

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

**Submission No:** 10

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**QUEENSLAND**  

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**TEACHERS' UNION**

## **Queensland Teachers' Union**

**Submission to  
Queensland Parliament's  
Education, Employment and Training Committee  
inquiry into the delivery of vocational education  
and training (VET) in regional, rural, and remote  
Queensland.**

**January 2023**

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## Introduction

Established in 1889, the Queensland Teachers' Union of Employees (QTU) has chalked up more than 130 years of achievements in providing professional, industrial, and legal leadership to Queensland's state education and training sectors. In 2023, the QTU is the professional voice of more than 48,000 members, including tutors, teachers, leading vocational teachers, education team leaders, and higher educators delivering quality programs of training and learning in Queensland schools, TAFE colleges, and Central Queensland University (CQU). Throughout this QTU submission, the term "TAFE" refers to both TAFE Queensland and the dual sector entity Central Queensland University.

As a significant stakeholder in Queensland education, the QTU is committed to actively engaging in processes in which the voice of teachers ought to be heard. The QTU's submissions and participation in stakeholder consultation are informed through the Union's active membership, which includes more than 2,500 QTU Workplace Representatives as well as decision making forums like our QTU Executive, which consists of democratically elected members from across the state.

This QTU submission is made in the interests of Queensland's vocational education and training (VET) educators, who are employed in TAFE and state schools, and the communities in which they live and work. The work of QTU members throughout the state delivers great VET outcomes for students, industry, and the state's economy.

In 2018, KPMG<sup>1</sup> found that Queensland's investment of \$707 million in TAFE returned \$1.8 billion, which is an increase by a factor of 2.5. More recently, and at a national level, Allison Pennington and the Centre for Future Work<sup>2</sup> estimated annual costs for operating TAFE to be \$5.7 billion and that its annual economic benefit is estimated to be \$92.5 billion, which is an increase by a factor of 16.

This QTU submission represents positions that are supported by QTU Policy, which is endorsed by QTU Conference, consisting of more than 250 democratically elected members from branches throughout the state.

QTU members have supported the drafting of this submission by contributing insights into the operations of TAFE as the premier provider of VET in regional, rural, and remote Queensland. This submission has collated members' stories and experiences, which were shared via email and specially convened online and face-to-face meetings.

The Queensland Teachers' Union acknowledges the terms of reference of this inquiry. The Union thanks the Education, Employment and Training Committee for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry and would welcome the opportunity to participate in further discussion.

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1 KPMG (2018). The Importance of TAFE Queensland to Queensland's Prosperity. November (Melbourne: KPMG).

2 Pennington, A. (2020) An Investment in Productivity and Inclusion: The economic and social benefits of the TAFE system. August (Canberra: Centre of Future Work).

## Terms of reference

The inquiry will examine:

1. the role of public providers in VET delivery in rural, remote, and regional Queensland, including:
  - VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes
  - VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including enablers and barriers to VET
2. the major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland
3. existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET
4. examples of successful localised VET models and how learnings might be applied in other locations
5. opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training to facilitate improvements in these areas.

## Summary of recommendations

<b>The role of public providers in VET delivery in rural, remote, and regional Queensland, including:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes</b></li> <li>○ <b>VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including enablers and barriers to VET</b></li> </ul>		
1	The QTU calls for acknowledgement that vocational education and training is a necessary and important part of the education landscape, and that TAFE should be maintained as the primary provider of VET and lifelong learning.	7
2	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to increase public funding for VET, and to increase TAFE's share of public funding to at least 70 per cent.	8
3	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a funding policy of positive discrimination that scales funding in favour of educationally disadvantaged groups in the community, including regional, rural and remote communities.	8
4	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to establish a Queensland higher education consultative committee.	8
5	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a funding policy of positive discrimination that scales funding in favour of educationally disadvantaged groups in the Australian community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	11
6	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to urgently review legislation and regulation to remove barriers to successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET.	13
<b>The major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland</b>		
7	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to collect data on geographic variance and adopt measures that address geographic disadvantage.	16
8	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a strategy to attract and retain VET educators in regional and rural Queensland.	17
9	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to adopt measures that ensure all Queenslanders can access face-to-face, in-person VET.	18

10	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to establish a fund that ensures regional, rural, and remote VET students can access appropriate high quality ICT devices at a reduced cost.	18
11	To accommodate increasing moves to hybrid, online and remote modes of learning, the QTU calls on DESBT to ensure additional funds are allocated to TAFE and CQU so that the workforce can appropriately develop their pedagogical practice in a manner that maintains quality.	20
<b>Existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET</b>		
12	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to guarantee the use of technology to ensure VET delivery is underpinned by a pursuit of educational excellence and/or equity, rather than pursuing low-cost and low-quality programs.	22
<b>Examples of successful localised VET models and how learnings might be applied in other locations</b>		
13	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to ensure local consultation occurs with communities, industries, and educators before VET models are transplanted from other locations.	23
<b>Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training to facilitate improvements in these areas.</b>		
14	The QTU urges DESBT to understand the true cost of VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote Queensland and develop a scaled funding model that recognises the additional costs.	25
15	The QTU urges the Queensland Government to recognise the need to deliver remote equity and the need for free-TAFE programs to fund social justice.	25
16	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to investigate factors that impact upon VET completion rates in regional, rural, and remote Queensland, and adopt policies that address factors of disadvantage that impact upon VET students.	26
17	The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to ensure VET educators can access authentic culturally appropriate professional development during rostered duty time, and that First Nations perspectives are embedded in VET courses.	26

