



## ***EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING COMMITTEE***

### **Members present:**

Ms KE Richards MP—Chair  
Mr MA Boothman MP  
Mr N Dametto MP  
Mr JP Lister MP  
Mr BL O'Rourke MP  
Mr JA Sullivan MP

### **Staff present:**

Mr R Hansen—Committee Secretary  
Ms R Duncan—Assistant Committee Secretary

## **PUBLIC BRIEFING—THE DELIVERY OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN RURAL, REMOTE AND REGIONAL QUEENSLAND (DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT, SMALL BUSINESS AND TRAINING)**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS**

**MONDAY, 28 MARCH 2022**

**Brisbane**

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**The committee met at 9.30 am.**

**CHAIR:** Good morning. I declare this public briefing open. I am Kim Richards, the member for Redlands and chair of the Education, Employment and Training Committee. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. We are very fortunate in this country to live amongst two of the world's oldest living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With me from the committee are: James Lister, the member for Southern Downs and deputy chair; Mark Boothman, the member for Theodore; Nick Dametto, the member for Hinchinbrook; Barry O'Rourke, the member for Rockhampton; and Jimmy Sullivan, the member for Stafford.

The purpose of today's briefing is to receive advice from the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and TAFE Queensland in relation to the delivery of vocational education and training in regional, rural and remote areas of Queensland. In particular, the committee is interested in learning about how well the VET system is meeting the needs of people and communities outside the state's south-east corner, how easy it is for people in these areas to access the training they want and need, what the likely employment outcomes are for them and what skills the local industries require across each region of the state in order to help us identify issues faced by students, staff and communities. In addition to this oral briefing today, the department provided the committee with a detailed written brief—thank you very much for that—which the committee has published this morning on our webpage under 'Portfolio Briefings'.

The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the Queensland parliament and are subject to its standing rules and orders. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Those present today should note that it is possible you may be filmed or photographed by the media and images of you may appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. I ask everyone to please ensure mobiles phones are turned off or switched to silent mode.

**BUTLER, Ms Jenni, Acting General Manager (South West Region), TAFE Queensland**

**CAMPBELL, Mr Tim, General Manager (North Region), TAFE Queensland**

**KOCH, Mr Steven, Deputy Director-General, Investment Division, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training**

**LUCAS, Mr David, Acting Deputy Director-General, Engagement Division, Department of Employment, Small Business and Training**

**CHAIR:** I welcome the witnesses from the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and TAFE Queensland. Thank you for agreeing to brief the committee today. I invite you to make some opening comments, after which committee members will have some questions for you.

**Mr Koch:** I would also like to begin today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Turrbal and Jagera people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. Thank you to the committee for the invitation to attend today's public briefing and discuss with you the important topic of the delivery of vocational education and training, VET, in rural, remote and regional Queensland.

My name is Steve Koch and I am the deputy director-general of investment in the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training. My departmental colleague attending today is David Lucas, the acting deputy director-general of engagement. Both Dave and I can assist the committee with information on the department's role in oversight and policy positions. We are joined by our executive colleagues from TAFE Queensland: Tim Campbell, the general manager of the north region; and Jenni Butler, the acting general manager of the south-west region. Both Tim and Jenni have a wealth of knowledge on the delivery of VET locally and can assist with questions on training delivery and future considerations via our premier public provider.

As the committee is well aware, Queensland is a large state, home to many industries and dispersed communities—hence skilling and training in regional, rural and remote Queensland is of vital importance. Queensland's economic recovery to date has been strong, and as we know many industries in regions are reporting ongoing workforce challenges that extend across the labour market. In response to these workforce issues, the Queensland government recently hosted the Queensland Workforce Summit 2022 on 11 March. This summit brought together many of the best and brightest minds across the state to identify key strategies and actions.

A quality VET system, including in regional, rural and remote communities, is one of a number of key inputs into the development of a future Queensland workforce strategy. Queensland is home to a vibrant and robust VET system that is constantly looking to improve its performance in pursuit of new opportunities. There are many strengths of the system for us to leverage off. For example, across the state the government is investing more than \$1 billion in VET in 2021-22. Through TAFE Queensland and Central Queensland University we have a spread of public VET facilities and programs to serve rural, remote and regional communities. This includes campuses on the Torres Strait and our regional centres down the coast and in inland towns, including Mount Isa and Toowoomba.

Importantly, the number of Queensland government funded VET students has increased by 17.3 per cent in Queensland over the last four years. This represents growth from just under 200,000 students in 2016-17 to over 234,000 students in the last financial year. It is very pleasing to note that the pattern of increasing student numbers is also present across all departmental regions, hence student numbers are broadly increasing in regional areas. As per the committee's request, the department will also be submitting further detailed data on student activities next week.

In terms of some specific programs that impact on VET in regional, rural and remote Queensland, there are a few that I would like to quickly highlight. From an investment framework perspective, the department pays higher subsidies for students training in rural and remote areas, with location loadings reaching 250 per cent of the subsidy for students training in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands. We have also established nine regional jobs committees that bring together a range of local volunteer experts to collaborate and consult on local workforce needs and training solutions.

Let us also consider TAFE Queensland, which is the largest provider of VET across the state, delivering training to over 129,000 students across more than 465 programs in the last year. Thirty per cent of these students are located in rural, remote and regional areas. As we look to continually improve the VET system, we also partner with other stakeholders such as Jobs Queensland, the Queensland Training Ombudsman and of course all of the stakeholders that participated in the recent Workforce Summit.

There are many success stories when we talk about VET delivery in rural, remote and regional communities and we look forward to examining with the committee the challenges and highlighting the successes and opportunities. Thank you again, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to attend today.

**CHAIR:** Can I say that I had the opportunity to participate in the Workforce Summit and I have never seen such engagement outside of the roadshows for small business. It was such an interactive day. Congratulations on that summit. It really was the culmination of a lot of hard work in bringing many stakeholders into one room.

**Mr LISTER:** Can I ask about regional jobs committees. Can you point to any developments or work in progress at the moment that will lead to changes or development in the way training is provided in the regions to cater for specific needs? In my own electorate I think of diesel mechanics, technicians and so forth for agricultural purposes.

**Mr Koch:** There are nine regional jobs committees across the state. They have been a key engagement mechanism for the department to get the on-the-ground local intelligence in relation to workforce needs and activities that are happening locally. Over the last year or so they have been expanded under additional funding under the Future Skills Fund that the department operates as well. I will shortly ask the deputy director-general of engagement to outline some of the work we are doing on the ground with those committees, including the Toowoomba committee that you may be familiar with. The general manager of TAFE Queensland South-West also has some examples around the work of that committee.

