

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

**Submission No:** 14

**Submitted by:** Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC)

**Publication:**

**Attachments:**

**Submitter Comments:**

**Submitter Recommendations:**



# Inquiry into the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland

January 2023

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## Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission on the role of public providers in the delivery of vocational education and training (VET) in regional, rural and remote Queensland, to inform the Education, Employment and Training Committee's inquiry announced on 24 October 2022.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic School Authorities (CSAs) and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 313 Catholic schools that educate more than 156,000 students in Queensland.

QCEC is committed to supporting CSAs in their work of providing a range of curriculum offerings that respond to the personalised learning needs of students, support successful post-school pathways and maintain students' engagement with school. Participation in VET and vocational learning builds and enhances young people's confidence to navigate pathways, provides opportunities to meet the different needs of young people in Catholic schools and contributes to a holistic and engaging education.

The Queensland Catholic sector recognises the important opportunities VET offers to develop foundational skills that support worker readiness such as workplace literacy and numeracy, problem-solving, communication, self-management; and to develop skills, attitudes and behaviours expected by employers.

QCEC supports the provision of quality VET and vocational learning that addresses the individual needs of students and contributes to their post school options. CSAs seek to ensure that VET and vocational learning are an integral and valued part of curriculum offerings in Queensland Catholic secondary schools. However, for some schools operating in regional, rural and remote areas of Queensland, ensuring students can access their VET courses of choice can be challenging.

Catholic schools acknowledge the importance of VET courses and promote VET opportunities to all students. Queensland Catholic schools' strong commitment to providing access to VET courses in senior secondary years is reflected in our student participation and completion rates. In 2022, almost 60% (59.7%) of students who completed Year 12 at a Queensland Catholic secondary school received a VET qualification. Furthermore, 13,091 VET Certificates were awarded to students who completed Year 12 in 2022 at a Queensland Catholic secondary school, and 1004 students completed Year 12 in 2022 in a

Queensland Catholic School were enrolled in a School Based Apprenticeship or Traineeships (SAT). These figures highlight the Catholic sector's strong commitment to making VET available for all students.

The sector's commitment is further demonstrated by data from the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) which indicates that Queensland Catholic School Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) offered a total of 50 different VET qualifications to students in 2022<sup>1</sup>. Students in Queensland Catholic schools were enrolled in a total of 276 different VET qualifications in 2022.

The data in Table 1 below reflects the broader VET activity in 2022 for Year 12 students and shows the trend over the past five years. The Year 12 SAT enrolments figures provided by QCAA includes those who undertook a SAT during their senior schooling regardless of the year of enrolment.

*Table 1 Year 12 VET Outcomes Data<sup>2</sup>*

Number of Year 12 students	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
Completed Year 12 in Queensland Catholic schools	10735	10606	10523	7661	10885
Received a VET qualification	6413	6071	5614	3734	5078
Awarded Certificate I	1254	1412	1454	1169	1442
Awarded Certificate II	4194	3939	3592	2365	2855
Awarded Certificate III	3779	3594	3188	1941	2556
Awarded Certificate IV	289	355	373	153	193
Enrolled in School-based Apprenticeship	434	395	377	238	322
Enrolled in School-based Traineeship	584	625	600	534	781
<b>Total SATs</b>	<b>1018</b>	<b>1020</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>1103</b>

#### 1. The role of public providers in VET delivery in relation to VET pathways, participation rates and outcomes in rural, remote and regional Queensland

Catholic School Authorities (CSAs) in regional, rural and remote areas report they would see great value in a more direct relationship with TAFE staff who are delivering training to Catholic school students. However, CSAs report that from their experience TAFE does not appear to have a focus on building a direct relationship with schools and some schools report they are uncertain if secondary students are a priority cohort for TAFE. CSAs report they would like to develop stronger partnerships with TAFE which would have the following features:

- TAFE to promote courses to Year 10 cohorts in schools when students are making decisions about subject selections that support future pathways.
- TAFE staff to provide regular feedback to school VET leaders on student progression. Currently, schools report they initiate this communication in most instances.
- TAFE to introduce efficient ways of contacting parents and the school when there are concerns regarding completion.
- TAFE to provide attendance reports to schools on the day of the course which would help schools follow up with students.
- TAFE co-ordinators to provide the school with information on the work to be completed each week so school staff can support TAFE students.
- TAFE to ensure content is accessible remotely.