## 1.0 Role of public providers in Queensland's rural, remote, and regional VET

The QTU asserts that the social and educational interests and needs of Queensland are best served by the maintenance of a strong, fully funded, high quality public education and training system. A strong public education and training system:

- is guided by the knowledge and experience of the teaching profession
- values social and cultural knowledge, respectful of traditional custodians of these ways of knowing
- strengthens democracy
- develops active citizenry
- provides benefits to individual students (e.g. preparation to undertake their role as a citizen in a democracy)
- contributes to the development of social, cultural and economic communities at local, state, national, and global levels
- respects the rights of employees to withdraw their labour
- acknowledges the role played by trade unions in representing the rights and aspirations of workers
- contributes to equity and social justice
- fosters inclusivity and values diversity
- values community partnerships in which the primary focus is the educational needs of students.<sup>3</sup>

The QTU believes that TAFE should lead in the provision of VET, as well as in the enhancement of industry developments. **The QTU calls for acknowledgement that vocational education and training is a necessary and important part of the education landscape, and that TAFE should be maintained as the primary provider of VET and lifelong learning.**<sup>4</sup>

The QTU opposes the provision of funds for VET via competitive market mechanisms. The QTU rejects the arguments for marketisation of VET, which spruik the alleged benefits of open competition as supposedly delivering increased flexibility, responsiveness, and efficiency of training provision. The QTU maintains that these assertions of free market ideology are articles of faith, impervious to empirical testing. Yet, despite the documented history of abject failures of marketisation in the sector, and even in the face of broad provider failure and fraudulent behaviour by some, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) continues to demonstrate policy commitment to marketisation.<sup>5</sup>

The QTU notes that contestability in the VET sector has led to a fundamental shift in TAFE's delivery of services. Opening TAFE to competitive market mechanisms has shifted TAFE's focus from delivering great programs of teaching and learning that meet the needs of students and industry towards delivering low-cost programs that meet the needs of the

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<sup>3</sup> QTU Policy (Funding and Organisation of Education, 2021 – 2023)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



bottom-line.<sup>6</sup> The QTU contends that the deliberate policy interest of DESBT and successive state governments is contributing to heightened levels of inequality and adversely impacting on the capacity of TAFE to deliver great VET programs in regional, rural, and remote Queensland.<sup>7</sup>

**The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to increase public funding for VET, and to increase TAFE's share of public funding to at least 70 per cent.<sup>8</sup>**

TAFE Queensland has a proud 130-year history of providing VET services throughout Queensland, and TAFE provides access and equity to training for students from diverse backgrounds in thin markets which are educationally necessary but fiscally challenging.<sup>9</sup> **The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a funding policy of positive discrimination that scales funding in favour of educationally disadvantaged groups in the community, including regional, rural and remote communities.<sup>10</sup>**

### 1.1 VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes

The QTU recognises that education is an integral community asset, and as such plays a significant role in building community sustainability.<sup>11</sup> The QTU strongly supports a system of VET, with TAFE as the public provider at its heart, and which, regardless of socio-cultural status or geographic location, can provide:

- broad-based vocational training
- opportunities for further learning and pathways to higher education
- personal enrichment learning opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

*"Pathways to higher level qualifications should be clearly shown to learners enrolling into low level qualifications, with mapping to show destinations from one qualification into the next (higher level) one. If students can't see clearly how to take the next steps, they often don't take them."*

QTU TAFE COUNCIL DELEGATE

To support transition between learning junctures, **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government to establish a Queensland higher education consultative committee.** The terms of reference of such a committee would include, but not be limited to, addressing the interface of secondary schooling, TAFE, and universities, and providing a forum for co-

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> TAFE Queensland. (2022). Annual Report 2021-22 <https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2022/5722T1395-8AA9.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> QTU Policy (Funding and Organisation of Education, 2021 – 2023)

<sup>11</sup> QTU Policy (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training, 2021-2023)

<sup>12</sup> QTU Policy (TAFE and VET, 2021-2023)

ordination of the concerns of higher education institutions. Membership of the committee should include representatives from institutions of higher education, higher education unions, TAFE institutes, schools, and relevant statutory authorities. The QTU should be represented on the committee.<sup>13</sup>

Turning to Queenslanders' participation in VET, the QTU notes the Productivity Commission produces an annual *Report on Government Services* (ROGS).<sup>14</sup> Table 5A.11 of the 2022 ROGS shows *Participation of 15-64 year olds in government-funded VET, by remoteness area* for all states and territories, in the period 2016 -2020. An abridged version, which focusses on Queensland, is reproduced below as Table 1.

