

Education, Employment and Training Committee

Delivery of Vocational Education and Training in Rural,
Regional and Remote Queensland



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Overview

1. The Queensland Government is committed to a strong, stable and inclusive vocational education and training (VET) sector. This commitment is supported by an investment of over \$1 billion in 2021-22. Through this investment, the Government is assisting all Queenslanders, including those in regional, rural and remote communities, to access the skills and training they need to get a job now, and in the future.
2. The Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) oversees the VET system in Queensland and facilitates access and participation in VET pathways, enabling Queenslanders to gain employment in current and future industries. Specifically, DESBT is focused on delivering a responsive, flexible and adaptable training system, that will help Queensland workers to gain new skills, up-skill and re-skill to remain agile and responsive throughout their careers as industries, technologies and jobs change.
3. Queensland's economic recovery to date has been strong. Over 124,000 more Queenslanders are in jobs now than at the beginning of the pandemic. However, many industries and regions are reporting ongoing workforce challenges that extend across the labour market in both skilled and unskilled/lower-skilled occupations. This issue is being expressed as a critical challenge across all sectors and all regions throughout Australia, including through media commentary.
4. In response to these workforce shortages, the Queensland Government hosted the Queensland Workforce Summit 2022 on 11 March 2022 to identify strategies and actions for addressing current and future workforce needs. The Summit was underpinned by key themes that emerged from stakeholder engagement throughout late 2021:
 - 'Growing your own' – Leveraging Queensland's unique regional diversity by addressing workforce challenges and opportunities through place-based approaches;
 - Shaping work-ready Queenslanders through school-to-work experiences that are underpinned by strong partnerships between schools and industry to support career planning, career advice and work readiness;
 - Maximising workforce participation through harnessing the skills, capabilities and potential of every Queenslanders and supporting employers to access diverse and inclusive sources of workforce supply;
 - Supporting employers to attract and retain suitable staff against a backdrop of already low unemployment, the changes prompted by COVID-19, and the new world of work;
 - Ensuring that Queenslanders can access skills development pathways that support our current workforce needs and enable future opportunities to be realised; and
 - Harnessing workforce opportunities in emerging and growth industries.

5. Approximately 350 delegates across industry, business, education, government and the community attended the Summit, hearing from keynote speakers and contributing to interactive plenary sessions and workshops focused on developing tangible, cooperative solutions.
6. The Summit will be a key input into the development of a Queensland Workforce Strategy that considers the needs of industry to manage workforce changes and improve labour market outcomes.
7. Improved workforce participation through skills development not only improves direct economic outcomes, but also benefits Queensland regional communities more broadly through enhanced social inclusion. This is particularly important for those who experience barriers to labour market participation.
8. Under the *Skills for Queensland: Great Training for quality jobs strategy*, initiatives such as the Regional Jobs Committees have played an important role in supporting selected regional communities to identify current and emerging jobs in key industries, and workers to gain foundation, employability and technical skills to transition to the jobs of the future.
9. DESBT's 17 regional offices located across seven regions deliver targeted and place-based responses that link up economic and regional development activities and provide a critical footprint across regional Queensland.
10. TAFE Queensland is the largest provider of vocational education and training in the state. In 2020-21, TAFE Queensland delivered training to over 129,000 students across more than 465 programs. Of these students, 30% are located in rural, regional or remote areas. TAFE Queensland delivers training from over 60 campus locations with more than 40 of these located in rural, regional or remote communities.
11. Under the Future Skills Fund, DESBT is renewing and refurbishing training infrastructure right across the state so that trainers and students have access to contemporary fit-for-purpose training facilities and equipment, including \$100 million in 2021–22.
12. The Queensland Training Ombudsman's Review of VET provision in regional, rural and remote Queensland (the QTO Review) found that, overall, Queensland's vocational education and training (VET) system is being responsive to the needs of industry, individuals and local communities throughout the state. The QTO Review Report further found that DESBT is investing widely through a range of funding initiatives to identify skills gaps, and demand and supply issues at the local level. However, DESBT recognises the importance of being responsive to changing demands and economic factors that influence investment decisions and service delivery.
13. A key initiative being led by DESBT in response to the QTO Review is the development of a First Nations Training Strategy (the Strategy), which is a \$5 million

commitment under the Future Skills Fund. The Strategy will be an important part of DESBT's activities to drive improvements to participation and attainment by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in training and skills that leads to sustainable employment and meet relevant Closing the Gap targets (related to skills, training and employment). The Strategy will include a focus on regional and remote communities. As part of this work, DESBT is currently finalising a state-wide stakeholder consultation process to inform the development of key priorities and actions under the Strategy.