- TAFE to seek to provide greater variety in offerings at local campuses that are targeted at local industries so regions can “grow their own” future workforce and reduce the number of young people moving away from regional, rural and remote areas.
- TAFE to provide flexibility around catch-up days for students who need to attend school for Year 11 and 12 Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) exams.
- TAFE to offer courses which are directly related to the needs of students in areas which may not be overly popular e.g. Cert III Engineering (Graphics).

QCEC suggests that implementing the actions outlined above would improve student attendance and participation, raise completion rates and recognise and support the role schools have in fostering student learning whilst at school. Secondary school students tend not to be part of the general student cohort attending TAFE, and schools have a responsibility to oversee and engage with each student’s learning even where the learning is provided by a third party, such as TAFE. CSAs advise they see great benefit in a closer relationship with TAFE and would welcome this opportunity.

The Rockhampton CSA advises that Catholic schools in Rockhampton are well supported by the public TAFE provider (i.e. Central Queensland University (CQU) TAFE) which provides an excellent variety of courses and positive student experiences. However, for schools in regional locations of Bundaberg, Emerald and Gladstone the range of offerings are not equivalent due to difficulty in sourcing staff to deliver in these locations; a difficulty which is known to be common in regional, rural and remote areas across Queensland. In response to these challenges, QCEC recommends that TAFE consider how a greater variety of course offerings can be made available in various locations through the use of flexible and remote delivery of learning and teaching.

Whilst CSAs support and welcome a wide variety of course offerings, there is also strong support for public providers of VET to have a strategic focus on course offerings that are linked to current and future jobs identified as in demand in regional, rural and remote areas. For example, the Queensland Future Skills (QFS) Partnership is a three-way partnership between BHP Mitsubishi Alliance (BMA), TAFE Queensland and CQUniversity and is designed to fund and facilitate the fast-tracked development and delivery of automated technology pathways, skill sets and qualifications in open-cut mining operations in Queensland. The Queensland Future Skills (QFS) Partnership delivers government-subsidised training for the new Certificate II in Autonomous Technologies (10935NAT) to students in Central Queensland and Brisbane. The course provides participants with lifelong learning skills to pursue pathways into further vocational or tertiary studies as well as the training and knowledge required to work within the fields of autonomous environments which is an increasing focus in mining operations.

## **2. The role of public providers in VET delivery for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples including enablers and barriers to VET in rural, remote and regional Queensland**

A key enabler to participation in, and successful completion of VET courses for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples is for TAFE to support the establishment of direct relationships between course trainers, school-based VET leaders and school-based Indigenous support officers. These school-based staff could enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students VET experience by supporting students both culturally and educationally.

CSAs advise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from regional, rural and remote areas face the same barriers as other students with VET offerings not being equivalent to offerings in greater metropolitan areas. This issue becomes even more pronounced the more remote an area is.

Some CSAs also suggest that consideration be given to providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with the option to undertake two VET in Schools (VETiS) funded qualifications. This would not necessarily be to preference VET pathways over other post-school options, but rather to provide targeted skill development for those students intending to return to remote communities in industries where there is a genuine opportunity for employment within the remote or very remote community.

Other suggestions to better support participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students could be assistance with transport to and from TAFE centres and consultation with local communities to ensure courses are relevant and delivered in a culturally appropriate manner and flexible, as well as offered in blended modes of delivery.

### **3. Examples of existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET**

Rockhampton CSA reports that an existing initiative through the Hervey Bay TAFE campus provides an excellent example of public providers meeting students need. TAFE staff support students and their families by ensuring that students are aware of what VET courses are available and likely job opportunities. This partnership is particularly helpful when students are developing their senior education and training (SET) plans and also provides TAFE with an opportunity to see first-hand the course preferences of young people. The Hervey Bay TAFE campus continues to provide a variety of courses that students have accessed based on their individual Senior Education and Training (SET) plans.

Public providers of VET could also support priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET by offering 1 on 1 guidance on course selections by accredited career guidance staff to assist students to see future pathways that the VET courses can provide. This could involve a closer working relationship between school-based career counsellors and expert VET career guidance counsellors, ensuring there is shared understanding and knowledge of future job opportunities, student preference in terms of course offerings and delivery mode, and how VET can provide a pathway to a range of career and further learning opportunities.