**Table 1: Participation as a percentage of population of 15-64 year olds in government-funded VET, by remoteness area**

2020	
Major cities	6.3
Inner and outer regional	8.5
Remote and very remote	12.0
2019	
Major cities	6.1
Inner and outer regional	8.1
Remote and very remote	11.4
2018	
Major cities	5.8
Inner and outer regional	7.6
Remote and very remote	11.6
2017	
Major cities	5.8
Inner and outer regional	7.7
Remote and very remote	12.1
2016	
Major cities	6.1
Inner and outer regional	7.9
Remote and very remote	12.4

Table 1 shows that rates of participation in government funded VET increase the further a 15-64 year old is away from a major city. This observation holds for the entirety of the reporting period of 2016 -2020, which includes four pre-COVID years, and it remains consistent in 2020, the first year of COVID lockdowns. For example, in 2016, 12.4 per cent of

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<sup>13</sup> QTU Policy (Funding and Organisation of Education, 2021 – 2023)

<sup>14</sup> Productivity Commission. (2022). *Report on Government Services 2022 (5. Vocational Education and Training)*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training/rogs-202206-partb-section5-vet-data-tables.xlsx>

people in remote and very remote Queensland were participating in government-funded VET, compared with 7.9 per cent of those located in inner and outer regional centres and 6.1 per cent of people in major cities. In 2020, 12 per cent (- 0.4 per cent) of people in remote and very remote Queensland were participating in government-funded VET, compared with 8.5 per cent (+ 0.6 per cent) of those located at inner and outer regional centres and 6.3 percent (+ 0.2%) of people in major cities.

ROGS table 5A.10 shows *Participation of 15-64 and 18-24 year olds in government-funded VET, by Indigenous status* for all states and territories, in the period between 2016 and 2020. An abridged version, which focusses on Queensland, is reproduced below as Table 2.

**Table 2: VET participation rate as percentage of population, by Indigeneity and age**

2020		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		
18-24 years old		19.0
15-64 years old		11.7
Non-Indigenous		
18-24 years old		15.0
15-64 years old		6.5
2019		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		
18-24 years old		19.8
15-64 years old		12.1
Non-Indigenous		
18-24 years old		14.5
15-64 years old		6.1
2018		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		
18-24 years old		18.8
15-64 years old		11.7
Non-Indigenous		
18-24 years old		13.9
15-64 years old		5.9
2017		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		
18-24 years old		18.6
15-64 years old		11.8
Non-Indigenous		
18-24 years old		13.5
15-64 years old		5.9
2016		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander		

18-24 years old	18.2
15-64 years old	11.5
Non-Indigenous	
18-24 years old	13.6
15-64 years old	5.9

Table 2 shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland consistently engage in government-funded VET at higher rates of participation than non-Indigenous people. This observation holds for both the 18-24 year old demographic as well as the 15-64 year old demographic, and is consistent for the 2016 -2020 reporting period. For example, in 2020, 19 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland aged 18-24, were participating in government-funded VET, compared with 15 per cent of non-Indigenous people in Queensland and aged 18-24.

## 1.2 VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including enablers and barriers to VET

*“Without funding, programs can’t be delivered.”*

QTU WORKPLACE REPRESENTATIVE

### 1.2.1 Cost factors

In Far North Queensland, the most often applied modes of delivery are either students travelling to centres like Cairns or TAFE teachers travelling to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The QTU recognises the growth of online learning but expresses equity concerns about over-reliance on such modes of delivery. This submission returns to matters of equity and social justice related to ICT later in this submission.

The QTU understands approximately 3,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students access Abstudy to support costs associated with travel, accommodation, and meals linked to training in Cairns, and that there is strict criteria around base funding. Moreover, there are limited accommodation options for students travelling from community to study in Cairns. Conversely, the QTU understands the cost to deliver training in communities can be \$20,000 per student.

The QTU contends that DESBT needs to fund costs of overheads like accommodation, travel, and meals, and **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a funding policy of positive discrimination that scales funding in favour of educationally disadvantaged groups in the Australian community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.**

### 1.2.2 Curriculum and delivery

In a recent special edition of *Ethnographic Edge*, focussed on shifting systems of education and training, Jean M. Uasike Allen (et. al.) reaffirmed a long-standing recognition of the need for education systems to address issues of inclusivity and cultural competence.