14. Detailed information on the range of DESBT supports, initiatives and programs are contained below.

VET Investment Framework

15. The Queensland Government invests in vocational education and training (VET) based on industry advice to provide Queenslanders with the skills they need to gain meaningful and sustainable employment. Government funding is directed to minimise skills shortages, focus on training for jobs that are in demand in critical industries, and increase the number of Queenslanders with formal post-school qualifications.
16. Queensland's current VET investment framework is largely managed through demand-driven training arrangements with key features including:
 - a network of Skills Assure Suppliers (SAS) pre-approved by the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) to deliver eligible training and assessment services – this includes both public and private providers;
 - published lists of qualifications and skill sets subsidised by government informed by industry advice and government priorities; and
 - choice for individuals and employers to select the qualification and the SAS that best meets their needs in terms of delivery strategy and location, value for money, and potential for securing employment in a priority industry.
17. Hence, Queensland has developed a system of quality training providers, offering choice and flexibility, and focused on the needs of students, employers and industry including in rural, regional and remote areas.
18. Queensland's current VET investment framework supports demand-driven funding arrangements across a number of program areas, provides support for disadvantaged learners and other priority student cohorts, and provides a significant contribution to public providers to enable them to operate in a competitive VET market. VET investment programs include:

- The Certificate 3 Guarantee program provides a government subsidy to allow eligible Queenslanders to obtain their first post-school certificate III level qualification.
 - The User Choice program provides public funding for the delivery of accredited, entry level training to apprentices and trainees.
 - The Higher-Level Skills program provides a government subsidy in selected certificate IV or above qualifications and priority skill sets to help individuals gain the higher-level skills required to secure employment or career advancement in a priority industry.
 - The JobTrainer Fund is helping Queensland's economy to recover from the impacts of COVID-19, in delivering additional free and low-cost training places in short courses, certificate and diploma qualifications to Queensland job seekers and young people.
 - The Free apprenticeships for under 25s initiative will cover the cost of training for eligible Queensland apprentices or trainees who commenced or are undertaking one of the 139 high priority apprenticeship or traineeship qualifications.
 - The Free TAFE for under 25s initiative will allow young people and school leavers up to the age of 25 years to choose to undertake one of 26 priority certificate III qualifications for free through TAFE Queensland and Central Queensland University only.
19. VET in Schools (VETiS) focuses on delivering qualifications to provide school students with the skills and knowledge required for employment in specific industries. VETiS can be undertaken in years 10, 11 and 12, and can count towards the Queensland Certificate of Education. Students undertaking VETiS funded under Certificate 3 Guarantee can complete one Certificate I or II level qualification while enrolled at a Queensland school.

Investment Loadings (including Regional)

20. Importantly for this inquiry, the department pays a higher subsidy to encourage and support participation by a range of priority student cohorts, including any student requiring foundation skills (LLN) training; concessional students; and students residing in country and remote areas in Queensland, and in Cape York and the Torres Strait.
21. Location loadings seek to support the costs of delivery into regional and remote areas of Queensland, to encourage and support greater VET participation, and encourage SAS to deliver across regions. Loadings are currently 115% for country areas, 175% for remote areas, and 250% for Cape York and Torres Strait.

22. Separately to the location loadings, concessional student status applies when the student holds a Health Care or Pensioner Concession Card issued under Commonwealth law; identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander; is a school student and is enrolled in a VETiS program (may include young people in detention); has a disability; or is an adult prisoner.
23. The Skills Assure Supplier (SAS) system provides a central register of pre-approved registered training organisations (RTOs) who have met the department's entry requirements to deliver training and assessment services subsidised by the department. This gives VET students, parents and employers confidence that the training delivered by these RTOs will develop skills that are valued by industry and will lead to employment.
24. The SAS system is based on a performance framework for the assessment, selection and monitoring of RTOs linked to national standards and department-specific quality requirements. Skills Assure aims to provide training participants with a level of assurance that their chosen RTO is able to deliver high-quality, industry-standard training that best meets their skilling and learning needs and supports employment opportunities.
25. SAS agreements are offered on a State-wide basis, with RTOs able to enrol eligible students from any region provided that they have the capability to deliver the training and assessment services.
26. There are currently **408** active SAS, **102** are located interstate, **306** are located in Queensland and **84** of the Queensland RTOs are located in 'regional and remote' areas.

