

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

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19 January 2023

Committee Secretary
Education, Employment and Training Committee
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Via Email: eetc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Hansen

Re: Inquiry into Delivery of VET in Regional, Rural & Remote Queensland

AgForce is a peak organisation representing Queensland's cane, cattle, grain, and sheep, wool and goat producers. The cane, beef, broadacre cropping and sheep, wool and goat industries in Queensland generated around \$10.4 billion in on-farm value of production in 2021-22. AgForce's purpose is to advance sustainable agribusiness and strives to ensure the long-term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Over 6,600 farmers, individuals and businesses provide support to AgForce through membership. Queensland producers provide high-quality food and fibre to Australian and overseas consumers, contribute significantly to the social fabric of regional, rural and remote communities, as well as stewardship of the state's natural environment.

Thank you for the opportunity for AgForce to provide input to the Committee's inquiry into delivery of vocational education and training (VET) in Regional, Rural & Remote (RRR) Queensland; a topic we are passionate about. We have a strong membership base seeking better outcomes for training.

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

a. VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes

The role of public providers in VET delivery in RRR Queensland is critical and should be expanded. There are very limited numbers of providers in RRR Queensland. Whilst we applaud the Government's dedication to Regional Queensland, more VET training centres in locations like Toowoomba, Gympie, Sunshine Coast, Ipswich, Townsville, Rockhampton and Cairns are not required. They already have high participation rates and existing pathways from schools and job seeker centres.

We require face to face learning and VET solutions for Rural and Remote locations such as Cunnamulla, Charleville, Roma, Longreach, Emerald, Charters Towers, Mt Isa and Ayr. We would recommend the Government complete a population and demand study that seeks to understand the current and expected geographic spread of demand and reduce the need for rural and remote young people to travel so far from family for vocational training.

Currently, many VET courses are online based learning. Whilst the perception is this online based learning can decrease the geographical divide of people and include all persons in RRR areas, this is not the case in our view.

Not all access to telecommunications and data connectivity is adequate and it can be a significant impediment to online learning structures. Phone and internet reception outside of big regional centres is a real and ongoing limitation. AgForce will continue to welcome expenditure on telecommunication services in RRR areas. We implore all levels of Government to consider further investment in communications infrastructure, which can also help bridge the VET training accessibility gap for students in the bush.

Whilst online training plays a critical role, not all people learn in a self-guided, self-disciplined, computer-based, sedentary way. Noting it may be more expensive to deliver, many people require face to face learning with hands on experience to effectively develop their skills. If students are participating in online learning, the agricultural sector would like to see that learning solidified in workplace visits with a 'boots on the ground', practical functionality embedded within courses as relevant.

b. VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including enablers and barriers to VET

Agricultural businesses owned and operated by indigenous people in northern Australia contribute to industry success and support local communities with economic activity and employment. They experience the challenges outlined above and would also benefit from their training needs being better met. AgForce has previously supported initiatives to empower indigenous employers and the wider workforce with training in the management and operation of agricultural businesses. Targeted solutions and funding are indicated to address any specific challenges in meeting these skills needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. The Major Barriers to the Provision of Localised and Place-Based VET and Priority Areas and Cohorts in Queensland

AgForce offers the following thoughts on current barriers to provision of localised and place-based VET.

1. A lack of investment in, and focus on, contemporary curriculum that considers - among other things - delivery methods and new and emerging needs, particularly in areas such as Workplace Health & Safety where *in situ* training and experiential learning plays a key role alongside other methods of delivery.
2. No mechanism by which industry can engage strongly with Government in describing training demand now and into the future and being an equal partner at the important training needs identification and development stages.
3. A focus on the south east corner of Queensland and an assumption (untested) that this will suffice by using a combination of online training and having students travel to the South East corner to attend in-person training elements.
4. An incorrect assumption that agriculture industry training requirements from the perspective of delivery methods and practices, differs little from the requirements of other industries such as manufacturing.

