Inquiry into the delivery of vocational education and training in regional, rural, and remote Queensland

Submission No: 5

Submitted by: IPCA Qld Inc

Publication:

Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

Submitter Recommendations:

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Advocating for equitable education access, opportunities, and support for all rural and remote students

SUBMISSION*:*

Inquiry into the delivery of vocational education and training (VET) in regional, rural and remote Queensland."

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld) advocates for equitable access to quality educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. ICPA Qld represents 45 branches, comprising of over 1300 families throughout the state.

ICPA Qld is a voluntary, apolitical parent organisation and is the only community-based parent group with interests in all sectors and levels of education – Early Childhood, State Schools, Boarding Facilities, Tertiary Education and Trade & Training, and all methods used to facilitate access to these platforms of education.

ICPA Qld State Council welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to assist in creating strategies to create a relevant, evolving, engaging, and responsibly delivered Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Queensland.

ICPA Qld believes that VET is currently well placed to support the development of existing and emerging industries and business practices, through the various programs that government and private providers offer. These are offered in various formats - internal and external, to the campus locations located throughout the state. VET potentially has an opportunity to be a key provider of knowledge and skills for the workforce engaged in industry and business.

Industry Engagement/Market Settings

*Responsive VET Arrangements/ Adapting Delivery to Regional Realities***:** The key to timely adaptive and responsive success lies in regular evaluation of evolving industries and business, whether that be of current activities or newly emerging opportunities and the creation and/or adjustment of existing courses to meet identified requirements. It is also vital to adapt courses to fit the circumstances of each campus and remain industry relevant. For example, in rural areas the quality and capability of internet offerings may make online components of the program challenging to complete.

Emerging in rural and remote areas are external training campuses, facilitated by Country University Centre (CUC) These offer fast, reliable, internet solutions along with dedicated learning spaces. Opportunities to engage in training at these dedicated centres may assist rural and remote VET students to successfully engage in online training opportunities where reliable internet is otherwise a barrier. For such a model to be successful, all stakeholders would need to develop strong partnerships with CUCs, enabling rural and remote VET students to remain in their local regions for training and avoid costs associated with travel and accommodation.

To ensure that regional areas still have the opportunity for growth in priority industry sectors, VET providers must be supported to build flexibility and innovation into their program delivery to allow full engagement of VET students in their chosen location.

It is essential that, given the challenge of attracting suitably qualified staff to regional/remote locations, those who choose to learn from a rural/remote location can engage with tutors with a high level of knowledge and skill relevant to the curriculum. Innovative ways to facilitate that engagement need to be identified, planned for and executed. The technological limitations that may be experienced in these locations also need to be recognised when planning for engagement, and strategies put in place to mitigate/minimise impact. It is recognised that not all regions have suitable regionally based training opportunities for VET students and long-distance travel is required to access appropriate training. Travel and associated expenses can often be a barrier to success for rural and remote VET students.

To further aid the success of regionally based VET students and enable equal opportunity for access to quality VET training, regional and remote students would benefit from additional funding support which is specifically targeted to meet the significant costs of travel and accommodation to attend training. Funding needs to be made available to ensure equitable access to training for rural and remote students, should suitable locally available training options not exist.

VET teachers require access to regular professional development to ensure their skills and knowledge remain relevant to emerging trends and demands of business/industry.

Supervised Registered Training Organisations (SRTO) play an indicial role in the overall success of the traineeship/apprenticeship. Timely and effective support for students, and an ability to work with other stakeholders is imperative and needs to be ongoing throughout the duration of the course.

Many rural and remote students attend boarding school to complete their secondary schooling. Students living away from home and undertaking VET courses require extra support to ensure that they have the same success as students who have access to regular family support networks. These networks are crucial in insuring positive outcomes. Anecdotal evidence from a member supports this:

"Our son attends boarding school almost 1200km away from the family home. Supporting him to complete his SAT (School Based Traineeship/Apprenticeship) has been extremely challenging. These young people, relocating to complete their education, have unique circumstances and support networks in all levels of the VET System are vital for success"

Given many rural and remote students desire to reside beyond the urban environment, students' exposure to courses "outside" the traditional offerings and career paths long existent in their communities are necessary to ensure that they are best placed to meet the evolving needs of business and society. This, in turn, will contribute to diversifying their local economy. Diversification is essential in successfully maintaining a thriving regional centre. When quality VET teachers exist in the regions, VET students can stay in their communities to access training required to further their careers. "On the job", regionally-based training is a solution for student access; however, these opportunities must be monitored for quality.

