

# Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training

## Submission

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### Queensland Family and Child Commission

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## Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide this submission to the *Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training* (the Review) in response to the published Discussion Paper.

The objective of the submission is to provide responses to the questions posed within the Discussion Paper. The QFCC has not aimed to respond to all questions posed in the Discussion Paper, but targets responses to where it has meaningful material to contribute.

The QFCC was established on 1 July 2014 under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld; the Act). Under the Act, the QFCC was established to:

- promote the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people
- promote and advocate the responsibility of families and communities to protect and care for children and young people
- improve the child protection system.<sup>1</sup>

The Act provides the QFCC with a range of functions, and it is under the mandate of specific functions that the QFCC makes this submission in response to the Review's Discussion Paper. These functions are noted as:

- 'to develop and review workforce planning and development strategies for the child protection system by collaborating with relevant agencies, the private sector and education providers'<sup>2</sup>
- 'to provide leadership and give expert advice to relevant agencies about laws, policies, practices and services'.<sup>3</sup>

In performing these functions, commissioners of the QFCC are required to engage with, and take account of the views of, children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

In 2018, QFCC conducted the *Growing up in Queensland* consultations, collecting the views and perspectives of over 7,000 children and young people between the ages of 4 and 18 years, on matters related to their wellbeing, families, communities and other important social issues.<sup>5</sup> Children and young people contributed their views through an online survey, school and youth group focus groups, teacher and librarian led activities, and written responses.

The QFCC's contribution to the Review is primarily based on information provided directly by children and young people through the *Growing up in Queensland* consultations. Perspectives gained through industry and workforce development, namely *Strengthening our sector strategy* and *Workforce futures* program of work, are also reflected in the submission. The QFCC also contributes material gained from the broad range of other engagement and consultation processes it undertakes with children and young people, their families, and our sectoral partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 4 of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld)

<sup>2</sup> Section 9(1)(c) of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld)

<sup>3</sup> Section 9(1)(g) of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld)

<sup>4</sup> Section 23(1)(a) of the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld)

<sup>5</sup> The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2018, *This Place I Call Home: The views of children and young people growing up in Queensland*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/>

## Skills

### What does success at the end of year 12 look like for students, for education systems, for industry, and the community?

Young people told us that success for them means the successful transition from school into employment, further education, or training.

Young people perceive education, employment opportunities, and preparation for life after school as the keys to future success. Eighty per cent of young people surveyed through *Growing up in Queensland* expressed a desire to engage in further training and education.

#### Summary

- The effective transition from school into education, training and employment is a key indicator of success for young people.

### What are the foundational skills essential for all students for all pathways, including further study, employment or starting a business?

Through the *Growing up in Queensland* consultations young people spoke about the importance of learning skills that contribute to their employability. They particularly expressed interest in learning to write a good resume and job application, as well as gaining skills to perform well at interview. These skills are critical to effectively showcasing their skills and experience, and will be required by every young person, regardless of the pathway to education, training and employment they take.

The QFCC has an ongoing commitment to influencing change to make Queensland a place where children and young people and their families can thrive. Resilience is an important attribute that supports young people's success. Resilience contributes to young people's meaningful involvement in education and flexibility in future skills market.

This emphasises the importance of recognising that it is not only cognitive, organisational, analytic and technical skills that contribute to young people's future success in education, training and employment; but also foundational skills in emotional intelligence, relationship building, conflict management, and balancing family, life and work.

In addition, these skills must be augmented by the range of skills that young people need to be effective citizens as they grow and change. Through the study, young people particularly spoke about key life skills such as how to vote, how to apply for a rental property, how to budget, and how to manage finances. These skills will be critical in supporting young people as they travel the pathway from senior schooling to further education, training and employment.

*"I'm excited about moving away [to University] but worried about getting a job and balancing work, study and having enough money to live. It's a big thing to leave my parents behind without extra help"*

*- Secondary Student, Central Queensland*



These skills may appear to represent the difference between skills required by job markets and those required by children and young people to operate independently as members of the community. The absence of these skills, however, has the potential to contribute additional legal and financial pressures, which can lead young people to disengage from education, training and job seeking, and leave employment.

