

# Queensland Teachers' Union

**Submission**

## **Skills for Queensland Discussion Paper**

**October 2018**



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## Introduction

Established in 1889, the QTU has chalked up over a century of achievement in professional, industrial and legal advice to the education and training sectors throughout Queensland. In 2018 the QTU is the voice of over 45,000 education and training professionals working in TAFE Queensland and the dual sector entity Central Queensland University, Queensland public schools, and other educational facilities.

Throughout this QTU submission the term TAFE refers to both TAFE Queensland and the dual sector entity Central Queensland University. The QTU submission is made after consultation with the QTU's TAFE members and analysis of QTU policy.

The QTU is committed to vocational education and training (VET) and lifelong learning in Queensland. It is the QTU's belief that TAFE should be maintained as the primary provider of VET.

The QTU supports the Queensland government's vision for Queensland to have the strongest VET sector in Australia. Further, the QTU believes that the vision for the state system should be to lead in the provision of VET and to become a training destination of choice throughout the Asia-Pacific region. TAFE Queensland's work with Australia Pacific Training Coalition, Shanghai Commercial Accounting School, and its industry and student satisfaction ratings, are all strong indicators of the leadership role that TAFE can fulfil in the region.

The QTU holds that negative impacts of competition and market reform on the TAFE system are well documented, and the introduction of market reforms has:

- Resulted in increased reliance of a large proportion of private providers on government funding and unnecessary duplication between private and public providers;
- Resulted in increased provider failure and subsequent intervention costs to government;
- Resulted in increases in low cost online delivery of training that leads to student disenfranchisement;
- Resulted in increases of low-quality training and unethical practice;
- Resulted in decreased standing of the VET sector and VET qualification reputation; but
- Not led to a decrease in training delivery costs.

## Industry Engagement

The discussion paper positions the government as being responsive to the needs of industry. Rather, the QTU believes, the role of government is to lead training in the state. The danger to Queensland's future economy is that a government that abandons its leadership role, leaves decision making to profit driven industries which ignore the training needs of the jobs of the future as their focus is to insert workers into present jobs in existing industries.

The QTU notes Queensland's priority industries include: Advanced manufacturing, Aerospace, Biofutures, Biomedical, Defence industries, and Mining equipment, technology and services. While Advanced manufacturing notes the place of training and workforce development in its ten-year road map and action plan, training is less evident in the Biofutures. Similarly, the Biomedical industry commits to research and development, but there is an absence of training in its ten-year road map. Mining equipment, technology and services' ten-year plan demonstrates the importance of the industry to the state's economy as well as regional employment, but it makes no commitment to training.

The Australian Government has established Industry Reference Committees, made up of employer and employee representatives, that consider industry skill requirements and review of training packages. In Queensland, WorkSafe similarly engages with industry through Industry Sector Standing Committees, that are made up of employers and workers. The QTU is aware that Jobs Queensland has previously engaged employers and workers in mapping of current and future skill needs for apprentices and trainees and suggests that Industry Sector Standing Committees, including priority industries, might be convened to report to government on the training needs of industry.

### **Future focussed curriculum**

The QTU is supportive of curriculum that prepares workers that will meet the needs of tomorrow's workplaces with employable skills that enhance industry productivity such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organising, self-management, and lifelong learning. The globalised jobs of tomorrow also require understanding of and respect for difference. A curriculum that delivers training needs for the state's future workforce needs transformational vision beyond the training packages of the twentieth century that have resulted in a narrow selection of atomised work tasks that are soon redundant in ever changing workplaces.

The QTU believes that consultation with industry pertaining to curriculum that meets the training needs of Queensland's future workers, ought to be framed with the student/workers' needs as the priority. Such a focus values education of individuals, who will access their learning in a range of contexts within and across communities. This approach is in contrast to reducing education to a myopic focus on specific skill sets that are neither adaptable or transferable to alternative contexts or industries.

The QTU also notes concern with the reference to the changing nature of work, and that this is not clarified in the discussion paper until page five. The QTU does not support training that fails workers by preparing them for a lifetime of insecure work, casualisation, or sub-contracting without access to fair and decent conditions like superannuation and leave entitlements that come through permanent employment.

### **Market settings**

To deliver the strongest VET sector in Australia, and to promote the sector throughout the Asia-Pacific region, Queensland's training sector needs to be immune to the abject failures of private vocational education and training companies like Evocca and Careers Australia. The rapid exit from the sector of such companies resulted in students accruing debt without being awarded their qualifications, as well as the termination of teachers and trainers.

The Australian government's micro economic reforms of the 1990s in vocational and higher education, continue to adversely impact on TAFE. Industry has increasingly been handed policy control of Australian VET and TAFE, meaning that communities, that were vital in the establishment of TAFE in the 1970s, are isolated. The addition of user pays philosophy, supported by VET FEE-HELP, continues to shift the provision of services from embodying an ethical and high quality teacher-student relationship with education at the core, to a buyer-seller economic paradigm with reduced educational benefit.

The QTU is the proud professional and industrial voice of TAFE teachers in Queensland. QTU TAFE members are alarmed by the incremental misuse of language that invites private providers to further encroach on the robust reputation of the TAFE brand, as well as profit from public expenditure on vocational education and training. An example of this is the *Free TAFE for Year 12 graduates* policy.

The QTU applauds the Palaszczuk-Labor government's initiative to establish a training ombudsman. The Queensland Training Ombudsman plays an important role in strengthening Queensland's training sector by working across the sector to improve protections for apprentices, trainees, and students. To ensure the protection of students, industry, and the reputation of the training sector, the Queensland government must ensure quality of training in the state by:

- Mandating a minimum number of hours of delivery for any VET course that receives public funding;
- Auditing inputs to learning including curriculum, teaching, and assessment;
- Capping funding to private RTO's;
- Guaranteeing a minimum of 70% of the state's training budget is delivered by public providers;
- Restricting access to state training funds to non-profit RTO's
- Ban the subcontracting of the delivery of courses to unregistered providers; and
- Applying even more stringent regulation of RTO's marketing and student recruitment practices.

