

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

Submission No: 30

Submitted by: Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA)

Publication:

Attachments:

Submitter Comments:

Submitter Recommendations:

Queensland Secondary Principals' Association



Submission –

INQUIRY INTO THE DELIVERY OF VET IN REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE QUEENSLAND

Submission Date: February 2, 2023

Prepared by: Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA)

Email contact details: [REDACTED]

Postal Details:

Mark Breckenridge

QSPA President

PO Box 3140

South Brisbane

QLD 4101

The Queensland Secondary Principals' Association (QSPA) would like to thank the Education, Employment and Training Committee of the Queensland Parliament for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland.

QSPA appreciates the extension of time provided for this submission.

QSPA is the professional organisation representing Government secondary Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department. QSPA members are represented in more than 90% of state secondary schools in all parts of the state; metropolitan, regional, rural and remote ranging in size from several hundred to our largest schools of over 3000 students. Throughout this submission, where the term 'Principal' is used it should be read as encompassing all secondary school leaders as listed previously.

The provision of VET is an valuable part of the senior school curriculum across Queensland state secondary schools. VET complements the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority (QCAA) curriculum offerings to ensure all students have access to a high quality, relevant learning and career pathway.

In many schools, and often those in regional, rural and remote parts of the state, VET offerings engage the majority of students. VET in schools provides students with the opportunity to undertake study pathways, earn nationally recognised qualifications and in many cases provide an entry point to a career post school. Students may choose to undertake more than one VET course during their senior schooling and not all students who complete a particular VET qualification will transition to that career post school.

VET provides valuable skills that enable communities to develop and retain young people on the completion of their certificate courses. A big part of why VET is so significantly in demand as a pathway in regional/remote schools is that the skills that are being taught are often in deficit and VET offers an industry-ready way to sustain the community by training locals to live locally and give back to the community. An example would be the Cert II Health Support Services – there aren't enough people to run the local nursing homes, so by training students who want to stay local and close to their families to fill these positions, it is sustaining local communities and the community's ability to fill their own needs.

It is common for schools to be the Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with the Principal (known in this context as the CEO of the RTO) accountable for the operations and governance of the RTO. Schools report that students have the greatest chances of success when undertaking VET courses when it is part of their normal timetable of study delivered by one of their regular teachers. This allows for greater levels of continuity and connection with the teacher, closer monitoring of progress and ultimately greater chances of success.

It is also common for external RTO's to provide course delivery to students. While this works well in major metropolitan centres through proximity and the availability of reliable public transport, this is not always the case in regional, rural and remote parts of Queensland. Attracting RTOs to smaller centres, geographically removed from major centres is a major barrier to students being able to access the diverse range of VET opportunities. Part of this complication includes the smaller student numbers in these schools.

Some schools report success by having an external RTO come to the town/community for a whole day or longer block of time to maximise enrolment, learning and outcomes. However, this brings with it other complications associated with disparate, intensive training sessions rather than regular practice and exposure to skill development opportunities afforded to students in more urban settings. Schools also report higher levels of disengagement and a greater number of issues regarding monitoring of progress when external RTOs deliver courses. In this way, the connection with a teacher within the school each day (as discussed previously) is a significant factor in student success.

If an external RTO is unable to provide on-site learning and the school is not an RTO then the alternative is transporting students to the nearest centre that has providers able to deliver desired courses.

The tyranny of distance is a major complicator as is the cost of providing transport with many families in rural and remote parts of the state suffering financial distress. Distance equates to time and the further a student must travel means the longer their day is disrupted. School timetables have a degree of flexibility that is used to support VET students external to the school, however that flexibility is understandably finite. Outside of school activities such as part time employment, sport, cultural and/or family responsibilities also come into play when a student considers the practicality of undertaking VET in a location separate to their own community.

Increasing use of, and access to, technology has broadened the way VET can be delivered. Whilst this has been of benefit in many locations there are still parts of this state where lack of access and poor connectivity severely impact opportunities for students to access VET online. Whilst technology has helped, external RTOs are still required to deliver a certain % of the course face-to-face. It must also be recognised that parts of some VET courses, sometimes large parts, can only be delivered face to face; online delivery is not possible, particularly when practical application is necessary.

Enrolling in VET courses comes with it the requisite amounts of paperwork necessary for the RTO-be it external or school-based. Schools report that low levels of literacy of parents/families, including first nations families, is a barrier to successfully engaging with VET.

Within Queensland state secondary schools there is a cohort of students who are in Out of Home Care situations, managed by Child safety. Schools report that liaising with Child Safety for consent and other required paperwork for VET/approval for student to undertake VET (usually via an external provider) is more onerous and complicated than for those students residing at home/with family. This is not a criticism of Child Safety, rather highlighting an additional barrier for some students.

In some regional locations there are disproportionately high numbers of students from English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). This is a consequence of 457 VISAs and the need for visa holders to live in non-metropolitan settings. These students and their families require additional levels of support to access, navigate and succeed in school and in this case VET.