*“Education systems in western nations are often built on a long history of centralising the western canon of knowledge and colonial norms. These norms are perpetuated and reinforced via western research, which amplifies the voices of the dominant, while working to silence the values, practices, and knowledges of minority groups.”<sup>15</sup>*

The contribution of Allen (et. al.) is a reminder of the need for continued vigilance in the implementation of curriculum that meets the needs of students and their communities. Allen (et. al.)’s recent contribution echoes recommendation 290 of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (the Royal Commission) which stated:

*“That curricula of schools at all levels should reflect the fact that Australia has an Aboriginal history and Aboriginal viewpoints on social, cultural and historical matters. It is essential that Aboriginal viewpoints, interests, perceptions and expectations are reflected in curricula, teaching and administration of schools.”<sup>16</sup>*

The contribution of Allen (et. al.) and recommendation 290 of the Royal Commission pertain to school curriculum, however they are made relevant by the experiences of QTU members delivering VET in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Moreover, recommendation 298 of the Royal Commission recommended the need for flexibility in the length of time allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete courses.<sup>17</sup> In 2018, a Deloitte *Review of the implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* prepared for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet stated:

*“Queensland has implemented Recommendation 298 by appropriately reviewing all courses designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for accreditation, accrediting Torres Strait Islander training organisations and allowing flexibility in the time taken to complete courses.”<sup>18</sup>*

The experience of QTU members delivering training in Indigenous communities refutes the assertion that Queensland has implemented Rec 298.

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15 Allen, J.M.U, Fasavalu, T.M.F., Iosefo, F., Ualesi, T.Y., Fa’avae, D.T.M., Cunningham, E. (2022). Collective Indigenous Approaches to Centring Pacific Voices of Leadership for our Future. *Ethnographic Edge* 5(2), 1–23.

16 Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol5/5.html#Heading5>

17 Ibid.

18 Deloitte Access Economics. (2018). Review of the implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/review-implementation-royal-commission-aboriginal-deaths-custody>

*"In 2018/2019, [COMMUNITY] was interested in having their community Sport and Rec. employees study with TAFE to enhance the standard of activity/delivery in the community. This was amazing, as it could have not only changed community sport delivery, but the council saw this as a way to publicly promote education to the rest of the community.*

*"To be viable, ten students were required to enrol; only five did. The course, however, went ahead with the five enrolments, with hope additional students would enrol. During the five delivery blocks, there were two deaths in the community. This meant a time of Sorry Business, not working or studying, and taking quiet time whilst those connected to the person grieved, or didn't get ahead whilst others were grieving.*

*"Students worked hard to catch up after their absence due to Sorry Business, however only the two students previously mentioned came close to passing. With only a couple of days to go to the end of a delivery block, there was another death in the community. The deceased person was related to several of the students in the course. Sorry Business followed and this impacted the students' ability to pass the course. I returned about a month later, and co-incidentally was on the same flight returning the deceased. The airport was full of hundreds people to greet the deceased and welcome her home (a flight with about 20 people on board).*

*"Again, emotions were high and it was a difficult time for the community, yet this was the time planned six months earlier for the delivery of learning, booking flights and accommodation early ensuring the most financially viable delivery.*

*"Under federal rules for Away From Base, students (or teachers) get eight weeks accommodation to gain an education (deliver education) 'Away from their home base'. With multiple deaths during education blocks, it simply ends the ability for students to learn and work/ study with respect to cultural protocols."*

QTU TAFE COUNCIL DELEGATE

Contrary to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, and despite the Deloitte report indicating Queensland had implemented the recommendation, the experience of this QTU TAFE Council delegate is that legislative restrictions continue to be a barrier to success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participating in VET.

**The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to urgently review legislation and regulation to remove barriers to successful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in VET.** The QTU agrees with our member's plea that "The death of a relative should have no bearing on educational outcomes, especially to the extent it does in communities under the available model, so make

adjustments so we can have successes so communities can flourish. We the teachers know we can do this through education, and the next generation.”

During QTU consultation with members to prepare this draft, the same QTU TAFE Council delegate also told a story about the power of relationships in community.

*“My observations during periods of Sorry Business are contrasted by the great example of the community swimming pool being open and staffed by our students/council employees. The students were demonstrating their course learnings, with approximately 50 students in three different groups in the pool based on age levels and ability, and one student as a lifeguard supervising those in and around the pool.*

*“ The educational learnings in this moment transformed the delivery for the community, and the young people of the community gained a standard equivalent to that of any aquatic centre in the state.”*

QTU TAFE COUNCIL DELEGATE

## 2.0 Major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland

In this submission, the QTU recognises three barriers to place-based VET: cost and contestability, staffing, and technology.

### 2.1 *Cost and contestability*

The QTU contends that VET delivery in rural and remote areas needs to attract additional funding loading as it costs more to deliver outside of the metro area. A QTU TAFE Executive member and VET teacher in regional and remote Queensland observed: "Cost is a major problem, but DESBT doesn't like the overheads."

A QTU TAFE Council delegate agreed, adding: "Teaching cert III in early childhood to 14 students in Brisbane is very different to delivering the same course to 14 students in Wide Bay Burnett, and different again to delivering the cert III at Thursday Island."