**Mr Lucas:** As Steve mentioned, those regional jobs committees are all at different stages of development and evolution of the work they are doing. The greatest benefit we have from the regional jobs committees is local engagement, so it is having those local stakeholders together, understanding

what is happening locally and then coming to the department through our local regional office through our regional director. From that, we find the area we believe we need to look into in terms of what those committees are finding.

At the moment I think part of how the regional jobs committees have evolved has been impacted by what has been occurring over the last few years with the changing economic conditions through the COVID pandemic et cetera. If I use the Toowoomba example specifically, from the information that has come through we already have the ability through subsidised training to meet a training need. What we want to do through the regional jobs committee is make sure that is still required going forward.

It will not surprise anyone to know that, while the regional jobs committees are at different locations doing different activities or with different stakeholders, a strong focus that has come through all of them is the youth. We are basically looking at how these different regional jobs committees are looking at how youth may need some assistance. Some of that assistance is an understanding of what is available. Some of that assistance is actually hooking local stakeholders into the groups to say, 'If this industry is looking for these types of workers, are we exploring how local youth might be that pipeline of employees?'

**CHAIR:** I want to place on record my thanks for the Redlands Regional Jobs Committee. I had the benefit of joining them last week when they did a recruitment speed-dating session. I think there were over 1,100 jobs on offer on that day by local employers. We had TAFE and a range of RTO providers there, along with a lot of young people coming through to try to meet that demand. It was a great way to get a feel on the ground. That is a lot of jobs to try to fill in our own local area and to see where the shortages are. I think you are absolutely right that the local knowledge on the ground is invaluable in terms of looking at where the needs are most to be served, whether that be from an employment sense or from a skills and training perspective.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** My question is to do with completion rates across the state. Are there any areas that are particularly worse than other areas? What would be the cause of those lower completion rates?

**Mr Koch:** Completion rates, particularly apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates, are a key feature of the sector that we monitor on an ongoing basis. The level of completion rates tends to track the commencements. With an apprenticeship or traineeship taking between one and four years to complete, the completion rates we are seeing now have actually been as a result of the commencements from three to four years ago. What is pleasing from our point of view is that the rate of completion continues to be fairly stable across time.

To your question, it does vary around different industries as well, particularly in terms of licensed trades. For a licensed trade such as an electrician, builder, plumber and so on, completion rates can be extremely high—at 80 or 90 per cent. For some of the unlicensed trades they can be a bit lower—for example, chefs. In terms of how we look at that across our regional areas, our regional teams are heavily involved in working with apprentices and employers. I will ask the deputy director-general of engagement to speak to that as well.

**Mr Lucas:** If I can put it a different way, the completion rate with an apprentice is probably more at an industry level than at a local level. Within an apprenticeship, as you would appreciate, is an employment arrangement, so you have an employer who has actually engaged that individual as an apprentice or a trainee. We do not see different completion rates in different locations necessarily but, as Steve mentioned, some industries have traditionally higher completion rates while some have lower rates. The role we play through our regional staff is to have a look locally again around whether there are certain employers, trades or individuals that we need to support a bit more to actually help that completion rate.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Does the department have an attraction program to go to certain regions? We were recently out at Mount Isa and I noticed in the window of one of the pubs there was a sign saying 'chef wanted' and the pay per hour they were offering was quite good. I was even thinking about applying myself!

**CHAIR:** Career change.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Is there a strategy to try to place apprentices in these areas to potentially get that good employment outcome?

**Mr Koch:** We work locally across the regions in particular—I note TAFE Queensland have a strong focus on this as well—in terms of working with local employers, trying to attract that pipeline of apprentices and trainees into the system. One of the key strategies we have at a departmental

level is our pre-apprenticeship program. That is a program that has received additional funding. Those programs attract young students into a certificate I or certificate II level qualification which will then provide a pipeline into an apprenticeship over time. We work with group training organisations locally as well as employers in terms of trying to provide that pipeline into apprenticeships and traineeships. I will ask the general manager for North Queensland TAFE if he has anything to add to that.

**Mr Campbell:** We have quite a few attraction programs running out in Mount Isa. One of the things we do a little bit differently in Mount Isa is our VET in Schools programs, our pre-apprenticeship programs. We do block release out there, as opposed to day release like we do back in Cairns and in Townsville. This has proved really successful for us. We service Mount Isa as much as we can by recruiting locally for our teachers, but we also have to service it in these big demand times from the coast. We try to get as many students through the school system and then transitioned into apprenticeships from there.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** Can you explain block release?

**Mr Campbell:** We do things differently. Normally with our TAFE at School program, in Townsville for example, the schools will send the students to us one day a week. In Mount Isa, we go out there and do a full week once a term; we do it in blocks. It is really successful. The relationship with the schools means they are really keen to get the students there for the retention and it really works well. It has done really well.

**Mr DAMETTO:** I am particularly interested in people who not only go through training and then into gainful employment but also fill those trade shortages as we assess what are our trade shortages and demands into the future. So that I can get a better understanding of that, is there a split that you can let us know about between people who are undergoing training in Queensland who are currently employed and those who are not employed and undergoing training to gain employment? I am happy for you to take it on notice if that is something you need to look up.

**Mr Koch:** In terms of the VET sector and government funded training that the system supports, there are two key pathways. The first one is the apprenticeship and traineeship system. The government funding program that is associated with that is the User Choice program. That is employment based training. As I am sure the member is aware, apprenticeship and traineeship training is an arrangement between the employer, the supervising RTO and the apprentice. That is regulated under the Further Education and Training Act in Queensland. The department administers that act.

The second key pathway is through institutional based training, which is students attending RTOs such as TAFE Queensland who may or may not be employed. Those students would undertake generally a certificate, a diploma or an advanced diploma qualification in that split. Of the 230,000 students last financial year I think we had, in terms of in-training apprentices and trainees, about 53,000 across Queensland, just to give you an idea of some of the broad numbers. I am sure that in the data the department will provide we will be able to break that down further.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Thank you for that introduction. I will direct my question to Mr Koch and invite the TAFE representatives to answer as well. First of all, congratulations on that fantastic growth rate for TAFE students. That is brilliant. Can I talk to the workforce flow-on effects of that? How are you going as a department and as training providers? In terms of TAFE workforce, how are you going in terms of recruiting qualified people to match that growth and to encourage that growth?

