

## Isolated Children's Parents Association Qld Inc.

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*Lobbying for opportunity, equality & support for all rural and remote students*

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### SUBMISSION

to the

*Discussion Paper: "Skills for Queensland"*

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association Qld Inc. (ICPA Qld) advocates for equitable access to quality educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. ICPA Qld represents forty-six branches, comprising over 1200 families throughout rural Queensland.

ICPA Qld is a voluntary apolitical parent organisation and is the only community-based parent group with interests in all sectors and levels of education – state schools, independent, church or boarding schools, early childhood and care through to tertiary education and all methods used to facilitate access to that education.

The Queensland State Council of ICPA Qld welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to assist in creating strategies to create a relevant, evolving, engaging and responsibly delivered Vocational Education and Training (VET) in our State.

ICPA Qld believes that currently VET is well placed to support the development of existing and emerging industries and business practices through the various programmes that government and private providers offer in various formats, internal and external, to the campus locations located throughout the state. Going forward, VET potentially remains well placed to be a key provider of knowledge and skills for the workforce engaged in industry and business.

#### Industry Engagement/Market Settings

***Responsive VET Arrangements/ Adapting Delivery to Regional Realities:*** The key to timely adaptive and responsive success lies in regular evaluation of evolving industries and business, whether that be from current activities or newly emerging opportunities and the creation and/or adaption of existing courses to meet identified requirements. It is also vital to adapt the courses to fit the circumstances of each campus location. For example, in rural areas the quality and capability of internet offerings may make online components of the programme challenging to complete. Furthermore, access to the place of business to facilitate the completion of the practical course components may not be readily available. To ensure that regional areas still have the opportunity for growth in priority industry sectors VET providers must be supported to build flexibility and innovation into their programme delivery to allow full engagement of VET students in their chosen location.

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It is essential that, given the challenge of attracting suitably qualified staff to regional/remote locations, those who choose to learn from a rural/remote location are able to engage with tutors with a high level of knowledge and skill relevant to the curriculum being taught. Innovative ways to facilitate that engagement need to be identified and enacted. The technological limitations that may be experienced in these locations also need to be recognised when approaching these engagement plans and strategies put in place to mitigate/minimise impact.

VET teachers require access to regular upskilling opportunities to ensure their skills and knowledge remain relevant to emerging trends and demands of business/industry. Given many rural and remote students desire to reside beyond the urban environment, students' exposure to courses "outside" the traditional offerings and career paths long existent in their communities are necessary to ensure that they are best placed to meet the evolving needs of business and society in turn diversifying their local economy. Diversification is essential in successfully maintaining a thriving regional centre in which to reside.

ICPA (Qld) firmly believes that continuing levels of investment into resourcing of VET providers – buildings, personnel and tools/equipment – to enable quality of learning and full engagement with the curriculum regardless of location of the place of learning is the key to an ongoing quality VET system. Also essential is oversight of the business of the VET provider to ensure they are adequately resourced and capable of delivering their programmes to completion.

**Maximising Local Jobs:** Robust workforces and workplaces contribute to the sustainability of regional Queensland locations. The following components are imperative to ensure diverse and healthy workforce development: -

1. Ensuring programmes match needs of the community both in terms of content and delivery method;
2. Teachers' skills and knowledge remain relevant and progressive; and
3. Programme adaptability meet current and emerging trends.

Additionally, the above potentially ensures that access to appropriately skilled tradespeople is more readily accessible in these locations as rural students are more inclined to stay in rural areas once their learning is complete.

**Stakeholder Engagement:** ICPA Qld believes a coalition between government, industry, business, VET providers and community stakeholders could be implemented to regularly identify, evaluate and review growing trends. The results of this regular review could then be offered to VET training providers to allow them to adapt their offerings and upskill staff to meeting identified needs. Appropriate personnel and fiscal support would need to be provided to allow this to occur in a timely manner. This coalition has the potential to be a cornerstone of the Department's annual VET qualitative and quantitative assessment.

### **Encouraging VET Participation**

**Attracting Stakeholders to VET:** It is vital that just as much value is placed on a trade or qualifications gained through a VET provider as it is on qualifications gained through attendance at a University. Both supply skilled people in various fields of the workforce that are needed for strong and robust economies. Public perceptions need to be challenged and altered so that seeking a non-tertiary job/learning pathway is more highly valued and encouraged by the wider community and secondary schooling providers. Secondary schools need to be encouraged to provide students as varied and robust an offering of VET opportunities as they do academic subjects. Schools also need to acknowledge and showcase the achievements of these students to their student cohort and their

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families to further promote a positive reception to careers emanating from VET subjects and encourage acceptance of these as acceptable and, indeed, enviable career paths.

