

Inquiry into volunteering in Queensland

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Dear Committee Members,

I write to you in response to the inquiry into volunteering in Queensland. My submission focuses on Parent and Citizens (P&C) associations in state schools. I am a volunteer executive member of a state school P&C; however, I make this submission in my individual capacity. P&Cs play a crucial role in supporting schools, fostering community engagement, and enhancing educational outcomes, yet they are increasingly burdened by administrative, financial, and regulatory pressures that deter volunteer participation, particularly in executive roles, which are becoming increasingly difficult to fill, but required to operate and provide services.

The Value of P&Cs and Volunteering in Schools

P&C associations contribute significant value to Queensland's education system, providing financial support, running essential services such as tuckshops and uniform shops, and facilitating community engagement. They create opportunities for parents and community members to be actively involved in their local schools, strengthening the connection between families, students, and educators.

Volunteers in P&C associations gain personal satisfaction, skills development, and a sense of contribution to their communities. However, despite these benefits, participation rates are declining due to increasing barriers, particularly required executive roles, which threaten the sustainability of these associations.

Barriers to Volunteering in P&Cs

One of the primary deterrents for volunteers, particularly for those considering executive roles in P&Cs, is the increasing complexity and cost of administration. This includes:

- **Financial burdens:** Rising costs of insurance, HR advice, IT systems, accounting, and auditing place a significant strain on volunteer-run P&C associations. These expenses, once manageable, now require a level of financial oversight and responsibility that most volunteers cannot commit to. A significant portion of the revenue raised through volunteers is spent on bookkeeping, insurance, and other operational costs.
- **Regulatory complexity:** P&Cs operate under strict constitutions, governance frameworks, and compliance obligations, which have become increasingly complex. Many volunteers hesitate to take on executive roles due to concerns over legal and financial liability.
- **Changing family dynamics:** With more households relying on two working parents, fewer parents have the time to dedicate to volunteering, especially when the commitment involves extensive administrative responsibilities. Personally, I find that after a full working day, I am coming home to sort out accounts payable, payroll, and HR matters in the evenings and on weekends. I frequently receive phone calls while at work regarding operational issues of P&C operations. This is not sustainable for most working families and has, at times, caused myself and other volunteer executives significant stress.
- **Service delivery pressures:** P&Cs are expected to run school tuckshops and other enterprises, yet managing these services requires bookkeeping, HR support, and financial compliance—tasks that most volunteers are not equipped to handle. While organisations like P&Cs Qld provide support, the administrative workload still falls heavily on parent volunteers. Additionally, P&Cs Qld have a vested financial interest in maintaining the current system, which may limit efforts to streamline processes.

- **IT systems complexity:** P&Cs are responsible for managing IT systems that handle financial transactions, volunteer records, and sensitive school-related data. Ensuring security, confidentiality, and compliance with privacy laws requires technical expertise that most volunteers do not have. The increasing need for cybersecurity measures, data protection policies, and secure payment systems adds another layer of complexity and responsibility that discourages participation in executive roles.
- **Complexity of Meetings and AGMs:** The administrative burden associated with holding meetings and Annual General Meetings (AGMs) has increased significantly. Volunteers are expected to manage compliance reports, student protection strategies, financial audits, membership applications, Blue Card requirements, and constitutional updates—all while ensuring governance documents are adhered to. The level of preparation and post-meeting reporting required is a major deterrent for parents considering executive roles.

Recommendations to Improve Volunteering in P&Cs

To support and grow volunteering in P&C associations, the Queensland Government should consider two main points:

- **Removing the administrative and financial burden on volunteers:** Many of the services that P&Cs provide, such as tuckshops, should be integrated into the school's staffing, systems, and processes that already exist. This would allow P&Cs to focus on their core mission—volunteering and community engagement—rather than running increasingly complex operations.
- **Simplifying regulatory requirements:** Reviewing and streamlining governance and compliance obligations for P&Cs would encourage more parents to take on executive roles without fear of liability or overwhelming responsibility.

P&C associations play a vital role in fostering a broader school community beyond just the curriculum by running events and functions and raising vital funds for students that are funded by the state. However, without addressing these challenges, attracting parents to participate will become increasingly difficult.

If volunteering in Queensland is to be strengthened and expanded particularly in context with school volunteering, there must be a concerted effort to remove barriers that deter participation. By reducing the administrative load on P&C associations and better integrating their functions with school systems, the Queensland Government can ensure that these vital volunteer organisations remain sustainable and focused on their core function of supporting the school community.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this submission and look forward to the committee's findings on how we can support and enhance volunteering in Queensland.