**Mr Koch:** In terms of the departmental response before I hand to my colleagues from TAFE Queensland, the funding the government provides to subsidise VET in training is a contribution towards the cost of that training for the students—that would also apply to registered training organisations we contract with—to assist with some of the cost to their workforce. We also increase those subsidies over time, in line with CPI and so on, just to make sure that those costs are adjusted for. In terms of regional Queensland, my colleagues to my left would definitely have a better lived experience of this in terms of recruiting teachers. I will ask Tim and Jenni to talk to that as well.

**Ms Butler:** As the provider of choice, TAFE Queensland does like to invest in our people. We were very excited last year to be able to introduce a TAE program, the Certificate IV in TAE, which is one of the requirements—holding both your qualification and the certificate IV—to teach within a VET provider, as you would know. We now are able to offer the qualification to students in a fully online way so they are able to stay within their own communities. Eligible students, regardless of where they are located, whether it be in Queensland or across all of Australia, are able to undertake the TAE within their own families whilst continuing to work. We offer the program in a morning session and an evening session—this is very popular for those people who still have to work within their businesses—so that people are able to gain the qualification to work within VET.

The other exciting thing about that program is that—a lot of students may not have been able to access the program because they live regionally or remotely—we are getting trained people within our regional communities. They are able to get the qualification, stay within the community in which they live and then work for TAFE or another registered training organisation.

The other thing we have recently introduced is foundation educators into our organisation. Foundation educators are educators who may not hold a full TAE yet, but we employ them as a foundation educator and we mentor them for nine to 12 months so that they are working in our organisations beside a fully trained and qualified expert trainer. At the end of that nine- to 12-month period, they transition out of becoming a foundation educator into a qualified educator. We are gaining the experience of people who may not have been able to enter the workforce for us because they did not have that Certificate IV in TAE, but they were able to gain that while working with us as a foundation educator. They are some of the strategies that, as an organisation, we have implemented to attract more current and qualified staff, to be able to meet the need that is rising within the training.

**Mr Campbell:** We have run a foundation educator program for the last couple of years. It is one of the programs we are really excited about. We have a bit of a youth crime problem up in Townsville and Cairns; it is well documented. One of our approaches to retaining school leavers is to start up a sports academy with a difference. It does not just provide a sporting outcome. We have a great relationship with the local clubs—the Black Hawks, the Pride, and the Suns have got involved with us with the AFL. In the second year we give them a VET outcome, so they can enrol in any VET program that is available to them. How we map this to the foundation educators is: we have managed to get some really good prospective teachers of the future to come in and mentor and coach in the sports program. They are based in Cairns and Townsville but receive the training through South West, so it ties it all together. They get a really good network to access support from and we have great hopes for the future in terms of retaining some of the teachers. Mapping it back to Mount Isa, one of our biggest recruitment issues is for trade teachers for Mount Isa. That, again, is where we have started some foundation educators to try to address that.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** Mr Campbell, you mentioned your school based programs in Mount Isa or from the South West. Are you seeing students who are doing certificates or school based apprenticeships or traineeships coming through to go on for further education through TAFE?

**Mr Campbell:** We have another really good program run in Cairns called SchoolTech. This is a different version of VET in Schools. With SchoolTech, we have a relationship with Woree State High School and their teachers are co-located on our campus. The students they attract from the surrounding schools who want a VET outcome, normally in trades, are located on the Cairns campus at all times. They get the normal school subjects taught on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, for example; on Thursday they go into the workshop with our trade teachers for a full day; and then on Friday they go out and get training in the workplace. A lot of those students transition across and become school based trainees and a lot of them also end up with apprenticeships, because the industry gets to have a look and see how it is and they are in a different environment from the school environment that they find more conducive to transitioning. That program is successful and works really well.

**CHAIR:** I have seen that work really well in my patch with the Australian Industry Trade College partnering with TAFE Queensland and that format of normal schoolwork, workshop and on-the-ground. It has been fantastic.

**Ms Butler:** Last year from our Roma campus we were able to offer a Certificate II in Electrotechnology for the first time ever in an online blended way. Where students from out in the regions were unable to usually do that course, we did it fully online. They came in for four days once a term and undertook block training, but the rest of the training was undertaken in their own community. I am very excited to say that we were notified last week that, out of 10 students who got through last year, four gained a school based apprenticeship and one gained a full-time apprenticeship. I have another example of where we have had success with the students going onto the apprenticeships. Last year Olivia Nunn undertook a Certificate I in Construction and a Certificate II in Electrotechnology and has now secured an electrical apprenticeship at the Stanwell Tarong Power Station as a full-time electrical apprentice. There are some great examples of where students have been able to undertake TAFE at School training in a different way than a normal model, as my colleague was saying, and this has led into school based apprenticeships or traineeships.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** There are some great outcomes. Chair, I have more questions but they are on a different topic. I will put the department on notice that I will be returning to Skilling Queenslanders for Work—one of my favourite topics—later.

**CHAIR:** It is one of mine too. I am looking forward to it.

**Mr O'ROURKE:** In your brief, dot points 46 and 47 note that TAFE Queensland has increased its market share across all regions since 2019-20 in a consistent manner, except for Central Queensland—CQU is the provider—where it has only increased by 8.9 per cent but CQU has increased its student numbers by 12.3 per cent. Can you unpack that? Is there a problem in CQ?

**Mr Koch:** As the member may be aware, Central Queensland University is a dual public sector provider of vocational education and higher education in the region. That was a merger that occurred with the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE in 2014. As a result, most of the TAFE training and assets went to the Central Queensland University at that time. TAFE Queensland has continued to have some presence in the region. That is why the 8.9 per cent market share is there. I know that TAFE Queensland offers some foundation skills and qualifications in Central Queensland, as well as offering support for migrants and refugees for training. The 12 per cent growth in Central Queensland University refers to purely their growth in their student numbers. It does not refer to their market share. I would need to come back to the member with the actual market share for Central Queensland University.

**Mr O'ROURKE:** So it is going okay?

**Mr Koch:** It is going in the right direction, yes, absolutely.

**Mr O'ROURKE:** That makes me feel a lot better.

**CHAIR:** In terms of industry clusters and the federal government's establishment of district clusters, can you talk about how that relates to our VET system and our regional jobs committees and what that integration looks like?

**Mr Koch:** I will ask the deputy director-general for engagement to outline some of those national policy changes in skills reform at the federal level that relate to industry engagement.