Publicly Funded VET Participation

27. Throughout Queensland, overall publicly funded VET participation has increased from 199,753 students to 234,232 students from 2016-17 to 2020-21. This is an increase of 17.3%. This pattern of increasing student numbers since 2016-17 is present across all DESBT regions ranging from 4.8% increase in North Queensland to 22.5% in North Coast.
28. Female participation has increased from 84,000 students to 113,000 students since 2016-17 which is an increase of 33.9%. In 2020-21 females made up 48.2% of all government funded students in Queensland (up from 42.2% in 2016-17).
29. This pattern of increasing female student participation is consistent across all DESBT regions.
30. First Nations student participation has increased from 15,690 to 17,498 since 2016-17 which is an increase of 11.5%. Change varied across DESBT regions ranging from decreases in FNQ and NQ of 10.5% and 5.9% respectively through to an increase in Central Queensland of 38.1%.

31. Between 2016-17 and 2020-21 First Nations students represented about 8% of all government funded students in Queensland.
32. Students with a disability participation has increased from 12,028 to 17,328 since 2016-17 an increase of 44.1%. Change varied across DESBT regions ranging from no change in North Queensland and an increase of 6.0% in Far North Queensland to significant increases of 62.6% in Metropolitan and 75.0% in South East Queensland.
33. The participation of students with a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background increased from 13,765 to 20,256 since 2016-17. This is an increase of 47.2%. While large increases were recorded across all DESBT regions they ranged from 24.7% in Central Queensland to 135.4% in Far North Queensland.

Public Providers

34. Public training providers are an essential component of a healthy VET system and a strong economy, particularly for regional areas.
35. The four organisations recognised as public providers in Queensland are: TAFE Queensland and its subsidiary company Aviation Australia (AA), CQUniversity (CQU), and the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts (ACPA).
36. TAFE Queensland is the largest training provider in Queensland and is a statutory body governed by the TAFE Queensland Act 2013 (the Act).
37. Especially in regional centres, TAFE Queensland is critical to supporting job creation and economic development through education and training services, industry support and partnership approaches, community engagement and reliable infrastructure.
38. Aviation Australia is a niche provider of aircraft maintenance training and is a proprietary limited company subject to compliance with the provisions of the Corporations Act 2001 (Commonwealth). TAFEQ acquired the shares from the Minister for Training and Skills in AA in October 2017, which operates as a subsidiary company with a separate Board.
39. CQU is the only Queensland dual-sector entity under the Act. It is the public provider for the Central Queensland region.
40. CQU became a dual sector entity on 1 July 2014 when the businesses, assets and liabilities of the former Central Queensland Institute of TAFE (CQIT) were transferred to CQU under a Merger and Transfer Agreement (MTA) between the State of Queensland and CQU.
41. The Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts Pty Ltd (ACPA) is a niche performing arts organisation, supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural

performance and production skills. ACPA is also a registered training organisation (RTO).

42. ACPA is a not-for-profit proprietary company limited by shares and is wholly-owned by the Queensland Government with the Minister for the Arts as the sole shareholder.
43. All public providers also receive a State Contribution Grant (SCG) annually. The SCG recognises the additional costs borne by public providers and maintains their ongoing presence in the contestable training market by supporting public provider teacher salaries, learning materials, and teacher professional development.
44. Public providers are also Skills Assure Suppliers and are able to earn revenue under all VET Investment programs through demand-driven arrangements.
45. TAFE Queensland market share of government subsidised training increased to 36.7% in 2020-21 from 31.3% in 2019-20. This is the highest level it has been since 2013-14 (52.3%) before the introduction of the C3G contestable market.
46. TAFE Queensland has increased its market share across all regions since 2019-20 in a consistent manner, except for Central Queensland (where CQU operates) where it has increased to only 8.9%.
47. CQU has increased its student numbers by 12.3% since 2019-20 (from 5,773 to 6,485)

