

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

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Submission to Queensland Parliament Inquiry into the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland

Presented to: Committee Secretary
Education, Employment and Training
Committee
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Introduction

Livingstone Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry into the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland.

Livingstone Shire Council is situated in the Capricornia region of Central Queensland. Covering an area of 11,800 square kilometres, the Shire incorporates the coastal areas of Yeppoon, Emu Park, Great Keppel Island, Stanage Bay and Keppel Sands; and the rural areas of Byfield, Cawarral, The Caves, Yaamba, Kunwarara, Marlborough and Ogmoo (refer figure 1). Approximately 400 staff provide services to a growing population of just over 39,000 residents.

Livingstone Shire Council provides this submission from the position as an employer in a regional area and the provision of VET training within our workforce.



Figure 1. Map of Livingstone Shire Council Local Government Area (LGA)

Response on inquiry submission

The major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET

As an employer in regional Queensland, we are currently experiencing some barriers in relation to VET based training across the cohorts of Water Industry Operations, Waste Management and Plumbing and Diesel Fitting trade-based qualifications. These are key service areas provided by local governments and being able to attract and maintain a skilled workforce within these industries has its challenges.

Water Industry Operations

The National Skills Commission, Skills Priority List, 2022 identified Waste Water and Water Treatment Plant Operators as being in shortage in Queensland. Livingstone Shire Council has continually supported staff (both existing workers and new entrant trainees) in gaining and upgrading VET qualifications within the Water Industry. During 2022 we experienced the withdrawal of TAFE Queensland, the only public provider in Queensland of Certificate III level qualifications in the Water Industry withdrawing all except one stream of this qualification from their scope. This leaves a huge deficit in providing VET training in this industry, which is already in a skills shortage. Alternative providers with this qualification on scope are limited, with only one other private provider available within Queensland.

Completed under traineeship arrangements this qualification attracts user choice funding at priority one level, which as an employer we are grateful to receive. Under current arrangements with the private provider, this funding is not passed on until the trainee successfully completes, as such meaning full course fees are required to be paid upfront. Being a government entity with a limited training budget these are considerable fees to manage in an already tight budget. It does also make it cost prohibitive in opening up further training opportunities to additional staff/trainees. Previous arrangements through the public provider saw fees managed progressively as units were enrolled into.

Waste Management

Another industry lacking in suitable providers for VET training is Waste. Whilst qualifications exist for Waste Management Operations (Certificate III and IV), there are no public providers offering these qualifications, furthermore no providers available at all within Queensland.

As detailed in the Queensland Government Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy, the vision for Queensland is to become a zero-waste society, where waste is avoided, reused and recycled to the greatest possible extent. This doesn't seem to be supported by the offering of VET training to provide formal qualifications to workers in this industry.

Another challenge is there is no funding allocated towards the costs in undertaking qualifications within this field from either a student or employer perspective.

To support Queensland's visions to become a zero-waste society, opportunities exist to encourage people to broaden a career in the waste management industry through subsidised formal VET qualifications.

Plumbing / Diesel Fitting

Livingstone Shire Council currently employ staff to undertake VET training under apprenticeship pathways within the Plumbing and Diesel Fitting trades. Whilst we are fortunate to have a local provider for the delivery of this training, the flexibility in delivery of this training

is restricted with apprentices at times waiting 12 or more months before attending their first block of formal training. This limits employers abilities to appropriately manage availability within the workforce as training blocks are then subsequently compressed over a shorter period of time during the remainder of the training contract. A further consequence of compressed training blocks means employers aren't having sufficient time to provide on the job learnings covering those competencies.

Within the plumbing industry, apprentices are required to travel to Mackay (4 hour drive from Yeppoon) to undertake their second to fourth year block training. From an employer perspective this adds significant costs in providing travel and accommodation to support their attendance. It is acknowledged that there are significant expenses in setting up specialised trade based learning facilities, however could facilities in the Rockhampton region be explored as a more central location, to better service apprentices and employers in the southern and western Central Queensland areas.

Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training to facilitate improvements in these areas.

The above points raised would likely be experienced across many local government authorities. The Central Queensland region alone comprises of 12 local government authorities with close neighbours Mackay and Wide Bay Burnett regions adding an additional 6 authorities. A leveraging factor the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training could investigate is working collectively with local governments in establishing centrally based provider/s to address some of the VET training barriers.

With regard to Water Industry Operations, during 2018/2019 discussions took place between CQUniversity, TAFE Queensland (SkillsTech) and the local government areas of Banana, Central Highlands, Gladstone, Livingstone and Rockhampton to try and establish regionally based water industry training. Unfortunately, nothing eventuated in the space, however we would welcome the opportunity for these discussions to be reopened.

To help address skills shortages in these professions, stronger partnerships between training providers (preferably within the local area) and industry could be cultivated. As with some other qualifications requiring a mandatory practical placement, linkages with Local Governments for this type of arrangements to occur with the Water and Waste Management industries could be explored. This would assist in connecting individuals with a desire for a career in these industries to employers who are actively seeking to fill shortages.

Supporting further education particularly to the high school/school leaver demographic on the benefits of careers within these industries and VET subsidised training pathways available could also facilitate improvements across these areas.

References

National Skills Commission, Skills Priority List, 2022

Queensland Government - Waste Management and Resource Recovery Strategy