**Mr Lucas:** There are a number of reforms occurring at the national level which we will fall into as a jurisdiction. The industry clusters within the federal system are still a work in progress. It is still going through the procurement type process into what might become the industry clusters that will help design the training products at the national level.

At a state level we have our industry engagement framework that help us then determine what is required at a state level related to what comes down from national products. We have mechanisms such as regional jobs committees. We also have industry skills advisers. Our industry skills advisers link in very closely with industry through established industry reference groups. They go to industry and then come back to the department with advice on what type of training may be required broadly for the industry or what might be required at a location level.

While we do have a number of reforms at the national level, including what might become industry clusters which may look at becoming training product development at the national level and at an industry level, we then take that down to the next level through our industry engagement framework and work out what is the best fit for industry locally or across the board. That then feeds in to the type of training the government may subsidise. It may feed into other policy mechanisms and other programs. As well as regional jobs committees, yes, we have a number of industry engagement frameworks that give us very valuable industry intel to determine what the department and government may do in terms of subsidised training and training delivery.

**CHAIR:** Those industry clusters are still in a very early stage of development. You mentioned that it feeds down to the state level. Is there the opportunity for you to feed up to them so there is a real understanding of the needs you have already identified through the range of existing programs we have?

**Mr Lucas:** Through the skills ministers that occurs through the national reforms. The state had input into that cluster framework through our skills minister. Then depending on how that is established, we still have the ability to go back through the national system and advise what Queensland requires in terms of training products or training delivery. That industry cluster framework or arrangement is still a work in progress. Under the current arrangement, national products go through a system now. National training products get reviewed on a regular basis. They come through to the states and territories for comment. At the moment that is how we use our industry skills advisers. I will just use a pure example. If there is a change to a Certificate III in Community Services, that will come down through the national process. We then go out to our industry engagement frameworks and ask our industry of Queensland what they believe is good, bad or what we might need to change in that Certificate III in Community Services. That gets fed back through.

**CHAIR:** That would take into consideration the fact that we are a decentralised state and the complexities of delivering VET rurally and regionally?

**Mr Lucas:** Yes.

**Mr LISTER:** Mr Koch, I am very keen to thank the government and the department for the partnership that you have with the University of Southern Queensland and the Queensland College of Wine Tourism, because without that partnership the place would not exist. It costs money to run it. I understand that the department has been considering what model to proceed with for the next duration of the contract. Is it likely that that contract will be signed soon? If so, do you envisage the model to be roughly the same as it is now, allowing for the fact that you may not be able to discuss some things?

**Mr Koch:** The Queensland College of Wine Tourism is a valuable asset to the system. Our deputy director-general for engagement oversees our interactions there. I will ask Dave to comment on that further.

**Mr Lucas:** I will be up-front and say that there are probably elements I cannot necessarily go into in a lot of detail about at the moment. Yes, the department and USQ have had a longstanding relationship with the Queensland College of Wine Tourism. That has included things like joint contributions to operating mechanisms within the college. The college is also a Skills Assure supplier and gets funding through our Gateway to Industry Schools program. There are a number of different support mechanisms.

In terms of the partnership, yes, jointly as partners the decision was made to have a look into how that is all working in terms of the partnership model—contributions et cetera. That piece of work is still ongoing. I will not give a date because unfortunately it is still a work in progress. A strong part of that work in progress was the ongoing conversations with the partner as USQ, so that will be continuing in the near future.

**Mr LISTER:** I am not sure I am speaking out of school in saying that they really appreciate the partnership as well. I am keen to see that it is bedded down to ensure a continuing service by the QCWT.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** My next question is again to do with participation rates but this is to do with Far North Queensland, for the more regional Indigenous communities. There has been a fall in completion rates in courses up that way. What is the main cause of that? Is it a staffing problem to complete courses or is it student retention?

**Mr Koch:** We track participation and numbers regularly and engage with providers right across the state. It is a demand-led system, where students choose the qualification and the provider that they engage with. I do have some data in terms of Far North Queensland. I will source that shortly. I might ask the general manager for North Queensland to add some on-the-ground perspective in terms of student numbers.

**Mr Campbell:** Our completion rates for our mainstream students—and this is a unit completion rate—stand at about 90 per cent. Our Indigenous student completion rate for TAFE is 85 per cent. We acknowledge that there is some work still to be done. A lot of our programs, certainly over the last couple of years, have been a little bit disjointed with COVID. We went through the original COVID closures. We had to get people back into the communities. The communities were closed, so our time to deliver has extended a great deal because of that. Some of the retention did slip due to that, for sure.

In general, we try to deliver into the community, so we have lots of examples of trying to get teachers on the ground in communities. We have had some great success around early childhood education and care. There are good examples of going into communities and having good results. In fact, on Friday I was at a graduation ceremony held in Cairns where we had four students graduate with a diploma from Yarrabah and two from Woorabinda. It was a really joyful day because it had been an 18-month journey for those students. That describes the desire required from the students and the support from the teachers over a period of time just to get them to that successful outcome. I think 85 per cent is not a bad benchmark for us. I am absolutely sure we will improve on that.

**CHAIR:** It has certainly been a challenging few years with COVID in terms of being able to deliver VET. In terms of First Nations and the training strategy, could you unpack that a little bit for us and talk about the objectives of the program?

**Mr Koch:** The First Nations Training Strategy is a really important strategy in terms of engaging First Nations Queenslanders in the vocational education and training sector. The average participation for First Nation students in Queensland is around eight per cent. Eight per cent of government funded students are First Nations students. This is well above the population share. That is a really strong feature for the system and recognises that we are performing strongly in terms of supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the sector.



The First Nations Training Strategy that you mentioned is a commitment under the Future Skills Fund. It is a strategy that is under development at the moment as well. We have started statewide consultation processes in terms of looking at culturally appropriate consultation as well as looking at what that strategy will target. It is very likely that the strategy will have a focus on those regional and remote communities as well as maximising and leveraging the existing strength we have in our current programs such as Skilling Queenslanders for Work as well as our general demand-led training programs.

The process we are going through at the moment is identifying and getting feedback from stakeholders around how to address and come up with innovative strategies in some of those remote areas whilst also considering that there is quite a lot of training that is being delivered to First Nations students at the moment.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** One of the concerns I have heard over the years—when I went to Weipa it was something that the staff mentioned—is that if you have a trade teacher in a more remote community and that person then has to leave that area, that would leave the course half finished. What processes have been put in place to try to alleviate that so that students can complete those courses?