TAFE Queensland

48. TAFE Queensland has been delivering practical and industry-relevant training for 140 years, training that provides students with the skills and experience they need to build lifelong careers. As the largest provider of vocational education and training in Queensland, TAFE Queensland is a pre-approved supplier for the delivery of training and assessment services subsidised by the Queensland Government.
49. In 2020-21, TAFE Queensland delivered training to over 129,000 students across more than 465 programs. Of these students, 30% are located in rural, regional or remote areas.
50. Training delivery for students and apprentices is undertaken on site, online, in the workplace, or on campus to give people the skills they need to enrich their communities, support their industries, and strengthen their local economies. TAFE Queensland offers students access to over 60 campus locations throughout Queensland, from Thursday Island in the North to Coolangatta in the South East, and as far west as Mount Isa, as well as online and international training delivery. More than 40 of these TAFE Queensland campuses are located in rural, regional or remote communities.
51. TAFE Queensland has a highly experienced workforce dedicated to delivering best practice and innovative training that provides real employment outcomes for our

students and employers. With around 4,000 full-time equivalent employees, TAFE Queensland is a major employer in the state, particularly in rural, regional and remote locations.

52. TAFE Queensland aligns its training with the needs of Queensland's industries and communities across the state. Delivering entry-level certificates and apprenticeships to bachelor degrees, TAFE Queensland also designs new programs in areas of emerging need and supporting industry transformation.
53. DESBT owns and manages 45 TAFE sites across the state and makes capital investments to ensure that TAFE Queensland's training infrastructure can provide students with access to state-of-the-art training facilities and equipment to fit industry needs.
54. Since 2017, DESBT invested over \$225 million into upgrading, renewing and revitalising TAFE campuses to ensure Queenslanders are supported in skilling and training for jobs in growth and emerging industries. DESBT and TAFE Queensland continue to work together with QBUILD to successfully deliver investment and maintain the campuses.
55. From 2017 to 2020, approximately \$76 million has been invested into regional, rural and remote TAFE campuses, which includes;
 - \$10.9 million into upgrades at the Toowoomba campus for a new Rural Centre of Excellence, Block B nursing upgrades and new general learning spaces.
 - \$1.1 million into modernising the TAFE campus on Thursday Island
 - \$15 million into upgrading the automotive workshop, learning areas and establishing a hair, beauty and hospitality precinct at the Cairns TAFE campus
 - Almost \$33 million into modernising Pimlico TAFE, creating a central hub for hair and beauty, nursing, visual arts, cyber security/IT, and hospitality.
56. In 2020-21, the most popular training qualifications selected by TAFE Queensland students in rural, regional or remote locations were:

Certificate II in Engineering Pathways	Diploma of Nursing
Certificate III in Electrotechnology Electrician	Certificate II in Electrotechnology (Career Start)
Certificate II in Automotive Vocational Preparation	Certificate IV in Adult Tertiary Preparation
Certificate III in Individual Support	Certificate II in Salon Assistant
Certificate I in Construction	Certificate III in Community Services
Certificate III in Engineering - Mechanical Trade	Certificate II in Kitchen Operations
Certificate III in Engineering - Fabrication Trade	Certificate II in Plumbing
Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care	

57. There are many examples where TAFE Queensland's approach to training in rural, regional and remote locations results in enhanced outcomes for industry, community and First Nations people. These include:

- **Warpil – Torres Strait Regional Authority:** In the Torres Strait, TAFE Queensland is one of many partners working together to improve the Indigenous fishing industry. Through an initiative called Warpil (Wah-pil), which is a traditional word for many fish, TAFE Queensland is delivering the Certificate II in Maritime Operations (Coxswain Grade 1 Near Coastal) plus the Marine Radio Operator's skill set to local fishermen and women. Each course is delivered over a period of four weeks across many outer island communities. Both Commonwealth and State funding supports this initiative, which is designed to improve Indigenous employment in the Torres Strait and ensure safe workplace practices.
- **RATEP (Remote Area Teacher Education Program):** TAFE Queensland students have the opportunity to live locally and learn locally, and even study in their own language. Established in 1990, the RATEP program is a great example of this. It's a community-based primary education and early childhood education program. Through TAFE Queensland, James Cook University and the Queensland Department of Education, in liaison with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, RATEP provides a direct pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become registered teachers, qualified teacher aides or early childhood educators. RATEP training is delivered across the state including at Palm Island, Woorabinda, Ravenshoe, Yarrabah, Thursday Island, Cairns and Toowoomba. During their studies, RATEP students complete a set amount of vocational placement hours so they can start practising their new skills in a real environment, ensuring they're job-ready when they graduate.
- **Rangers Program:** Certificate III Conservation and Land Management: TAFE Queensland is receiving an increasing number of enquiries from Indigenous groups seeking training in Certificate III CALM. This training is being provided on-country (and in Cairns) with teachers travelling to location from Cairns and other regional centers to provide training in a local setting.
- **Cherbourg Yarning Circle:** Certificate I in Construction students assisted in the construction of the community Yarning Circle and gained on the job training. This was in collaboration with CCRAICHs, Cherbourg Shire Council and Darling Downs and West Moreton PHN. This is a space for First Nations people to come together in the community to connect in a traditional setting.
- **Chinchilla Electrical Training:** In 2021, TAFE Queensland worked with the Chinchilla Chamber of Commerce & Industry to establish delivery of electrical & instrumentation skills course programs at the Chinchilla Campus. This was after a community needs assessment determined between 80 – 100 electrical apprentices were identified as being needed in the region. Consultation continued to ensure the delivery was designed to be relevant to industry needs and industry support was significant with tools and equipment (hand tools,

meters, and switch boards) donated to enable industry current training. In Semester 1 2022, two electrical / instrumentation classes commenced as a result of this collaboration effort.

58. TAFE Queensland operates from exceptional training facilities that include purpose-built workshops (complete with world class equipment), fully functioning health clinics, simulation labs, digital studios, restaurants, beauty salons and gyms. In rural, regional and remote locations, upgraded campuses have contributed to outcomes for students, communities and local industry. These include:

- **T2S – Townsville Trade Training Centre Upgrade (Bohle):** Transition to Success (T2S) is a training program for young people of 15 and over who are involved in the youth justice system or who are assessed as being at risk of entering it. The Queensland Government's COVID Recovery Funding recently provided \$75,000 to the Horticulture facilities at Townsville's Trade Training Centre to provide a horticulture shade house to improve practical training opportunities in horticulture and commercial nursery methodologies. Ten young people recently participated in a short course "Farm Hand Course" through the Government's Job Trainer initiative at the Townsville Trade Training Centre, which will lead to further Certificate courses in Rural Operations, Conservation and Land Management and Horticulture. All participants are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This course will also be delivered at the Cairns Campus in November, to nine young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.
- **Student experience – Workshop Upgrade to Burdekin Campus:** As part of the COVID Recovery Funding, Burdekin Campus received \$350,000 to upgrade the existing trades workshop. The funding has provided revitalised engineering and automotive workshops; the replacement of well-used welding bays and the modernisation of general learning area classrooms to stimulate active learning for students. The works also included a ventilation upgrade, and workshop re-paint to enhance the student experience in the workshop training areas.

Rural Centre of Excellence (Toowoomba): The new Rural Centre of Excellence was opened at the Toowoomba campus in 2020. The \$2.7 million Centre as part of a \$7 million redevelopment of the Toowoomba campus, which included a major upgrade to the nursing, health care and general training facilities in B Block. The Rural Centre of Excellence delivers high-quality training to ensure the rural industry's workforce is equipped with a broad set of up-to-date skills and has the capacity to train up to an additional 400 students annually in the facility alone.

DESBT Regional Networks

59. DESBT operates across Queensland through seven regions via 17 regional offices to deliver targeted and coordinated place-based responses that link up economic and regional development activities.
60. DESBT regional offices support regional service delivery, including targeted engagement across Queensland regions, to increase economic participation by

supporting small business opportunities and a skilled workforce; promoting subsidised training opportunities aligned to employment, to increase participation in VET and address local skills needs; simplifying service delivery; and monitoring and regulating the Queensland apprenticeship and traineeship system.