### Summary

- Young people are seeking skills that improve their employability.
- Resilience is a key element of young people's successful transition to education, training and employment.
- Traditional cognitive, organisational, analytic and technical skills will not, on their own, ensure the successful transition to education, training and employment.
- Young people need emotional intelligence, relationship building and conflict management skills, as well as a range of other life skills, to be effective citizens who can engage in further education, training and employment.

## What are the learning attributes necessary to prepare students for the future of work in a world of digital communication, robotic process automation, machine learning and cognitive technologies?

Young people have raised with the QFCC concern about the impact that automation and digitisation will have on the availability of jobs in the future. They understand that the skills and knowledge required in the future will differ from more traditional skill and knowledge sets.

Importantly, young people feel unsure of how to determine those skills and knowledge sets that will guarantee their employability in the future.

Children and young people would benefit from clear messages about the skills and skill sets that will be required in the future, and information about how they can gain these through further education, training and employment. This information would, not only, build young people's future employability, but would contribute to their sense of safety, resilience and wellbeing.

To balance this, the QFCC is aware that it is equally important that there be a transition to an understanding of learning as a lifelong process. While it remains important for young people to gain key qualifications to facilitate their future career, it is important that there is an emphasis on continuing education and micro-credentialing, that will enable young people to remain competitive in employment markets as these markets change and develop in response to new technologies.

### Summary

- Young people need clear advice on those skills and knowledge sets that they will require to ensure their employability in future labour markets
- Pathways from senior schooling should instil an appreciation of the need for lifelong learning.

## Selection

### Is it possible for schools to count other flexible delivery options towards the SSCE and/or ATAR?

Through *Growing up in Queensland* children and young people expressed significant concern about their school grades, and about how their school grades will impact on their future success. Young people report that this makes them feel stressed.

Sixty per cent of children reported they were concerned or very concerned about stress and 54 per cent reported that they were concerned or very concerned about school grades. Academic stress was rated as a top issue of concern across all Queensland regions.

Students highlighted the perception that stress at school impacts young people's mental health and physical health.

Young people's ability to successfully navigate stressors, and the impact of stress on mental and physical health and wellbeing, will have consequences for engagement in education, training and employment. As an example, Commonwealth Productivity Commission research indicates that preventing a mental health or nervous condition increases the probability of labour force participation by between 16.7 and 24.7 per cent for women and 17.0 and 29.6 per cent for men.<sup>6</sup>

Addressing the effects of academic and lifestyle stress for children and young people will likely have positive impacts for engagement in education, training and employment.

Providing young people with a broad range of pathways into further education, employment and training will support young people to match their aptitude, ambitions, existing skills and strengths, and, importantly, their resilience to the pathways available.

#### Summary

- Providing a broad range of pathway options for young people could help to reduce academic stress and improve engagement in further education, training and employment.

### What new or different data would help provide a fuller picture of senior secondary pathways? How would that support students to make informed choices and governments to make better public policy decisions?

Through the *Growing up in Queensland* consultations, children and young people emphasised that they want the opportunity to contribute to decision-making. Young people are of the view that they have a lot to contribute to discussion and the development of solutions. By listening to their voice, organisations can improve the decisions they make to impact positively in the lives of young people and reduce negative, unintended consequences.

Decisions that include the views and perspectives of young people are likely to be more relevant to young people, and have a greater longevity, given that today's young people are tomorrow's leaders.

Young people are, in general, an under-utilised source of data.

<sup>6</sup> Laplagne P, Glover M and Shomos A 2007, *Effects of Health and Education on Labour Force Participation*, Staff Working Paper, Productivity Commission, Melbourne, viewed 22 February 2019, <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/supporting/health-education-labour-participation/healthandeducation.pdf> (Table C.5)



A systematic program of data collection from children and young people would provide a fuller picture of secondary school pathways, and one which aligns with young people's direct experience and addresses the specific issues that young people identify.

The QFCC's workforce planning and development data activities for the child protection and family support sector noted the limitations of generating workforce analysis through ANZCO data given the broad, yet less defined, occupational definitions. Through our consultations with broader community service sector partners this has been reported across community service sectors particularly with the changing nature of the sectors (the NDIS workforce would be a clear example). A review of ANZCO occupational definitions could enable more reliable data analysis for community service sectors to inform employment projections, occupations and educational pathways. This has significant relevance being one of the largest growing sectors in the coming years.