**Mr Koch:** There is a lot of flexibility around the completion of courses and the possibility of different modes of delivery as well. I might ask Tim if he can elaborate on that.

**Mr Campbell:** We cover the Weipa area. We take a two-pronged approach. We deliver in Weipa, so we send our teachers up specifically more around aged-care and childcare centres. For the trades we deliver in partnership with Rio. We go in there and we try to service the local industry and communities while we are there. We also bring students down to Cairns for block delivery. We bring them down once a year for a week or two weeks. We also have a group of nine staff who are our training consultants. It is their job to visit once every three months and make sure there is a skilled person in the workplace who can support that delivery. They also liaise with the industry themselves to make sure that the skills the student is learning are up to industry standard. They bring that information back and then we assess that information. We also obviously, with COVID, have put a lot of material online through our learning management system, Connect. We also check in with them online. We try to provide as many services as we possibly can. I think the loss by industry of a trainer in the workplace is generally the one we try to support as much as we can, but it is an issue that we are aware of.

**Mr BOOTHMAN:** I can certainly understand it is very hard to get a trainer to go up into these remote areas and unfortunately sometimes they have to leave rather quickly. I am curious to see what type of process has been put in place. One of my school principals was from Western Cape College and it was something that he certainly was very vocal about.

**Mr Koch:** Supporting what Tim was saying, in the apprenticeship and traineeship space we also have our own staff. Part of their role is to help those apprentices and trainees who may not be progressing or for whom something might have come up during their apprenticeship—not specifically that the TAFE training might have stopped or those sorts of elements. We definitely have staff in that area, and a major part of their role is supporting apprentices through to completion.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** You will be shocked at what I am going to ask about. I am going to ask a quick couple of questions about SQW. One is probably to TAFE. With the regional SQW advisory committees, does TAFE by practice sit on these committees in the various regions?

**Mr Campbell:** Not to my knowledge. I can find out if we do have a member of staff there, but not to my knowledge.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** I will ask the department: in terms of where the programs for SQW are designed to get people not necessarily into jobs but at least into further education, do they target them towards TAFE or RTOs?

**Mr Koch:** We work with the community based sector and community organisations, as members are aware, in terms of Skilling Queenslanders for Work programs. Those partnerships are then with RTOs. It has to be a skill that is in short supply that is contracted with the department so it could be TAFE Queensland, Central Queensland University or another RTO. We do not dictate who that training provider would be. We know that TAFE Queensland does play a role in many SQW projects, particularly in some of the regional and remote areas.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** As the bigger players, yes. You have listed on page 18 that 76 per cent of SQW participants go on to positive outcomes. That includes either getting a job or going on to higher education or further apprenticeships or traineeships.

**Mr Koch:** That is correct. That is actually an updated figure. Our previous survey indicated 73 per cent. That is from a survey of students in 2020 that is now indicating 76 per cent. Even throughout the duration of the pandemic, to improve that successful outcome I think is a great testament to the program as well.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** It is fantastic. I was with a local SQW program during the week with the Active Queenslanders Industry Alliance. They effectively do community sport and get out to do improvements to clubhouses, fences or whatever and get skills on the job. The community club gets the benefit. One of the challenges the trainer has—shout-out to Anthony—is that sometimes some of the talented kids, boys and girls, were not on site because they were off getting jobs or doing job interviews. For those who go part way through the program and then go on to get a job, does that count against them or against the program in terms of a positive outcome? They have not failed the program or have not cancelled the program. How is that treated in the figures?

**Mr Koch:** The way we do the evaluation and the outcome metrics is by working with the Queensland Government Statistician's Office. They do a population survey of all participants in Skilling Queenslanders for Work projects. In that example, that participant would actually be recorded, I imagine, assuming they are still employed at the time of the survey, as a successful employment outcome. We hear that on quite a number of projects they are recruiting participants on: they then leave and get a job prior to the completion of the project, which is obviously a great outcome.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** I know that we are here to talk about regional delivery and I am not sure that Newmarket or Stafford Heights counts as regional.

**CHAIR:** Not quite.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** In the recent rain and weather situation, one of our great SQW providers, the multicultural community centre at Newmarket, went under. Their first priority was not just about rebuilding their facility. They have a 90 per cent rate of getting people into jobs through nursing, child care, cleaning and a range of those sorts of services. I guess I will ask on behalf of members such as Maryborough, Bundaberg, Hervey Bay, who also experienced those events—further north obviously Cairns and Townsville go through it far too often: how does the department deal with participants and providers of SQW who have to have a break in their delivery or adjust their delivery because of these natural environments? In terms of acquittals, are there extended time frames? Do they transfer to different providers? How do you handle those very difficult circumstances?

**Mr Koch:** Of course our thoughts are with those providers who have been impacted. One of the key aspects of SQW is its flexibility. That has been highlighted in evaluations by Deloitte Access Economics over many years. A key feature that is different from some of the federal employment services systems has been highlighted in those evaluations. We have a very flexible approach with providers. If a provider is impacted and cannot complete a project, we would actually aim, particularly through our regional teams, to work with that provider to pause the project and then restart it or, if necessary, to work with another provider, another registered training organisation, to do whatever we can to support those participants through to the completion of the project. An on-the-ground example of that is that we would hold some of the funding for those projects to enable those providers to potentially come back and re-access that through a variation to the contract.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** So it would not be held against them for future funding rounds if they are trying to do the right thing?

**Mr Koch:** With Skilling Queenslanders for Work being a permanent program now in last year's state budget, that gives us the flexibility to manage our budget over a number of years.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** To roll over if you need to?

**Mr Koch:** Yes, exactly.

**Mr SULLIVAN:** On page 13 of your brief you talk about the pre-apprenticeship support and I think both Mr Campbell and you, Steve, spoke about that earlier. What is the interface between Skilling Queenslanders for Work and the pre-apprenticeship program? Is it a pathway? I imagine it is a similar cohort.

**Mr Koch:** Yes. I will ask the deputy director-general for engagement to speak about the pre-apprenticeship program in more detail in a second. What I would highlight out of Skilling Queenslanders for Work firstly is: there is a program within the suite which is the Work Skills Traineeship Program, and that encourages any of the disadvantaged cohorts who are eligible under SQW, which can be used, but much broader as well, to take a paid traineeship on a community recovery project or a community project of benefit. That provides them with a variety of certificate I

qualifications and a traineeship as well. There is some slight parallel there. We would work to make sure that the most appropriate avenues for students are available. I will ask David to cover anything further on the pre-apprenticeship program.