Nevertheless, the Queensland Government and DESBT require TAFE to deliver services in thin markets with the same market-driven ideology and commitment to the budget bottom line that operates in metropolitan markets.

The QTU holds that the negative impacts of competition and market reform on the TAFE system are well documented. It is established without doubt that the introduction of market reforms:

- does not produce efficiency
- does not result in a decline in training delivery costs
- results in high transaction costs, greater complexity and uncertainty in quasi-markets, which cancel out savings gained in streamlining internal administrative and planning systems
- increases the reliance of a large proportion of private providers on government funding and results in unnecessary duplication between private and public, and between public providers
- increases the instances of low-quality training and unethical practice
- increases the instances of provider failure, and the subsequent costs to government when it has to intervene, for example, in the form of refunds for students
- increases the use by public and private VET providers of taxpayers' dollars to fund an increase in their advertising and marketing budgets and the proportion of non-teaching staff, in order to attract students
- increases the incidence of wholly online delivery of training, regardless of the efficacy of the delivery and assessment methodology, so disenfranchising students
- decreases the standing of the VET sector and the reputation of VET qualifications.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> QTU Policy (TAFE and VET, 2021-2023)



The QTU has consistently called on state and federal governments to ensure that 70 per cent of public investment in skills and training is invested in TAFE.<sup>20</sup> The QTU welcomes programs like *Free TAFE for under 25s*<sup>21</sup> and *More Fee-Free TAFE and VET places for Queenslanders in 2023*,<sup>22</sup> where such programs lift TAFE's share of public funding. However, while fee-free TAFE announcements are welcome, QTU members delivering programs in regional, rural and remote Queensland are keenly aware that when such announcements are blind to geographic scale of cost of delivery, equity in remote locations is impacted.

The QTU observes that fee-free programs assume no regional variance in the cost of VET delivery. For example, the joint federal and state government announcement *More Fee-Free TAFE and VET places for Queenslanders in 2023* included an injection of "more than \$200 million into the Queensland skills and training sector to support access to over 37,000 Fee-Free TAFE and vocational education and training (VET) places in 2023." The announcement aimed to support the Queensland Government's work on "strengthening and growing the regional workforce," and recognises courses that meet industry need. However, there is no recognition of the need for a funding model that applies scalability to address geographic disadvantage.

The Queensland Budget papers report service delivery statements from departments and agencies, including the Department of Employment, Small Business, and Training<sup>23</sup>. The 2022-23 papers report on *Connecting Queenslanders to training and skills programs and initiatives* and include "effective measures" and "efficiency measures", however reporting on these service standards ignores regional variance. For example, DESBT's reporting assumes the average cost of \$730 per competency successfully completed applies to a student completing a Cert III in Gas fitting at Roma as much as a student completing the same course at SkillsTech, Acacia Ridge. The table on page five of the DESBT's service delivery statement includes eight notes that draw attention to variance between target/estimate and estimated actual that is attributed to COVID, however there is no note or reporting that indicates the variance in the data resulting from geographic locations. The QTU does not suggest public reporting on regional variance is required in the service delivery statement, where such reporting risks stigmatising communities, however **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to collect data on geographic variance and adopt measures that address geographic disadvantage.** The QTU believes that the "average cost per competency successfully completed" should apply to major cities, that weighting for "inner and outer regional" should be applied, and that additional weightings for "remote and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Queensland Government. (2022). *Free TAFE for Under 25s*. <https://desbt.qld.gov.au/training/training-careers/incentives/freetafe>

<sup>22</sup> Queensland Government. (2022). *More Fee-Free TAFE and VET places for Queenslanders in 2023*. <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/96790>

<sup>23</sup> Queensland Government. (2022). Service Delivery Statements: Department of Employment, Small Business and Training. [https://budget.qld.gov.au/files/Budget\\_2022-23\\_SDS\\_Department\\_of\\_Employment\\_Small\\_Business\\_and\\_Training.pdf](https://budget.qld.gov.au/files/Budget_2022-23_SDS_Department_of_Employment_Small_Business_and_Training.pdf)

very remote” locations should also apply. The *Report on Government Services*<sup>24</sup> already records data for geographic variance using the categories “major cities”, “inner and outer regional”, and “remote and very remote”.

## 2.2 Staffing factors

“Programs like Fee-Free TAFE have meant that TAFE is recruiting students, but we’re experiencing workforce recruitment challenges.” (QTU member, Cairns Branch)

The QTU recognises the central role that teachers perform in the delivery of VET. However, QTU members delivering programs in Far North Queensland, including delivery in remote communities, have reported on the workforce challenges that exist. This submission reaffirms the earlier observation of QTU members who note the simple reality that: “Without funding, programs can’t be delivered.” (QTU member, Cairns Branch)

The *TAFE Queensland Award – State 2016*<sup>25</sup> establishes the roles of tutor, teacher, and lead vocational teacher (LVT). The QTU believes that every student should be able to access the knowledge, skills and expertise of LVTs, and that access should not be limited by geographic location. The QTU also notes that the current DESBT funding model disadvantages students in rural and remote centres, where it is less economically viable for TAFE to employ LVTs.