Another example of a successful existing initiative, reported by the Toowoomba CSA, is that the local TAFE specifically advertises the VETiS funded courses on offer which assists schools to make these opportunities known to students. An additional suggestion to support students to access localised and place-based VET is for public providers to consider flexible/blended delivery modes which would assist with school timetabling.

### **4. Examples of successful localised VET models and learnings that could be applied in other locations**

The following examples of successful localised VET delivery include training delivered by both public and private training providers and demonstrate innovative partnerships that are delivering VET solutions responsive to local needs and achieving successful outcomes for students.

In Emerald, a successful localised VET model is the Emerald Drone Program. This is a collaborative training model whereby students from all schooling sectors complete a Certificate III in Aviation Remote Pilot at a shared location. This ensures enough participants for the training provider to deliver the VET course and provides opportunities for students to learn with, and from, their peers in the community.

Marist College Emerald, the lead school for the Emerald Drones in Schools Program, initiated the program in 2018 to provide training for students that is relevant to emerging job opportunities in their region. The program includes all secondary schools in the area collaborating with an external Registered Training Organisation (RTO), local Councils and local industry to support an annual cohort of students to participate in and complete the program (over 260 students have completed the program since 2018).

The Drones in Schools project was named as one of Queensland's top-three finalists for the 2020 Premier's Industry Collaboration Award, creating opportunities for students to develop vocational STEM skills. The program also includes a focus on increasing participation by female students in STEM related qualifications. The program provides students with a qualification that offers pathways for students directly into industries such as the agricultural industry (crop inspection, pesticide targeting) and mining - both of which are industries common to the region and which are embracing technology solutions. Schools saw a need and coordinated the program.

Another example of a successful localised VET model is an initiative of Shalom College in Bundaberg. Shalom College offers the Certificate II in Conservation and Ecosystem Management in collaboration with Where Youth Live Dreams (WYLD) Projects Indigenous Corporation, and Tallebudgera Education to support four First Nations students to gain the skills to support an endangered turtle population. As a result of their participation in this program, three students identified that they intend to pursue environmental studies or environmental pathways, and one student has obtained employment with WYLD Projects in ecosystem management.

The Toowoomba CSA reports that in Dalby, TAFE has partnered with Our Lady of the Southern Cross College to deliver the Certificate II Horticulture on the school campus at the school's Horticulture facility. This training and assessment, provided by TAFE personnel has supported students to complete the qualification which in turn has provided students with an opportunity to connect with local employers and commence a School Based Traineeship in the Certificate III Agriculture.

## **5. Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training to facilitate improved delivery in these areas**

CSAs see an opportunity for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) to implement a planned and targeted approach to assist schools to provide guidance to students on future pathways by sharing advice from local employers on what jobs are in demand for each region, skill sets required and match these to qualifications relevant to work in local areas. This approach could build on the support provided by the Regional School Industry Partnership (RSIP) managers who have been appointed by the Department of Education to strengthen school-industry partnerships and support school to work transitions.

Through DESBT's employer networks, DESBT could also encourage employers to support students with work experience and/or school-based apprenticeships. Many CSAs report that schools struggle to establish connections with employer networks or have access to resources, and as such, they are constantly searching to identify employers who are looking for potential staff and may be able to support school students with a VET placement. It is suggested that through a greater focus on growing dedicated relationships between DESBT field officers, local industries and school-based VET leaders (that goes beyond inviting schools to industry roundtables), schools could be better informed of opportunities in their local area. If students are engaged in local work experience in regional, rural and remote areas, they are more likely to consider remaining in the community where they have access to employment and can complete their VET qualification.

QCEC acknowledges and appreciates that some of this activity is already occurring in some locations to varying degrees. However, feedback from some CSAs indicates that greater gains could be achieved through a stronger relationship between DESBT field officers and school VET leaders. DESBT regional offices are well placed to be a link between schools, industry and employers and support collaboration that will help schools to provide a pipeline into work and future work growth areas (e.g. renewable energy) for young people in regional, rural and remote areas.

QCEC appreciates the opportunity to provide a submission to the Education, Employment and Training Committee's inquiry into the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland and would be pleased to discuss the submission in more detail if necessary.

**Dr Lee-Anne Perry AM**  
Executive Director