**Mr Lucas:** There are similarities between SQW and the group training organisation pre-apprenticeship program but, as you mentioned before, a difference is the cohort. With the group training organisation pre-apprenticeship program it is actually placing those individuals with a group training organisation. Then they do the certificate I with the view that they will be placed with a host employer that those GTOs have within their network. There are similarities there, but we have purposefully done it differently to assist a different cohort and to take advantage of the host employers that those GTOs have networks with. 'Take advantage' might sound harsh: benefit from that arrangement.

**CHAIR:** While we are on the topic of Skilling Queenslanders for Work, in terms of its regional delivery, it is a really important pathway in those early stages of VET that, as we know, translates into greater opportunity in terms of skilling and training. What are the considerations given to providers of Skilling Queenslanders for Work in terms of more complex delivery than maybe necessarily in, say, a Newmarket Multicultural Community Centre? Is there different consideration given in terms of providers that are delivering regional and rural and what does that look like by contrast?

**Mr Koch:** As the member for Stafford made reference to earlier, we have a number of Skilling Queenslanders for Work advisory committees and they operate regionally across each of the department's seven regions. Those committees are made up of local government representatives—so quite often the LGAQ is represented—employer groups and employee representatives. They are volunteer committees. They make recommendations to the department around which Skilling Queenslanders for Work projects are recommended and then it goes through our internal approval processes. Those committees are a really important local mechanism to ensure that the projects of local need in regional Queensland are supported.

As part of the ongoing improvement and work we have been doing, and work with the Queensland Training Ombudsman, we are also now looking at how we have a geographical spread within each region at the LGA level, so Skilling Queenslanders for Work projects, and making sure there is a good spread right across the state. Another really critical element that drives regional outcomes for Skilling Queenslanders for Work is our allocation of regional budgets. We do that on a yearly basis and that is based on ABS statistics and feedback that we are getting from local stakeholders and on-the-ground need. That allocates the budgets and then the committee can make recommendations in line with those budgets. That is a really key aspect to make sure we have that regional focus.

**CHAIR:** It acknowledges that it can be more costly for those providers to deliver a program in a rural or regional area.

**Mr Koch:** Absolutely. That is one of the considerations. We do not necessarily have strict benchmarks and so on. Where there are Skilling Queenslanders for Work providers in remote locations or particularly dealing with very disadvantaged cohorts there may be additional costs, and we have the flexibility to fund that as well.

**Mr DAMETTO:** A bugbear of mine has always been around dodgy RTOs in the Queensland training space. Would you be able to tell us a little bit more about what the department is doing to tidy up that part of the training organisations? I am talking about everything from fraudulent activity all the way through to poor training outcomes.

**Mr Koch:** Certainly a key focus of the department is on driving quality in training delivery in Queensland—making sure we are delivering the best outcomes for students. There is a number of compliance mechanisms and checks that we have in the system. We have a dedicated contract management team. Each month they review data submitted by each contracted RTO. There are just over 400 contracted RTOs that the department works with at the moment. Our contract management team do a great job each month reviewing each of the data submissions, analysing trends in student data and growth, and looking at complaint mechanisms and other feedback that we have.

In terms of your point around less than desirable behaviour and making sure we have a strong focus on that, we have a quality and compliance team that does our deep contractual audits. As well as our data checks, our compliance checks and our on-the-ground work with our regional terms, our quality team goes around and reviews student files and looks at contractual audit provisions within our contracts with those providers. There is a number of sanctions that we may impose.

What is important about that activity is that this is over and above what the national regulator does. The best system in Australia, in Queensland in particular, is regulated by the Australian Skills Quality Authority. Each registered training organisation needs to meet national standards. We strive

through our Skills Assure system to have standards that go above and beyond that. We have continued to focus on that through improvements to Skills Assure in the last two years. I am happy to talk about some of the more detailed improvements we have made through the Skills Assure system in the last financial year.

**Mr DAMETTO:** It is great to see that we are going above the national standard because I believe people were falling through the cracks, just measuring with that stick. When it comes to the department checking the data on the RTOs, what kinds of things are they checking? I remember making a complaint about some activity in the Townsville region at one stage. The department said anecdotally, 'Can you give us some names?' We said, 'Well, the RTOs that are complaining to us say to go and check the data and see who is putting through 50 to 60 forklift tickets a weekend.' That is the kind of thing I would hope the compliance department is checking.

**Mr Koch:** Absolutely. We would absolutely check student growth. If we see a significant growth in student numbers, that may actually be a good thing. Conversely, it may require further investigation. Those data checks are more of an indicator. They feed into the risk tolerances for our RTOs. That is what drives our contractual audit activity. We also check that the students are eligible students, that they do not have previous certificate III qualifications. There is a mechanism for us to be able to check that. If a student already had a certificate III qualification and therefore was ineligible for another government subsidy, that would automatically come up in our systems. There are a number of validations and a number of data checks that potentially flag for further investigation.

In relation to the complaint process, we have a number of complaint mechanisms through the department. The Queensland Training Ombudsman is a key one as well. One of the situations we deal with is working through those investigations and complaints, trying to make sure we have that body of evidence to back that up. There are occasions where we may receive a complaint but then do not get anything in writing, through a stat dec for example, which enables us to take the next step.

**Mr DAMETTO:** Trevor Roberts was a great trainer in North Queensland who worked in the mining and construction space for years. He actually trained me to drive a crane. At one stage he made some complaints that certain RTOs were basically writing out tickets. When he was doing the onsite training to make sure they were able to operate those tickets, some of the students admitted that they had never actually been on that machine before, which is very alarming. The whole point of my question, and the bugbear I have with this part of the industry, is that as a taxpayer we all want value for money and the best training outcomes for our students. It is great to see how the department has taken strides to improve that.

**CHAIR:** Would there be any difference in the complaints you receive from metro versus regional and rural areas, or is it pretty consistent?

**Mr Koch:** I would need to get some more information and data on that. I am more than happy to provide that to the secretariat. I would say that there were obviously a lot of complaints and a lot of issues that the member referred to. I think it is on the public record around previous federal programs such as VET FEE Help from five to six years ago. We have taken a lot of activity, from a state point of view, aligned to that to ensure we have quality in place. Our complaints this financial year to date have moderated to a reasonable level that we track. We investigate every complaint that we receive.

**Mr O'ROURKE:** What share of VET services in Queensland is delivered by TAFE in comparison to the private providers?

**Mr Koch:** In terms of government funded students it is about 40 per cent. I would note that that share has grown over the last year or two.