61. DESBT regional offices offer personalised, local support and provide direct outreach to provide accurate, timely and contextualised information to customers including information and linkages on subsidised training opportunities, apprenticeships and traineeships, grants, initiatives and services. This support includes connecting to the department's assistance and services and providing resources and information.
62. To support regional jobs growth, DESBT also conducts targeted engagement with regional employers, small businesses and industry stakeholders to ensure training and employment solutions are aligned with local skill needs. This engagement is done through a range of mechanism including physical visits, where possible and Departmental Reference Groups, which are attended by a broad range of stakeholders.
63. DESBT regional staff monitor and provide advice and support about apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland. This includes assistance in conflict resolution and mediation processes to resolve issues in the workplace, with training organisations or other key stakeholders. Regional officers also undertake monitoring visits of employers, apprentices/trainees and registered training organisations to ensure quality training through educative processes. Regional officers make decisions under the *Further Education and Training (FET) Act 2014* about matters that may affect an employer and apprentice/trainee.

Regional Jobs Committees

64. Regional Jobs Committees (RJC) are an action identified in the Department's Industry Engagement Framework stemming from *The Queensland Skills Strategy - Skills for Queensland – Great Training for Quality Jobs*.
65. Nine RJC are now operating across Queensland in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Bundaberg, Fraser Coast, Redlands, Gold Coast, Springfield and Toowoomba.
66. RJC are funded up to \$150,000 per annum for committee operations and secretariat support costs.
67. RJC members volunteer their time to actively participate in regular meetings to collaborate and consult with peers regarding industry trends in terms of current and future jobs and employment opportunities in their region, and to explore and identify possible training solutions for skills gaps and training needs as they arise.
68. Outcomes and achievements of RJC vary across locations, based on local economic conditions and labour market opportunities. All RJC are positioned to provide local intelligence that can inform DESBT, and Jobs Queensland, of training,

skills and workforce development needs/gaps within their local communities and related response options.

69. RJC's are playing a role in developing and implementing collaborative place-based solutions to workforce challenges and opportunities within their regions. The Committees strengthen regional industry engagement arrangements and aim to effectively align government investment to incentivise participation in skills and training most needed by employers.
70. RJC's participate in discussions with local employers, schools and other stakeholders regarding recruiting, retention and skills development practices with the aim of improving the understanding of potential job seekers on what attributes suit different industries.
71. An example of this is the Mackay RJC, which has been collaborating with local high schools in the Greater Whitsunday region to develop a Career module aimed at Years 10-12 that can be used by educators to better prepare students for the future of work. A series of workshops will be developed in 2022 to assist with capacity building of educators around the future of work and how to better prepare students for industry.

Support available for Queensland apprentices and trainees

72. Apprentices, trainees and their employers are supported by a range of policy, financial assistance, rebate and discount programs delivered by DESBT and other Queensland Government departments. These include;
 - Pre-Apprenticeship Support - a two-year \$25 million commitment that is part of the Future Skills Fund and adds new pathways for people interested in starting an apprenticeship and expands current programs supporting Queenslanders to become skilled workers.
 - The Apprentice and Trainee Payroll Tax Rebate of 50% to 30 June 2022, provides an incentive for businesses throughout Queensland to take on apprentices.
 - The \$100 million Equipping TAFE for our Future program is investing in TAFE campuses across Queensland so world class training can be delivered from fit for purpose facilities.
 - The Queensland Government Building and Construction Training Policy is supporting employment and skills development by requiring 10% of the total hours on eligible building and civil construction projects across Queensland (15% on major projects over \$100 million) to be undertaken by apprentices and/or trainees and through other workforce training
 - WorkCover Queensland giving employers a discount on their premium if they employ an apprentice, applied by removing the apprentice wages from the employer's premium calculation.

- Travel and accommodation subsidies provide financial assistance to eligible Queensland apprentices and trainees for travel expenses incurred attending off-the-job training at the closest registered training organisation, where travel incurred is a minimum of 100 kilometres return from their usual place of residence.
73. DESBT has also introduced collaborative arrangements with Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers allowing them to undertake a range of delegations on behalf of the department, under the FET Act, to provide a one-stop-shop service to Queensland employers, apprentices and trainees to make it easier for them to do business.
 74. The Queensland Government introduced legislation to establish an independent Training Ombudsman as part of its plan to focus on quality training and to reinvigorate the VET sector in Queensland.
 75. The Queensland Training Ombudsman (QTO) provides a free, confidential and independent service to review and resolve enquiries and complaints from apprentices, trainees, students, employers and other stakeholders within the VET system.
 76. As part of this role, the Honourable Di Farmer, Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development recently asked the QTO to undertake a review of the support measures available to apprentices and trainees in Queensland and more broadly, the support for female apprentices and trainees working in male dominated occupations.
 77. These policies and initiatives, combined with rigorous monitoring, are working to support the retention and completion of apprentices and trainees in Queensland.

