

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

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Education, Employment and Training Committee
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To the Education, Employment and Training Committee

Inquiry into the Delivery of VET in Regional, Rural and Remote Queensland

On behalf of Caravan Parks Association of Queensland and Caravan Trade & Industries Association of Queensland (collectively referred to as **Caravanning Queensland**) we appreciate the opportunity to make a submission into the Inquiry into the Delivery of VET in Regional, Rural and Remote (**RRR**) Queensland.

As an industry we have two pathways into employment, the first is through on the job learning, generally unaccredited, the second is through VET (an apprenticeship, traineeship, or VETiS).

With access to an interested and engaged workforce being one of the key constraints to our industry at present, these VET pathways are even more critical, particularly where they provide pathways for young people entering the workforce.

Over 75% of our member caravan parks and 30% of our trade members are located in regional Queensland. The bulk of these businesses are also micro to small operations with limited resources, where even the business owner is involved in the day-to-day operation of the business.

RRR businesses face additional challenges, particularly around employment, beyond those faced by businesses located in Brisbane and on the Gold and Sunshine Coast's, with a lower population base and less access to support than their city counterparts.

In the past three years, caravanning has continued to grow in popularity with more RV's¹ on the road than ever before. In the 2022 financial year alone, the Caravanning Industry is responsible for over 12 million visitor nights across the state, with over 83% of these in regional Queensland².

¹ A collective term to encompass all recreational vehicles including but not limited to caravans, campervans, motorhomes, camper trailers, tent trailers and slide-ons.

² Tourism Research Australia (TRA) – National Visitor Survey YE June 2022



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RV production for 2022 is approaching 27,431 units³ (highest recorded manufacturing figures in over 4 decades) and Queensland continues to lead the nation in RV registrations with over 210,000 vehicles registered⁴.

With this surge in RV ownership and visitation, the Queensland RV industry is reporting a dramatic increase in demand for servicing, repairs and warranty work, along with increased use of caravan parks. The ability to provide quality work in a timely manner, or in the case of accommodation, a quality experience, is critical to the ongoing success of the many businesses within our industry.

There are several challenges and opportunities facing VET programs in RRR Queensland which we have set out below.

Access to information and support

While many businesses in our industry would like to access the programs currently available, they state that their access to clear and concise information is a barrier.

While programs exist to provide connections to funded programs, training providers and jobseekers through schools, employment agencies or other relevant stakeholders, for those businesses in RRR Queensland, it can be harder to access these services. Further these services do not have a strong connection to community.

While the introduction of Industry based Workforce Advisors is a step in the right direction, the development of a self-service website which clearly outlines the programs available and how to get more information on them would assist RRR businesses.

While Regional Community Forums are critical to provide insight from beyond South East Queensland, the state is large and for many regions, the cost to travel to their closest regional meeting can be significant, with some business owners having to travelling the equivalent of a full day.

A self-service website would allow these business owners to access information at a time that suits them – with many of our members being small businesses, this kind of task is normally designated to late in the evening when their business has closed to customers.

This may include recommendations for business owners on how they can approach their local school or to identify other organisation which can assist them to recruit school leavers (or VETiS students) or cohorts that would not traditionally be considered (migrants, those with a disability etc).

Industry based internships, projects and work experience

Relevant government agencies, including local governments, should continue to work with industry bodies to develop industry-based internships, projects, and work experience opportunities for students and vulnerable cohorts in RRR Queensland. Many businesses in these regions would welcome the opportunity to provide an internship or work experience opportunity however are unsure how to go about doing this.

Work experience opportunities for school students can create an employment pathway or provide awareness about VET opportunities in industries they may otherwise have not known of as they leave school and enter the workforce.

³ Caravan Industry Association of Australia October 2022 RV Production Report, Data provided by nEM Australasia

⁴ Caravan Industry Association of Australia, Caravan and Campervan Data Report 2021, October 2021

Most schools currently include a work experience program in year 10, with students spending one whole week in a business. Many schools struggle to find enough host employers for their “wannabe tradies” with many businesses seeing this program as a hinderance to their work schedule. Re-education on this program is required to sell the benefits to potential host employers. Additional financial incentives could be offered to businesses that host and ultimately follow through with apprenticeship offerings for work experience students.

Students can perform up to 30 days of work experience, per year. If employees host a student, loved them and potentially wanted to offer them employment, they could negotiate with the school to keep them longer, inviting them back for another stint of work experience before committing. The school would prepare a work experience contract that is signed by all parties, outlining dates, times etc. This also covers the student with Work Cover, liability insurance etc.

Mentoring and support for employers

The provision of support to employers with apprentices and trainees in RRR, where the student doesn't have the same access to trainers, would support stronger job outcomes.

Many businesses employing an apprentice or trainee for the first time would benefit from mentoring and/or support through this process. Where the apprentice or trainee does not attend a face-to-face training facility on a regular basis, the lack of support for the employer may result in knowledge gaps or the poor employment outcomes if the apprentice/trainee does not feel supported.