## Role of providers

The QTU strongly supports the statement, "Strong and viable public providers are the cornerstone of a healthy VET sector in Queensland." In Queensland, TAFE has a proud 130-year history of delivering quality VET programs throughout the state. Excellence in TAFE teaching in the 2017/18 financial year resulted in a greater than 90% completion rate of attempted competencies, and nearly 95% of employers were satisfied with the quality of TAFE trained graduates.

TAFE, as the quality public provider of VET in Queensland, delivers more than the knowledge and skills that create the basis of the Queensland economy. It also provides opportunities for lifelong learning, alternative avenues for education and training for those who need a new start, and for retraining workers displaced by structural change in the economy. Significantly, TAFE operates throughout the state, supporting the education and training needs of Queenslanders and industries in regional and remote locations.

While new and emerging industries might develop niche training, the QTU holds that the public providers are best placed to meet the skills needs of industry and the next generation of Queensland workers. However, one of the inefficiencies in the current VET sector is the myopic nature of a national training system that is incapable of meeting the future needs of new and emerging industries because of its retrospectivity. National training accreditation is achieved through RTOs demonstrating how they teach and assess prescriptive skill sets that reduce training to compartmentalised and decontextualized units. The process for identifying the skills and developing the training packages is such that by the time courses are being delivered the course is out of date. Public Providers are well placed and have the knowledge and industry connections to work directly with industry to develop qualifications that meet future needs. This would include education and training that teaches holistic and transferable capacities that are more suited to, and in accord with the discussion paper's notion of *jobs of tomorrow*. The provision of funding directly to public providers to facilitate this direct engagement is recommended.

To further facilitate this and while Queensland's VET providers might deliver the skills required by today's industries, national training accreditation has the potential to fail Queensland's new and emerging industries. Providers with scale, like TAFE, need powers for self-accreditation so that they can create future-focused training partnerships with industry.

The discussion paper makes the case for a broad-based curriculum, containing training packages that develop skills that are transferable across jobs and industries. The QTU believes that this ought to be expanded further to ensure that workers' training includes employment rights, Australian and Queensland Employment Standards, Fair Work provisions, and International Labour Organisation conventions.

## **Encouraging VET participation**

The QTU believes that innovative models of practice that connect schools with TAFE and other VET providers already exist. The Annual Queensland Training Awards showcase regional case studies of success, and the case study of Lanie Heath, published in the discussion paper, demonstrates successful connections between TAFE and industry.

The QTU believes that participation in VET is a post schooling option that ought to be positioned in Queensland schools as equally legitimate and valued as entry into university. Pathways that allow school students to undertake apprenticeships, traineeships, and other recognised programs of study need to be available to all students regardless of regionality and socio-economic status.

## **Vocational Education in Schools**

Schooling should facilitate young people's transition to a broad range of post-school options and pathways, and people should be able to re-enter the education system to enhance their quality of life as part of a fundamental commitment to lifelong learning. To that end, the provision of vocational education and training in schools (VETiS) should be a curriculum option available in all Queensland state high schools and state colleges.

Queensland has maintained its position of providing VETiS programs to the highest number of students in Australia since 2012<sup>1</sup>. In 2016, 81,300 Queensland students were undertaking VETiS courses, and this represents 33% of VETiS students in all jurisdictions. QTU members delivering VETiS programs consistently identify the need for additional release time to maintain industry currency. Additional barriers to the provision of VETiS that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency include hours of work expended undertaking internal reviews of courses and increases to teachers' spread of hours that is required to undertake the supervision of industry placements.

Queensland Industry should contribute to the implementation of VETiS, as industry is a major beneficiary of such programs. Industry contributions may be material, in cash or in kind through the provision of opportunities for students to learn in the workplace, or a combination of all of these. To that end, the QTU encourages schools to form equitable partnerships with local industry for the benefit of their students. The QTU totally rejects commercial or sponsorship arrangements which are designed as advertising, shifting specific training needs of a business to schools, or disguising work in unpaid roles as training opportunities.

## Funding

The VET funding model that is being delivered by the Palaszczuk government was first designed and implemented by the former Newman government and largely cost shifted VET funding responsibility from the state to individual students, via the corrupted federal VET student loans system. The taint of the previous government's ideological obsession with contestability in the Queensland economy, specifically the VET sector, colours any attempts to tweak a fundamentally flawed approach by the current government.

The QTU believes that the current funding model presents a barrier to VET. Limits that apply to students receiving subsidised training should be lifted, particularly for those students whose individual circumstance or community demonstrates financial hardship, for example low socio-economic status. The QTU believes that access to VET is a fundamental tool to improve employment and quality of living outcomes for individuals and their communities. Implementation of mechanisms to supply state-based assistance that both supplements and remedies the failures of the federal funding system will increase uptake of diploma and above level qualifications. The QTU understands that cost is the single largest barrier to participation in certificate IV and above qualifications and this is demonstrated in the falling enrolment numbers in these qualifications. The success of the Palaszczuk government rescuing TAFE policy funding in increasing participation in those regions where implementation of policy has reduced cost to the student, further demonstrates this.

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<sup>1</sup> National Centre for Vocational Education Research. (2017). [www.ncver.edu.au/data/collection/vet-in-schools/vet-in-schools](http://www.ncver.edu.au/data/collection/vet-in-schools/vet-in-schools)