3. Existing Programs that might assist in reducing Barriers or supporting Priority Cohorts in accessing Localised and Place-Based VET

TAFE Queensland currently offers several valuable agricultural courses from rural operations, to agribusiness management, to machinery maintenance, however these are only offered in Toowoomba, despite TAFE campuses being in every major agricultural centre in regional Queensland. Expanding the locations of these courses would be very beneficial for the ag sector. ([Agriculture Courses | TAFE Queensland \(tafeqld.edu.au\)](https://tafeqld.edu.au))

Delivering VET in schools used to be commonplace but there has been a loss of capacity over time. Appropriate funding and resourcing for schools to deliver Cert 1 & Cert 2 courses would ensure rural and remote students can complete these while attending school and staying within their existing social support structures. Longreach High School has delivered a very successful VET program with its Big Red Truck initiative. ([Big Red Truck—Outback College of Hospitality Trade Training Centre \(education.qld.gov.au\)](https://education.qld.gov.au))

AgForce understands the limitations of delivering VET in schools is due to a lack of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) in rural and remote areas. Anecdotally, the reason behind this has been suggested to be the administrative paperwork involved in the ASIC audit process for RTOs. Many small family operators in rural and remote areas do not have the resources to support detailed review processes and the administration required. Large, well-capitalised providers are needed to deliver VET in schools for sectors like agriculture.

AgForce Training Pty Limited – this Joint Venture between Response Learning (responsegroup.com.au) and AgForce combines the best in private training provision with industry expertise to identify, design and deliver fit for purpose training solutions. A genuine collaboration, and support from Government, provides a unique opportunity for a contemporary and effective government/industry approach. The Joint Venture aims to achieve a long-term, sustainable presence in ag training regionally.

4. Examples of Successful Localised VET Models and how learnings might be applied in other Locations

Response Learning has a very successful model and is one of the reasons industry through AgForce has been attracted to work with them. The Joint Venture is looking for further partners and would welcome any ongoing dialogue with Government about how we can coordinate efforts and energy in delivery of solutions.

There are some organisations who are delivering opportunities for students within Queensland that could expand their footprint with further funding.

Blue Light Shearing at Charleville is a multi-agency approach to training young people to shear. Police Liaison Officer and Guinness World Record holding ex shearer, Laurie Batement, selects a group of interested young people to progress through a Certificate II in Rural Operations with training in south west Queensland shearing sheds. Laurie attributes the success of the program to hands-on learning as shearing is not a skill you can learn out of a book, which is consistent with most agricultural jobs.

Blue Light Shearing is hoping to duplicate this program at Longreach should government funding become available, as currently they rely solely on industry funding.

[South West Blue Light Shearing Program – Blue Light Qld](#)

LeadAg through CHRRUP at Emerald – Meg McCosker

The program addresses the lack of opportunity for young people to gain practical, hands-on training and skills to make them employable. Participation in the program provides young people with work-ready skills and support from industry mentors. Not only do they benefit from the skills development but also build the confidence and capacity to choose a career in the agricultural industry. [CHRRUP | LEADAg](#)

5. Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business & Training to facilitate improvements in these Areas.

Job pathways into agriculture can be an unknown for those outside of the industry. AgForce runs its own School to Industry Partnership Program ([Education and Schools Programs \(SIPP\) · AgForce · Advancing Rural Queensland \(agforceqld.org.au\)](#)) that seeks to introduce school children to agricultural careers and build community awareness of career paths. Further funding of this model is essential.

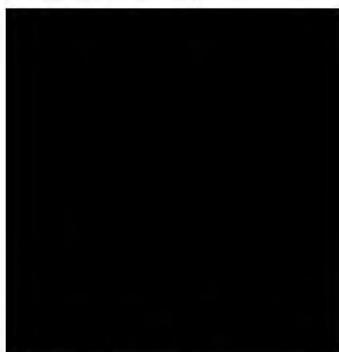
Final comments

Apprenticeships and Traineeships in agricultural sectors need to be improved to see an increase in employers taking on long-term workers instead of seasonal workers, due to the incentivising wage subsidies available.

We need to address the subject content gaps in the VET model to create training for industry, by industry. The geographical locations of RTOs also need to be industry specific. AgForce would like to see traineeships and/or apprenticeships in wool handling and machinery operations. An extension of Feedlot Operations would also be beneficial.

For further information or to discuss this submission in more detail please contact Ruth Thompson, Grains Policy Director, via email: [REDACTED] or by phone: [REDACTED].

Yours faithfully



Michael Guerin
Chief Executive Officer