**Connections between School and VET:** Anecdotal feedback from members indicates a desire for flexible, organic delivery of content of VET courses. Students in rural and remote locations are constrained in their ability to complete courses through easy, regular access to appropriate businesses to conduct the practical component of their chosen course.

Instigating programmes that would allow for blocks of formal learning and practicum would be welcomed. Developing partnerships and linkages with schools in larger communities, in particular those that have accommodation facilities, should also be facilitated. This would allow students to access their practicum and receive appropriate food/accommodation in a location that could be hours from their home/family and provide a secure, safe environment that parents, in absentia, desire.

Developing clusters of smaller, rural/remote schools that could undertake courses and practicum in parallel could create sufficient numbers to make such collaborative approaches viable.

Often, students attending a rural/remote P-10 school are only able to complete a Certificate I or II due to their location and limited readily available courses. Funding support is provided to enable them to undertake their course. To complete their senior education, these students move to a larger centre providing access to an expanded VET curriculum, both in terms of qualification level and variety of offerings. These students may wish to pursue a Certificate III now they can do so. ICPA Qld believes appropriate funding should be allocated to support these students to complete a second, higher level certificate.

**Overcoming Challenges/Barriers to Allow Successful Engagement with VET and the Labour Force:** Students with disabilities require innovative approaches to enable full engagement and to allow them to realise their potential. These innovative approaches need to be recognised and accepted as eligible assessment. Anecdotal evidence from an ICPA Qld member highlights this:

*“My son was keen to take on an apprenticeship through a local training provider. Although a fluent reader with good comprehension skills, due to his learning disability, he has great difficulty with making written responses. He was unable to progress his application for an apprenticeship. If he had been able to answer questions verbally or utilising a scribe, he would have passed through the initial stages of his application and undertaken the apprenticeship he desired.”*

Engagement of allied health and support staff to ensure the individualised needs of students with disabilities are being met would also encourage engagement, retention and completion of their chosen field of study. For example, an occupational therapist, would be able to assist and advise on placement of and engagement with students with ASD to minimise their sensory/social sensitivities in the VET classroom as well as in the workplace. Post-course completion these staff could also assist in the transition to meaningful employment.

ICPA Qld notes that a non-government VET training provider in North Queensland has created a boarding environment that allows students to still complete subjects to qualify for their QCE but also undertake VET courses and potentially commence apprenticeships. Queensland’s Agricultural Training Campuses also offer boarding opportunities that facilitate easier engagement in learning for rural/remote students. This model, potentially, warrants further investigation and expansion into key locations to allow for increased participation in regional areas.

**Going Forward: Adaption, Engagement and Remaining Relevant:** The statistics contained within the discussion paper show that on the whole VET is working well in Queensland. There is considerable engagement from a variety of cohorts, including those cohorts where engagement with learning has proved challenging.

Boarding options, where offered by VET providers, has encouraged participation in courses by rural and remote students. There is strong evidence to show that one of the primary reasons rural and remote students do not engage in either post-secondary learning or upskilling via a trade is the difficulty in relocating to access those opportunities with no familial support. Provision of facilities assists in negating some of those challenges.

As stated earlier in our submission, the adoption of flexible approaches to the way the learning/practical components are structured would encourage student participation, retention and course completion. Supporting students to relocate, (due to a paucity of relevant businesses in their local area), through partnerships with other schools to allow the completion of practical course components would be welcomed by the students and their families.

Enshrining flexibility in assessment into policy would allow greater engagement by students with disabilities, allowing them to contribute to their own, and society's, communal and economic wellbeing. Building in support services to minimise the impact of their disability, where practical, would also promote uptake of VET opportunities.

Rural and remote Queensland has a critical place in the modern economy. Availing these areas of opportunities to access learning and skills to respond to traditional as well as emerging opportunities will contribute to the liveability of these regions. This in turn assists in attracting and retaining residents, boosting the economic and social sustainability of regions going forward.

Once again ICPA Qld appreciates the opportunity to provide input to this Discussion Paper.