Negotiations between the QTU and TAFE Queensland resulted in the establishment of a new teacher position, foundation educator, which was recognised in the *TAFE Queensland Educators Certified Agreement 2019*.<sup>26</sup> Foundation educator is an effective career step that builds support mechanisms around new educators entering the workforce. However, while it might be effective in metropolitan areas, there is a skills shortage in regional, rural, and remote Queensland. QTU members contend that redeploying workers, already in short supply, from industry and into training has short term impacts on local needs of businesses in their communities.<sup>27</sup> QTU members also recognise that the foundation educator rate of remuneration is typically less than the wages of workers in many industries.

**The QTU calls on the Queensland Government to develop a strategy to attract and retain VET educators in regional and rural Queensland.** The QTU contends such a strategy should include incentives to encourage TAFE teachers to work in rural and remote centres. The incentives should involve both monetary compensation and enhanced working and living conditions, should be offered for the whole of a teacher’s service in rural locations, and should also be available to local teachers. To encourage teachers to serve in rural centres, the following incentives should be offered:

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<sup>24</sup> Productivity Commission. (2022). *Report on Government Services 2022 (5. Vocational Education and Training)*. <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2022/child-care-education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training/rogs-202206-partb-section5-vet-data-tables.xlsx>

<sup>25</sup> *TAFE Queensland Award – State 2016*. [https://www.qirc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/tafe\\_queensland.pdf](https://www.qirc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/tafe_queensland.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> *TAFE Queensland Educators Certified Agreement 2019*. [https://www.qirc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019\\_cb136.pdf](https://www.qirc.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019_cb136.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

- payment of a salary loading
- offer of permanency
- advanced salary progression
- good quality, low-cost accommodation
- offer of short tenure appointments to teachers from favourable locations, with guaranteed return to their base within three years
- provision of ICT equipment appropriate to functioning in remote locations, including mobile phones and internet connections.<sup>28</sup>

A significant concern to the QTU is the out-of-pocket travel expenses incurred by teachers who deliver programs in communities. The relevant directive is *9/11 Domestic Travelling and Relieving Expenses*<sup>29</sup>, in which Schedule A, 2.2 recognises four options for payment. Many QTU members are required to pay for their meals and expenses and then claim reimbursement. The QTU contends that where an educator is regularly required to travel to deliver VET in communities, the preferred method of payment is through travelling and relieving allowances prescribed by the directive.

### 2.3 Technology.

The QTU recognises that flexible and hybrid modes of delivery provide options for training in thin markets, however the QTU contends that training is best served when educator and student are co-located, sharing real time and space, and that there is a diminution in quality when this sharing is disrupted.<sup>30</sup> **The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to adopt measures that ensure all Queenslanders can access face-to-face, in-person VET.**

The QTU recognises innovation and change can increase the quality of program delivery and that new technologies and future work can increase the types of program delivery. Indeed, the growth of modes of flexible and hybrid delivery were accelerated through recent experiences of lockdowns, during which educators revolutionised their pedagogies to ensure continuity of learning.

Arising from COVID lockdowns and the subsequent accelerations in online delivery, QTU members report that there are two major barriers to student success in online modes of learning. First, remote students experience connectivity issues due to unstable internet and insufficient bandwidth, which mean that Zoom classes and the streaming of video lessons are frequently disrupted. This can lead to student frustration, low levels of engagement, and impact on student completions. A second barrier is caused by students attempting to complete online learning using unsuitable ICT devices, such as a mobile phone. If the Queensland Government and DESBT seek to scale up hybrid and online learning, **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government to establish a fund that ensures regional, rural,**

<sup>28</sup> QTU Policy (TAFE and VET, 2021-2023)

<sup>29</sup> Directive 9/11 Domestic Travelling and Relieving Expenses

[https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0036/187983/2011-09-domestic-travelling-and-relieving-expenses.pdf](https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0036/187983/2011-09-domestic-travelling-and-relieving-expenses.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> QTU Policy (TAFE and VET, 2021-2023).

**and remote VET students can access appropriate high quality ICT devices at a reduced cost.**

The QTU also recognises that, while alternative modes of delivery may bring economies of scale through larger class sizes, there will be a commensurate increase in additional duties not previously encountered, as well as overall increases to workload expectations. The QTU contends that current workload measures and industrial instruments do not properly consider the impact of modes of delivery that are not compatible with the traditional.

The QTU maintains that scaling up online delivery to achieve economies of scale or as a low-cost method of VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote Queensland poses a risk to the quality of VET delivery. The QTU posits the following indicia of traditional, hybrid, and online/remote modes of delivery.