Apprenticeship and traineeship commencements

78. Commencement for apprentices and trainees have increased by 39.9% since 2016-17. Interestingly, all of this increase (and more) has happened since 2019-20 (64.6%) before which there was a steady decline.
79. The only region that was an exception to this pattern was Central Queensland which saw a 42.7% increase since 2016-17 of which 32.6% was since 2019-20.
80. Increases in apprenticeship and traineeship new commencements were slightly higher for females than overall with 50.0% since 2016-17 and 71.7% since 2019-20.
81. Still, the proportion of female apprenticeship and traineeship new commencements has only increased slightly from 34.5% in 2016-17 to 37.0% in 2020-21.
82. Increases in apprenticeship and traineeship new commencements for Indigenous students were broadly similar to the overall pattern and increases were seen

across all regions although NQ and CQ had relatively small increases since 2019-20 of 23.8% and 28.0% respectively.

Apprenticeship and traineeship completions

83. From 2016-17 to 2020-21, completion numbers for apprentices and trainees in Queensland have decreased 17.7% from 22,925 to 18,860. Every region experienced similar decreases over the same period ranging from 25.2% in Far North Queensland to 9.4% in Darling Downs South West.
84. Completion rates for apprentices and trainees have decreased in recent decades, a trend observed in many countries. Completion rates in Queensland have generally exceeded the national average for apprenticeships and completion rates for university study in Queensland (bachelor degree).
85. Characteristics of individuals most likely to complete are that they are generally older; have graduated Year 12; have sound language, literacy and numeracy skills and have a passion for the occupation.
86. Characteristics of employers that best foster completions are they are generally large enterprises; experienced in business; have well-organised processes for managing training and use rigorous recruitment processes.
87. The outcomes of the previously mentioned QTO review of the support measures available to apprentices and trainees in Queensland will assist guide ongoing activity for the department in supporting apprentice and trainee completions.

Regulation of the Further Education and Training Act 2014

88. DESBT delivers a broad range of services, with a particular focus on supporting businesses and providing individuals with training and employment opportunities aligned with Queensland's employment, skilling and economic recovery priorities.
89. The DESBT Director-General is responsible for managing Queensland apprenticeships and traineeships under the FET Act.
90. The Queensland Apprenticeship and Traineeship Office (QATO) manages the general oversight of the apprenticeship and traineeship system on behalf of the Director-General, DESBT.
91. DESBT has collaborative arrangements with Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers allowing them to undertake a range of delegations on behalf of the department, under the FET Act, to provide a one-stop-shop service to Queensland employers, apprentices and trainees to make it easier for them to do business.

92. The Queensland Government introduced legislation to establish an independent Training Ombudsman as part of its plan to focus on quality training and to reinvigorate the VET sector in Queensland.
93. The Queensland Training Ombudsman (QTO) provides a free, confidential and independent service to review and resolve enquiries and complaints from apprentices, trainees, students, employers and other stakeholders within the VET system.
94. In addition to the services provided by DESBT regional officers, a centrally-located DESBT Customer Centre undertakes a range of administrative activity and represents the 'front door' to the department, responding to general training and apprenticeship enquiries via phone, email and mail.
95. The FET Act facilitates the development of high-quality training and employment by industry via a simple, streamlined apprenticeship and traineeship system featuring flexible, industry endorsed approaches to support industry and employers train and retain apprentices and trainees.

Industry Skills Advisors

96. Industry advisory arrangements are a key component of Skills for Queensland – Great Training for Quality Jobs, assisting industry to contribute effectively to government priorities, target regional skills and foster a better understanding of the opportunities across the skills industry.
97. Industry Skills Advisors (ISAs) engage with employers, small business and industry stakeholders to provide the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) with high quality, evidence-based industry advice and intelligence about current and emerging industry direction, regional skills needs and training solutions, jobs growth and employment opportunities to:
 - inform and align Queensland Government training and skills priorities and decision-making, including program design and investment settings;
 - support and connect with the Department's Industry Engagement Framework priorities including the work of DESBT Regional officers, Regional Jobs Committees and Jobs Queensland;
 - support the ongoing implementation of the Department's vocational education and training (VET) Quality Framework;
 - inform and contribute to national VET reform agendas and the review and development of training package product; and
 - a. support employer, small business and industry's connection and engagement with VET and VET pathways and DESBT's programs and initiatives.