This support may be provided online or in person depending on the location and the number of other businesses in the region needing support.

Higher government subsidies for regions

While Away from Base funding is available for some students, businesses employing apprentices and trainees are often responsible for these costs. Due to the RRR locations of these businesses these costs are significantly higher than they would be for their city counterparts.

Doubling (or significantly increasing) the subsidies available for employers with apprentices and/or trainees in RRR would assist in offsetting these costs, making these options more attractive.

Impact on workflow and productivity

While businesses understand that the long-term benefits of hiring an apprentice or trainee can be significant, many in RRR Queensland note the impact that training time can have on their business.

For those businesses in RRR, many send their apprentices off to training for a two-week block, rather than one day a week/fortnight. This block can have significant impacts on workflow and schedules with some employers advising us that they have had to get contractors in to minimise customer delays during this period. While this face-to-face training is critical to the success of the apprentice or trainee's education outcomes, it does create a barrier for employers considering this as an employment option.

For many modules within existing qualifications, it is unviable for RTO's to deliver these in small groups. This is why employers are currently sending their appreciates or trainees to SEQ for block training within a large group scenario.

More opportunities for remote learning need to be investigated and better utilisation of regional TAFE training facilities to reduce the amount of time apprentices and trainees spend away from their employer. Investigate options to utilise existing and emerging communication technology to enable regional students to attend groups sessions remotely, while working with the same equipment, tools and materials as those attending the block training.

Consideration should be given to encouraging trainers to work across multiple campus' to provide appropriate training to RRR apprentices and trainees closer to their homes.

Incentives to stay

Businesses in RRR Queensland report that they have experienced instances where young apprentices or trainees work within their business while they get qualified and then once qualified, leave for 'the big smoke'.

While a Train and Retain marketing campaign is planned to 2023, this focusses on workplace cultures rather than keeping skills in the regions.

Consideration should be given to programs which encourage young people to stay in region, or to attract people to RRR Queensland.

TAFE Super Hub

An opportunity exists to establish a "TAFE Super Hub" in a major centre in either Central or North Queensland. TAFE campuses in Sout East Queensland like Acacia Ridge, are blessed with state-of-the-art facilities, crossing multiple industry sectors. Replicating these facilities further north exposes apprentices and students to the same opportunities to those in the South East of the state without having to travel great distances.

Affordable, onsite accommodation located within the campus could be offered to apprentices and students attending block training. This accommodation and associated facilities could actually form part of the training modules for students.

There would be construction, maintenance and repair work associated with the ongoing management of this onsite accommodation that would provide valuable "real-life" training and experiences for apprentices from a variety of industry sectors. In addition to this, hospitality students could also be involved in catering to those staying onsite.

Work and Play Opportunities

For tourism students, on the job training could be provided in a location away from their home offering a work and play opportunity.

Tourism businesses in the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, the Whitsundays, and Cairns, often offer a very different experience to a tourism business in the Outback (for example), these work/play opportunities – or a regional exchange program – has the potential to provide a greater job outcome with varying experience gained through the process.

Support of short-courses

As the way we work changes, smaller businesses may not have the resources to support an apprentice or trainee due to the impact that this individual has on the productivity of the workplace.

In these instances, a more flexible training model, still supported by the Government, may provide a better outcome. This could potentially allow the student/employee to undertake a range of 'micro-credentials' which collectively could be recognised as a unit of competency towards an accredited qualification.

Effective training for the trainers

As technology evolves, it is critical that trainers maintain industry currency – something which is easier to maintain when located in a major city or regional centre.

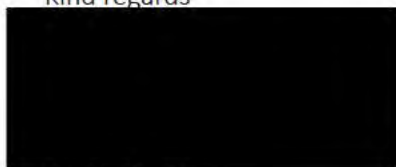
Those trainers working in RRR Queensland should be provided support and incentives to assist them to maintain their industry currency. It is vital for Government agencies to engage with industry regularly to ensure current and relevant methods, equipment and technology are being utilised within training organisations.

For more information

Employment pathways are critical to addressing staffing shortages within our industry and a strong RRR VET Program will assist our members in RRR Queensland in achieving similar outcomes as their metropolitan counterparts.

Should you have further questions about this submission, please do not hesitate to contact us on the details in the cover email sent with this letter, or on page one of this document.

Kind regards



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Caravanning Queensland

We trade under the brand **Caravanning Queensland** which joins the two related but separate peak industry bodies in Queensland:

Caravan Parks Association of Queensland (CPAQ) the voice of the caravan park owners and operators and the associated supply chain in Queensland. CPAQ has over 430 full and associate members located across Queensland.

Caravan Trade & Industries Association of Queensland (CTIAQ) the voice of the trade sector in the caravan and camping industry in Queensland with a membership made up predominantly of retailers, manufacturers, hirers, repairers, and suppliers in the caravan and camping industries. CTIAQ has over 240 full and associate members located across Queensland.