*Indicia of traditional mode of delivery*<sup>31</sup>

In a traditional mode of program delivery, a teacher:

- co-occupies the same physical space as students
- delivers face-to-face teaching
- controls progression of content according to students' needs
- checks for students' understanding
- makes pedagogical choices to best meet the needs of students
- incorporates students' prior knowledge and experience, where relevant, into the learning content
- determines the timing of assessment within the schedule of delivery
- provides direct tuition support
- conducts some or all assessment in class – formative or summative.

In a traditional mode of program delivery, a student:

- co-occupies the same physical space as their classmates and teacher
- is mandated to attend
- can ask direct questions in real time
- interacts with other students in real time.

*Indicia of hybrid mode of delivery*<sup>32</sup>

In a hybrid mode of program delivery, a teacher:

- occasionally shares the same physical space as students
- can be divided between meeting the needs of students in a classroom with those participating online
- relies on student engagement to provide feedback on acquisition of course content and student understanding
- must simultaneously deliver two types of pedagogy

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

- incorporates students' prior knowledge and experience, where relevant, into the learning content
- determines the timing of assessment within the schedule of delivery
- conducts some or all assessment in class – formative or summative.

In a hybrid mode of program delivery, a student:

- participates in person or online
- makes choices about level of engagement while participating in classes
- can ask questions but is limited in how and to whom the questions are directed in real time
- has limits on their capacity to interact with other students.

*Indicia of online/remote mode of delivery*<sup>33</sup>

In an online/remote mode of program delivery, a teacher:

- rarely interacts directly with students
- is limited in the immediacy of their responses to student questions
- is limited in their capacity to provide direct feedback to students
- can experience a very high volume of electronic communication from students
- can experience high volume of contact from students outside of programmed hours of duty
- pre-records video lessons and provides learning materials via websites
- delivers teacher-directed programs
- relies on student engagement to provide feedback on acquisition of course content and student understanding
- determines the timing of assessment within the schedule of delivery.

In an online/remote mode of program delivery, a student:

- rarely interacts directly with teacher or other students
- makes choices about their level of engagement and when they will engage in learning
- can ask questions but can experience delays in responses
- requires access to stable internet connection and appropriate ICT device.

**To accommodate increasing moves to hybrid, online and remote modes of learning, the QTU calls on DESBT to ensure additional funds are allocated to TAFE and CQU so that the workforce can appropriately develop their pedagogical practice in a manner that maintains quality.**<sup>34</sup> Workforce development needs to ensure quality professional development is available, as opposed to a 30-minute pod-cast broadcast during scheduled meal breaks or a one-off day of programmed professional development. Quality professional development is an opportunity to share models of best practice, enabling teams to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

deconstruct the models and make professional choices about which parts of the shared model can be adapted into their local programs. Quality professional development is also a continuous cycle, with programmed time for educators to work in reflective communities of practice to embed new knowledge and skills in their teaching.

### 3.0 Existing programs that can assist reduce barriers or support priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET

*“TAFE Qld Online (formerly TAFE Online and prior to that Open Learning Institute of TAFE) has been delivering training to remote students since the turn of the century, originally delivering through correspondence materials by post but now using 100 per cent online delivery to allow students that can’t attend a campus or whose local campus doesn’t offer their desired program, to complete the training.”*

QTU WORKPLACE REPRESENTATIVE

The QTU acknowledges the commitment of TAFE Qld Online educators to VET delivery, pedagogical innovation, and to their VET students in Queensland and around the world. TAFE Qld Online educators are harnessing the benefits of technology to facilitate connections between students and learning. Technology has also afforded VET teachers the opportunity to work more efficiently through sharing online curriculum materials and delivering programs at a time and place of convenience to the student. However, **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to guarantee the use of technology to ensure VET delivery is underpinned by a pursuit of educational excellence and/or equity, rather than pursuing low-cost and low-quality programs.**<sup>35</sup>

The QTU recognises that the use of technology and delivery by TAFE Qld Online has the potential to address equity issues, including VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote Queensland. To increase the success of online delivery, the QTU believes that ICT training and support should be available to all teachers and school leaders, that such professional development should be fully funded, and that there should be an appropriate allocation of release time. Moreover, just as teachers differentiate the curriculum to meet the individual learning needs of students, so too the allocation of professional development time for teachers undertaking ICT training should be needs-based.<sup>36</sup> The QTU believes that a range of training modes should be available to teachers, including but not limited to face-to-face tutorials, collegial communities, and online training. Teachers should not be placed in the position of having their ability to deliver effective learning and teaching programs hampered by low exposure to ICT. Such a position is demoralising to the teaching profession, which values professional skills and is motivated to ensure successful outcomes for all students.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Queensland Teachers’ Union. QTU Position Statement: Information and Communications Technology.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.0 Examples of successful localised VET models and how learnings might be applied in other locations

*"There were many highly successful programs in the 90s."*

QTU WORKPLACE REPRESENTATIVE

Many QTU members who supported the drafting of this submission have a long and proud history of delivering vocational education and training with TAFE. Their corporate memory of successful programs includes:

- Conservation and Land Management, which is delivered on country
- Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which is a partnership between TAFE Queensland, the Department of Education (Qld), and James Cook University<sup>38</sup>
- First Nations Pathways to Policing, which includes industry involvement that draws on Reconciliation Action Plans of agencies, meeting needs of students, employers, communities, and addressing wider social issues like racism
- Youth Conservation Corp program was very successful because there was investment to ensure support mechanisms and generate employment outcomes.

