance, we do not have any upholstery courses in Queensland and that is a very important part of the boat industry. If we do not have those trade skills coming forward, we are going to lose a whole industry on the Gold Coast. I am just curious as to what strategies the department has tried to rectify that.

Mr Koch: I agree: it is a really important point. What you are referring to there is what we determine as thin markets around qualification areas or regional areas where there may be small numbers of either training providers or students but important industry areas. They are the areas where we do try to facilitate as much as possible access to training, whether that be through qualifications and ensuring that we have a very broad qualification list. There are over 500 qualifications and skill sets available across our programs as well as working to have as many training providers in those key industry areas as possible, and that is why we do have over 350 providers right across the state that are contracted as well. Noting that it is a national system around registration and qualifications and registration of RTOs, that is where we need to dedicate our time towards working with industry and then working with RTOs. It is an approach that we have. We identify those areas largely through our interactions with industry skills advisers to the department and then we try to do whatever we can. Whether it is RTOs from interstate, we may ask whether they can deliver in Queensland if there are no other providers available.

Mr BOOTHMAN: On the Gold Coast obviously boat building is a very large industry and to my understanding I believe there are training courses in WA. It is sad that we are not jumping on board and getting those upholsterers trained up in South-East Queensland.

Mr Tucker: I might just add a comment there. TAFE Queensland is registered and delivering the Certificate III in Upholstery in Queensland.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Whereabouts is that?

Mr Tucker: At the Acacia Ridge campus.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Okay.

Mr Tucker: Admittedly that is a separate qualification from being specific to the marine industry, but TAFE Queensland is the only provider of that Certificate III in Upholstery.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Would they then consider going to, say, Coomera, which is right next to the marine precinct? As I say, you do not want to sit on a fibreglass seat going over the Gold Coast Seaway.

Mr Tucker: The new Coomera Marine Centre of Excellence does include some training facilities for marine textiles, not a separate qualification in upholstery because the boat-building qualification is a qualification that encompasses not just the marine craft construction but fit-out units of competency. So there are marine textile units of competency in that qualification.

Mr Koch: One of the most important discussions we have when we talk about thin markets is often with the public providers to see whether they can provide assistance in delivering those qualifications or create new qualifications and be registered.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Yes. There are boat builders on the Gold Coast who would be absolutely ecstatic if you could give us some nice comfy seats.

Mr DAMETTO: I have a question going back to the submission and the evidence provided earlier from the Queensland Water Directorate and the fact that TAFE had pulled out of training for their water-testing courses. They were taking care of, I believe—I might be paraphrasing here—about 60 per cent of the training in Queensland that was being provided. When TAFE decides to pull out of training in a certain sector, what is the consultation with industry? Is there a strategy of making sure that that course is being picked up by a private RTO or someone else?

CHAIR: I think that question has sort of been answered, but I will let you have a second response.

Mr Koch: As I outlined earlier, we did work with TAFE in that instance and we do work with the industry skills via qldwater. Again, it does depend on the number of RTOs that are registered nationally in those qualification areas and working very closely with industry and employers to try to promote as best as possible access to training in those areas. We are fortunate to have a strong relationship and partnership with TAFE Queensland, so we do work together if there are any industries and areas that we need to be aware of and look at strategies that we need to put in place.

Mr DAMETTO: Thank you.

Mr BOOTHMAN: When it comes to strategies for current industries—for instance, just recently I was looking for a concreter and I had a hell of a time trying to get a concreter—what types of strategies does the department have going into schools to promote industries where there is a critical shortage?

Mr Koch: One of our key strategies in that regard is the Gateway to Industry Schools program. I might ask the executive director for service delivery to provide some more information on that program.

Mr Lucas: The Gateway to Industry Schools program was referred to earlier in the session, but we fund a number of organisations to deliver that program across Queensland and it is about industry areas, so there is one for construction and there is one now for hydrogen and other industries. It is really about connecting that industry with the schoolkids and the parents to then put them on a pathway to that industry if that is what they are interested in. Those pathways might be school-based apprentices and traineeships, it might be VET qualifications, it may be university and sometimes it leads to employment when they leave school as well.

Mr BOOTHMAN: Are there any key performance indicators when it comes to VET business development managers going into schools to sell those programs? The reason I am asking this—

CHAIR: Do you mean private RTO business development managers?

Mr BOOTHMAN: No, just TAFE. There are obviously some private RTOs going into my schools. They are being very active in liaising with those schools and going there regularly to try and drum up business. What strategies does TAFE have to counteract that?

Mr Tucker: I would point to an activity that TAFE Queensland undertakes with schools called Trade Taster. It does exactly what it says and it is one of our most popular programs with schools. School students can pick a small number of trades to experience and have a taste, exactly as the name would suggest. That has been one of our most successful programs across the schools that

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we work with to try and crack through that barrier that education is the only valuable pathway for a career and introduce trades. It is specific to year 10—so only available to year 10 students—in an attempt to absolutely get the message across to the question that you are talking about.

Mr BOOTHMAN: How many schools will participate in that program?

Mr Tucker: It is across the state. I do not have the number of schools with me, but when I say 'one of our most popular programs' it literally creates problems for our call centres when it opens because it is that popular that it creates great volumes of interest in school students. I would be happy to provide the exact number.

CHAIR: It is an excellent day. I had great potential as a bricklayer, I think!

Mr BOOTHMAN: And concreters.

CHAIR: With regard to the travel reimbursement for apprentices, under a number of modern EBAs employers are required to pay the travel costs associated with the training for their apprentices. Are they then able to seek reimbursement from the department for that or do they pick it up holus-bolus?

Mr Koch: We do have a travel and accommodation subsidy that we provide to apprentices and trainees. I will ask Mr Lucas to make some more comments on it shortly, but we have recently increased the rates for that travel and accommodation.

Mr Lucas: The allowance or subsidy that we provide is for the apprentices and the trainees—and it has been referred to earlier today as well—so there is a subsidy there for accommodation and travel. In terms of what the employer is obliged to pay through, say, an EBA or their award, no, they cannot claim that from the department.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you very much. As there are no further questions, the time for this briefing has now expired. Thank you to officers for the information you have provided today and thank you to our Hansard reporters and the parliamentary broadcaster for their assistance and the secretariat as well. There were no questions taken on notice. A transcript of these proceedings will be available in due course. I declare this public briefing closed. Thank you very much again.

The committee adjourned at 4.12 pm.