**Mr O'ROURKE:** What are the benefits of having a major government owned provider in the VET space with TAFE Queensland?

**Mr Koch:** Certainly from the departmental point of view, public providers are a critical part of the system. They provide training right across the state. Particularly in regional, rural and remote areas, the role of public training providers is paramount. Those public providers have the ability to not only lead the quality of training delivery in the state, making sure that we have excellent educators delivering in great facilities to students, but also deliver on the community service obligations or elements of making sure that we have access to students right across the state, particularly in regional areas. That is a really critical element as well. Tim or Jenni may have some further perspective on that.

**Mr Campbell:** Our most northerly campus is Thursday Island, going out to Mount Isa. As we have heard, we are in Mackay doing some things; we are at Whitsundays. The opportunity is there for us to employ into our communities and have people who represent TAFE in an amazing way.

They are located, for example, in Bowen and Burdekin, where we are seeing infrastructure investment. Having place based people who can represent us and do so much of our engagement there is comforting not only for me as general manager of that area but also for the community, to look at TAFE to provide that extra service as well. I think a lot of the good outcomes come from those relationships on the campus. Jenni has an area probably nearly as big as the north, but certainly that ability to have people place based, building that relationship on the ground, is fantastic for us. We get good feedback from the community about forging those relationships with the department. It is really excellent for us.

**Ms Butler:** I would agree with my colleague. It is TAFE Queensland's birthday at the end of this year—140 years—which we are very excited about. We have 60 physical campuses. As I travel around the ones within my community, as far out as Charleville, the connection that people have to the campus or the people within that community is unquestionable. We constantly see that connection. One of the great things we have been able to do this year in my region is work with local health and run some vaccine hubs from our campuses. The reason we did that, especially at our Inala campus and some activities at other regional campuses, was to get people feeling comfortable, especially with the high level of AMEP and SEE—the new Australians who go to that campus and the fear they had. We were able to connect with the health area and get people to come in the week before the hub occurred and talk to them in their own language about what the vaccine would do. When we had the hub occur the following week, not only did the students come but also their families came and local families came.

There are examples of that across all of our state, not only in my region and Tim's region. There is connection to community. We actually teach and train in the communities in which we live. That is one of the things we are super proud of—hence the comment earlier around some of the strategies we are doing to try to get people who are living and training within the community. That can be challenging, but that is something that as an organisation we are very committed to.

**CHAIR:** We have 1,258 schools around Queensland and we know how important the schools are. We heard about the transition from school into the VET process. What does engagement look like, particularly in our rural and regional and remote areas? How do the department and our TAFEs engage with high schools to make sure we are providing knowledge about what is on offer and available?

**Mr Koch:** VET in Schools is a critical part and pathway of the VET sector. I think probably all four of us have a perspective to add, if that is okay with you. Queensland is a national leader of VET in Schools; it has been for many years. Our share on a jurisdictional basis has gone up over the last year. Now, over 36 per cent of all VET in Schools students across Australia are actually in Queensland. We have around 50 per cent of all school based apprenticeships and traineeships. We get excellent outcomes in terms of participation in VET in Schools. From the departmental point of view, one of our key programs is the Gateway to Industry Schools program. I might ask Dave to outline some of the regional aspects.

**Mr Lucas:** With the Gateway to Industry Schools Program we have contracts with 10 industry organisations. The primary focus is to get in and engage with those schools on behalf of industry. It is around connecting local industry with the local schools and with local school students. That is across a range of industries—construction, health and community services. These are organisations that work within that industry. They operate across the state. We have MOUs with quite a number—270-odd. I think about 276 schools have MOUs with those GISP providers to allow a range of activities to occur. Some of that activity would be industries coming in and talking to the schools. Some of it may be an industry fair. It is basically a greater understanding of what is in an industry. That is not only for the school student; it also helps the schools understand that so they can broaden that across those students who are immediately engaged.

From the Gateway to Industry Schools Program they may end up in a VET in Schools qualification. A number might end up in a skill based apprenticeship and traineeship. A great benefit of the school based apprenticeship and traineeship, as most members would know, is that employment connection. If someone is in an apprenticeship in year 11 or year 12 then there is a strong possibility they are going to stay connected, and that employer has that pipeline of beneficial workers as well.

**Mr LISTER:** This is probably a question for Mr Lucas and Ms Butler, but forgive me if I am not on the mark there. My electorate spans a large amount of border country and most of it is fairly remote. I know, Mr Koch, you have helped me with another matter there. What sort of engagement is there

across the state border with the New South Wales equivalent of the department in terms of recognising the eligibility for support and training of somebody who might live just over the Queensland border in New South Wales?

To give you some context, in my electorate there are many people who live just on the other side of the border but who would fight for Queensland if we were at war with New South Wales. They are part of our community, they work in Queensland and their family connections are in Queensland. They may just live on the other side of the border or just down a road. Is there some sort of recognition of their status and needs in terms of letting them into Queensland programs, either at TAFE or in other vocational programs that are funded by the Queensland department?

**Mr Lucas:** I will start from a departmental perspective. Eligibility for the departmental funded programs is that you must be a Queensland resident. There has to be a line drawn, unfortunately, on that eligibility aspect. Because of that very close connection, the department looks at how conversations can occur for other possibilities for those prospective students or the employers. That might be in the New South Wales government; it might be in other stakeholders locally. It recognises that there is a very close relationship. While the departmentally funded programs require you to be a Queensland resident, there is work done on the ground to try to support those individuals where possible.

**Ms Butler:** I will leave my colleague to talk from a funding perspective. I have some great examples of where we are working with partners within your particular catchment in developing programs that meet the needs of the local community. From our perspective, that connection on the ground is really important and we have a business development officer as well as our teachers who are consistently connecting with small or medium businesses in the Warwick area and the surrounds to ensure the programs we are accessing are going to lead to employment outcomes for people.

A great example of a recent success story is: we had a lady who is a grandmother who was undertaking the foundation skills to improve her literacy in computers and also language. She got her first ever job in retail only recently. That is great for that particular lady. Her goal was to get employment within there so we were able to offer programs. From a funding perspective, that would be based on the eligibility of the programs. Where we can we try to access a variety of funding where people can utilise that to undertake the programs.

**Mr DAMETTO:** This question is probably a bit left of field, but it would be remiss of me if I did not mention it while getting a public briefing from the department after speaking to so many business owners in the Hinchinbrook electorate and further afield. One thing that business owners keep telling me is that it is not just the skill set that students learn while undertaking training; it is also the attitude of employees that needs to be addressed—whether it is through training or the school system—when it comes to how they view employment. Is that something that is considered by the department when putting some of these training packages together?