Where a qualified trainer delivers VET in an external provider situation Queensland state secondary schools must still ensure a staff member is also present, further complicating access for schools and students.

For schools that operate as an RTO, qualified staff are a requirement in the provision of VET. Staff delivering VET need to have completed a Cert IV in Training and Assessment (TAE). This is in addition to their already completed teaching qualifications. They must also be able to produce evidence that they hold the competency that they are delivering, or the same competency at a higher level. Historically, if a teacher doesn't have the competency, they needed to be able to provide evidence that they had the relevant skills from other learning. E.g if a teacher does not hold a Cert I in IT, but was able to demonstrate units from their Bachelor of IT that cover network design as evidence that they are qualified to teach a competency in network design within a Cert I IT.

Schools report that this has been made more difficult over time as what is deemed as acceptable evidence of competency has been tightened to the point where a teacher effectively now has to hold the competency itself. Schools report that the content of Bachelor level degrees does not satisfy audit requirements as evidence of teacher ability to deliver that competency. A practical example-this means that even though a school has Dance teachers on staff who run their own Dance studios outside of school and teach Dance/ run Dance Troupe at school, the teacher is required to complete a Cert III Dance-Teaching Assistant (some RPL exists).

These staff are also required to undertake training to maintain their 'industry currency'. Releasing teachers to undergo this training in business/industry provides a challenge to schools, as they must backfill the teacher during their absence. This is not only a financial cost to schools but also impacts the classes that the teacher is not in front of. Continuity and potentially quality of learning is impacted through the absence of a teacher at industry training. Identifying relevant industry placements to host industry currency is also an issue. Often there is a lack of local providers that teachers can access to ensure their industry currency, therefore requiring travel and time away to a metropolitan/larger regional centre to complete their currency requirements. Costs schools meet for this include travel, accommodation and backfill for the teacher whilst away.

Maintaining this level of currency on top of the other professional development needs of teachers is significant. There is a large amount of work required for teachers to deliver high quality VET programs. In many regional, rural and remote schools VET is the predominate senior offering taken by students. Many schools report that the number of students undertaking VET as their primary pathway of study far exceed those students who are university (ATAR) bound.

Staff turnover in regional, rural and remote Queensland is a significant issue that impacts schools every year. The more remote the greater the impact. Often schools in these locations are geographically isolated and whilst incentives exist, attracting and retaining staff is a constant challenge. With high levels of staff turnover there is an ongoing requirement for schools to train staff to undertake VET- this is not a one-off occurrence in many schools. It can happen annually. This turnover creates significant issues with maintaining current Training and Assessment Schedules (TAS)/ HR profiles/ and associated bureaucracy for the school as an RTO; if you can't find a teacher with the specific competencies required for the existing TAS, then the school needs to rewrite the TAS to suit the skillsets of the new teacher, which makes continuity difficult.

Where a school is delivering VET an internal review is required yearly, an external audit every four years. Teachers must produce the appropriate TAS, HR profile and assessment. Assessment must be validated over a five-year cycle. This all creates additional workload for staff and is noted as a turn off for teachers and schools to deliver VET.

VETiS funding is provided by the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and is available for students to access once only to undertake a Certificate level I or II. If students wish to complete additional VET certificate courses the cost of that must be met by the student or family. Schools in some cases also provide financial support. The inability to access VETiS funding to support enrolment in VET is a barrier for families facing financial hardship. In the words of a Principal:

"This is also a further incentive for schools to be their own RTOs – offering training at limited or no cost to students; however this then creates the administrative nightmares for schools outlined above.

It is a catch 22 – we either support our students to access the training appropriate to their community needs and individual pathways, and in doing so take on the bureaucracy of being an RTO, or we remain at the mercy of whatever external RTOs are prepared to work with us, accept their terms, and burn the finite VETiS allocations students have access to.

Future considerations:

- Investigate ways that external providers of VET can more readily be supported to provide courses in areas where students are located.
- Redefine 'industry currency' to better reflect the realities of business and industry that may not undergo significant changes. Consider currency every 5 years. Rather than having a teacher attend external training broaden opportunities for teachers demonstrate to their currency/expertise.
- Consider embedding Cert IV TAE in tertiary education courses or recognise teacher preparation courses as prior learning to meet the competencies of the TAE. Focus on industry currency.
- Investigate models in other jurisdictions that focus on improving indigenous access, eg. Wilcannia-Forbes Aboriginal Corporation in New South Wales and consider how learnings from these can be applied in the Queensland context.
- Consider how Government agencies can further facilitate improvements by providing funding and support for infrastructure development in remote and regional areas, as well as increasing the availability of training providers in these areas.
- Consider expanding VETiS model to fund more than one course for a student.

QSPA is appreciative of the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry and looks forward to the findings and their subsequent improvement in the delivery of VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland.