

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

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**Submitted by:** Mackay Regional Council  
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Committee Secretary  
Education, Employment and Training Committee  
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### **Submission – Inquiry into the Delivery of VET in Regional, Rural and Remote Queensland**

Dear Sir/Madam

Mackay Regional Council (Council) congratulates the Queensland State Government in identifying the opportunity for an inquiry into the delivery of VET in Regional, Rural and Remote Queensland.

This submission is broken down into the below headings for your reference:

- The role of public providers in VET delivery in rural, remote, and regional Queensland
- The major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland
- Existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET
- Examples of successful localised VET models and how learnings might be applied in other locations
- Opportunities for the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training to facilitate improvements in these areas.

#### **The role of public providers in VET delivery in rural, remote, and regional Queensland**

1. There is a lack of public providers being able to provide face-to-face delivery for practical units in regional, rural and remote regions.
2. Public providers are increasingly removing qualifications that are deemed not business viable – which leaves organisations with no RTOs to delivery content, or limited RTOs which increase pricing and make it unaffordable organisations to train staff.



3. Cost effectiveness of public provider having more awareness of funding opportunities than private RTOs. Industry requires to utilise funding streams to access VET pathways, having a public provider that covers a larger scope of one-stop shop is more beneficial to organisations than managing several private providers for delivery of VET training.
4. Public providers should be supporting thin markets better and offer qualifications that are not being covered by private RTO's due to commercial viability.
5. Public providers provide limited face to face support to their students in remote and rural locations. Often the induction is completed via an email where documents are sent out. No consultation occurs and employers/students are left to fill out documents and return. This is not appropriate for ensuring an adequate Employer resource assessment is completed.
6. In Central Qld we are further limited by CQU being deemed our public provider. This means we do not have a strong TAFE Qld representation.

### **The major barriers to the provision of localised and place-based VET, and priority areas and cohorts in Queensland**

1. DESBT's lack of influence on private RTOs prevents delivering of critical skills in region.

**Example:** There is no available RTO for Certificate III – trade pathway in Australia that delivers the Certificate III Farrier qualification. If you were to pursue the Farrier career pathway, the only option is a Certificate IV and there is one RTO in Queensland located in Gatton. This is not easily accessible and can be costly to attend.

2. Commercial viability of delivering in rural or remote regions.
3. Commercial viability of thin market qualifications.
4. We often experience not being able to locate an RTO who will deliver qualifications into our region for our apprentices and trainees.

**Examples:** In two instances, we have not been able to progress with the position due to no availability of an RTO or have had to change qualifications.

Examples of where we have difficulty sourcing an RTO have include:

- Certificate III in Nursery Production
- Certificate III in Local Government
- Certificate III in Arts Administration



- Certificate III in Live Production and Technical Services
- Certificate III in Arboriculture.

5. DESBT's "hands off approach" is allowing RTO monopolies to occur.

**Example:** For the Water Industry Network Trainees we have only two operational SAS approved RTOs available. These RTOs are delivering substandard training for real world application and what organisations require their employees to do in industry.

**The Effect:** In the National Water Package (NWP) there are two operational SAS providers, one based in Melbourne and one based in Brisbane. The effect of not providing localised training includes:

- adding additional direct and indirect costs for organisations
  - the loss of resources to attend training both financial and via operational scheduling is reducing the number of enrolments into VET training.
  - with non-localised RTOs we find that not all VET delivery is suitable to online – practical Units of Competency are best delivered via face-to-face training. Reducing the face-to-face, hands-on assessment of enrollees from non-local RTOs and relying more on the approved supervisors to supply third party evidence allows for greater unconscious and conscious bias.
6. Significant focus is required from DESBT / ASQA and other government organisations to monitor the approval of over and under supply of scope for RTOs.

**Example:** The RII30120 – Certificate III in Surface Extraction Operations has 13 RTO SAS providers, whereas the NWP30219 – Certificate III in Water Industry Operations has two operational providers for an essential qualification to maintain the water and wastewater quality for Queensland communities.

7. Currently fit for purpose training is not specific to industry or facility requirements. DESBT could provide more support to gain a higher fit for employers across different industry.

**Example:** Confined space is industry specific for Regional Councils compared to mining organisations. A greater focus in content delivery is focused on mining organisations, leaving councils and other industry employers to pay RTOs extra to create content specific to their requirements.



### Existing programs that might assist in reducing barriers or supporting priority cohorts in accessing localised and place-based VET

1. Organisations often pay for their trainees and apprentices to attend training and supply them with resources due to cost of living and affordability pressures. However, organisations can struggle to provide these services as the VET funding subsidies are given directly to the individual trainee or apprentice and not the organisations that have actually paid for the travel or resources.

**Example:** Council may pay \$1000 for an apprentice's tools but aren't eligible for the \$500 tool subsidy and this money then goes directly to the apprentice, there is also the requirement for travel and accommodation costs that are paid by the employer on behalf of the employee to attend training. We are then put in the awkward position to attempt to get the apprentice/trainee to reimburse the subsidy back to the employer.

**Solution:** A more beneficial approach would be to provide an option for where the money is returned – if employer pays – employer is reimbursed – if employee pays then employee is reimbursed.

2. Some RTOs are requesting full fee prior to releasing learning materials, this is placing financial strain on employers, and reducing the number of VET enrolments.

Stipulate in the policy of SAS providers that full cost of training cannot be an upfront payment from employer.

3. Incentivise RTOs to deliver into rural and remote areas.
4. Tighten up on price gouging by SAS providers with a lack of competition to keep them reasonable.
5. DESBT could ensure that if the SAS has the qualification on their scope, they are then delivering the qualification.
6. Action to be taken by DESBT to prevent an SAS from only delivering in SE Qld and refusing to accept training in rural and remote Qld.

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

1. RTOs with Head Offices in SE Qld have a local office in Mackay and are providing a quality training service and delivery. For example - Axiom College. Axiom is delivering a blended model of online training supported by face to face with trainer.



2. Current Training – Delivers RII and short courses. Based in Brisbane, trainer regularly travels to employers and delivers site-based training.

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

1. RTOs will not hold scope if they have low participant numbers enrolled in certain qualifications regardless of if the qualification is on the Skills Priority List or not. RTOs have no financial incentive to keep VET qualifications on scope.
2. Often travel out of region to gain access to an RTO is a problem. Small business and the apprentices /trainees cannot afford to do this, and more support is needed to establish local RTOs.
3. Not enough Industry bodies are advocating and driving industry upskilling. For example, Queensland Water have aligned their advisory and advocacy body with Regional Councils to fund and drive the upskilling of Water Industry Workers.
4. Industry representatives are the best choice to hold RTO accountable.
5. Funding to go through industry bodies to RTOs would be beneficial in keeping RTOs accountable. DESBT to provide oversight for bias and conflicts of interest.
6. DESBT does a great deal in terms of information and general awareness which is great; but is seen as a toothless tiger when it comes to taking action.
7. DESBT struggle to hold an underperforming RTO accountable. An example of this is where there is only one RTO in Region. Organisations must tolerate low service delivery and sub-standard outcomes, to avoid losing the only RTO capable of delivering in region. DESBT can at times knowingly allow this behaviour by not holding the RTO accountable for the standard of training they deliver.
8. DESBT doesn't actively support commercial RTO competition through their current SRTO certification program. Organisations have experienced resistance from DESBT to accredit new SRTOs.
9. Reviewing the user choice access to allow more opportunity to qualifications such as the NWP training package. Smaller regional councils have cross over of teams in maintaining essential water and wastewater activities – although they are only able to access User Choice once for their role, they require training in more than two specialisations from the NWP. This adds additional costs and minimises skilling of individuals based on funding access.



10. Provide more flexibility in fit for purpose training especially for high level skills arena. Example of the NWP is that 10 units are required with electives coming from NWP, BSB, TAE, TLI and other. RTOs with more specialised fit for purpose training and industry specific focus may be better to deliver Units of Competency from different packages for the qualification, than one RTO with a generalised approach delivering the whole qualification.

If you have any queries on the above submission, please contact our Learning and Development Team via email at [REDACTED] or via phone on [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely,



**Scott Owen**  
*Chief Executive Officer*