**Mr Koch:** You are absolutely right. We get that feedback quite often as well, that vocational skills and capability are important but attitude, punctuality and a number of those other softer skills are just as important for employers. That is one key aspect that was also highlighted through the Minister for Training and Skills Development in the lead-up to the Workforce Summit.

I would highlight that the training package process that David mentioned earlier nationally and a number of those employability skills or foundation skills that Jenni mentioned before are components of a number of the qualifications. There are some qualifications that pick up on aspects of that as well, and that occurs across the board. There are also some projects such as Skilling Queenslanders for Work. The benefit of that is the employability, the mentoring and the support for those who are disadvantaged. The help with that step up on the rung of the ladder, so to speak, is a fundamental part of that project. It is not just about training; it is also about that wraparound support to help an individual. We do hear that and we do consider it. We look at flexibility within the system to try to accommodate that. Tim or Jenni might want to add to that.

**Ms Butler:** Many of our teachers understand the importance of what you just described. Many of our educators actually have that connection to employers anyway through vocational placement or work experience that our students undertake. What we see many of our educators do is get the employers to come and speak to the students in the class. We get them to say, 'If you work in this industry, this is what would be expected.' They talk about being on time and not being on your phone. If it is a trade, they could say that you are going to be outside in the sun so they mention sun safety. They talk about safety in a worksite, for example. Discussions might be completely different if it is a hairdresser or a nurse. Where you find we get a lot of cut-through is where the educators get an employer to come and speak to them for 10 or 20 minutes. They say, 'It all seems really lovely in a Brisbane

simulated environment in TAFE, but on a hot day at 45 degrees you are going to be outside in the sun.'

**Mr DAMETTO:** You might have to be on a roof; that is right.

**Ms Butler:** That is the benefit we bring as an organisation—that is, that connection with our employers. What we see through some of our programs as well is that, because the employers have that opportunity, they actually wait to employ our graduates out of the program. One that I am thinking of in particular is our Cert III in Individual Support in Toowoomba. At the end of every six months, a number of the students get employment casually with a particular organisation the week before they finish because they interview our graduates. If we can do more of that, I think you are going to get the graduates understanding the workplace they are going into and what is expected in today's work environment.

**Mr DAMETTO:** That is brilliant. I can still remember Mr Bullock from the Burdekin TAFE teaching us a fair bit of that 20 years ago when I was doing my apprenticeship. It is great to see that mindset is still being pushed through the department.

**Ms Butler:** It is a critical connection.

**CHAIR:** Free apprenticeships and TAFE for under 25s has been a fantastic initiative in my area. From a departmental point of view, has there been some analysis of that? What does that look like for our regional, rural and remote areas? In terms of an analysis of the funding for that, is there a greater uptake regionally versus metro? What does that look like for the department?

**Mr Koch:** As you highlighted, the free TAFE and free apprenticeships for under 25s is an initiative that provides fully subsidised training to a young Queenslanders. For free apprenticeships, there are 139 qualifications that are priority qualifications that an apprentice can undertake. For institutional training, there are 26 higher priority qualifications through TAFE Queensland or Central Queensland University. These are fully subsidised, so fee-free to students, which is fantastic. Overall, right across the state, over 45,000 Queenslanders have benefited from these programs to date since 2019. The regional breakdown of that is that over 18,700 have been in regional locations.

**CHAIR:** That is about 40 per cent, which is excellent. My other question was with regard to female participation rates in apprenticeships and traineeships. We know there has been a slow growth in female participation. Could you talk a bit about the barriers and what the department is looking at to encourage more women to take up the opportunity that traineeships and apprenticeships provide?

**Mr Koch:** Female participation in government funded students has continued to grow. Over the last four years there has been an almost 34 per cent growth in females undertaking government funded VET in Queensland. It has been 16 per cent over the last year. That is really strong growth that is consistent right across every region. It is up almost 32 per cent over a four-year basis in Far North Queensland. It is really strong growth.

In terms of apprenticeships and traineeships, the rate of female participation right across Queensland over that four-year period is up 50 per cent. It has grown strongly over the last year, just over 70 per cent. We have seen some extraordinary growth in apprenticeship commencements as well over the last year to 18 months, so that is really pleasing to see. Female participation continues to grow, but we want to do more in that space and continue to partner with stakeholders such as Construction Skills Queensland, NAWIC and others in that space.

**CHAIR:** We still have some work to do in that space. Finally, I thought the Workforce Summit was a highly valuable day. Could you talk a bit about what strategies and actions have been identified in terms of regional and remote delivery of VET as a result of the summit?

**Mr Koch:** There were over 350 participants in the Workforce Summit. As mentioned earlier, it was a fantastic opportunity for deep discussions around some of those workforce challenges, including in regional areas. As a result, the Minister for Employment and Small Business and Minister for Training and Skills Development has announced that we will be preparing a future Queensland workforce strategy to take on board those strategies and actions that were spoken about as part of the summit and in the lead-up to the summit.

From our point of view, the summit reinforced and highlighted the value of place based approaches and local partnerships. In the final session of the day, a number of the speakers spoke about the critical local connection between employers, training providers and students and highlighted the opportunities at a local level that are available to students in particular. The variety of industry we

have across Queensland as well as the renewable energy boom will have a huge impact on regional Queensland. Making that information available to students and promoting that in terms of future opportunities is something we will continue to progress. The workforce strategy will look at those aspects as well.

**CHAIR:** I was lucky to be sitting next to a gentleman from the Bowen growers association, and he was talking about the importance of place based local and understanding where those needs and demands are in terms of the workforce. It was a fantastic day with a huge cross-section of industry stakeholders that I hope will come together in forming that strategy and action plan going forward.

As there are no further questions, I thank you very much for appearing before us today. We are very grateful for your time and responses. It has been extraordinarily comprehensive. There were two questions taken on notice: the breakdown of regions in terms of the complaints data, and TAFE members sitting on the Skilling Queenslanders for Work committee. The details of those questions will be available within the transcript. That concludes this briefing. Thank you for the information you have provided today. Thank you to our Hansard reporters and broadcast staff. A transcript of these proceedings will be available on the committee's inquiry webpage in due course. The responses to those questions taken on notice will be due by close of business on Monday, 11 April 2022. I declare this public briefing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 10.59 am.**