The QTU is concerned by notions of transplanting successful models from one location to another. There are limitations on the transferability of models, including availability of teaching facilities, mentoring expertise, educator knowledge and experience, community interest, and industry need. **The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to ensure local consultation occurs with communities, industries, and educators before VET models are transplanted from other locations.**

Drawing on their detailed corporate memory, QTU members assert that for programs to be successful there is a need to ensure:

- funding, including scalable funding, that recognises additional costs of VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote locations
- infrastructure
- stable internet connectivity with appropriate bandwidth
- availability of appropriate ICT devices
- authentic planning at the local level that which extends beyond broad DESBT goals
- cultural appropriateness of curriculum and pedagogy.

From an industrial perspective, the QTU also notes with concern the high intensity/low frequency model of delivery. In this model, educators travel to communities for intense periods of training. This work in communities is an opportunity for high levels of community engagement in training, bringing community facilities to life, and celebrating community while community celebrates students' achievements. However, the high intensity nature of

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<sup>38</sup> TAFE Queensland. RATEP. <https://tafeqld.edu.au/information-for/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/ratep>



this model has safety implications. Supervision of students performing high risk activities has the potential to harm the student or other people, or cause death, and must be addressed. The high intensity also adds to educator fatigue and is a risk to the educator's travel to and from communities.

## 5.0 Opportunities for DESBT to facilitate improvements in these areas

### 5.1 Funding

Section 2.1 of this submission addressed costs of VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote Queensland, as well as the flawed contestability funding model. **The QTU urges DESBT to understand the true cost of VET delivery in regional, rural, and remote Queensland and develop a scaled funding model that recognises the additional costs.** Further, **the QTU urges the Queensland Government to recognise the need to deliver remote equity and the need for free-TAFE programs to fund social justice.**

*“TAFE is best placed to undertake delivery in regional, rural, and remote settings, BUT the funding allocated for this delivery NEEDS to be spent on the actual delivery and associated support services for students, NOT be continuously eroded by the for-profit margin approach.”*

QTU TAFE COUNCIL DELEGATE

### 5.2 Completion rates

Section 2.3 of this submission recognised the impact of technology on completion rates. The QTU posits that a range of factors contribute to completion rates in regional, rural, and remote communities, including but not limited to:

- access to local mentors and role models
- language difficulties
- undiagnosed health conditions, including mental health and hearing
- undiagnosed conditions that impact on education
- access to ICT
- cultural competence of educator workforce.

*“DESBT needs to understand the reasons for perceptions (or otherwise) of low completion rates; Students are being set up for failure by a system that fails to prepare students prior to their commencement of a training program.”*

QTU TAFE COUNCIL DELEGATE

**The QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to investigate factors that impact upon VET completion rates in regional, rural, and remote Queensland, and adopt policies that address factors of disadvantage that impact upon VET students.**

### 5.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The QTU recognises that the impact of colonisation and racism, the lack of services, and poverty results in First Nations peoples experiencing more health issues than other Australians. This adversely impacts on educational success. As a result, there is an urgent need for truth-telling and action in the four broad categories of:

- non-communicable diseases, for example, circulatory disease, respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes etc.
- communicable diseases, for example, HIV/AIDS, STIs, diarrhoea, hepatitis etc.
- other conditions, such as ear conditions, dental health, substance use and abuse etc.
- trans-generational trauma and mental health issues.

The QTU notes the high rate of youth suicide in First Nations communities and calls on the Queensland Government to work with stakeholders, including First Nations communities, TAFE, VET educators, and unions, to develop programs to support at-risk students.

The QTU also notes recommendation 294 of the Royal Commission<sup>39</sup> pertaining to successful methodology employed in such programs as that at Batchelor College, Northern Territory in the training of Aboriginal teachers and others for work in remote communities. The QTU contends that the provision of culturally appropriate professional development will increase awareness of:

- symptoms of undetected broader public health problems presented by students, therefore impacting on their learning
- all available preventative, corrective and promotive healthcare services
- the need for early detection and treatment of these health conditions, to ensure additional learning difficulties do not develop
- substance abuse issues that impact on student behaviour and performance
- mental health issues, including those related to suicide and the impact on communities
- the impact of trauma on students and their learning.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the recommendation made in section 1.2 of this submission, **the QTU calls on the Queensland Government and DESBT to ensure VET educators can access authentic culturally appropriate professional development during rostered duty time, and that First Nations perspectives are embedded in VET courses.**

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<sup>39</sup> Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.  
<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol5/5.html#Heading5>

<sup>40</sup> QTU Policy (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education and Training, 2021-2023)