### Summary

- Young people themselves should represent a key source of data.
- Regular data collection should be used to inform policy and decisions making regarding pathways from senior secondary schooling into education, training and employment.
- Review ANZCO occupational definitions for the community services sector for more reliable data analysis to inform educational pathways.

## Sentiment

*"In schools they focus on university. We need more information about TAFE and other options and courses – broader information and pathway options"*  
- Young person, South East Queensland

### How can we change perceptions toward the full range of available pathways?

Young people spoke about the need for more advice, and a stronger emphasis, on the fact that alternative pathways to employment, education and training are available. Young people wanted more one-on-one advice about alternative pathways, and the ability to access realistic information and support to make these pathways accessible.

Young people perceive work experience to be desirable as a means to develop and demonstrate the skills required by employers. Young people across the Queensland reported that getting a job with no prior skill or experience in the area represents a significant challenge.

As an alternative to work experience, young people were interested in more job pathways that offered on-the-job training and skill development.

### Summary

- Greater provision of one-to-one career support and advice, work experience, and on-the-job training could provide young people with greater information about careers and career pathways.

## Volunteering

Through the *Growing up in Queensland* consultations, young people advocated volunteering as a useful mechanism to gain or maintain practical skills that could improve their future employability.

In response to these findings, the QFCC delivered *Young People Volunteering: Removing the Barriers – Growing up in Queensland Issues Paper* in 2019. This paper reported a range of findings about volunteering and its relevance to the pathways to further education, training and employment for young people.

- Volunteering assists young people develop critical skills that employers require, particularly problem-solving, networking, and interpersonal skill.
- Volunteering assists young people enter a chosen career or specific career path.
- Volunteering supports young people to build up their links and connection across the community, improving awareness of the job market and creating opportunities to access employment.
- Volunteering supports young people to build mentoring relationships and develop goals and ambitions.
- Organisations consider volunteering experience to be equally as valuable as paid employment.
- Volunteering leads to positive employment outcomes.

Volunteering can improve young people's chances of employment in their local community, making the option of remaining in regional, rural and remote communities, or in communities where the support of friends and family is available, more attractive.<sup>7</sup>

*“Even volunteering is difficult to get into if you are trying to get experience”*  
- Secondary Student, South East Queensland

### Summary

- Volunteering could be promoted to build new, alternative pathways to education, training and employment for young people.

## How can we expand our thinking to embrace non-traditional or currently not undertaken pathways?

Within the child and family support sector workforce context, the QFCC has heard that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing are a privileged capability. Our stakeholders advocate acknowledging and building these capabilities during secondary education and developing pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into qualifications relevant to the sector and other industries.

During consultation, the QFCC has heard that many organisations and young people simply do not know about Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualifications and associated subsidies and those that do, find the information confusing.

The affordability of VET qualifications is commonly highlighted as a barrier that stops some young people from choosing the career pathway they desire. Many opt for a course that is more affordable.

<sup>7</sup> The State of Queensland (Queensland Family and Child Commission) 2018, *Young People Volunteering: Removing the Barriers – Growing up in Queensland Issues Paper*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/>

Within child and family support sector workforce planning and development consultations, we have been advised that this sector, and broader community services sectors, have less well-known secondary school pathways, despite the community services sector being forecast to have large workforce demand in the coming years.

### Summary

- School, VET and university pathways could be clearer, promoted, affordable and enhanced.
- VET in Schools (VETis) and internship/apprenticeship (similar to early childhood education and care models) pathways could be explored, as they have potential to provide school-based qualifications and real-world experience.

## Support

### Is there a better model of career information and career advice that could be implemented?

Young people have told the QFCC that they begin thinking about future careers at an early age.

They want more information, provided at an early age, about both potential future careers and pathways to careers.

*“Help me and other Queensland children better understand the variety of options in the workforce. If this was implemented in later primary school and early secondary many young minds would have a career that they truly enjoy”*  
- Young person, Central Queensland

This information would assist them direct their learning toward desired careers, through the selection of aligned subjects and courses, both within school and post-school environments.

Children and young people highlighted that they look to the adults in their lives as role models, with 82 per cent of young people reporting that parents, carers and other adults were important sources of advice. However, as this has the potential to reduce their awareness of the diverse careers on offer, young people also sought additional information about a broader range of careers, to facilitate greater choice.

Young people advocated having capacity to talk directly with others about their plans. Many young people spoke of the need to be able to access more one-on-one advice about pathways. Young people want access to people already working in fields of interest, as these people provide the most useful advice about careers because they work directly in the field.

As an adjunct to this, young people raised the idea of being able to draw on the expertise of people in their local community and work directly with these skills people to gain direct experience and knowledge about their field of interest. This appeared particularly important in regional centres, where career information, pre-employment training and leaders in professions may not be accessible or able to provide direct assistance.

Our data indicate that young people are having these conversations, with 46 per cent of young people responding to the QFCC’s survey reporting that they ‘frequently’ have conversations about their future, with a further 34 per cent reporting that they ‘sometimes’ have these discussions.

However, QFCC data indicate that only a small proportion of students would speak to a school guidance counsellor (eight per cent) when discussing their futures. Students often demonstrated that they were unsure of who their school guidance counsellors were or what their roles were in assisting them make decisions about their future. This highlights an area where significant improvements could be made to the effectiveness of school-based career guidance processes.

With respect to this model, young people reported that they also felt that school-based career guidance services were not intensive enough.

*“We need more one-on-one time with career counsellors or teachers to help younger students understand their options in depth”*  
*Young person, South East Queensland*

In line with this assertion, 18 per cent of young people surveyed through *Growing up in Queensland* reported ‘lack of information’ as something stopping them from achieving their hopes and dreams.

Young people also reported that online information was often overly complicated or, conversely, too general to be useful to them, when making choices about education and training. This aligns with the comments of the Productivity Commission, as reported in the Background Paper.<sup>8</sup>

## Summary

Consider could be given to:

- models enabling the provision of career information and advice to children at a younger age
- career advice that looks at a broad range of potential careers
- models of direct support from people already working in the field, particularly experts who can provide mentoring like services
- improvements to the existing models of school-based career guidance, given that children and young people do not appear to know how to access or utilise this effectively.

## Support for all students

### What are the challenges faced by different groups of students in understanding and accessing the full range of pathways?

Through *Growing up in Queensland*, young people reported that, to gain access to their desired career paths, they required university entry or completion of vocational courses. These pathways could be prohibitive:

- the financial resources required to fund the desired courses were often not available to young people
- young people located in rural and remote locations could not access educational services in regional centres and metropolitan areas.

Fifty-eight per cent of young people surveyed through *Growing up in Queensland* responded that financial difficulties represented a barrier to accessing further education and vocational training. Not only were costs an

<sup>8</sup> Background Paper, refer page 16



issue for themselves, but also had the potential to impact on family members who would need to make sacrifices to enable the young person to access these opportunities.

Twenty-five per cent of young people surveyed responded that the place that they live represented a barrier to accessing pathways into education and training. This was particularly relevant for young people in rural and remote locations, where access to training and further education was perceived to be limited.

Young people in these locations were particularly aware of the need to move away from their homes to access education and training or accessed their desired career pathways. Not only did this represent an issue associated with accessing support and care, given that many young people accessing university were not yet 18 years of age, but it also represented an issue for young people who did not feel that they had access to sufficient financial resources.

Young people in regional, rural and remote locations sought to access training and education using web-based tools, but presented the view that the speed, reliability and cost of appropriate internet access represented a significant barrier to these resources.

### Positive educational environments

With respect to education, young people identify good teachers and good schools as an important condition of a good education. This feedback has a particular cultural relevance.

Young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spoke of the importance of having teachers who reflect their cultural identity. This could improve their education, for example by teaching in first languages and building their knowledge of culture and tradition; but it could also to provide them with role models through their educational years.

#### Summary

Challenges faced by young people include:

- Financial barriers of specific pathways – particularly university and vocational training courses.
- Geographical barriers in accessing pathways from school to further education and training – particularly in rural and remote areas.
- Cultural barriers for young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seeking to access further education and training. One strategy to address this could be to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mentoring roles for young people.