ICPA (Qld) firmly believes that the key to an ongoing quality VET system lies with a strong investment into resourcing of VET providers – infrastructure, personnel, support networks and equipment. This will enable quality learning and full engagement with the training courses regardless of location of the place of learning. Also essential is oversight of the business operations of the VET provider to ensure they are adequately resourced and capable of delivering their programs to completion.

Maximising Local Jobs: Robust workforces and workplaces contribute to the sustainability of regional Queensland locations. The following components are imperative to ensure diverse and healthy workforce development: -

1. Ensuring programs match needs of the community and are industry relevant both in terms of content and delivery method
2. Teachers' skills and knowledge remain relevant and progressive, and
3. Programs' adaptability to be able to meet current and emerging trends

Additionally, the above potentially ensures that access to appropriately skilled tradespeople is more readily accessible in these locations as rural students are more inclined to reside in rural areas once their learning is complete.

Stakeholder Engagement: ICPA Qld believes a coalition between government, industry, business, VET providers, educators, and community stakeholders could be implemented to regularly identify, evaluate and review changing trends. The data gained from this regular review could then be provided to VET training providers, allowing them to adapt their offerings and upskill staff to meet identified needs. Appropriate personnel and fiscal support would need to be provided to allow this to occur in a timely manner. This coalition has the potential to be a cornerstone of the Department's annual VET Qualitative and Quantitative Assessment.

Encouraging VET Participation

Attracting Stakeholders to VET: It is vital that just as much value is placed on a trade or qualifications gained through a VET provider as is on qualifications gained through attendance at a university. Both supply skilled people in various fields of the workforce; they are needed for strong and robust economies and the current widely documented, skill shortage. Public perceptions need to be challenged and altered so that seeking a non-tertiary learning pathway is more highly valued and embraced by the wider community and secondary schooling providers/careers advisors. Further it is essential that women are supported in selecting VET training opportunities in male-dominated workspaces and are appropriately supported to undertake this in rural and regional areas.

Overcoming Challenges/Barriers to Allow Successful Engagement with VET and the Labour Force:

A positive view of careers emanating from VET subjects and promotion of these as acceptable and, indeed, enviable career paths is important.

Most students require support of some nature. Particularly students with disabilities require innovative approaches to enable full engagement and to allow them to realise their potential. These innovative approaches need to be recognised and accepted as eligible assessment. Anecdotal evidence from an ICPA Qld member highlights this:

"My son was keen to take on an apprenticeship through a local training provider. Although a fluent reader with good comprehension skills, due to his learning disability, he has great difficulty with making written responses. He was unable to progress his application for an apprenticeship. If he had been able to answer questions verbally or utilising a scribe, he would have passed through the initial stages of his application and undertaken the apprenticeship he desired."

ICPA Qld notes that opportunities for VET students to access affordable accommodation options to undertake training outside of their regional bases is essential to success. We are watching closely the developments of TAFE's Townsville based campus accommodation options to monitor success for rural and remote students. This model, potentially, warrants further investigation and expansion into key locations to allow for increased opportunities for VET students in regional areas.

Going Forward: Adaption, Engagement and Remaining Relevant:

Not all regions have suitable regionally-based training opportunities for VET students. Therefore, the adoption of flexible approaches to the way the learning/practical components of courses are structured would encourage student participation, retention, and course completion. Engaging existing regionally-based training spaces may offer solutions to barriers to digital access, thus removing the need for long distance travel to access training.

Providing financial assistance to support VET students would allow equitable access to training should it not be available regionally. Students must be supported to the completion of practical course components and support would be welcomed by the students and their families.

Ensuring flexibility in assessment into policy would allow greater engagement by students with disabilities. This is essential too, for the engagement of women in male dominated trade industries to continue to diversify the workforce.

Rural and remote Queensland plays a critical role in the economic fabric of the nation. Providing access to learning and skills to respond to traditional as well as emerging opportunities will contribute to the livability and vibrancy of these regions. In turn, this assists in attracting and retaining residents and boosting the economic and social sustainability of regions going forward.

ICPA Qld appreciates the opportunity to provide input to this Review.