98. An example of the contribution of ISAs can be seen in the review of VET investment. DESBT works to ensure the Qld Government's annual investment in VET is aware and responsive to the evolving needs of industry. The ISAs play a central role in working with their Industry Reference Groups and broader industry networks to review the investment and contribute to a comprehensive annual report to DESBT with recommendations to inform the Annual Price List Review. ISAs also provide quarterly updates to this reporting to ensure an ongoing responsiveness to changes within industry.
99. ISA Price List Review Reporting has resulted in industry intelligence enhancing the Queensland Government's capacity to support industries evolving training and skills needs and development of a network of key industry stakeholders who feel connected to a responsive government system.
100. New ISA arrangements are in place for the period 1 March 2020 to 30 June 2023.

Skilling Queenslanders for Work (SQW)

101. SQW has been extended with a commitment of \$320 million over four years, with \$80 million ongoing permanent funding. The initiative will assist up to 15,000 disadvantaged Queenslanders each year into work through a suite of targeted skills and training programs.
102. SQW funds the community sector and has a place-based approach with a focus on the attainment or pathway to a certificate III qualification
103. SQW targets a broad range of equity groups that generally face barriers to their participation in training and the labour market. These includes young people (including those in and transitioned from out-of-home care), mature-age job seekers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability, women re-entering the workforce, veterans, recently released prisoners, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
104. SQW projects are delivered state-wide within specific timeframes in a community-based setting at no cost to eligible participants. Projects can provide work experience alongside nationally recognised training, job readiness skills and job search skills to enhance opportunities for employment.
105. Regional SQW Advisory Committees (SQWACs) have been established in each of the seven DESBT regions (North Queensland, Far North Queensland, Central Queensland, Darling Downs Southwest, North Coast, South East and Metropolitan regions) to review and assess applications for funding taking into consideration the local skills and employment needs.
106. SQWACs are made up of community, local government, employer and employee representatives and are an essential mechanism to ensure funding decisions under the SQW initiative are made with a regional and local perspective. Nominations for membership are sought from Local Government Association of Queensland,

Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland, Queensland Council of Social Service, Queensland Council of Unions, Australian Industry Group, and Community Services Industry Alliance.

107. As at 28 February 2022, 65,874 disadvantaged Queenslanders have been assisted under SQW with over 76% of those participants exiting with a positive outcome. 41,876 people secured employment as a result of their participation in the program.

Back to Work (BTW)

108. In the 2021-22 Queensland State Budget, the Back to Work (BTW) program was extended with additional funding of up to \$140 million over four years for a revitalised BTW program to provide businesses the confidence to employ Queenslanders who have experienced a period of unemployment and help workers facing disadvantage in the labour market.
109. The revitalised BTW program is now focussed on intensive wrap around support, including financial and non-financial, for jobseekers, employers and their employees who identify from one of the following cohorts: youth (aged 15 – 24 years), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people with disability and long term unemployed.
110. The BTW program is available in regional Queensland and select South East Queensland (SEQ) local government areas (LGAs) including Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Logan, Moreton Bay, Scenic Rim, and Somerset.
111. Employer Incentive payments of up to \$20,000 are available to eligible employers as well as a suite of services to support the business and the employee including the Pre-Employment Program, Small Business Short Courses and the Small Business Support Pool.
112. The BTW program has teams based throughout Queensland who provide local support to employers and jobseekers. BTW teams work in collaboration with employers, service providers and community representatives to assist in building regional employment solutions that meet both current and emerging needs.
113. The BTW program works in partnership with TAFE Queensland where BTW Jobseeker Officers work with jobseekers including providing career advice to help find a suitable job, helping jobseekers determine their individual skills and identifying services and support, such as training that may be of assistance.
114. Since 2016, the previous Back to Work program has supported 26,658 jobseekers into employment with over \$292.8 million in funding provided to 12,528 employers.
115. Since its launch on 1 July 2021, the revitalised Back to Work program has supported 434 jobseekers into employment with over \$2.1 million in funding provided to 378 employers. (Data as at 24 February 2022).